

Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council Planning Committee held on Wednesday 1st August 2018 at 7.30pm.

Present: Councillors Mark White (Chairman), Martin Hoffman (Vice-chairman), Graham Lee, Madeleine Legg, Bridget Macey, David Short, David Sims.

The Clerk (Jane Porter) and the Deputy Clerk (Laura Brooks-Payne) were also in attendance.

Part A

1. Apologies: None.

2. Minutes of the meeting 4th July 2018. It was *resolved* that these be approved and signed.

3. Declarations of interest. Item 06, Cllrs David Short and Madeleine Legg declared interests. Cllr Short holds an agricultural tenancy for Townsend Field with the landowner, Mr Chris Outram, the resident of Townsend House, 22 Lucas Lane. Cllr Short uses Townsend Field and the associated agricultural buildings for his flock of rare breed sheep. Cllr Legg, his wife, assists him in this business. Both councillors left the meeting after the public session.

Part B

On site considerations and proposals for recommendations to the NHDC Planning Officer

Item 06 NHDC Case Ref. 18/01874/FP Land at the junction of Ashwell Street and Station Road.

Full Planning Permission: Erection of 9 (6 No. Three Bedroom, 3 No. Four bedroom) dwellings with associated parking, amenity space and associated ancillary works, following demolition of existing redundant structures. Creation of new access from Station Road.

Members of the public present: 27 parishioners.

Applicant: No representative of the applicant was present. The Chairman reported that he had received an email, and subsequently a phone call, from the applicant explaining that he was abroad. The applicant had also given some background to his financial interest in the site and his desire to progress with residential development.

The Chairman explained, for the benefit of the public present, the procedures for the meeting.

The Chairman reported that the NHDC Planning Officer had, with the permission of the applicant, supplied a copy of the pre-application advice given by NHDC to the applicant. The main points of this were:

- Policies that are relevant to the application.
- Principle of development; the need for the applicant to demonstrate that the benefit outweighed any harm (economic, social and environmental factors)
- Settlement boundary; both the current definition (site outside) and the changes in the emerging new Local Plan (site inside) to be considered in the application.
- Sustainable; the need to ensure access to eg. shops and services, transport links, school and doctor's surgery capacity, water and sewage resources.
- Conservation Area; the need to safeguard the designated heritage asset.
- Character area/V2 Eastern Area; the applicant to demonstrate that the need outweighed the harm.
- Housing; the need to meet 'an identified rural housing need'.
- Highways; the application to address the requirement for safe access both for vehicles and pedestrians (NPPF paragraph 32).
- Ecology; the significant value should be explored in an appropriate study.
- Archaeological Area of Significance; the results of an evaluation should be included in the application due to the likely impact (the designated area covers the whole village; the site is less than 60m from a monument of considerable importance).
- Arboriculture; a full site survey should be submitted and form part of a biodiversity/ecological management plan.

Standing orders were suspended for members of the public to express their views

The following views were expressed:

- The application was incomplete and lacked a significant number of necessary documents. This was despite the recommendations in the pre-application advice given to the applicant by NHDC.
- No clear justification for the development had been put by the applicant nor any demonstration of how it would be sustainable.

- The field was, and had been for many years, in continuous agricultural use; no application for a change of use had been made.
- There were existing significant highway safety issues in Station Road. The three recently built housing developments off this stretch of Station Road had significantly increased the number of pedestrians and vehicles. At certain times traffic flows were considerable with vehicles accessing the station in one direction and the village centre in the other. Pedestrians were especially at risk as there was no footway on one side of Station Road and no easy crossing points. The proximity of the school bus stop to the proposed new access road had not been taken into account.
- There were existing concerns over the capacity of the school, doctor's surgery, water and sewage supplies; additional housing would exacerbate these
- Consideration should be given to the argument that infill, with suitable housing that met village needs, was preferable to extension of the built area onto agricultural land.

In addition parish councillors expressed the following:

- Settlement boundary changes. The Parish Council had objected direct to NHDC, in consultations, and at the Examination in Public to the Inspector, to the changes to the boundary drawn by NHDC in the new Local Plan. These changes had resulted in this site being included inside the line where there would be a 'presumption in favour of development'.
- Agricultural use. The NHDC pre-application advice had stated, 'The site appears to be a garden area...'. This was incorrect. Cllr David Short reported that he had held an agricultural tenancy with the owner of Townsend Field, the resident of Townsend House Mr Chris Outram, since 2015 and prior to that with the previous owner of the field. He used the field and the buildings on the site to keep his flock of rare breed sheep. The form that the applicant had submitted to NHDC was also incorrect; his name was not listed as an agricultural tenant of the site.
- Neighbourhood Plan. This was now at a stage when the planning authority should give it weight as emerging policy. It was not supportive of development in this location. Surveys of parishioners had identified the housing needs of the village to be for smaller homes designed for the elderly and those with mobility issues; this application did not meet this need. To safeguard the policy for smaller dwellings permitted development rights should be withdrawn.
- Conservation Area. The prevailing design in this part of the village was of the Arts & Crafts style of the 1920's and echoed the strong influences of Letchworth Garden City. This had been a factor in a recent planning decision by NHDC further along Station Road. The applicant's proposals were an 'off the shelf' style that did not reflect local design.
- Highway safety. It was noted that for some years the Parish Council had been petitioning Herts Highways for safety improvements in Station Road. Of particular concern was the lack of adequate footways and crossing points for pedestrians. Additions were essential to ensure safe access to the centre of the village (recreation ground, shops and services) in one direction and the sports facilities and allotments at Small Gains in the other.
- Trees. A full survey should take into account the trees within and adjacent to the site.
- Archaeology. The site was within the Area of Significance. A new scheduled ancient monument had recently been identified further along off Station Road. There was evidence of ridge and furrow in the field.
- Site definition. The proposed development site did not include the whole of the field situated at the junction of Ashwell Street and Station Road; it did not extend along the boundary adjacent to the ancient track known as the Ruddery. It was thus incorrect to identify the application as being at the junction.
- Structures on the site. The application title referred to 'redundant structures'. This was incorrect as they were in active use as agricultural buildings. The application made no reference to the asbestos in the roofs of the structures in the field.

Standing Orders reinstated.

A proposal was made to recommend that the NHDC Planning Officer REFUSE the application on the grounds that, (i) it was incomplete, contained inaccuracies and lacked essential documents, (ii) there were significant objections to the proposals (see bullet points above).

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted (unanimous).

Action: Clerk to NHDC