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HERITAGE STATEMENT

In respect of

**Land north of Ashwell Street,
Ashwell, Baldock, Herts**

On behalf of

Manor Oak Homes Ltd.

AHC REF: 9758

June 2024

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CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	4
	<i>Scope.....</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>Recent relevant planning history.....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>New application</i>	<i>7</i>
2.0	DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT	8
	<i>Historical context.....</i>	<i>8</i>
	<i>Present-day description of the site</i>	<i>17</i>
3.0	ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	18
3.1	Intrinsic significance.....	18
3.2	Contribution to the conservation area.....	19
	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>19</i>
	<i>Summary of special interest.....</i>	<i>21</i>
	<i>The contribution of the site</i>	<i>22</i>
3.3	Listed buildings and their settings.....	27
	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>27</i>
	<i>Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane (Grade II)</i>	<i>28</i>
	<i>St Mary's Church (Grade I)</i>	<i>29</i>
3.4	Non-designated heritage assets.....	32
4.0	THE APPLICATION SCHEME AND ITS HERITAGE IMPACT	35
	<i>General layout and access</i>	<i>35</i>
	<i>Design concept, details and materials.....</i>	<i>36</i>
	<i>Heritage impact.....</i>	<i>38</i>
5.0	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	46
6.0	REFERENCES	47

FIGURES (embedded in text)

Fig.1: Dury & Andrews' map of Hertfordshire, 1766	9
Fig.2: Ashwell tithe map, 1841	10
Fig.3: Ashwell tithe map, 1841, with application site to centre (plot 252)	11
Fig.4: 1888 OS map (surveyed in 1877)	13
Fig.5: 1888 OS map (surveyed in 1877)	13
Fig.6: 1898 OS map	14
Fig.7: 1924 OS map	15
Fig.8: 1975 OS map	15
Fig.9: Postcard view of Ashwell from over Angell's Meadow, before 1970 (from Pre-Submission Consultation Version September 2018 of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan	25

PLATES

- Plate 1: The field gate into the site from Ashwell Street
Plate 2: KV23 looking north across site from vicinity of field gate
Plate 3: Looking north-west across site from its south-eastern corner towards No.5 High Street with church tower beyond
Plate 4: Looking west across site towards Hunt's Ridge (left) and No.5 (right)
Plate 5: Looking north-east from close to field gate
Plate 6: View across site looking south-east towards trees along southern boundary to Ashwell Street
Plate 7: View across site looking east (the roof of East Lodge is seen behind the hedged boundary)
Plate 8: View across site looking west along northern boundary towards No.5
Plate 9: Looking south-west along southern boundary of site (winter)
Plate 10: Looking south-west along southern boundary of site (summer)
Plate 11: View from the site looking north-west towards St. Mary's church tower
Plate 12: Ashwell Street looking east (site on left) in winter months
Plate 13: Ashwell Street looking east (site on left) in summer months
Plate 14: Looking west along Lucas Lane (site beyond bungalows to left)
Plate 15: Looking west along Ashwell Street from alongside the garden to East Lodge
Plate 16: Looking east along Ashwell Street from the same position as Plate 15, past the gates to East Lodge, with Townsend House gates beyond
Plate 17: Walkden's development on south side of Ashwell Street
Plate 18: Looking south-west across agricultural land south of Ashwell Street
Plate 19: Looking north-east across agricultural land south of Ashwell Street towards the Walkden's development
Plate 20: Looking north towards site from top of earth bank on south side of Ashwell Street (winter)
Plate 21: Looking north towards site from top of earth bank on south side of Ashwell Street (summer)
Plate 22: Looking south-west along Ashwell Street, with site boundary to right (summer)
Plate 23: Looking in direction of site from junction of Springhead and Lucas Lane; the top of the treeline on Ashwell Street can just be seen above the garage to right
Plate 24: Looking from playing field south of Lucas Lane south-west in direction of site; there is a fleeting glimpsed view (in winter) between Nos.20 & 16 towards the site and treeline on Ashwell Street
Plate 25: Looking south from PRoW 18 (part of site visible in centre of image)
Plate 26: Alder Cottage, No.16 Lucas Lane
Plate 27: No.14 Lucas Lane
Plate 28: St Mary's Church
Plate 29: View of rear of Alder Cottage and 14 Lucas Lane from the north-eastern corner of the site
Plate 30: Nos.20, 16 and 14 Lucas Lane
Plate 31: New houses on the Lucas Lane frontage on land associated with Townsend House, which can just be glimpsed behind along the driveway
Plate 32: Looking across earth bank on south boundary of site from Ashwell Street from south-eastern corner of site: the spike on the church tower is just visible left of the distant telegraph pole
Plate 33: Looking east across site towards East Lodge, with part of roof of Townsend House seen to left beyond
Plate 34: Townsend Meadows

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Map showing location of listed buildings
Appendix 2: Ashwell Conservation Area designation map
Appendix 3: Historic Ordnance Survey maps

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Scope

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Sarah Watt, MCIfA, Director of Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Manor Oak Homes. Its purpose is to provide an assessment of the potential impact on the historic built environment of developing an area of greenfield land (within the settlement boundary) north of Ashwell Street in Ashwell, Hertfordshire (hereafter referred to as the 'site' or 'the application site'). The site is included within the Ashwell Conservation Area.
- 1.2 The application is in full and proposes 14 new dwellings on the site, with associated access, public open space and landscaping. The application is made following a refused application in 2022 and subsequent pre-application discussions with the Council.
- 1.3 The report is a revised and updated version of a Heritage Statement prepared and submitted with an application for the same site made in 2022. The first part of the report remains largely unchanged from that submitted with the 2022 application; this focuses on the contribution that the site makes to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area and on the contribution it makes to the significance of other designated and non-designated heritage assets as part of their physical setting. The second part of the report has been revised; this describes the development proposals and assesses the potential impact the scheme may have on these heritage assets.
- 1.4 This two-part approach of properly understanding significance and then evaluating the potential impact of proposals upon it is in line with good conservation and planning practice advocated in English Heritage's (as was) Conservation Principles (2008) and formally expressed in the government's policies on conserving and enhancing the historic environment set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 1.5 It is also aligned with *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (Historic England, July 2015) which encourages applicants to consider the significance of heritage assets likely to be affected by proposals at an early stage and take their own expert advice.

The report follows the structured approach to the assembly and analysis of relevant information advocated in the Note. The use of this approach will help to demonstrate that the heritage value of the site and its surroundings have been fully considered in formulating the proposed scheme.

Recent relevant planning history

- 1.6 Two previous applications for residential development of the site have been refused.

20/00126/FP

- 1.7 This was refused on 19th November 2020. It was for the erection of 24 dwellings on the site, with associated access, public open space and landscaping.

- 1.8 Refusal Reason 1 was made on the grounds that *'the proposal would occasion less than substantial harm to the significance of the Ashwell Conservation harm [sic] toward the upper end of the continuum such that would outweigh any public benefits associated with the delivery of 24 dwellings.'* This harm was alleged to arise from *'the removal of the sole remaining opportunity to experience the village nestled in the so-called 'river valley' from the south side of the village and unfettered by development in the fore or mid ground; the impairment of views towards an area to the east of the historic core, the impact upon the high degree of inter-visibility between Townsend House, 5 High Street and the parish church of St Mary the Virgin; and the adverse impact upon the character of the medieval route that is Ashwell Street...'*

- 1.9 Refusal Reason 2 alleged that the development *'would have a detrimental effect on the rural character of Ashwell Street, resulting from the creation of an access onto Ashwell Street...In addition, the setting of the Conservation Area as experienced when viewed from the existing gate on Ashwell Street would be adversely affected...'*

- 1.10 After the submission of the 24-dwelling application (and during the period of its determination), a Conservation Area Character Statement (October 2019) ('the CACS') was prepared for Ashwell by consultants to the Council, Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK Limited. This identified a 'Key View' looking north-west across the application site from the existing gate on Ashwell Street.

22/03094/FP

- 1.11 In light of the refusal and the publication of the Character Statement, the applicant reconsidered the site afresh and prepared a second scheme that sought to address the heritage-based reasons for refusal. The key change from 20/00126/FP was a significant reduction in the number of new dwellings proposed, from 24 to 14, which enabled a correspondingly substantial reduction in the area of the site to be developed, in turn enabling the preservation of the Key View identified across it.
- 1.12 This application was refused on 30th January 2024. The wording of Refusal Reasons 1 and 2 is very similar to that given under 20/00126/FP. In the case of Refusal Reason 1, the level of less than substantial harm is now clarified as being *'moderate to high on the continuum such that this harm would outweigh the public benefits associated with the delivery of 14 dwellings including 5 affordable homes.'* Furthermore, it is additionally alleged that, *'the development would impair Viewpoint 10 of the Ashwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (February 2023) and Significant View 12 of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (made on April 2022).'*
- 1.13 In the Report to Committee, the Conservation Officer notes that, *in light of the latest submission,* he had moderated his view on the degree of less than substantial harm, reducing this from *'towards the 'upper end''* to *'moderate to high,'* observing that Historic England's view was that the degree of harm would be 'moderate' and that my own view (as expressed in the relevant Heritage Statement) was that it would be 'low.'
- 1.14 In the case of Refusal Reason 2, the creation of the access onto Ashwell Street is now considered to *'have a transformational impact upon the western end of this informal track...'*
- 1.15 It should be noted that, despite the existence of the 2019 Character Statement, the Council commissioned a new Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan for Ashwell (the 'CAMP') from consultants, Place Services. This was under consultation when 22/03094/FP was submitted, but its contents were considered in the supporting Heritage Statement alongside those of the 2019 Character Statement. It has since been revised and was finalised in February 2023. As both documents are still available on the Council's website, reference to both continues to be made in this revised Heritage Statement as it is not clear whether the one supersedes the other.

New application

- 1.16 The current application proposes a new scheme of 14 dwellings, arranged on a different layout and using a different design aesthetic to the 2022 scheme. This has been subject to pre-application discussions and feedback from the Council which concluded that:

'Overall, it is considered that positive progress has been made to revise the layout and appearance of the proposal in the context of the previously refused scheme. It is likely that the Council's Conservation Officer would sustain an objection to development on this site, as the previous reasons relate to the principle of development in this location from a heritage perspective and urbanising impacts upon part of the track, rather than objections to layout/design. However, amendments to the scheme that are now proposed would in my view result in a better-quality housing development. As case officer, I would be happy to support the layout and design of the proposal that has been considered in this pre-application submission...'

- 1.17 My own view, based on the assessments in this report, is that the assessed harm remains less than substantial in terms of its impact on the conservation area. I do not identify harm arising to listed buildings. This harm falls to be weighed in the balance of public benefits under paragraph 208 of the NPPF.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Extracts of a selection of historic maps are embedded in the following text. Fuller Ordnance Survey map coverage is found at **Appendix 3**.*

Historical context

- 2.1 Ashwell is a large village located on a north-facing slope of the chalk downlands between Royston, Biggleswade and Letchworth Garden City in the north of Hertfordshire. It developed around the source of the River Rhee which emerges from springs on the north side of High Street.
- 2.2 The site lies amidst a complex prehistoric landscape evidenced by dispersed Neolithic monuments. The Romans probably settled as a farming community in Ashwell and there is archaeological evidence of occupation in the 7th and 8th centuries. The 1888 OS map labels Ashwell Street as a 'Roman Road' but the origins of Ashwell Street are not well-researched and it could be of earlier date than this, related to the network of prehistoric paths and tracks connected to the Icknield Way.
- 2.3 By the time of the Domesday Survey (1086) and throughout the medieval period Ashwell was a thriving market town, recorded as a borough at Domesday and granted a market before 1211. The medieval street pattern (in particular, High Street, West End and Silver Street) is still clearly visible at the core of the village where continuously built-up frontages, including some surviving medieval buildings, follow the curve of the road. The scale of the Parish Church of St Mary is testament to the significance of Ashwell at that time; it has considerable presence in the village because of its scale and particularly because of its four-stage west tower, topped by a slender spike.
- 2.4 Ashwell's commercial significance as a market town declined in the 18th and 19th centuries when it became a local centre for brewing and farming. Within the confines of the village there were several farms with attendant farm buildings, yards and labourers' cottages. Most of the farm buildings are now converted to residential or commercial uses.

- 2.5 Dury and Andrews' map of Hertfordshire of 1766 (**Fig.1**) shows the village in a rather simplified way, but the main street pattern (omitting to show Back Street and Silver Street) is clear, as are strips of land extending between High Street and Ashwell Street.

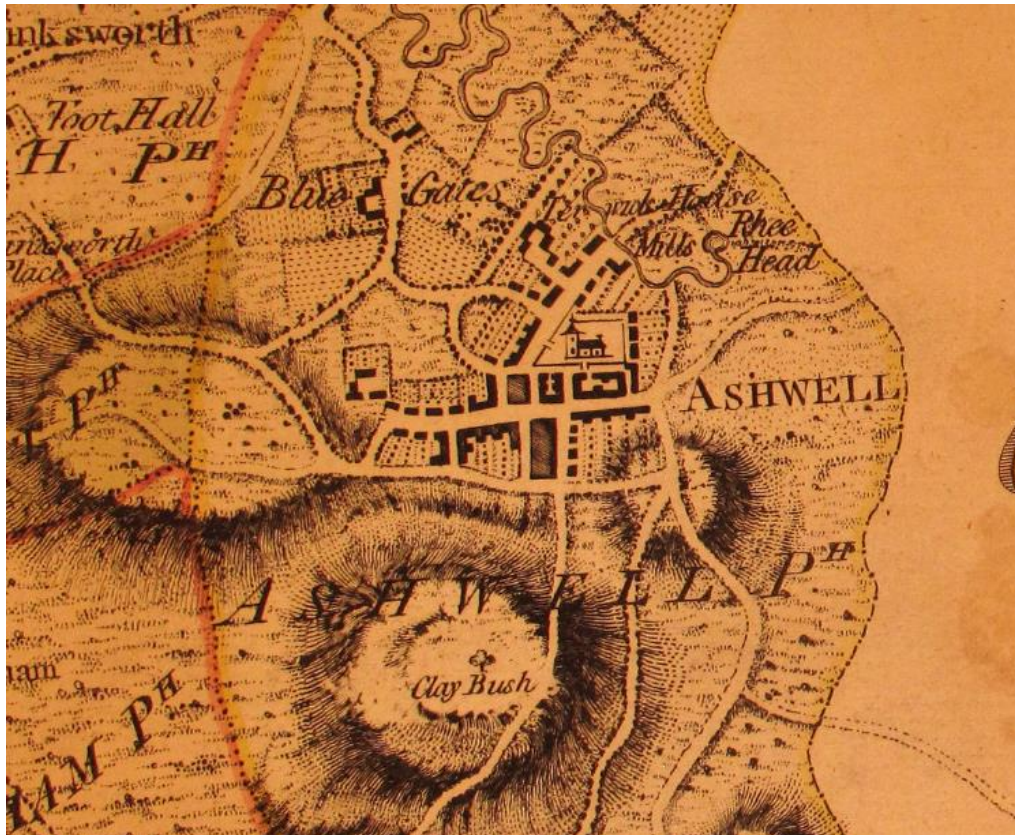


Fig.1: Dury & Andrews' map of Hertfordshire, 1766

- 2.6 The Ashwell tithe map of 1841 (**Figs.2 & 3**) provides a more accurate picture, showing the village with built-up development concentrated on either side of High Street and with a triangle of development to the north formed by Mill Street and Springhead, bisected by the springs and river and containing the church and vicarage, with the small early 19th-century country house The Bury to the north. Each side of the High Street had parallel 'back lanes' running along the backs of its properties (which included several farms), giving access to strips of field beyond; to the south, these field strips extended south from the back lane to Ashwell Street, in a series running from Partridge Hill to the west to Station Road to the east.
- 2.7 Surrounding the village were large open fields divided into furlongs, indicating a surviving pattern of medieval strip farming (the word 'furlong' deriving from the Old

English *furh* (furrow) and *lang* (long) and originally referring to the length of the furrow in an acre of ploughed open field).



Fig.2: Ashwell tithe map, 1841

- 2.8 On the south side of High Street, the back lane (comprising Back Street and Silver Street) extended east only to Limekiln Lane (now Kingsland Way). Eastwards from here, the field strips simply extended between Lucas Lane (the continuation of High Street to the east) and Ashwell Street. There was no need for a back lane serving Lucas Lane as the latter had not yet been developed, with only a few small cottages present on its south side.
- 2.9 The application site (numbered plot 252 on the map; see **Fig.3**) comprised one of these fields, immediately beyond the main built-up edge of the village. It, like the adjoining plot 249 to the east, was of greater width than the majority of the plots, and had perhaps been created out of two parcels. It was known as Hunt's Close and was owned by the Master & Fellows of Pembroke College and occupied by William Bacon (who held much land in the parish), who used it for pasture. In its north-west corner was a small orchard (253) in the same ownership and tenancy.
- 2.10 Plot 249 to the east was another double-width pasture field known as Townsend Close, owned and occupied by Thomas Chapman. Two adjoining plots had been carved out of

its north-west corner to provide two cottages with gardens, one owned and occupied by Thomas Lucas (presumably the derivation of the street name) and the other owned by Ann Bowman and tenanted by James Huffer; the latter (251) is the present-day No.14 (an 18th-century timber-framed house, now listed at Grade II) and the other (250) appears to represent a now-demolished continuation of the unlisted No.20. No.16 (a mid-19th-century house now listed at Grade II for group value) had not yet been built.

- 2.11 In the north-east corner of 249 was another group of cottages and gardens. One of these must be the late 17th-century No.34 (listed at Grade II), and another was possibly the unlisted No.32.



Fig.3: Ashwell tithe map, 1841, with application site to centre (plot 252)

- 2.12 The strip to the west of the site (254) was owned and occupied by William Thompson as a house and garden, the house (Spring House; listed at Grade II as a 16th-century or earlier hall house, now encased in 19th-century stuccoed brick) standing on the High Street frontage. To the west of that, plot 255 was owned and occupied by John Lees as a farmhouse, yard, buildings and garden (Jessamine Farm; the farmhouse, Jessamine House, of c.1700 and in the Queen Anne style, is now listed at Grade II*). A number of buildings are shown at the northern end of the majority of the field strips, standing on

the back lanes. It is interesting to note that 254 and 255 had, by this relatively early date, already been given over to use as gardens rather than pasture.

- 2.13 In 1863, the enclosure award was granted. Edward Fordham, as the most prominent landowner, was given the largest share of the medieval open fields and commons, and his rationalisation of this land led to major changes. The old green lanes which had led into the fields largely disappeared and some existing roads were straightened. New model farmsteads were built along a straightened and extended Northfield Road to Mobs Hole, taking the place of some of the farmsteads which had lined the High Street since late Saxon times and were now for the first time partly dispersed. In addition, the Fordhams built a grand new home, Elbrook House, in their newly emparked grounds north of Ashwell Bury (Thompson, I., (2002) *Ashwell Extensive Urban Survey Project Assessment Report*). The land divided into furlongs south of Ashwell Street and elsewhere had been enclosed into larger regular fields, marking the end of the system of open-field farming here.
- 2.14 The 1888 OS map (actually surveyed in 1877; **Figs.4 & 5**) shows numerous buildings of timber construction in the village (those shaded grey) as opposed to brick or stone construction (those shaded pink – all brick in this case, apart from the church). The buildings shown fronting onto Back Street and Silver Street and encroaching into the field strips between it and Ashwell Street were a mixture of brick and timber construction. A number of farms still stood between High Street and Back Street/Silver Street.
- 2.15 The application site (plot 313) was at this time in arable use (as recorded in the OS Area Book) and there was still a small orchard in the north-west corner against Lucas Lane. The plot to the west (312) was pasture, well planted with trees, and truncated by the encroachment of the large garden to Springhead House (now Spring House) into it. West of this was Jessamine Farm with plot 311 to its rear comprising an orchard. Plot 278, to west of that, comprised houses, yards and gardens, including houses and gardens at the southern end facing onto Ashwell Street. Likewise, the plot to the latter's west on the opposite corner of Limekiln Lane had buildings fronting onto Ashwell Street.
- 2.16 A new house, yard and garden (plot 315) had been erected in the pasture field east of the site (plot 314), with a long driveway extending through to it from Lucas Lane. This

house, now much extended, is known today as Townsend House (the field is recorded as Townsend Close in 1841).

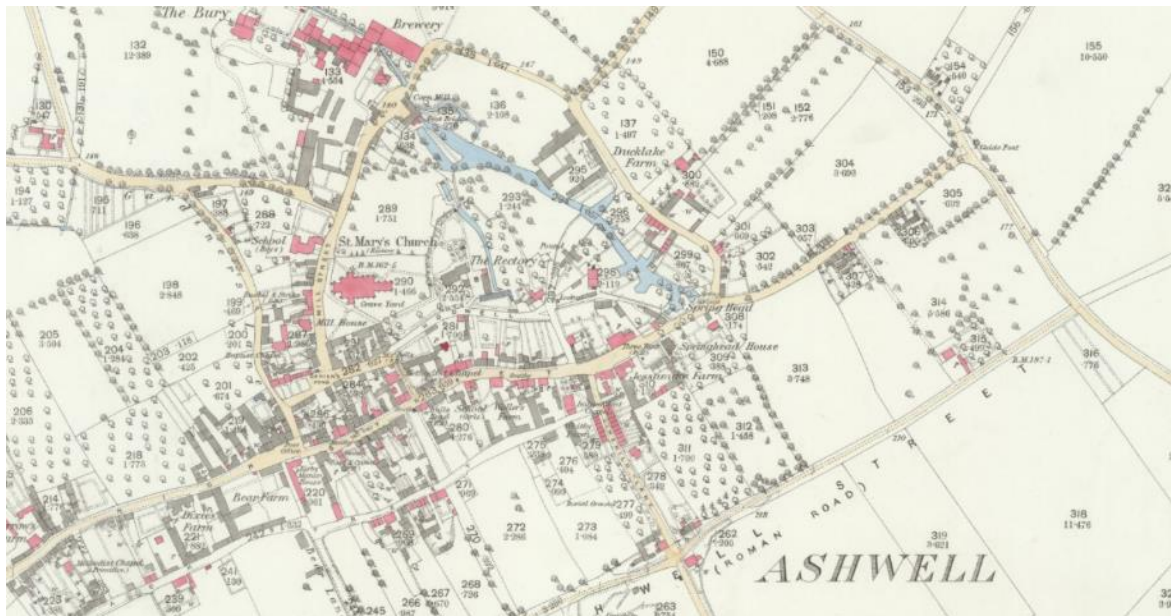


Fig.4: 1888 OS map (surveyed in 1877)

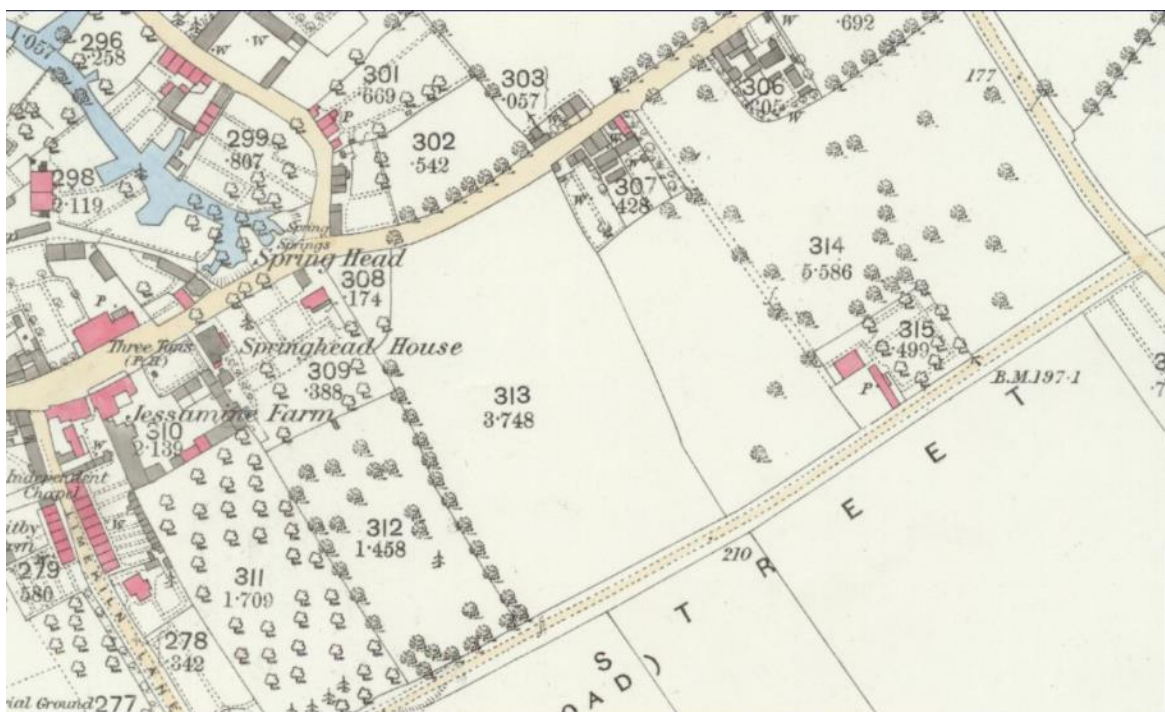


Fig.5: 1888 OS map (surveyed in 1877)

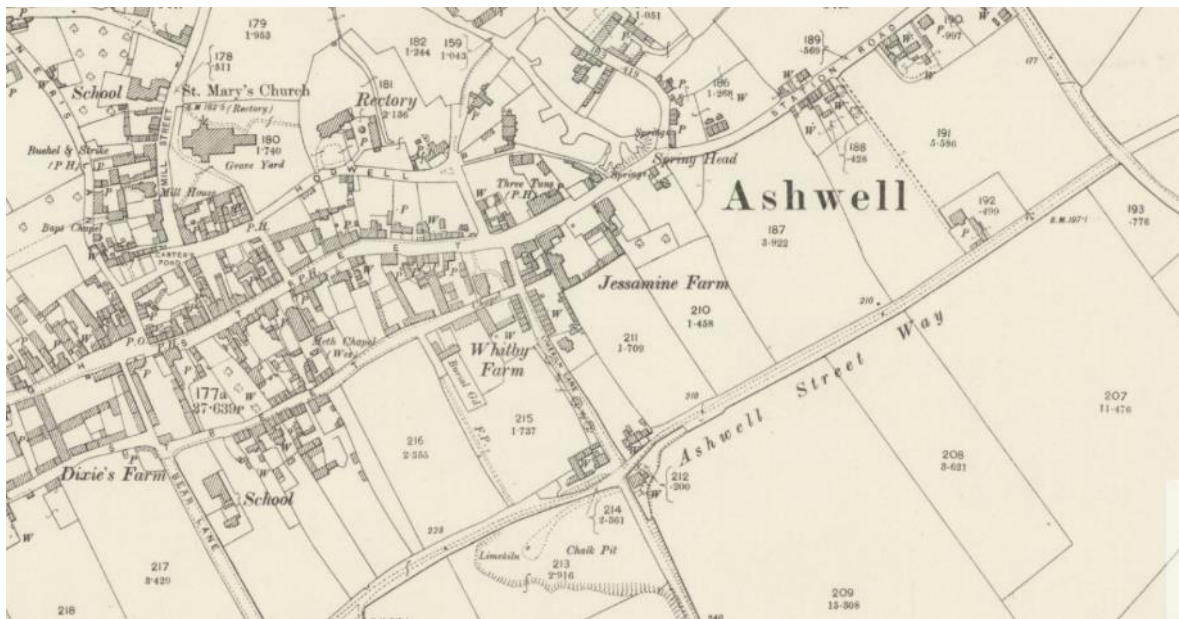


Fig.6: 1898 OS map

- 2.17 The 1898 OS map (**Fig.6**) shows further encroachment into the fields between Back Street/Silver Street and Ashwell Street, with a burial ground in the plot west of Limekiln Lane and a school east of Bear Lane. This encroachment continued into the early 20th century with a timber yard established on one plot and the construction of a new house (Ashwell House, No.5 High Street) between 1901 and 1924 (**Fig.7**) in the centre of the plot west of the application site.
- 2.18 In the 1930s new residential development began in Ashwell, with new houses along Station Road east of the site. By 1960, more development was taking place in the field strips between Back Street/Silver Street and Ashwell Street. By 1975 (**Fig.8**), the frontage of the plot containing the site to Lucas Lane had been developed with a row of five bungalows, maintaining an access to the field between them. The Woodforde Close cul-de-sac development had also been built over the two plots west of Ashwell House, with access from Ashwell Street. Whitby Farm had been demolished and its plot directly west of Limekiln Lane (which had become Kingsland Way) and that adjoining to the west were in the process of being developed with another cul-de-sac, Angell's Meadow. East of the site, a group of outbuildings had been erected east of Townsend House, including a row of pigsties (recently demolished as part of the land's redevelopment with nine houses).



Fig.7: 1924 OS map

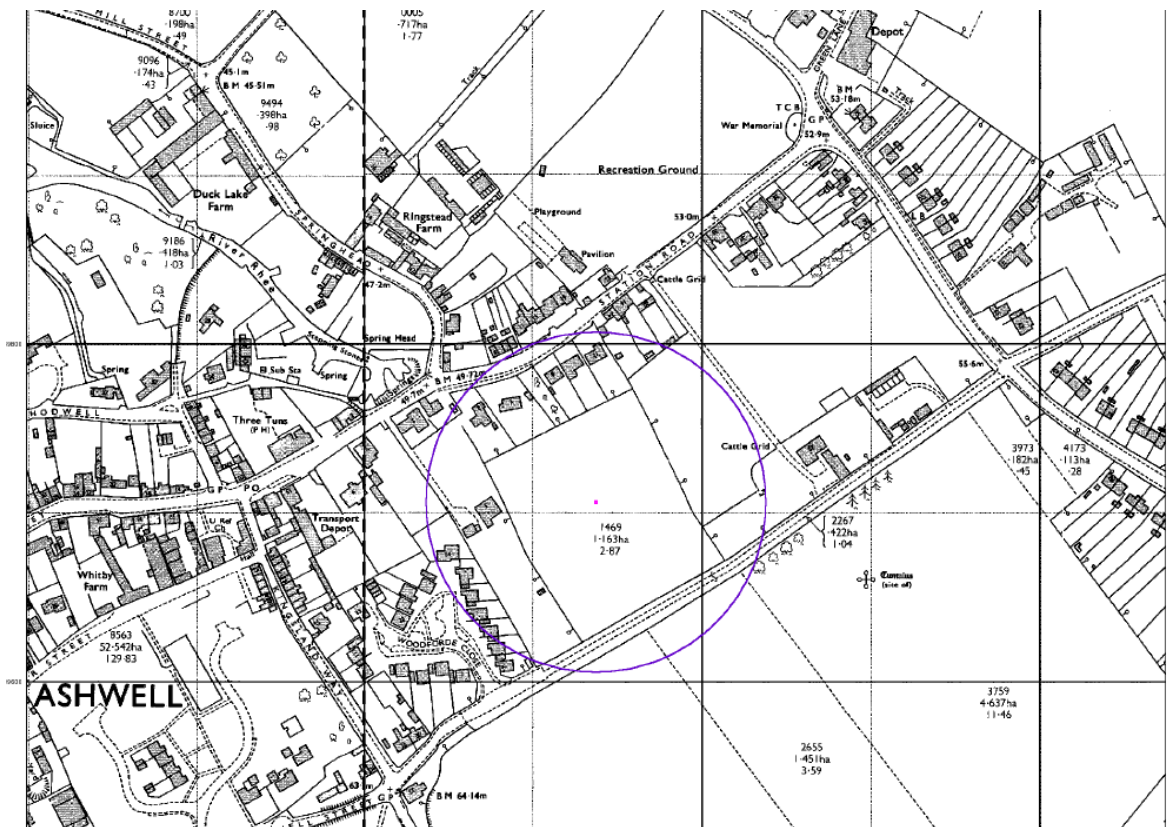


Fig.8: 1975 OS map

- 2.19 By 1983, Dixie's Close had also been developed to the west over the former field strips west of Bear Lane and other development had taken place to the west of this, including houses fronting Ashwell Street and a factory. The house called Hunt's Ridge was built on Ashwell Street adjoining the western boundary of the site in the 1980s-90s. The development known as Moule's Yard was built in c.2000, west of Angell's Meadow and accessed from Ashwell Street. The OS 1999 aerial photograph shows the application site was then in arable use (see **Appendix 3** for the later 20th-century OS mapping).
- 2.20 In more recent times, there has been further new development in the immediate vicinity of the site. Following consent granted in 2010 (ref: 10/02608/1), a substantial new four-bed detached house with two attached garages and detached garden building with a new access from Ashwell Street (East Lodge, No.22 Lucas Lane) was built on a new plot carved out of the garden to Townsend House, standing between the latter and the site.
- 2.21 Planning permission was granted on 15th August 2019 (ref: 19/01377/FP) for four three-bedroom dwellings forming two semi-detached pairs on the Lucas Road frontage of the large garden to Townsend House, with a new access from Lucas Lane (named 'Boundary Cottages'). Despite their inclusion in the conservation area and position immediately north-east of the Grade II listed Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane, no consultation comment on the application was made by the Council's Conservation Officer. These houses have now been constructed.
- 2.22 Planning permission (ref: 19/00455/FP) was granted on 11th August 2020 on the plot east of Townsend House for the erection of nine dwellings and the creation of a new access from Station Road. This development, known as Townsend Meadows, was completed in 2021. The Council's Conservation Officer considered less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the scale, to result to the significance of the Conservation Area *'due to the visibility of the development and its urbanising effect on land which is part of a wider undeveloped area that extends further to the west.'* This harm was weighed against the public benefits arising, as per paragraph 208 of the NPPF, and these were considered *'to outweigh the relatively small harm to the Conservation Area.'* The principal benefit cited was that the development would result in an improvement to the District's housing land supply position.

Present-day description of the site

- 2.23 The application site comprises a rectangular pasture field (**Plates 1 to 11**). Access is gained by a field gate onto Ashwell Street at the south-western corner of the site. The site slopes down towards the north to meet the rear gardens of post-war bungalows fronting onto Lucas Lane (Nos.2-12) on its northern boundary, divided from the site by a mix of post-and-wire, post-and-rail and close-boarded fencing, and the trees and shrubs within the gardens to these properties.
- 2.24 To the west is the plot comprising No.5 High Street (Ashwell House), a large early 20th-century detached house in a Queen Anne style, and its substantial garden, backing onto the garden of Hunt's Ridge, a late 20th-century detached dormer bungalow fronting onto Ashwell Street. The boundary itself is formed by hedges of varying heights.
- 2.25 The eastern boundary is formed by a close-boarded fence and post-and-rail fence, overhung by a high hedge against the large garden to the early 21st-century Regency-style No.22 Lucas Lane (East Lodge).
- 2.26 Ashwell Street forms the southern boundary, divided from the site by an earth bank with mature trees and undergrowth, with extensive arable farmland extending to the south of the street (**Plates 12 & 13**). Ashwell Street is surfaced with Tarmac from its western end, becoming an unmade lane where it meets the driveway to Hunt's Ridge. Beyond this, it is flanked by earth banks (higher on the south side), supporting trees, bushes and undergrowth. It is a public byway, used by vehicles as a cut-through to and from Station Road and to access East Lodge and Townsend House, both properties having wide gated vehicular openings onto it.

3.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Intrinsic significance

- 3.2.1 The site is a remnant of a formerly extensive system of small fields extending back to Ashwell Street. Unlike other such fields, which extended from a back lane in the heart of the village, the site and the two fields to its east lay outside the purview of the back lane, as did three such fields at the western end of the series.
- 3.2.2 The site is now a single isolated example of these which, without recognisable context, has lost much of its meaning; all the other such fields have now either been developed with housing or are in use as large gardens to individual houses, a process of change which began in the mid-19th century and accelerated throughout the second half of the 20th century. More recently, in August 2020, planning permission was granted for the Townsend Meadows development of nine houses over the easternmost field strip, east of that containing Townsend House.
- 3.2.3 Without surviving context, it is now difficult to appreciate the site as part of this former farming system; although the origins of the street pattern of High Street/Lucas Lane and Back Street/Silver Street can still be recognised, the use of the land encompassed by it has entirely changed, with development cutting across the former plots (e.g. Angell's Meadow and Dixie's Close) so that the pattern of strips has also been heavily degraded and is no longer legible as a single entity. Once agriculture started to become less dominant and farmsteads became simple homesteads, the fields directly associated with them fell out of agricultural use, inevitably leading to pressure for development as the town's population expanded in the 20th century.
- 3.2.4 In this context, the intrinsic heritage significance of the site is relatively low. It is no longer part of a legible and meaningful 'whole,' that is, one element of a series of similar fields making up a single system, but a single plot of land which has lost context and therefore significance as part of the whole. In other words, the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. Nevertheless, the site (apart from the bungalow development along its northern edge) has survived as open land, and therefore retains a limited degree of interest in this respect.

- 3.2.5 The below-ground archaeological significance of the site has been assessed and discussed in separate reports.

3.2 Contribution to the conservation area

Introduction

- 3.2.1 The application site falls within the Ashwell Conservation Area, first designated on 10th June 1968, extended on 19th June 1978 and in December 1986, and most recently amended in 2023 as a result of proposed amendments put forward in the 2023 Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (the 'CAMP'). The current conservation area designation map is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2.2 The 2023 review resulted in the removal of the Townsend Meadow development (east of the application site) from the conservation area on the grounds that, *'The materials and design of the dwellings do not reference the Conservation Area's character and the cul-de-sac development is somewhat at odds with its historic pattern of development,'* despite this development having been approved by the Council as recently as August 2020 (ref: 19/00455/FP).
- 3.2.3 The 2022 consultation draft of the CAMP proposed the inclusion in the amended area of land south of Ashwell Street between Station Road and Kingsland Way, south of the application site. This proposal was dropped following consultation (rightly, in my view, as it comprised an arbitrarily defined strip of arable land encompassing one of five Bronze Age ring ditches designated as Scheduled Monuments, more properly considered as part of the setting of the conservation area). However, the now-omitted accompanying text noted that this arable land *'falls just outside the settlement boundary and marks, along with the unpaved section of Ashwell Street, the distinct transition between the settlement boundary to the north and open rural countryside to the south,'* recognising the fact that Ashwell's settlement boundary had been extended to include the application site.
- 3.2.4 The October 2019 Conservation Area Character Statement ('the CACS') was produced by Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions UK Ltd on behalf of the Council. This document is still available on the Council's website and appears therefore to remain current alongside the CAMP. The latter says of the CACS that it, *'identified the*

significance of the Conservation Area but did not assess the boundary or provide a management plan. It is therefore assumed that its assessment of the area's significance remains valid.

- 3.2.5 It is perhaps worth noting that, in the course of determination of application ref: 20/00126/FP, it was made apparent that the Council's Conservation Officer was not wholly satisfied with some of the content of the CACS although a draft had been submitted to the Council for 'client review' in July 2019 and was presumably signed off thereafter.
- 3.2.6 The Officer, in his 14/10/20 consultation comments on the application expressed disagreement with the document's description of the local topography as a 'river valley' (and see paragraph 3.2.22 below) with hills to the north; noted that the associated mapping failed to plot a number of listed buildings on Lucas Lane (an error of fact which has since been corrected in an updated version of the CACS); and noted also that a number of buildings which in his opinion should have been identified as Buildings of Local Interest ('BLIs') had not been so identified. These included No.5 High Street (Ashwell House, on the plot west of the site), Townsend House (two plots east of the site), No.32 Lucas Lane (The Cricketers) and Ringstead Farmhouse, Springhead.
- 3.2.7 These latter buildings were not subsequently identified as BLIs in the updated CACS. This is relevant to this assessment because if they had been so classified this would have equated to formal identification of these buildings as non-designated heritage assets.
- 3.2.8 The 2023 CAMP identifies buildings which it considers are non-designated heritage assets that should be considered for inclusion on a future local list. These include The Cricketers and Ringstead House, but No.5 and Townsend House are not identified in this category. Nevertheless, these two buildings, which are in proximity to the application site have, in order to be robust, been considered in this report as though they had been so identified.

Summary of special interest

3.2.9 The conservation area encompasses the historic core of the village, including the medieval streets at High Street and Lucas Lane, West End, Back Street, Silver Street, Church Lane, Swan Street and Hodwell. In these streets there is a very distinct and cohesive character where the buildings, the street patterns and the spaces all reflect the village's history as a market town and farming community.

3.2.10 The oldest part of the village appears to have developed around the church, with High Street dominated to the west by large timber-framed farmhouses. Back Street and Silver Street, the back lanes south of the High Street, are now fully developed to both sides with 19th- and 20th-century brick housing and likewise the land behind the frontages so that, other than the surviving street pattern, there is little or no sense now of the field strips which once extended through from the back lanes to Ashwell Street. The land between High Street and Back Street/Silver Street contains a number of courtyard developments, some of which incorporate the remnants of farms.

3.2.11 The CACS summarises the special interest of the conservation area thus:

'Ashwell Conservation Area contains most of the village, except for small areas of modern housing to its west, south and east. It centres on the Church of St Mary (1102715), with its large four-stage tower and spike, Swan Street, possibly the site of a former village green or market place, and High Street. The latter is densely developed, at least in its central part, and contains medieval to modern buildings, notably a number of medieval hall houses, the form of which is echoed in other, later buildings through the Conservation Area. At the west end of High Street is The Spring from which a waterway with tree-covered banks runs north-west towards Ashwell Bury, the former corn mill and a former brewery. The Church of St Mary is Ashwell's main landmark, visible from across the village, beyond the boundaries of the Conservation Area and village, whether in long views or glimpsed between buildings as you move around Ashwell.

A key feature of the Conservation Area is the parallel High Street and Back Street/Silver Street, and the roads and alleyways that connect them and play a role in enhancing the coherence of this large Conservation Area through providing access and long views, especially towards the church.'

- 3.2.12 The eastward extension of High Street beyond the main edge of the earlier settlement is Lucas Lane, which is more varied in character with a mix of 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century buildings interspersed with modern inter-war and post-war housing stock, most of which was designed with little regard to its historic context. This runs along the northern edge of the site (**Plate 14**). Mature trees and greenery contribute significantly to the character of Lucas Lane particularly, but not exclusively, in the area of the recreation ground.
- 3.2.13 At the southern edge of the village, much of the later infilling development of the 20th century has been excluded from the conservation area, albeit Woodforde Close, west of the application site, has been included, as has some of the inter-war social housing on parts of Station Road to the east (constructed in an Arts and Crafts style influenced by Letchworth Garden City) and the post-war development along Lucas Lane.

The contribution of the site

- 3.2.14 The CAMP divides the conservation area into four Character Areas based on an evaluation of the various attributes, characteristics and phases of development of each area. The application site lies within Character Area One – Ashwell’s Historic Core. The Map of the Character Areas included in the consultation document is of poor quality but inexplicably includes the 2010 house (East Lodge, No.22 Lucas Lane) east of the application site in this Character Area while including the 19th-century Townsend House to its east within Character Area 3 – Interwar Development.
- 3.2.15 The CACS identifies a number of ‘significant key views’ within the conservation area, one of which (KV23) is taken looking north-west across the application site from the gate onto Ashwell Street in its south-west corner (see **Plate 2**). The view is described as being, *‘From Ashwell Street looking north across field towards Alder Cottage including the tree coverage within the Conservation Area.’* The particular quality of the view is not otherwise described.
- 3.2.16 The CACS (paragraph 2.1.3) refers to this view again, where it discusses the playing field: *‘The open space of the playing field north of Lucas Lane and pastures north of it are on the edge of the populated part of the village but, again, are brought meaningfully into the whole by the views they afford from the edge of the Conservation Area towards*

the Church of St Mary (1102715) and the centre of the village. Such views are not possible across the green space on the south side of Lucas Lane due to the intervening properties, although Ashwell Street is elevated above most of the village and has good views across pasture towards Lucas Lane and the playing field.'

- 3.2.17 The 'green space' on the south side of Lucas Lane is taken to mean the application site and possibly other areas adjoining it. Although KV23 is not specifically mentioned, it must fall within the above description of the view from Ashwell Street towards the playing field.
- 3.2.18 All that can be seen of the Grade II listed Alder Cottage (No.16 Lucas Lane) in KV23 is its rear roof-slope and a first-floor window; the rest of the building is concealed by the substantial single- and two-storey extensions to the rear of the adjoining Grade II listed No.14, erected following consent in 2001. This is not a view of either of these listed buildings that is in any way remarkable or revealing of their heritage interest.
- 3.2.19 The CAMP includes the same view ('View north from Ashwell Street') which it numbers Viewpoint 10. It describes it, rather vaguely, as a view which *'looks down from higher ground to the village and its buildings below.'*
- 3.2.20 The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan ('the NP') includes a map of Ashwell (Fig.7.10; [ashwell_neighbourhood_plan_january_2021.pdf](#)) identifying *'important village views.'* The Pre-submission Consultation Version September 2018 of the NP did not include the view identified in the CACS as KV23, or any other view encompassing the application site, but the 'made' version does include an 'extensive (over 90°)' view (SV12) looking north across the site from the gateway, described as *'To the North – from Ashwell St (also known as The Ruddery). An important distant view through Hunts Close pasture land across Lucas Lane housing and beyond to open countryside in the North towards Wrestlingworth. The view projects a strong feeling of space and rural tranquillity.'*
- 3.2.21 This description is more indicative of the particular qualities of the view, focusing on landscape rather than heritage attributes. KV23/SV12 looks north and north-west across the field comprising the application site, across the roofs of the bungalows and other 20th-century houses on Lucas Lane, beyond which is the tree-lined playing field (only the treetops are seen) and beyond that a distant view of a gently rolling agricultural

landscape of fields extending to the horizon. It is an attractive layered view across the later edge of the settlement, which enables some appreciation of the topographical setting of the village and conservation area.

- 3.2.22 Because of the 19th- and 20th-century infill of the other fields which may once have allowed similar views across the settlement and out to the landscape beyond, this view has been identified (in Refusal Reason 1 of both the 2020 and 2022 applications) as *'the sole remaining opportunity to experience the village nestled in the so-called 'river valley' from the south side of the village and unfettered by development in the fore or mid ground.'*
- 3.2.23 The part of the settlement over which KV23 looks is not part of the historic core but for the most part later ribbon development extending eastwards from its edge. Apart from Nos.14 & 16 Lucas Lane at the extreme right of the view, the exceptions are the jumble of roofs of buildings in the extreme left of the view, which include the unlisted Ringstead House and an associated barn, unlisted Victorian red brick Nos.10-12 Springhead, and the Grade II listed Spring Cottage, all on Springhead, which lie at the historic built edge.
- 3.2.24 Fig.4 of the 2018 Pre-Submission Version of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (reproduced below as **Fig.9** because it has been omitted from the 'made' version) shows a pre-1970 postcard view from Ashwell Street looking north over Angell's Meadow (west of the application site), a former field strip extending between Silver Street and Ashwell Street, before it was developed with housing in the 1970s. While this is therefore a view with a similar context to KV23, the view across Angell's Meadow was towards the central historic core of the village and St Mary's Church, very much showing the historic village in its topographical setting.
- 3.2.25 KV23 is clearly not of this quality in terms of what it reveals of historic character, but is a lesser view, giving a sense of a village in its landscape setting, but not the historic core of that village. It looks instead over land which was historically outside the main built-up area of the village, with only a few scattered cottages on Lucas Lane, and which has since become developed with post-war housing.
- 3.2.26 I would therefore consider KV23 to make a low to moderate contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The greatest value of the conservation area,

and the reason for its designation, lies in the interest of the historic built environment of its core. KV23 reveals something of its wider physical setting in the landscape.

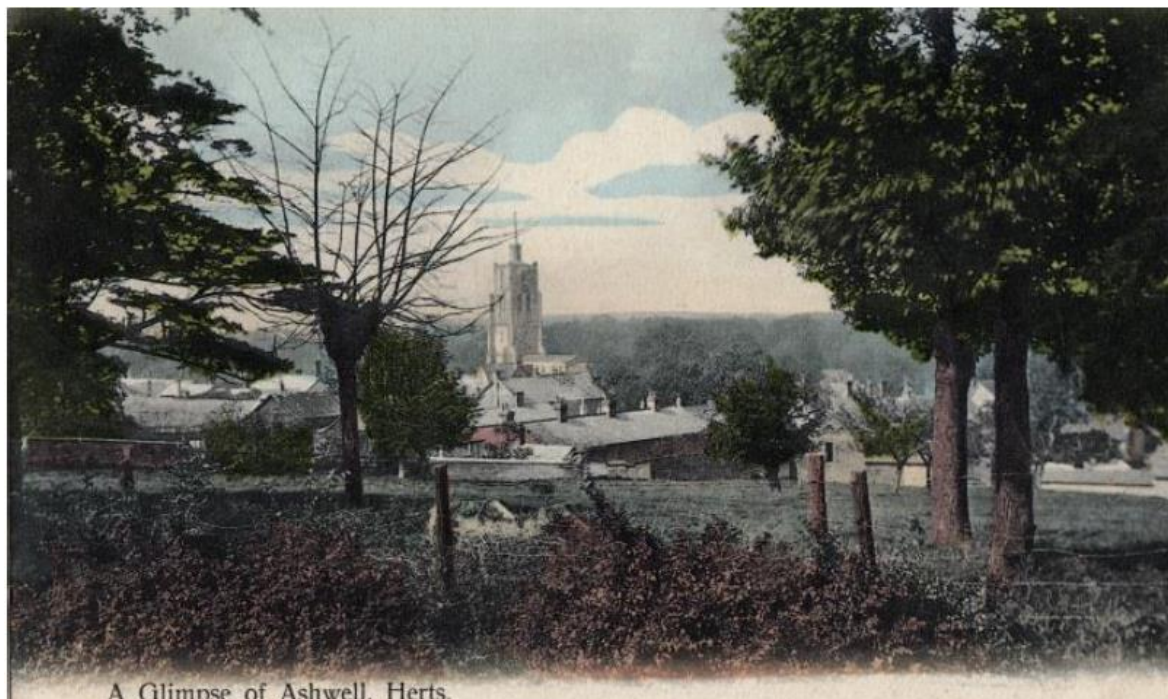


Fig.9: Postcard view of Ashwell from over Angell's Meadow, before 1970 (from Pre-Submission Consultation Version September 2018 of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan

3.2.27 Within the conservation area, the site is most visible from Ashwell Street, which forms its southern boundary. Just west of the site, Ashwell Street turns from a tarmac road with street lighting, a footway and concrete kerbs to a narrow, unmade track with grassy verges and trees which create a tunnel-like effect. Raised banks and vegetation limit views into the site, more so in summer than in winter, and the character of the lane becomes more rural, although this is diluted again just to the north-east by the presence of East Lodge and Townsend House and their high boundary treatments and vehicular gates, and by the recent Walkden's housing development on the south side of Ashwell Street as it approaches Station Road and the suburban streetscape there (**Plates 15-17**).

3.2.28 The lack of development on the application site feeds into the more rural character of this section of Ashwell Street, but the experience of that character is not wholly dependent on the site. Immediately having left the late 20th-century housing developments and tarmac road by Hunt's Ridge, one is at the field gate and KV23.

Beyond that, the street continues, edged by earth banks with trees and undergrowth, giving way to hedgerow beyond the site. Because of the banks and tree screening, one's view is generally channelled ahead, in the summer months through the 'green tunnel' that is created by the trees. It is this effect which contributes most to rural character, with extensive agricultural land lying to the south (**Plates 18 & 19**).

- 3.2.29 In summer the site is very well screened by trees and other vegetation. In the winter months, there is more visibility between the trees into the open land of the site, albeit one has to climb the southern bank and look across to really appreciate this (**Plates 20-22**).
- 3.2.30 In summary, the site, as an open field, particularly in the winter months, makes some contribution to the semi-rural character of this part of Ashwell Street but the character of Ashwell Street does not rely on the site.
- 3.2.31 From Lucas Lane, there are only occasional glimpses to small parts of the application site, which is thoroughly screened by the row of bungalows, garden trees and garages, which are slightly elevated and leave little scope for meaningful views through to the south (**Plate 23**). Similarly, glimpsed views of small parts of the site (mostly of the treeline) are available from points on the playing field (**Plate 24** and see Wireframe 2 included in the LVIA). The main focus of these views is the treeline along Ashwell Street.
- 3.2.32 There are glimpsed distant views to parts of the site from PRow Ashwell 018 to the north of the village and conservation area (**Plate 26**). These views are kinetic rather than being taken from a fixed point. The most prominent aspect is the treeline on the ridge along Ashwell Street – even in winter, as the trees are full of ivy growth. Part of the open land within the site can be seen, and the roof of Hunt's Ridge. The settlement is experienced from here as a linear form extending east, with the church right at the extreme western end of some of these views. Some understanding is gained of the topographical setting of the village and how it has spread eastwards in later times, away from the church, but the site is not a significant contributor to that understanding in these views.
- 3.2.33 In summary, I am of the opinion that the contribution of the site to the character and appearance of the conservation area, as that is described and understood in the CACS,

is low to moderate, and derives chiefly from the ability to appreciate the wider setting of the village (albeit a later edge of the village) in KV23.

3.3 Listed buildings and their settings

Introduction

3.3.1 Ashwell contains numerous statutorily listed buildings. Of these, there is only a small number that have any appreciable inter-visibility with the application site. These are:

- Alder Cottage, 16 Lucas Lane, Grade II (**Plate 26**)
- 14 Lucas Lane, Grade II (**Plate 27**)
- Church of St Mary, Mill Street Grade I (**Plate 28**)

3.3.2 Nos.14 & 16 Lucas Lane are situated just beyond the north-eastern corner of the site while St Mary's Church stands c.340m from the north-west corner of the site.

3.3.3 The NPPF Glossary defines the setting of a heritage asset as, '*The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.*'

3.3.4 The assessment of setting herein is based on the guidance provided by Historic England in *The Setting of Heritage Assets. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3* ('GPA3'; 2nd edn December 2017). This document explains that setting is not itself a heritage asset; its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or to the ability to appreciate that significance. As the PPG accompanying the NPPF amplifies, an assessment of the impact on setting needs to take into account the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.

3.3.5 The staged approach to the assessment of setting outlined in the guidance is followed here. Those heritage assets with the potential to be affected by the proposed development are first identified (Stage 1); the contribution of the settings of the assets to their significance (and/or to the ability to appreciate that significance) is assessed

(Stage 2); the effects of the proposed development on that significance or on the ability to appreciate it are assessed (Stage 3); and the mitigation of any identified harm is considered (Stage 4).

Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane (Grade II)

Significance and setting

- 3.3.6 The closest listed buildings to the site are Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane, the rear gardens of which are slightly detached from the site at its north-eastern corner (**Plate 29**). It is the rear of No.14 and its early 21st-century extensions that is closest to the application site.
- 3.3.7 The architectural and historic significance of 14 Lucas Lane lies in the symmetry of its front elevation and plan form, its use of local vernacular materials and as an example of a modest cottage of 18th century date. However, the rear of the listed building was much extended with surprisingly large two- and single-storey additions in c.2001 (planning refs 01/01079/1LB and 01/01078/1HH). The consequence of the extensions is that the historic part of the building is largely screened from the application site by them and they dilute historic character such that the age and significance of the building is not appreciable from the site.
- 3.3.8 No. 16 Lucas Lane (Alder Cottage), a mid-19th-century cottage, stands immediately east of No.14. It is of timber-framed construction with plastered walls and large 12-pane sash windows. Its architectural and historic significance lies largely in the unusual treatment of its front elevation which employs Egyptian-style architraves to the door and window surrounds. The horse carved in relief on a plaster panel on the façade is apparently the mark of a craftsman. The building was included on the list for its group value, presumably in association with No.14.
- 3.3.9 The key element of the shared setting of these buildings is the Lucas Lane streetscape and their relationship with each other and with the deeply set-back No.20 (**Plate 30**). This is reflected in the inclusion of No.16 on the list for its group value, and the relationship is characterised by the significant differences in the architecture of all three buildings, which makes for an interesting grouping. These, along with No.32 and others further east are earlier outliers of the historic village on the approach from the east and,

while they now give way to mid and late 20th-century infill before the historic core is encountered, they give a sense of what might lie further on. The wider group has also been interrupted recently by the introduction of four new houses ('Boundary Cottages') between No.20 and The Cricketers at No.32 (**Plate 31** and see **Plate 24**).

3.3.10 The application site does not affect the ability to experience the significance of these buildings, either individually or as a group, within their key setting.

3.3.11 As there is intervisibility between the site and the rears of both buildings, the site might be considered to form part of their physical setting. However, the dominant feature of the view of the buildings from the site is the substantial late 20th-/early 21st-century extensions, particularly the two-storey addition to the rear of No.14, and the views from the site do not assist in revealing the significance of either building (**Plate 29**).

3.3.12 From the recreation ground, in the winter months, there is a glimpsed view between No.20 and No.16 into the site, in which the treeline along its southern boundary to Ashwell Street is visible above and beyond No.20, but this is a transient glimpse which does not contribute to the ability to appreciate the significance of the listed buildings (**Plate 24**).

3.3.13 In summary, both properties have a passive visual connection to the site to their rears, but the site does not contribute to their significance or special character. Neither does it contribute anything to the principal views of these buildings within their key streetscape setting.

St Mary's Church (Grade I)

Significance and setting

3.3.14 St. Mary's parish church is Ashwell's main landmark, visible from numerous vantage points across the village and from beyond the boundaries of it and the conservation area. As the CACS states, '*The Church of St Mary...with its tall four-stage tower...and spike, is visible across the village, whether as an open view or between buildings when passing along High Street. Ashwell is notable for having a number of connecting streets and alleyways between High Street and Back Street/Silver Street. These add to the coherence of the large Conservation Area as they occasionally allow long views towards*

or from the church, for instance Church Lane leading from the churchyard to High Street, which continues to Silver Street as an alleyway.'

- 3.3.15 The CAMP also refers to how the church '*dominates the settlement, providing a prominent communal and spiritual way-marker, being visible in multiple views whilst travelling through the village.*'
- 3.3.16 The church was completed in 1381 and altered in the 15th century by the addition of new aisle windows and a north porch. Apart from its impressively large tower, it is particularly renowned for the 14th-century graffiti that survives inside, including an inscription recording the survival of Ashwell's inhabitants during the great plague and a drawing of Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London.
- 3.3.17 As tall structures, church towers and spires are often widely visible within their respective townscapes but also from within their surrounding landscapes, often at long distances, particularly where assisted by the topography. This means their physical settings can be considered very extensive. Inter-visibility does not in itself mean that a setting makes a particular or positive contribution to heritage significance.
- 3.3.18 In this case, the ability to appreciate the tower and spire from locations within and outside the village is certainly an aspect of the significance of St Mary's Church and contributes to its heritage value. The fact that it is so visible speaks of the aspirations of those who built it; it was designed to be seen from far afield and views of the tower, even glimpsed views, are a cherished part of the local scene.
- 3.3.19 In illustration of this, out of the 13 key views identified in the NP, 11 focus on, or otherwise include, the tower of St Mary's Church, unsurprising given its scale and height, and its high degree of visibility generally. Similarly, 12 out of the 23 identified 'key views' in the CACS incorporate the church tower and reference is made in the document to the numerous views available of the building.
- 3.3.20 These views generally fall into three broad categories: the sudden intimate views that open up between buildings or along lanes within the village; mid-range wider townscape views; and those more distant views which allow an appreciation of the church within

its wider context. Examples of the first type (see Appendix B of the CACS) include KV7, KV9 and KV14. Examples of the second type include KV3, KV11 and KV13, and of the third type KV19 and KV20.

- 3.3.21 The CAMP identifies 15 views on fig.71, p.55, which do not include all of the 23 views identified in the CACS. While this is unnecessarily confusing while both reports apparently remain extant, one of the views identified in the CAMP (Viewpoint 10) is coincident with KV23 in the CACS.
- 3.3.22 Although not a view which is identified in the CACS, the CAMP or the NP, the upper two stages of the church tower and its spike can be seen from the application site (see **Plates 3, 4 & 11**), and the top stage and spike just glimpsed, if one looks for it, through the trees from just outside its south-east corner on Ashwell Street (**Plate 32**). This latter is a relatively insignificant view because it is not easily seen because of the earth bank and trees, but the views from within the south-eastern corner of the site are better; from here, the church is seen as a more distant backdrop to No.5 High Street, which is well set back from the road within the adjoining plot west of the site.
- 3.3.23 This latter building, considered by the Council's Conservation Officer to be worthy of classification as a Building of Local Importance (BLI) but not identified as such in the CACS or the CAMP, was built during the first 20 years of the 20th century and is in the Queen Anne Revival style popular at that time, a style which I suggest was inspired here by the c.1700 Grade II* Jessamine House just to its west. It is a large four-square red brick double-pile house with hipped roof and tall stack to each corner, dormers and multi-paned sashes. It is prominent in views west across the site, with the upper part of the church seen rising behind it or close to it from some vantage points, and the juxtaposition, while incidental, is quite attractive.
- 3.3.24 As one moves northwards partway along the eastern boundary of the site, the relationship of the two buildings changes a little but they are still seen in conjunction; further down the slope, the church becomes quite divorced from No.5, and from other vantage points within the site it is not seen at all.
- 3.3.25 This view should probably be considered to straddle the second and third types of view referred to above at paragraph 3.3.20, somewhere between the mid-range and longer

distance views. It is not seen in conjunction with the historic core of the settlement but does serve as a 'signpost' to where that is in relation to the site, placing the site in its context on the outskirts of the village and contributing to its sense of place. It is an attractive view albeit not necessarily one which reveals much about the significance of the church other than, as in most of the numerous available views of it, to give some indication of its large scale and therefore importance. This view is not publicly available.

- 3.3.26 Because there are so many views of the church, many parts of the village could be said to form part of its setting and many areas at some distance away could also be said to form part of its wider setting. As set out above, setting comprises the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced, and its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or to the ability to appreciate that significance.
- 3.3.27 As one of numerous views of the church available throughout the village and conservation area, and beyond it, the view available across the site towards the church in conjunction with No.5 has visual appeal. It is not a view of the highest importance as it reveals little of the context of the church (there are many views which better reveal the significance of the church within its historic context), but it does provide a reference point for the location of the historic core in relation to the site.
- 3.3.28 The site itself contributes nothing specific to an understanding of the significance of the church, other than providing one of many vantage points of varying quality from which to appreciate its scale and therefore status. The view is attractive but by no means 'unique' in terms of its contribution, or key to an understanding of the Grade I listed church.

3.4 Non-designated heritage assets

- 3.4.1 There are no BLIs identified in the CACS or CAMP that have any intervisibility or other meaningful relationship with the site. However, it has been mentioned above (see paragraphs 3.2.6-3.2.7) that the Council's Conservation Officer was of the opinion that No.5 High Street and No.24 Lucas Lane (Townsend House), *inter alia*, should also have been identified as BLIs.

- 3.4.2 No.5 High Street has already been mentioned in the context of its visual relationship with St Mary's Church in views from the site. As described above, this is a large detached residence of the 1900s or 1910s, designed in a Queen Anne Revival style that was very possibly influenced by the neighbouring Jessamine House of c.1700.
- 3.4.3 The CACS selected buildings as BLIs '*through the contribution they make to the townscape of the Conservation Area.*' It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the document's authors did not include No.5 because it is barely seen from the public highway and is therefore not very visible in the townscape. However, it is visible from the application site and is an attractive and striking building that does make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 3.4.4 The primary setting of the house, which was built in the field strip adjoining the site, is the generous private garden that was created out of that field. While the site could be said to form part of its physical setting as the house can be seen from it, it has no meaningful relationship with it other than to allow a view of a building that is not readily seen from elsewhere. The visual relationship of No.5 with the church (as experienced from the site) is incidental.
- 3.4.5 Townsend House was erected in the mid-19th century on the large field parcel east of the site that was extended to include the parcel further east. Although it faces north and has a Lucas Lane address, and a long driveway from that street, it is situated close to the Ashwell Street frontage, on which there is another vehicular entrance and where there are rear ancillary buildings on the frontage. The property comprises an elegant Classically-styled stuccoed villa with hipped slate-covered roof and large sash windows, and has very extensive landscaped gardens which form its primary setting.
- 3.4.6 Like No.5, Townsend House is relatively well concealed from public view, with glimpses available (particularly in winter) along the driveway from Lucas Lane (see **Plate 31**). However, this view to the house has recently been altered by the construction of four new houses on the Lucas Lane frontage of the land formerly associated with Townsend House; the latter is now seen as standing to their rear.
- 3.4.7 Other land historically associated with the house has recently been developed, with the division of its main garden and the erection of No.22 (East Lodge) in c.2010, in the

western part of it, having a similar position close to Ashwell Street and a vehicular entrance from there as well as a branch from the Lucas Lane driveway to Townsend House. The construction of this house has entirely changed the setting of Townsend House and its relationship to the site, from which it is now screened by East Lodge and its large garden (see **Plates 7 & 33**). In the northern half of the land east of Townsend House, nine houses have recently been constructed (Townsend Meadows).

- 3.4.8 Townsend House has no known historical relationship with the site and the site cannot meaningfully be considered part of its setting, particularly now that it has been 'divorced' and screened from it by the construction of East Lodge. From parts of the site, there are occasional glimpses available of parts of the hipped roofs and chimneys of both buildings, but no meaningful views.

4.0 THE APPLICATION SCHEME AND ITS HERITAGE IMPACT

General layout and access

- 4.1 The scheme comprises 14 new semi-detached and terraced dwellings in the eastern half of the site and public open space in the western half. The dwellings, of 1.5 and 2 storeys, with the exception of three single-storey bungalows on the lower ground at the northern end of the site, include four affordable houses.
- 4.2 The vehicular access into the site will be from Ashwell Street, from a point c.30m east of the south-west corner of the site, east of the existing farm gate, which will be retained *in situ* and from where there will be a separate pedestrian access connecting to the vehicular access.
- 4.3 At the northern edge, a second footpath will be provided through to Lucas Lane via an existing field access between existing 20th-century properties. A third footpath will enter the site from its south-eastern corner and will enable public appreciation from the site of the views through to St Mary's Church and No.5 High Street.
- 4.4 As referred to above, the proposed new houses are largely contained within the eastern half of the site, as divided along a roughly central northwest-southeast axis, along which the main continuation of the vehicular access will be taken. This will effectively form the western edge to the majority of the development, and will be screened from the public open space in the western half of the site by ornamental trees.
- 4.5 The exception to this arrangement is a pair of semi-detached dwellings (Plots 1 and 2) proposed to be situated in the north-western corner of the site parallel to its northern boundary, but the majority of the western half of the site will otherwise remain as open land and be used as public open space; this will have an informal appearance and include rich wildflower grassland with mixed native shrub and tree planting, while maintaining an open character.

Design concept, details and materials

- 4.6 This revised layout for the 14 dwellings has moved away from the traditional housing types presented proposed in 2022 and is based on a new 'farmstead' concept for the site, using a traditional courtyard type of layout and a rural agricultural aesthetic.
- 4.7 This typology was encouraged by the Council during pre-application discussions as being appropriate for this site, based on precedents Officers provided of other successful schemes which took such an approach. In this concept, Plots 1 and 2 in the north-western corner of the site represent the 'farmhouse' element overlooking the open space, while the other dwellings are designed in an ancillary agricultural style in a courtyard arrangement. On the advice of Council Officers, this layout and design is intended to reflect the semi-rural and edge-of-settlement nature of the site, adopting a layout that reflects the organic growth of a farmstead.
- 4.8 The 'farmhouse' typology for the semi-detached pair at Plots 1 and 2 will be of a traditional 'Arts and Crafts' influenced character, comprising an overall 'H'-shaped plan like that of a single house with two cross wings. The front (south-facing) elevation will incorporate exposed timber framing with white rendered infill over a red brick plinth and exposed rafter ends between gabled dormers; projecting gabled bays, with brick at ground floor and white render above, exposed purlin ends to the gables and joist ends between storeys; and hip-roofed porches set into the angles of the gabled bays. The fenestration to the gables comprises long six-light windows reflective of the Arts and Crafts revival of a 17th-century style. To either end, covered parking is provided. The rear elevation will be of red brick, with an appropriately less-detailed appearance while maintaining vernacular forms and detailing.
- 4.9 The three bungalows (Plots 3-5; arranged in an attached terrace parallel to the northern boundary of the site and behind the existing bungalows fronting onto Lucas Lane) will take the form of an extended linear stable block, constructed of brick with weatherboarding above and a slate-covered roof, incorporating open covered parking areas (with wooden gates) beneath the same continuous hipped roof structure and supported by angled timber braces, The roof will have overhanging eaves to the front, supported on posts, following a clearly evident stable block form.

- 4.10 Facing these, Plots 6 and 7 will be of a vernacular 'workers' cottage' style, comprising a simple 1.5-storey pair with gabled dormers, pitched slate-covered roof and porch canopy, with pale rendered elevations. The 1.5-storey pair at Plots 13 and 14 also express a cottage style, albeit differing from Plots 6 and 7, with exposed red brick elevations and half-hipped roof to a 'cross-wing' at one end.
- 4.11 Plots 8-12 are designed to express a collection of barns. Plots 8 and 9 (facing onto the stable block form of Plots 3-5) are of threshing-barn form, but of differing detailed design, reflecting the concept of an organic evolution of the 'farmstead.' Plot 8 is 1.5 storeys and weatherboarded over a brick plinth, while Plot 9 is fully two storeys and of exposed red brickwork. Both have half-hipped clay-tiled roofs and full-height glazed screens expressing the threshing-bay openings.
- 4.12 Plots 10–12 provide a continuous angled frontage at the south-west 'corner' of development. In combination, these buildings will appear as a mixed collection of buildings of traditional agricultural character and materials (sharing red brickwork, black weatherboarding and clay tiles) but incorporating a contemporary 'take' on those forms through the use of tall, glazed screens. Together, the group has a varied roofline and incorporates a cart-shed form which will serve as a car port.
- 4.13 The Council's comments on this concept at pre-application stage were that, in their view, *'In terms of the general layout and appearance of the proposed development, the Council consider that positive amendments have been made from the previous scheme. The development has been simplified to be less suburban in character and has become more agrarian/farmstead instead, which is viewed as an improvement... The general layout of plots 3 to 14, with the inclusion of a cart lodge building behind plots 6-8 and 13-14, is considered acceptable in general terms.'*
- 4.14 In terms of the overall concept of the layout and architectural style, my view was that the 2022 scheme reflected its existing residential context at the edge of the village, which comprises a mix of dwellings of both rural and suburban character, with the traditional vernacular design and materials of the dwellings then proposed intended to reflect the more rural aspects of that character. This enabled that scheme to sit well in its existing context and to avoid any suggestion of a uniform appearance (as alleged of

the recent Townsend Close development in the CAMP and which has led to that scheme being excluded from the conservation area).

- 4.15 While there has never been a farmstead on this particular site to set a precedent for the use of the farmstead form now encouraged, and considered more appropriate, by the Council, it is true that the village historically contained several large farmsteads, with a number still standing between High Street and Back Street/Silver Street in the late 19th century. In that respect, the farmstead typology now proposed shares characteristics with a historical form of development in the locality and, as an approach to development of the site, can also therefore be justified in heritage terms. The approach simply uses a different frame of reference to the previous design, but in my view both are acceptable for this site.
- 4.16 Like the 2022 scheme, but perhaps to an even greater degree, the scheme avoids repetition of design, incorporating a variety of forms and materials across the site. The low density of the proposed houses reflects the site's location on the periphery of the village where densities naturally fall, away from the centre of the village. Generous provision of public open space combined with gardens and high-quality planting and landscaping will all serve to retain some of the site's green qualities and maintain a soft edge against the rural landscape to the south.

Heritage impact

The conservation area

- 4.17 When considered as a whole, I draw a similar conclusion of less than substantial harm arising from this scheme on the character and appearance of the conservation area as I did in relation to the 2022 scheme. While the respective schemes differ in terms of layout, the differing impacts can be balanced to result in a similar conclusion.
- 4.18 The current proposal addresses the concerns expressed in Refusal Reason 2 of the 2022 decision. It does this by shifting the southern edge of the proposed development significantly further north into the site and away from the Ashwell Street frontage, also introducing further tree planting between the development and Ashwell Street. This clearly substantially reduces the impact on the rural character of Ashwell Street alleged

by Refusal Reason 2 of the 2022 scheme, which brought development up to the Ashwell Street frontage.

- 4.19 Ashwell Street has a semi-rural character where it passes the site, although the north side of the street is already substantially developed to both east and west of the application site, with both late 20th-century and early 21st-century houses; this development, which began in earnest in the 1970s, has significantly changed and diluted what would historically have been a much more rural character with agricultural fields to either side. The north side is, however, the village side and has always looked over the buildings in the village, while the south side retains its agricultural use (apart from the Walkden's development that has encroached into the fields at the eastern end from Station Road).
- 4.20 The street therefore is of a mixed character, which changes significantly along its length, with this particular section retaining a more rural feel because of its well-vegetated boundaries, unmade road surface and largely undeveloped south side.
- 4.21 The proposed development of the site will add to the existing development present and apparent on the north side of Ashwell Street, but will be deeply set back from the latter such that in the linear views along the lane, which is heavily screened by trees and other vegetation, it is unlikely that the proposed new dwellings will be perceived, albeit glimpses may be available in the winter months. Certainly, given the proposed orchard planting and the retention and reinforcement with native understorey hedgerow planting, of the bank and vegetated boundary of the site to Ashwell Street, the new buildings are likely to be less noticeable in such views than are the existing developments immediately to the north-east, which have solid boundary treatments against the lane.
- 4.22 Only a short section of the existing unmade road will be resurfaced up to the new access and this will be designed as a more informal shared surface. The retention of the unmade surface beyond the access and the retained and reinforced planting will ensure the continuation of existing character to a large degree.
- 4.23 I am therefore of the view that while there may be glimpses of the proposed new houses from Ashwell Street through the trees and vegetation in the winter months, the rural

character of the principal linear views along Ashwell Street will be preserved by the deep set back of the proposed dwellings from the lane, the topography, which slopes down away from it, and the existing and proposed tree and vegetation screening. In this respect, the character and appearance of the conservation area and its setting will be preserved.

- 4.24 This aspect of the scheme is referred to positively in the pre-application response, which states that, *'Some of the dwellings have also been moved north away from Ashwell Street, which would reduce the impact of built form on the character and appearance of this historic thoroughway, which is also an improvement.'*
- 4.25 This positive aspect of the proposals can be balanced against the fact that Plots 1 and 2 under the new scheme (the 'farmhouse') are proposed within the view identified in the CACS as KV23 and in the CAMP as Viewpoint 10 (under the 2022 scheme no new dwellings were sited within this view).
- 4.26 In mitigation of the proposal to site Plots 1 and 2 within the view from the field gate, the new dwellings will be located at a distance within the view, close to the northern boundary of the site and on the lower ground, where they will be seen in conjunction with existing 20th-century bungalows on Lucas Lane. In addition, the high-quality detailed design of the dwellings, intended to express an Arts and Crafts vernacular that has a relationship with the agricultural-style character of the buildings in the rest of the site, can be seen to reflect their 'edge of settlement' location. In short, the dwellings will be designed to be attractive and representative of their location and thus add visual interest to the view.
- 4.27 The importance of the view, as expressed in the CAMP, is simply that it *'looks down from higher ground to the village and its buildings below.'* This will still be the case, albeit with the introduction of the new dwellings within the view parallel to the existing Lucas Lane dwellings, while views out across the wider landscape beyond the village will still be possible above and beyond the new dwellings. This preserves the ability to appreciate the topographical setting of the settlement from Ashwell Street and the link between Ashwell and its surrounding landscape.

- 4.28 A wireframe (Viewpoint 1 included in the LVIA by Aspect Landscape) and an artist's impression (by AT Architecture) have been prepared to illustrate how the Plots 1 and 2 dwellings will appear in view KV23. The wireframe illustrates what will be blocked by the new dwellings in this view (primarily trees in the gardens of Lucas Lane and glimpses of the bungalows here), while the more detailed artist's impression provides a realistic idea of how the new buildings will appear.
- 4.29 As this shows, Plots 1 and 2 will be attractive and well-detailed and will sit comfortably within the existing landscape, their varied roofline and relative height according well with the existing village buildings seen through the large gap between the new dwellings and the western edge of the site. While the open nature of the view is reduced, this cluster of buildings to the west remains visible, as do glimpses of the roofs of existing buildings along Lucas Lane, providing the proposed development with a clear context and sense of place.
- 4.30 It is also clear from the image that the ability to appreciate the presence of the wider landscape beyond remains, with the existing closer treeline visible well above the roof of Plots 1 and 2, and the layered, more distant landscape still seen extending above and beyond. The wide gap between Plots 1 and 2 and the rest of the proposed development to the east also preserves views out to this landscape, while the farmstead concept actively contributes to an edge-of-settlement character.
- 4.31 As is well illustrated by the image, this concept, and the attractive architectural appearance and character of the proposed dwellings, are positive aspects of the scheme; the individual design of Plots 1 and 2, and their particular relationship with the agricultural-style dwellings to the east, ensure that the scheme is distinctive and without any sense of uniformity.
- 4.32 In summary, in relation to the changes to this view, I would identify the potential for a degree of less than substantial harm arising to the character and appearance of the conservation area, at the lower end of the scale. The harm is limited by the degree of significance of the view (see above); by the high quality detailed design of Plots 1 and 2; and the fact that fundamental aspects of the view will remain to be appreciated.

- 4.33 I would also draw attention to the benefit that the new public open space will bring, reinforced by the provision of pedestrian routes through the site between Lucas Lane and Ashwell Street.
- 4.34 The Management Proposals in the draft CAMP include the following criteria for successful new development:
- Relate to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land,
 - Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it (including public footpaths),
 - Respect important views,
 - Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings,
 - Use materials and building methods which are as high in quality of those used in existing buildings, and
 - Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of their setting.
- 4.35 In my view, the proposals accord with these requirements. The scale, form and materials of the new houses respect those of neighbouring buildings; the open space over which KV23 is obtained is largely preserved and new public views towards St Mary's Church will become available (see paragraph 4.46 below); the development provides new public footpath routes between Ashwell Street and Lucas Lane; and the substantial provision of undeveloped public open space enables a continuing appreciation of the site's origins as part of a historic field system.
- 4.36 It also retains a significant enough area of undeveloped land such that the site's origins will still be legible (in the way that the plots to either side have generous gardens that, although of more manicured character, enable at least some appreciation of their origins as pasture fields to be discerned).
- 4.37 The site is visually well contained and not particularly visible from other public vantage points within the conservation area. Consequently the visual impact of the proposals, particularly from Lucas Lane, will be very small. While there may be some glimpsed visibility of rooftops between properties on the Lucas Lane frontage, the likelihood is

that most observers will not be conscious of the development, in the same way that they are not conscious of the field today.

- 4.38 As already noted, it is difficult to see the site from Lucas Lane. The late 20th-century bungalows on the south side of the lane stand on ground that is raised above the level of the road and the occasional limited glimpsed views, which the casual observer would specifically have to seek out, are mainly to the upper part of the treeline along Ashwell Street.
- 4.39 A wireframe (Viewpoint 2; see the LVIA) has been prepared which provides an example of how the development might be experienced in a glimpsed view from the recreation ground on the north side of Lucas Lane. While parts of the development would be visible from this particular vantage point, the rising ground and treeline above and beyond will continue to evidence the topography of the settlement edge. A large area of open land within the site will still remain to an appreciable extent behind the Lucas Lane frontage.
- 4.40 In terms of longer-distance views from PRoW 18 to the north, there will be some visibility of the new houses below the treeline along Ashwell Street, but this will be less than under the 2022 scheme as the proposed dwellings are set further northwards into the site. In any case, these will be experienced as part of the existing eastwards linear expansion of the settlement.

Listed and unlisted buildings

- 4.41 The decision on the refused scheme made no specific reference to any impact on the setting and significance of the Grade I listed St Mary's Church other than in reference to its intervisibility with two unlisted buildings, No.5 High Street and No.24 Lucas Lane (Townsend House). No significant impact was noted to the significance or settings of the Grade II listed Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane.
- 4.42 My own view is that there will be no adverse impact on Nos.14 and 16 Lucas Lane. The site does not form a significant element of their setting, as discussed above, and does not inform or otherwise influence the ability to appreciate their significance. The proposals will not therefore diminish or otherwise affect their significance in any way and their 'special interest' as listed buildings will be preserved.

- 4.43 The views from the site towards St Mary's Church and the unlisted No.5 High Street are discussed above. None of these views has been identified as important in the CACS, the CAAMP or the NP, but it is a fact that the views are attractive and reveal the presence of the church and thus the historic core of the settlement in relation to the site.
- 4.44 As Historic England's GPA3 notes, *'Being tall structures, church towers and spires are often widely visible across land- and townscapes but, where development does not impact on the significance of heritage assets visible in a wider setting or where not allowing significance to be appreciated, they are unlikely to be affected by small-scale development, unless that development competes with them, as tower blocks and wind turbines may. Even then, such an impact is more likely to be on the landscape values of the tower or spire rather than the heritage values, unless the development impacts on its significance, for instance by impacting on a designed or associative view.'*
- 4.45 The proposed development of the site will not have any impact on the significance of the church or on the ability to appreciate its significance. Incidental views of the church are available from various points within the site and will remain available following its development. Views towards the church from the south-east corner of the site (not currently available to public view and appreciation) will remain available from the pedestrian access and footpath to be provided from Ashwell Street. Many more people will thus be able to access the views to the church from the site, including from the public open space within it. Enhanced access for the public to enjoy the views of the church tower is in my opinion a public benefit. The views of the church will also help to bestow a sense of place on the new development at this eastern edge of the historic settlement, indicating the relationship between the two.
- 4.46 It is perhaps worth noting that the site is not itself visible from the church or its churchyard.
- 4.47 As discussed above, the church tower has a strong presence in numerous glimpsed and incidental views across and into the village, seen in the context of an extensive setting of mixed townscape and landscape, a mix that is very much an established characteristic of its wider setting. The tower is glimpsed in all sorts of ways, between buildings, over hedges and rising above treelines. The way in which it will be experienced from the site will not be detrimental to its significance or to the ability to appreciate it.

4.48 The intervisibility between the church and No.5 has already been discussed and will remain apparent. The refusal reason on the 2022 scheme also referred to intervisibility with the unlisted 19th-century Townsend House, but in my view this is a 'non-issue' in the sense that in 2010 a large new house (East Lodge) was built between the site and Townsend House. The erection of this house has altered the setting of Townsend House (which in any case has no particular relationship with the church or No.5) and, while views may still be available from its garden towards No.5 and the church, any direct view from the house is likely now to be obstructed or otherwise affected by East Lodge.

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 5.1 In summary, and for all the reasons set out in detail above, it is my view that the proposed scheme does not adversely affect the significance or setting of any listed building (insofar as that setting aids an appreciation of the significance of the building). In respect of the Grade I listed St Mary's Church, the view towards its tower from various points on the site is one of many similar such views found throughout the village, which all combine to ensure that the church is an extremely visible local landmark and speaks of the prosperity of its builders and the 14th-century settlement.
- 5.2 The proposed development of the site maintains views towards the church from the south-eastern corner of the site, while also making them publicly available.
- 5.3 In terms of the impact on the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area, the set-back of the proposed development from Ashwell Street in my view removes any impact on the rural character of that street, as alleged under the refused 2022 scheme. There is, however, some impact arising from limited development proposed within the purview of KV23, the view identified in the CACS (and the CAAMP and NP) from the field gate looking north across the site over Lucas Lane and towards the countryside beyond.
- 5.4 This will reduce the current degree of openness of this view, which will result in a degree of less than substantial harm. However, as the artists' impression that has been prepared and submitted shows, the intrinsic merits of the scheme in terms of its concept and architecture mitigate this harm to a relatively low level.
- 5.5 Where any degree of less than substantial harm is found, paragraph 208 of the NPPF is engaged, which requires that the harm is '*...weighed against the public benefits of the proposal...*'
- 5.6 The benefit of opening up views to the church from the site has been mentioned. Other public benefits of the proposals are discussed in the Planning Statement submitted with the application.

6.0 REFERENCES

Ashwell Parish Council (2021) *Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan*

North Hertfordshire District Council/Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK Ltd. (2019) *Ashwell Conservation Area Character Statement*

North Hertfordshire District Council/Place Services (June 2022) *Ashwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan* DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Thompson, I. (2005) *Extensive Urban Survey - Hertfordshire*. York: Archaeology Data Service <https://doi.org/10.5284/1000193>



Plate 1: The field gate into the site from Ashwell Street



Plate 2: KV23 looking north across site from vicinity of field gate



Plate 3: Looking north-west across site from its south-eastern corner towards No.5 High Street with church tower beyond



Plate 4: Looking west across site towards Hunt's Ridge (left) and No.5 (right)



Plate 5: Looking north-east from close to field gate



Plate 6: View across site looking south-east towards trees along southern boundary to Ashwell Street



Plate 7: View across site looking east (the roof of East Lodge is seen behind the hedged boundary)



Plate 8: View across site looking west along northern boundary towards No.5



Plate 9: Looking south-west along southern boundary of site (winter)



Plate 10: Looking south-west along southern boundary of site (summer)



Plate 11: View from the site looking north-west towards St. Mary's church tower



Plate 12: Ashwell Street looking east (site on left) in winter months



Plate 13: Ashwell Street looking east (site on left) in summer months



Plate 14: Looking west along Lucas Lane (site beyond bungalows to left)



Plate 15: Looking west along Ashwell Street from alongside the garden to East Lodge



Plate 16: Looking east along Ashwell Street from the same position as Plate 15, past the gates to East Lodge, with Townsend House gates beyond



Plate 17: Walkden's development on south side of Ashwell Street



Plate 18: Looking south-west across agricultural land south of Ashwell Street



Plate 19: Looking north-east across agricultural land south of Ashwell Street towards the Walkden's development



Plate 20: Looking north towards site from top of earth bank on south side of Ashwell Street (winter)



Plate 21: Looking north towards site from top of earth bank on south side of Ashwell Street (summer)



Plate 22: Looking south-west along Ashwell Street, with site boundary to right (summer)



Plate 23: Looking in direction of site from junction of Springhead and Lucas Lane; the top of the treeline on Ashwell Street can just be seen above the garage to right



Plate 24: Looking from playing field south of Lucas Lane south-west in direction of site; there is a fleeting glimpsed view (in winter) between Nos.20 & 16 towards the site and treeline on Ashwell Street



Plate 25: Looking south from PRow 18 (part of site visible in centre of image)



Plate 26: Alder Cottage, No.16 Lucas Lane



Plate 27: No.14 Lucas Lane



Plate 28: St Mary's Church



Plate 29: View of rear of Alder Cottage and 14 Lucas Lane from the north-eastern corner of the site



Plate 30: Nos. 20, 16 and 14 Lucas Lane



Plate 31: New houses on the Lucas Lane frontage on land associated with Townsend House, which can just be glimpsed behind along the driveway



Plate 32: Looking across earth bank on south boundary of site from Ashwell Street from south-eastern corner of site: the spike on the church tower is just visible left of the distant telegraph pole



Plate 33: Looking east across site towards East Lodge, with part of roof of Townsend House seen to left beyond



Plate 34: Townsend Meadows