

Minutes

Planning Committee Meeting: Saturday 8 April 2023 at 10am.

Present: Councillors Nikki da Costa, Ian Duffy, Vinny Hall, Graham Lee (Chairman), Norton Mahy (Vice-chairman), and David Sims. Representative of the applicant Jarvis Homes Ltd.

Eighty members of the public.

Venue: on site (see below)

Part A

1. Apologies received from parish councillors. Gemma Allan (dispensation due to work commitment), Martin Hoffman (away), Mark White (other commitment).

2. Declarations of interest. None.

Part B

To agree a response to the planning application consultation received from NHC: Dixies Meadow, High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, SG7 5NS.
Planning reference: 23/00666/FP.

Erection of 12 dwellings with associated hard and soft landscaping, creation of vehicular access, public open space and children's play area.

Standing Orders suspended for members of the public to speak.

Chair, Graham Lee, welcomed all to the meeting. He noted that representatives of the applicant had also attended the April Parish Council meeting and had given a short presentation and answered questions from the public. He invited the representative to give a short summary of the application.

The applicant's representative stated that the proposal was designed to achieve a balance. It would deliver three affordable homes. The site was 1.35 hectares but the proposals would only develop one-third leaving two-thirds as public open space including a play area and natural environment.

The Chair noted that, following the approval of the new District Local Plan in November 2022, the whole site was outside the settlement boundary, ie there was not an

assumption in favour of development. The front part of the site was also in the Conservation Area. He expressed the view that there were inconsistencies in the applicant's proposals; much had been written in advance of the new Local Plan being approved. There was also an inevitable bias in favour.

Comments and questions from members of the public included:

- Public open space. How would this be secured for the future? The applicant's representative stated that they were trying to achieve balance with some benefit to the community on what was currently a privately owned site with no public access. Although the owners had permitted some access in the past there was no guarantee that this would continue. The open areas for public access would be secured in perpetuity through a planning condition or a section 106 agreement.
- Housing mix (seven 5-bedroom, two 4-bedroom and three affordable units of two-2-bedroom and one 3-bedroom). In response to a question the applicant's representative stated that the three affordable homes that would be managed by a housing association (rented or shared ownership). The costs of the affordable homes would be set by the housing association under their rules.
- Flood risk and drainage. Flooding of properties was an existing issue and a condition must be included to provide improvements to the existing infrastructure. The applicant's representative stated that this was not within their power; improvements would have to be requested by the relevant authority.
- Principle of development. An application for development on the site had been refused by the Local Planning Authority in 1986 and this decision had been upheld by the Planning Inspector on appeal. The Inspector's report had stated that the site should be protected from development in perpetuity. The applicant's representative stated that planning policy had changed since then; the proposals would achieve the required balance and infill was acceptable.
- Biodiversity. The net gain claimed by the applicant was based on urban not rural criteria; this was not correct.
- School places. Demand for places at Ashwell School was an existing issue and other developments already granted or in the planning system would exacerbate this. The applicant's representative stated that they had been led to believe that there was sufficient capacity; any grant of permission would require contributions to be made to Herts County County to fund school places.
- Significant views. The claims included in the application that views across the site, particularly to the Church, would be maintained were questioned.

- Light pollution. In response to a question the applicant's representative stated that details were yet to be decided but this would be designed to be low-level and non-polluting.
- Solar panels. In response to a question the applicant's representative stated that these were to be included and would be of a 'roof-line' design. He agreed to determine the precise specification.
- Parking spaces and traffic. Congestion at certain times of day was 'a huge issue' often resulting in gridlock; further development would only result in 'increasing chaos'. The applicant's representative stated that their consultant's traffic report had estimated only an extra twelve movements per hour at peak times. The development was close to the village centre enabling residents to walk or cycle to local amenities.
- Village benefit. The proposed development would destroy the meadow that gave significant benefits to the village. The applicant's representative stated that the site was in private ownership and the landowner was thus entitled, with planning consent, to act in their own interest. The Chair, Graham Lee, noted that the village could raise funds to a level at which the landowner might be interested to sell but this would still be up to the landowner. This was a reason why the Parish Council had set up the Ashwell CLT; a non-profit organisation in which parishioners could buy a £1 share and have their say.
- Water supply capacity. In response to a question the applicant's representative stated that the water authority was a statutory consultee and would therefore respond to the Planning Officer on this.
- Protection of the badger setts on site. Concern was expressed at the discrepancies in the application re the extent of the areas that, in accordance with statutory requirements, were to be protected. The applicant's representative stated that the buffer zones would be as required. Concern was expressed that the diggers, noise, etc during the build process would result in significant risk of disturbance; the applicant's representative denied this would be the case.

The Chair, Graham Lee, requested a show of hands from those present to gauge who would object to the proposals, who was as yet undecided and who was in favour. Six people were 'undecided' and all the rest 'would object'. Eighty members of the public were present.

The Chair, Graham Lee, noted that the Parish Council would be formulating and agreeing its consultation response to NHC based on the approved Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan; both of these reflected the characteristics and requirements of their respective communities. Significant breaches to the Neighbourhood Plan in this

application had already been noted including the design and type of housing. The identified housing need was for units of three-bedrooms or less that were affordable and manageable as starter homes for young families or for downsizing for older people. The village had an above-average age profile. He noted that the permission granted for twenty-eight homes off Station Road had been given on appeal only because the new Local Plan had not at that point been approved.

The Chair, Graham Lee, encouraged all to submit responses to the NHC consultation.

Standing Orders reinstated

A proposal was made, and seconded, that an objection to the application be made on the grounds that the proposals were contrary to the policies of the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan. It was agreed that the response to the NHC Planning Officer would include details of inaccuracies and discrepancies in the application as well as contraventions of relevant policies. It was noted that a section 106 claim would be submitted to NHC for implementation should permission be granted.

The proposal was agreed (unanimous).

Meeting closed: 11.15am

Signed

Date