

## Minutes

### Planning Committee Meeting (on site): Saturday 07 January 2023.

**Present:** Councillors Vinny Hall, Graham Lee (Chairman) and Norton Mahy (Vice-chairman). The Clerk was also present. *See under individual items below for other attendees.*

#### Part A

**1. Apologies received from parish councillors.** Gemma Allan (ongoing dispensation due to work commitments), Ian Duffy (personal commitment), Martin Hoffman (ongoing health issues), David Sims (unwell).

**2. Declarations of interest.** None.

#### Part B

To agree responses to the following planning application consultations received from NHC as the Local Planning Authority.

**1 Land between Hunts Ridge and Ashwell House (the field known as Hunts Close between the Ruddy and Lucas Lane). NHC ref. 22/03094/FP**

Erection of 14 dwellings including creation of access from Ashwell Street, footpath link to Lucas Lane, associated infrastructure, public open space and landscaping.

The meeting convened at the site with the permission of the landowner. Twenty-eight members of the public were present. The applicant's agent was also present. It was noted that 10 objections had been posted on the NHC website and one neutral comment requesting the provision of boxes for bats and swifts.

**1.1 Presentation by the applicant at the January Parish Council meeting.** It was noted that two representatives of the applicant had attended. The main points of their presentation were reiterated:

The application to NHC included, (i) 14 homes of which 5 would be affordable, (ii) An extensive area of publicly accessible open space, (iii) A design that retained key views and the open character of the site, (iv) Additional landscaping including an orchard, additional trees and boundary buffers, (v) A biodiversity net gain of greater than 10%, (vi) Pedestrian access to Lucas Lane, (vii) Retention of the viewing corridor towards St Mary's Church, (viii) Mainly 2 and 3 bedroom dwellings including bungalows to reflect the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan, (ix) The new Local Plan had now been adopted and Ashwell was identified as a Category A sustainable village with the required services.

The extension of the settlement boundary that the plan included allowed for the growth of the village within this.

## 1.2 Questions and comments from members of the public at the January Council meeting.

Clarifications given by the applicant's representatives were reiterated:

- 1.2.1 Infrastructure. Any additional infrastructure would be requested by relevant statutory consultees in their responses to the consultation eg school places by the county council, sewerage upgrades by the drainage authority, and would be funded by the developer. Concern was expressed that aspects of village infrastructure were already overburdened and required attention prior to any additional housing.
- 1.2.2 Impact on Ashwell Street (the Ruddery) track and the conservation area. The new entrance to the top of the site, including a footway as well as a road, was positioned adjacent to the existing field gate. The gate was to be retained as a feature and to maintain the existing views. Along the section of Ashwell Street from Woodforde Close leading up to the new access the existing track would be upgraded to highways standards. Concern was expressed that this would encroach on the special nature of the Ruddery. The representative agreed to take this up with the Conservation Officer.
- 1.2.3 Safety concerns on Ashwell Street (the Ruddery) track and the Kingsland Way junction. County councillor Steve Jarvis reported that, following the request from the Parish Council some time ago for the current BOAT status to be changed and bollards installed to restrict vehicular traffic this had been agreed in principle with the Highways authority. This was being progressed through what was a lengthy approval system that included both informal and formal consultations with local residents. There had been some objections and there was a requirement that these had to be responded to. It was noted that there were existing safety concerns re the junction of Ashwell Street and Kingsland Way and the Highways authority had been requested on many occasions to review this.
- 1.2.4 Planning obligations/section 106 funding agreement. This would form part of any planning approval. It was noted that the current 'safer routes to the station' project required significant funding and was a relevant sustainable transport initiative.
- 1.2.5 Affordable housing. The application included 5 affordable homes of which 3 were to be rented and 2 intermediate; this was above the Local Plan requirements.
- 1.2.6 Sustainability. All of the dwellings on the site would be built to a standard that met net zero criteria with EV chargers and a fabric first approach to construction. This was in line with Neighbourhood Plan policy.
- 1.2.7 Site layout. The location of the bungalows at the top of the site, ie nearer to Ashwell Street, was questioned in relation to the significant slope and the accessibility for anyone with mobility issues using the pedestrian route to access local facilities. The impact on the existing bungalows in Lucas Lane should also be considered. The representative responded that this had been done to lessen the landscape impact. None of the buildings would be greater than one and a half storeys. The representative agreed to consider the request that the bungalows be located at the bottom of the site, ie nearer to Lucas Lane.

- 1.2.8 Landscape boundary details. consider requests from local residents re the details, eg fencing and/or walls.
- 1.2.9 Public open space. The plans included a grassed area and a small orchard. The area would be protected from any future development by a planning condition. Management of the area would be by an appointed management company or it could possibly be gifted to the Parish Council.

*Standing orders were suspended for member of the public to speak.*

1.3 Questions and comments from members of the public and the responses from the applicant's agent.

- 1.3.1 Infrastructure. There had already been too many new houses in the village without addressing the already strained infrastructure, eg school places, sewerage, traffic congestion. It was agreed that the current situation re school places be determined.
- 1.3.2 Public open space. The allocation of a large area in the application was commended but concern was expressed that this might not be protected from future development. The applicant's agent stated that the option existed for the freehold to be gifted to the Parish Council.
- 1.3.3 Adverse impact on the Ruddery and the conservation area/location of the vehicular access. It was noted that adverse impact on the conservation area had been a key reason for the refusal of the previous application. The new access would require the tarmacking and widening of Ashwell Street resulting in the loss of part of the ancient trackway and vegetation. A suggestion was made that this access be moved as far as possible to the west of the site to reduce the loss; if this meant the entrance being at the position of the existing gate this would still allow the retention of the significant viewpoint as provided from the existing field gate. A further suggestion was made that the pedestrian access at the south-east corner be eliminated; it was not necessary for access and would lessen the negative impact.
- 1.3.4 Adverse impact on the Ruddery/pedestrian safety. The additional vehicular traffic would exacerbate the existing hazard for pedestrians; there had been at least one accident resulting in injury to a pedestrian. It was noted that the County Council, following a request some years ago from the Parish Council, had agreed in principle to change the status of this section of Ashwell Street and to install bollards to restrict vehicle access; their consultation process on this was ongoing but lengthy. It was requested that this be implemented as a condition of any development.
- 1.3.5 Access/additional traffic to the Ashwell Street junction with Kingsland Way. This was already a dangerous junction on a key route for pedestrians, including those going to the school, with poor sight lines, very limited footways and a record of speeding. Additional traffic would exacerbate the hazards.
- 1.3.6 Housing need. The larger houses did not address the needs of the village; the Neighbourhood Plan policy required smaller units for the elderly/poorly mobile, downsizers and starter homes.
- 1.3.7 Archaeology. The site was in a key area and a Roman temple had been identified. Further investigation was required.
- 1.3.8 Drainage. Flooding was already an issue in the village and more houses/hard landscaping would exacerbate the risk particularly to the bungalows in Lucas Lane at the bottom of the slope. Who would be liable for any issues arising in the longer term was questioned.

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- 1.3.9 Security concerns. The proposed pedestrian route to Lucas Lane would increase the security risks for immediate neighbours.
- 1.3.10 Boundaries. Requests were made by neighbours that their requests re walls/fences be considered and adequate provision for access by local wildlife be provided. The applicant's agent agreed to this and noted the 3 metre boundary buffers in the plans.
- 1.3.11 Height and location of dwellings. Concern was expressed that the bungalows were sited at the top of the significant slope and thus poorly situated for those with mobility issues. The current layout with the two-storey dwellings adjacent to the existing Lucas Lane bungalows would result in overlooking/dominance issues. Siting the bungalows at the bottom of the site would address both these matters.
- 1.3.12 Lighting. This was questioned and the view expressed that it should be in keeping with the site; pedestrian routes should have low-level units.

*Standing orders were reinstated.*

- 1.4 Views of parish councillors. The following objections were made; the application, (i) failed to sufficiently meet the requirements of the Neighbourhood Plan housing policy, ie for smaller units for the elderly/poorly mobile, downsizers and starter homes, (ii) would have a significant adverse impact on the conservation area as identified by the NHC Development & Conservation Manager in the 19 November 2020 decision to refuse the application for development ref 20/00126/FP ; the Ruddery, part of the Icknield Way ancient track, contributed significantly to the rural character of the area, (iii) would have an adverse impact on pedestrian safety due to additional traffic on the Ruddery and the already hazardous Ashwell Street/Kingsland Way junction.
- 1.5 Ashwell CLT Ltd. It was noted that this had recently been set up with a key objective of gaining more control over development. This to ensure that the type of housing built met the needs identified by the Neighbourhood Plan and the eligibility criteria for social/affordable units prioritised people with strong Ashwell connections. It was agreed that possible options for the CLT to be involved be pursued with the developer and the landowner.
- 1.6 In the event of the NHC Planning Officer being minded to recommend to the Planning Control Committee that permission be granted the Parish Council would request the following:
  - 1.6.1 Design amendments to the proposals, (i) changes to the layout to position the bungalows at the bottom of the slope to address the issues cited above, (ii) re-location of the main access as far as possible to the west of the site to reduce the impact on the conservation area, the Ruddery being part of the Icknield Way ancient track ,and the loss of vegetation, (iii) accommodation of requests from neighbours re boundary materials, ie fences and/or walls, (iv) further consultation re lighting.
  - 1.6.2 Highways matters, (i) the vehicular restrictions to the Ruddery already agreed in principle with the County Council to be in place prior to the development being started, (ii) safety improvements to the Ashwell Street/Kingsland Way junction to be agreed with the County Council's Highways Dept also to be implemented prior to the development being started.
  - 1.6.3 Planning obligations. A section 106 agreement for a contribution from the developer for identified village facilities as defined by the Parish Council.

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1.6.4 Public open space. A legally binding agreement re the ownership of the public open space between the developer and the Parish Council or a body of its choosing such as Ashwell CLT Ltd.

A proposal was made, and agreed, that an objection be made on the grounds expressed (*see 1.4 above*). The items specified in the event of the NHC Planning Officer being minded to recommend to the Planning Control Committee that permission be granted to be included in the response to the Planning Officer (*see 1.6 above*). **Action: Clerk**

**2 Land to the West of 35 Ashwell Street NHC ref. 21/02650/FP**

Full Planning Permission: Erection of two detached 4-bedroom dwellings and double garages, including alterations to existing vehicular access (as amended by plans received 12.12.2022).

The meeting convened at the site entrance. One member of the public was present (resident of no.35 Ashwell Street). Parish councillors were invited onto their property so the impact from their perspective could be considered. It was noted that the neighbour had submitted their objections to NHC and that four other objections had also been posted on the NHC website from local residents.

*Standing orders were suspended for the neighbour to present their views.*

Following discussion a proposal was made, and agreed, that an objection be made to the NHC Planning Officer on the grounds that the application, (i) failed to meet the requirements of the Neighbourhood Plan housing policy, ie for smaller units for the elderly/poorly mobile, downsizers and starter homes, (ii) failed to meet the requirements of the Local Plan policy that the density of housing be reduced towards the edge of the settlement boundary, (iii) lacked details on the landscape impact particularly the views across the site and the relative heights of houses in Claybush Road. **Action: Clerk**