

Planning Statement

Full planning application for the erection of 14 dwellings including new access from Ashwell Street, footpath link to Lucas Lane, associated infrastructure, public open space and landscaping on Land north of Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire

Oscar Briggs (Manor Oak Homes)



June 2024

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Planning Statement

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APPENDIX A - NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S PRE-APPLICATION RESPONSE LETTER DATED 24 APRIL 2024

1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This planning statement has been prepared by Lanpro Services Ltd, on behalf of Manor Oak Homes, in support of a full planning application for the erection of 14 dwellings, provision of new access from Ashwell Street, associated public open space and landscaping, on land north of Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.

1.1.2 This application follows on from the previous planning application (22/03094/FP) for 14 dwellings, which was refused on 30 January 2024. The application was presented to Planning Control Committee on 15 December 2023 with a recommendation for refusal. The member voting was 5 against, 4 in favour, and 1 abstention.

1.1.3 The planning application was refused for the following reasons:

1. *By reason of the following: the very positive contribution the application site makes to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area; the fact that the site represents the last area of land that could be developed along Ashwell Street; the substantial removal of the sole remaining opportunity to experience the village nestled in the 'valley' to the north 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; it is considered that the proposal would occasion less than substantial harm to the significance of the Ashwell Conservation Area and that the level of harm is 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, 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). Accordingly, the proposal would fail to satisfy the provisions of Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of Paragraph 135c), Section 16 of the NPPF, Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 and Policy ASH3 A of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan 2022.*
2. *The creation of an access onto Ashwell Street including the removal of trees and surface upgrading would have a transformational impact upon the western end of this informal track which forms part of the ruddery (which is part of Ashwell Street and is also part of the Icknield Way ancient track). This would have a detrimental effect on the rural character of Ashwell Street and would not add to the overall quality of the area and would not be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to satisfy the provisions of Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as supported by the aims of Paragraph 135c) and Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 and Policies ASH3 C (i), ASH3 C (ii) and ASH8 of the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan 2022.*
3. *The submitted planning application has not been accompanied by a valid legal undertaking (in the form of a Section 106 obligation) securing affordable housing and any other necessary obligations. The secure delivery of these obligations is required to mitigate the impact of the development on local infrastructure and services in accordance with Policy SP7 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031. Without this mechanism to secure these provisions the development cannot be considered as a sustainable form of*

development contrary of the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

- 1.1.4 It was clarified at the Committee meeting by the Development and Conservation Manager that the principle of residential development on the site along would be acceptable. This was also confirmed in the final Minutes of the meeting.

1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 In view of the marginal resolution to refuse the application by the Planning Control Committee and confirmation that the principle of residential development would be acceptable, the applicant agreed to resubmit a revised proposal that had the benefit of officers' pre-application advice.
- 1.2.2 The scheme has been subject to extensive pre-application engagement with officers (previous Case Officer and Development and Conservation Manager) at North Hertfordshire District Council. This included an on site meeting with the officers on 15 February 2024 to assess the site context and key issues. This was followed by a face to face meeting at the Council offices on 18 March 2024. Further email correspondence followed to seek advice on a revised site layout and appearance of the proposed development.
- 1.2.3 Officers also provided examples of the types of 'rural/farmstead' schemes that they advised to take into consideration. The proposed scheme has taken on board the examples provided and now has a farmstead typology which complements the rural character of Ashwell Street and open character of the site. The site would still maintain a high degree of its openness with the majority of the development located on the eastern side of the site. The proposed scheme also maintains a low density and many of the other public benefits from the previous scheme.
- 1.2.4 The pre-application response letter was received on 24 April 2024. Officers considered that positive progress had been made on the revised layout and appearance of the proposal from the previously refused scheme, and would be happy to support the proposal. However, officers noted that the Council's Conservation Officer is still likely to sustain an objection to the proposed development and so the proposal would be considered in the planning balance. A copy of the Council's pre-application response letter is contained in Appendix A.
- 1.2.5 An assessment of the significant public benefits of the proposed scheme is set out in detail in Section 5. Below is a brief summary of the key public benefits.
- 1.2.6 The site is located within the Ashwell settlement boundary, where under Policy SP2 development will be allowed. No new housing allocations are proposed in Ashwell and so any future growth is expected to be delivered within the new extended settlement boundary. The site is also located within the Ashwell Conservation Area, which covers the majority of the village including the 1960s housing development in Woodforde Close off Ashwell Street. The site is not identified as an area of protected open space or 'Green Infrastructure' or 'Local Green Space' in the Proposals Map or Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (ANP, January 2021), and is not identified as a valued landscape. The proposal would provide a new publicly accessible connection from Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane which would also provide views towards the historic core of Ashwell from an elevated located which are currently not possible.
- 1.2.7 Residential development of the site could be delivered in the short term should planning permission be granted and contribute in the short term to the supply of housing within Ashwell. The proposed development would contribute smaller houses mainly 2 and 3 bed dwellings including bungalows, and four affordable homes. The housing mix and size would also respond directly to the housing needs of Ashwell, as set out in the made ANP.

- 1.2.8 The proposal will also provide significantly over the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement on site through the creation of habitats, tree plantings and other ecological mitigation and enhancement measures. All dwellings will have electric vehicle charging points installed and a proportion of the dwellings will be designed to achieve accessible standard M4(2) and M4(3) in order to meet the future needs for residents.
- 1.2.9 Therefore in view of the above policy context, the proposed layout and elevation plans show that a suitable residential scheme can be delivered on the site that provides an attractive and high quality environment, whilst respecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, as a whole, and without having a detrimental impact on local residents. The proposed development would also be in accordance with local and national planning policies, and would provide other environmental, social and economic benefits.
- 1.2.10 Paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023, states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This planning statement demonstrates how the proposed development meets this requirement and sets out the planning justification for the proposals with reference, where relevant, to the detailed supporting reports, surveys, and plans.
- 1.2.11 Paragraph 10 of the NPPF states so that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

1.3 Structure of Planning Statement

1.3.1 This statement is structured as follows:

- Section 1 – Introduction and Background: sets out the submission documents, the structure of the planning statement, and the community engagement undertaken to date;
- Section 2 – Context and Site Description: which describes the location and local context of the application sites and considers the nature of the surrounding area and adjoining land uses. It also assesses the proximity of the Site to local services and amenities;
- Section 3 – Proposed Development: explains the form and nature of the proposed development and sets out the anticipated impacts of the proposals and the measures that have been incorporated to mitigate this impact, including any legal obligations;
- Section 4 – Planning Policy Considerations: this section considers the proposals against adopted planning policy, as set out in the development plan, and also examines any other material considerations – such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG);
- Section 5 – Planning Assessment – this section assesses the planning justification for the proposed development having regard to the development plan, the NPPF and PPG, and other relevant material planning considerations; and;
- Section 6 – Conclusions – this section provides a summary of the issues raised by the proposals and explains how they have been dealt with, as well as setting the conclusions that can be drawn from the overall planning assessment.

1.4 Planning Submission Documentation

1.4.1 This planning statement should be read in conjunction with the following supporting documents, which also accompany this planning application:

Document	Consultant	Revision

Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Survey	Origin Environmental	V1c
Archaeology Design Based Assessment including trial trenching reports	MOLA	19/93
Detailed plans, elevations, street scenes and sections	AT Architecture	See separate schedule
Design and Access Statement	AT Architecture	June 2024
Ecological Impact Assessment,	Blackstone Ecology Ltd	June 2024
Biodiversity Statement including Biodiversity Net Gain Metric	Blackstone Ecology Ltd	Ref: 1335.BNG.002 June 2024
Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy	Martin Andrews Consulting	190 FRA 02 rev A
Heritage Statement	Asset Heritage;	
Landscape Strategy Plan,	Aspect Landscape	7615.LSP.ASP4 rev E
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Aspect Landscape	7615.LVIA.007 rev F
Phase 1 Geo-environmental Assessment	Geo-Environmental Services;	GE17963 DSR-FEB19
Services Appraisal	Martin Andrews Consulting	190-SA-01-0
Transport Note	Martin Andrews Consulting	190-TN-05-A
Travel Plan	Martin Andrews Consulting	190-TP-01-0
Technical Note	Martin Andrews Consulting	190-TN-04-0

- 1.4.2 A full schedule of the proposed plans, which include the site layout plans, elevations and sections are contained in the cover letter.

2 Context and Site Description

2.1 Geographical Context

- 2.1.1 Ashwell is located within the District of North Hertfordshire and is situated approximately 8 kilometres west of Royston. The A505 is located approximately 3km south-east of the village and runs in a south-west to north-east direction, linking the A1 (M) motorway at Letchworth with the M11 motorway at Duxford. Both of these primary roads provide fast north-south road links to London and other parts of the country, and connect the village to the wider national road network.

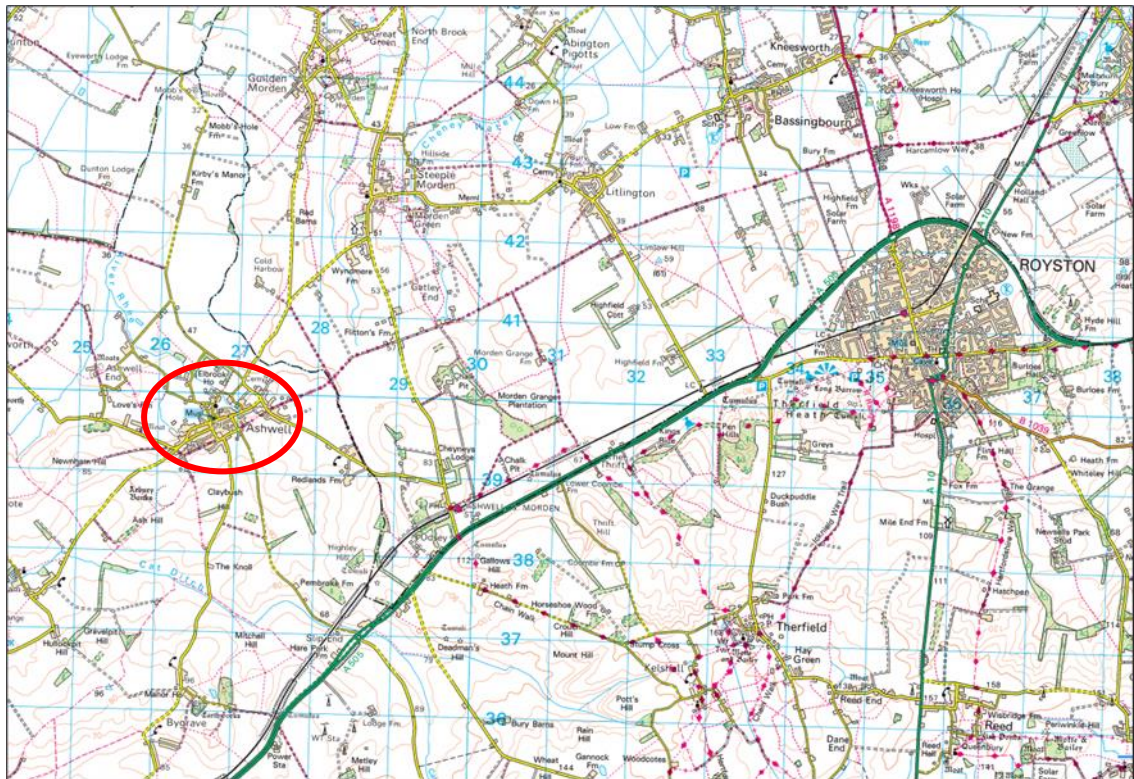


Figure 1: Location of Ashwell in its wider geographical context.

2.2 Proximity of Local hops, Services & Facilities

- 2.2.1 Ashwell is the northernmost Parish within the District of North Hertfordshire. In the 2021 Census the population of the Parish was 2,000 and there were 850 dwellings. Apart from the village itself, the Parish also includes a wide tract of countryside and some scattered farms. However, the population figure will have increased following the development of new homes in the Parish since the last census.
- 2.2.2 The village benefits from a range of services and facilities, which include three public houses, a garage and petrol station, primary school, day nursery, church, museum, post office, bakery, butchers, coffee shop, hairdressers, pharmacy, village stores, estate agent, a village hall, church hall and a dentist. The village is served by local bus services that run between Royston and Letchworth (routes 90 and 91), with stops situated opposite the Three Tuns public house in the High Street, and at the east end of Lucas Lane; both sets of stops being within a short walking distance from the application site. Further details on public transport are contained in the Transport Statement (Martin Andrews Consulting), which accompanies this planning application.

2.2.3 The village also benefits from a further peak hours’ bus service (route 202), which runs between Ashwell village (West End) and the mainline railway station of Ashwell and Morden (approximately 3.5 kilometres away). The railway station provides direct rail services to London Kings Cross via Stevenage, and Cambridge North via Cambridge.



Figure 2: Location Map

2.2.4 Figure 3 below sets out the types of services/facilities available and the approximate distance from the application site. It also sets out typical cycling and walking time to each of these facilities (based on standard speeds), demonstrating the sustainability of the site. Further information is contained within the Transport Statement (prepared by Martin Andrews Consulting), and Design & Access Statement (prepared by AT Architecture), which accompany this planning application.

Service/facility	Closest service/facility	Distance from the site	Cycling Time	Walking Time
Primary School	Ashwell Primary School, Silver Street, Ashwell	650 metres	3 mins	8 mins
Secondary School	The Greneway Middle School, Royston	11 kilometres	36 mins	N/A
	The Knights Templar School, Baldock	8.2 kilometres	30 mins	N/A
	Roysia Middle School, Royston	10 kilometres	34 mins	N/A
	Etonbury Academy, Stotfold	11km	31 mins	N/A

Service/facility	Closest service/facility	Distance from the site	Cycling Time	Walking Time
Local Services	The Three Tuns pub,	160 metres	1 min	3 mins
	Village Stores	600 metres	3 mins	5 mins
Community facilities	St Mary's Church	0.5km	3 mins	5 mins
	Ashwell Village Hall	1km	5 mins	13 mins
	Ashwell Recreational Ground	150 metres	1 min	3 mins
	Ashwell Village Museum	0.5km	3 mins	5 mins
Public Transport	Bus Stop, High Street	120 metres	N/A	1 min
	Bus Stop, Lucas Lane	325 metres	2 mins	6 mins
	Ashwell & Morden Railway Station	3.5km	16 mins	N/A
Healthcare	Ashwell Surgery, Gardiners Lane, Ashwell	800 metres	4 mins	9 mins

Figure 3: Table showing proximity of services and facilities from the application site.

2.2.5

Ashwell has a relatively good range of facilities and any modest growth from residential development will help to sustain the local community and the vitality of the village, and to reinforce its designation as a 'Category A' village (see Planning Policy section). Para 4.48 states "...Ashwell still has enough shops, services and facilities to have a designated centre, unlike many other small settlements in the District."

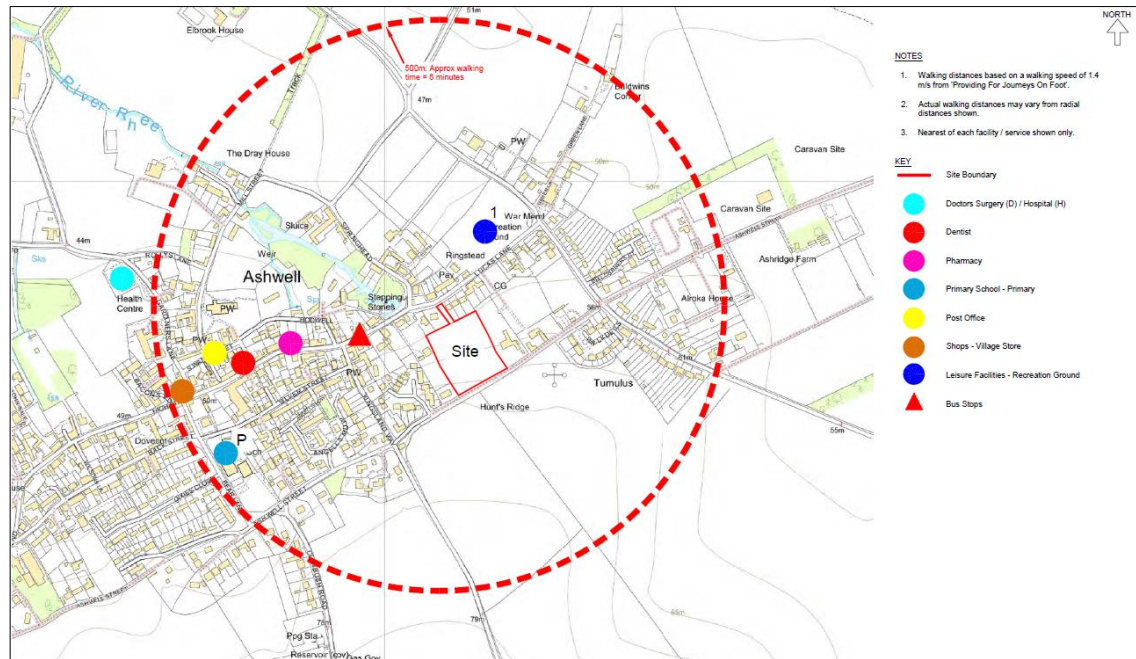


Figure 4: Facilities and Services within 500 metres of the Application Site

2.3 Site Description

- 2.3.1 The application site comprises a rectangular area of land that is located on the eastern side of the village of Ashwell, to the south of existing houses that front onto Lucas Lane and to the north of Ashwell Street, which runs south-westwards from Station Road in the east and forms the southern boundary of the village for most of its length. The site comprises approximately 1.18 ha of land that is surrounded on three sides by existing housing and has a frontage onto Ashwell Street of approximately 90 metres, and a depth of around 115 metres. The site was used as pastoral land and used for the grazing of sheep. The character of the wider locality is private residential housing of mainly detached and semi-detached two and single storey properties.
- 2.3.2 The southern boundary of the site with Ashwell Street is marked by a line of trees, and the eastern boundary of the site adjoins a large, modern detached house – 22 Lucas Lane. The western boundary of the site also adjoins large detached residential properties – Hunt's Ridge to the south, and Ashwell House (5 High Street) to the north. Beyond these two dwellings, is a 1960s housing estate on Woodforde Close. The northern boundary of the site adjoins the rear gardens of numbers 2 – 12 (even) Lucas Lane, which comprise five detached bungalows. There is no number 6 Lucas Lane and the gap between numbers 4 and 8 Lucas Lane is included within the application site. This strip of land is currently overgrown.
- 2.3.3 The site lies between 55 and 65 metres above Ordnance datum (AOD) sloping upwards from the north-east corner of the site at 55 metres AOD to 65 metres AOD in the south-west corner. The whole site is located within Flood Zone 1 (Figure 5 below), where there is the very lowest risk of flooding from rivers or the sea.

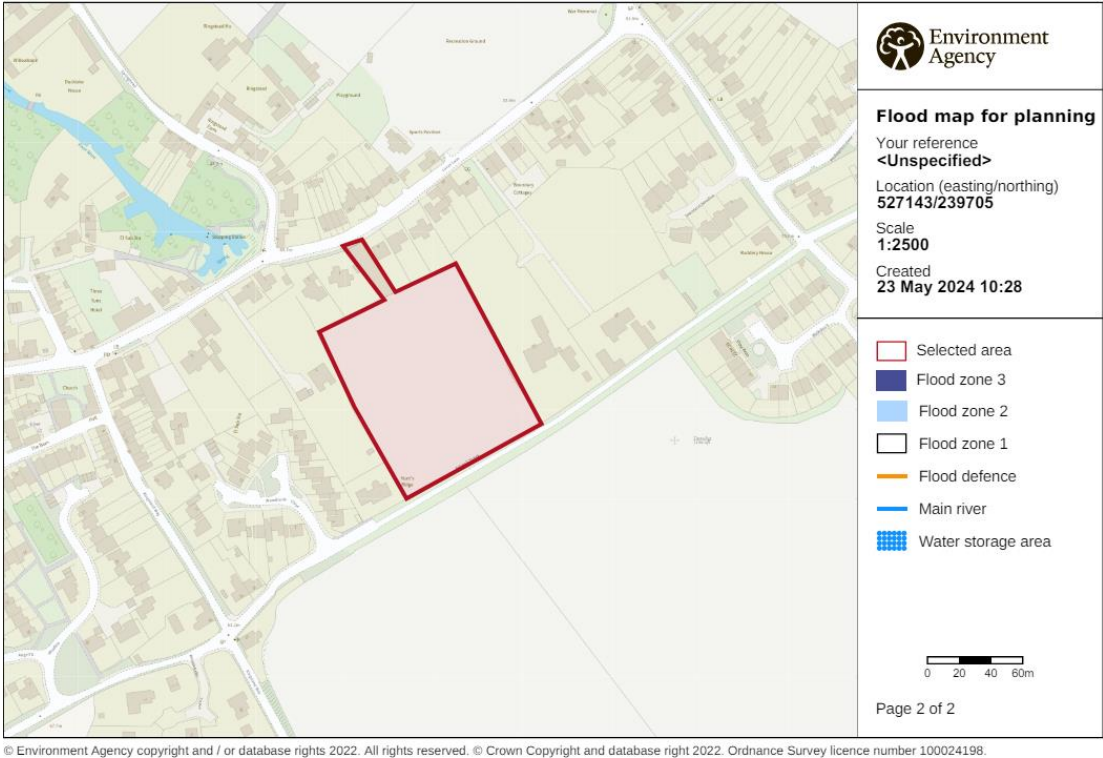


Figure 5: Gov.uk Flood Map extract

2.3.4 The site is also at very low risk of surface water flooding based upon the government’s flood map (see below):

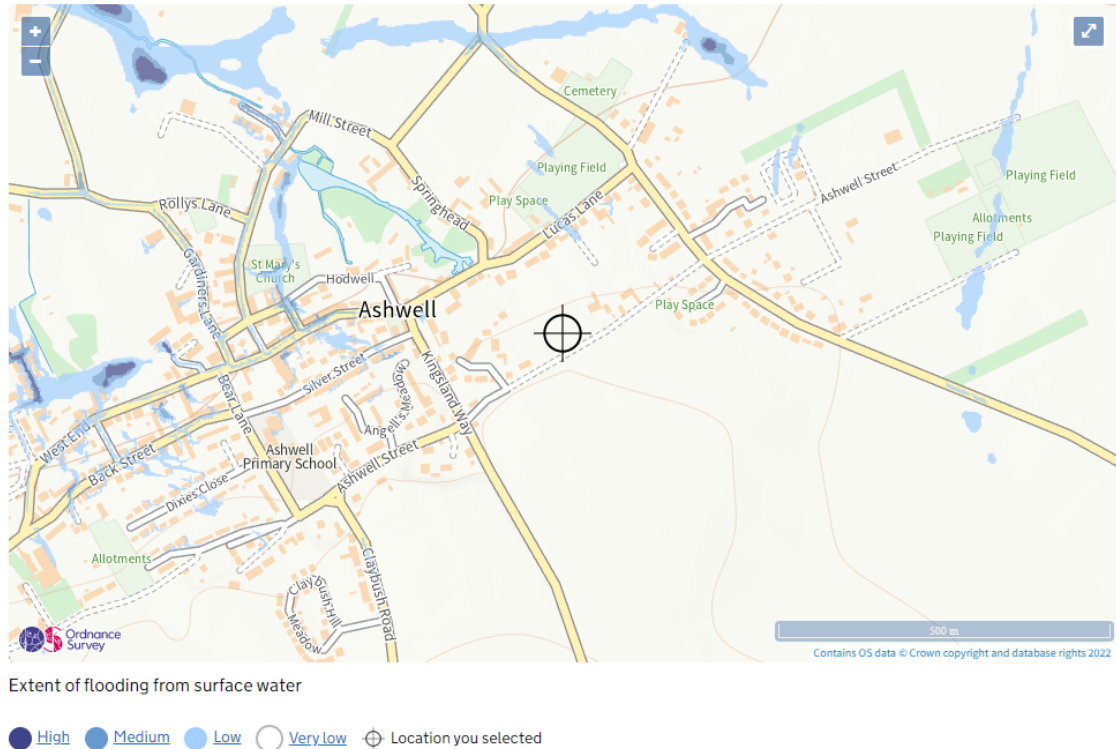


Figure 6: Surface water flood map extract

2.3.5 The application site is situated within the Ashwell Conservation Area, although there are no listed buildings immediately adjacent to the site – the nearest listed buildings being located at numbers 14 and 16 Lucas Lane (to the north-east of the site). The Ashwell Conservation Area

Character Statement (CACS, April 2019) sets out a list of the listed buildings and key views. Whilst there are no listed buildings immediately adjacent to the site, the CACS identified a key view (KV23) which is from the field gate in the south-east corner of the site, looking north. This key view is due to the elevated location of Ashwell Street which runs across (east-west) the southern boundary of the site. However, views over the historic core of Ashwell (north-west) from KV23 are not possible due to the intervening vegetation and properties. The only view is north and north-east of the roof tops in Lucas Lane and countryside beyond.

2.3.6 Alongside the CACS, the Council has also published the Ashwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (CACAMP, February 2023) for the Ashwell Conservation Area. The CACAMP is a more detailed document that provides a baseline to inform future change, development and design with regard to the sensitivities of the historic environment and its unique character. The CACAMP references the heritage policies in the Local Plan and the relevant policies in the made Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan.

2.3.7 The aerial photograph below shows the wider context of the application site, which is currently surrounded on three sides by existing residential properties, with the southern side adjoining Ashwell Street and countryside beyond.

2.3.8 The land either side of the site is built up with housing development, which has changed the character of this part of Ashwell Street. Further housing development comprising 9no. two storey detached dwellings have also been built out on land to the east of the site at the corner of Station Road and Ashwell Street (see yellow star).



Figure 7: Extract from Google Maps of site context

2.3.9 Further information on the description of the site and its surroundings is contained within the Design & Access Statement, prepared by AT Architecture, and in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal by Aspect Landscape.

3 Proposed Development

3.1 Proposals

- 3.1.1 The proposal seeks full planning permission for the erection of 14 dwellings including a new access from Ashwell Street, affordable housing provision, a new footpath link to Lucas Lane, extensive open space and landscaping and associated infrastructure works, on land north of Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.
- 3.1.2 The submitted Design and Access Statement provides a detailed analysis of the design evolution from the refused scheme and demonstrates how the proposed scheme has addressed the key concerns particularly in terms of design, scale and layout.
- 3.1.3 The proposals would provide mainly 2 and 3 bed dwellings including bungalows and four affordable dwellings. The house-types have been designed to meet accessible standards M4(2) and M4(3) in excess of what is required by planning policy. The proposed house-types range from 2 and 1 ½ storey dwellings and single storey bungalows.
- 3.1.4 The proposed development would also provide:
- A new access from Ashwell Street designed to discourage left turning;
 - A new publicly accessible pedestrian route (with view corridor towards the historic core) linking Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane;
 - Extensive areas of open space with wildflower meadow and an orchard;
 - Extensive soft landscaping around the site including hedgerow and tree planting;
 - A 3 metre wide landscape buffer along the eastern and western boundaries;
 - Extensive ecological mitigation and enhancement and biodiversity net gain;
 - Electric vehicle charging points for all dwellings;
 - Dwellings designed to achieve M4(2) and M4(3) accessible standards to meet the needs of elderly and disabled people;
 - Enhancement and retention of the viewing point from the field gate on Ashwell Street towards the River Valley to the north;
- 3.1.5 The site has a total area of 1.18 hectares. Therefore for a development of 14 dwellings would achieve a low density of 12 dwellings per hectare. This is considered to be low for a residential development site located close to the village core.



Figure 8: Extract of Proposed Site Plan (drawing no.A_2133 PL100)

3.2 Layout and Design

- 3.2.1 The proposed layout and design have been revised from the previously refused scheme following pre-application advice from the Council. The revised layout and house-type designs now reflects a farmstead typology with the main farmhouse, ancillary workers cottages and barns that are arranged in a way that responds to the site constraints. The layout has been pushed back from Ashwell Street to reduce the appearance of development and increase the appearance of open space.
- 3.2.2 The existing field gate in the south-west corner of the site is proposed to be retained and enhanced to allow passers-by to continue to appreciate the view north of the 'River Valley', without significant interruption from the proposed development.
- 3.2.3 Plots 1 and 2 have been designed in an '*Arts and Crafts*' style and to appear as what would have been the main farmhouse. Being located at the bottom of the slope, these plots would sit within the canopy of the adjacent trees behind, so the view towards the 'River Valley' would still be possible. Officers consider the revised layout and scale of plots 1 and 2 acceptable during the pre-application stage. Officer did not raise any concerns with introducing dwellings within the key view (KV23) subject to the design and scale being acceptable.
- 3.2.4 The other dwellings have been designed to appear as modest cottages and ancillary farm buildings. The layout has a more formalized arrangement, which reflects the examples of other similar agrarian housing schemes provided by officers at the pre-application stage.
- 3.2.5 The new pedestrian link from Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane will be created in the south-east corner of the site to open up views towards the historic core of Ashwell and especially of the tower and spire of St. Mary's Church, which is a Grade I listed building.

- 3.2.6 The southern boundary will be enhanced with soft landscaping including tree planting to respond sympathetically to the rural character of Ashwell Street. The proposal also allows for the retention of all the existing trees along the southern boundary, with the exception of the trees that would need to be removed to create the new vehicular access into the site. The details of the trees to be removed are contained in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.
- 3.2.7 The Proposed Site Plan shown at Figure 7 also shows how the new homes would be accessed via a 'spine road' which flows through the centre of the site separating the housing and open space areas. The spine road and shared surface area have been kept to a minimum and the junction has been designed to discourage left turning leaving the site.
- 3.2.8 Two areas of public open space would be provided on the western side of the site and across the southern boundary and includes tree planting and wild-meadow landscaping. An orchard is also proposed which provides a green buffer to the built form from Ashwell Street. The open space will provide areas of play and wildlife habitats but essentially maintaining the openness of the site when viewed from the existing gates in the south-west corner of the site. The existing key view (KV23) will also be enhanced through the management and maintenance of the existing hedgerows and additional landscaping.
- 3.2.9 In terms of housing mix, the proposals comprise a range of smaller detached and semi-detached houses and bungalows and includes both market and affordable units. The dwelling mix for the 14 dwellings has been devised based upon what is required locally as set out in the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (ANP). The ANP seeks new development to focus on providing smaller units for younger people to enter the housing market and older people to downsize into. Therefore, the housing mix consists of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom units as follows:

Type	2 bed bungalow	2 bed house	3 bed house	4 bed house	Total
Market	1	2	5	2	9
Affordable (affordable rent and shared ownership)	2	1	1		5
TOTAL	2	3	6	2	14

Figure 9: Proposed Accommodation Schedule

- 3.2.10 Most of the proposed dwellings would be 2 and 3 bed including bungalows, to help meet local housing need.
- 3.2.11 The proposed layout plans prepared by AT Architecture shows how each dwelling will be provided with dedicated off street parking and private amenity space.

3.3 Arboriculture

- 3.3.1 The application site is bounded by a line of mature trees and hedgerow along its southern boundary to Ashwell Street, and although there are no mature trees within the majority of the site, the adjoining residential gardens to the west, north and east do contain some mature trees.
- 3.3.2 An updated Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has been included within the submission documents, which is based on a full tree survey of all the existing trees and hedgerows on the site. The trees have been categorised by size and condition and a tree protection and retention plans are also included within the assessment. There has been a requirement to remove some

lower value trees in order to create the main access into the site and to accommodate a suitable residential layout.

- 3.3.3 A total of 12 individual trees, 9 tree groups and 3 hedgerows were surveyed of which 2 were Category B value and 22 Category C value. No Category A trees or groups were identified. The proposed development would require the removal of 2 groups of trees and partial removal of 1 group to trees, all of which are identified as Category C value. No visually important or fine specimen trees would be removed.
- 3.3.4 Whilst some tree removal is required, the proposal includes significant replacement tree planting as part of the site wide landscape strategy.

3.4 Landscaping and Ecology

- 3.4.1 An updated Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) has been carried out for the proposed development. The assessment provides details on the existing landscape context, the visual impact of the development, and the proposed landscaping features, and concludes the proposal will not have an adverse visual landscape impact on the local and wider context.
- 3.4.2 An updated Landscape Strategy Plan has also been prepared which shows the proposed soft landscaping for the site. The plan includes extensive tree planting including street trees along the main spine road, orchard trees and wildflower and lawn within the open space area and green area in between Ashwell Street and the proposed dwellings. The landscape strategy for the site has been designed to frame and maximize the views towards the historic core from the proposed public access point in the south-east corner of the site.
- 3.4.3 The landscape strategy has been prepared in accordance with ecological consultant to maximise the biodiversity net gain for the site. An Ecological Impact Assessment has been carried out for the site to assess the ecological value of the site and makes recommendations for mitigation and enhancements.
- 3.4.4 The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations with the nearest designation being Ashwell Springs SSSI which is located approximately 50 metres to the north-west.
- 3.4.5 The assessment concludes that the site has limited potential to support protected species and minor potential for reptiles, amphibians and badgers to occur within the site. Nevertheless, the assessment recommends measures to retain trees and hedgerows and for any lighting to be designed to avoid light spill on hedgerows and trees. The assessment also includes biodiversity enhancement measures using the Natural England Metric calculator, which concludes that the proposed development will achieve significant biodiversity net gain on the site. It has been demonstrated that the proposal will provide on site net gain of 91.83% of habitat units and 26.83% of hedgerow units.

3.5 Transport and Accessibility

- 3.5.1 This application includes full details of the proposed vehicular access into the site, which will comprise a new junction on the north side of Ashwell Street, to the south-west of the mid-point of the site frontage (see Figure 9). The proposed access would require 6 (Category C) of the existing trees along the southern boundary of the site to be removed. The proposed access design along Ashwell Street was considered to be acceptable by the Highways Authority in the previous application.

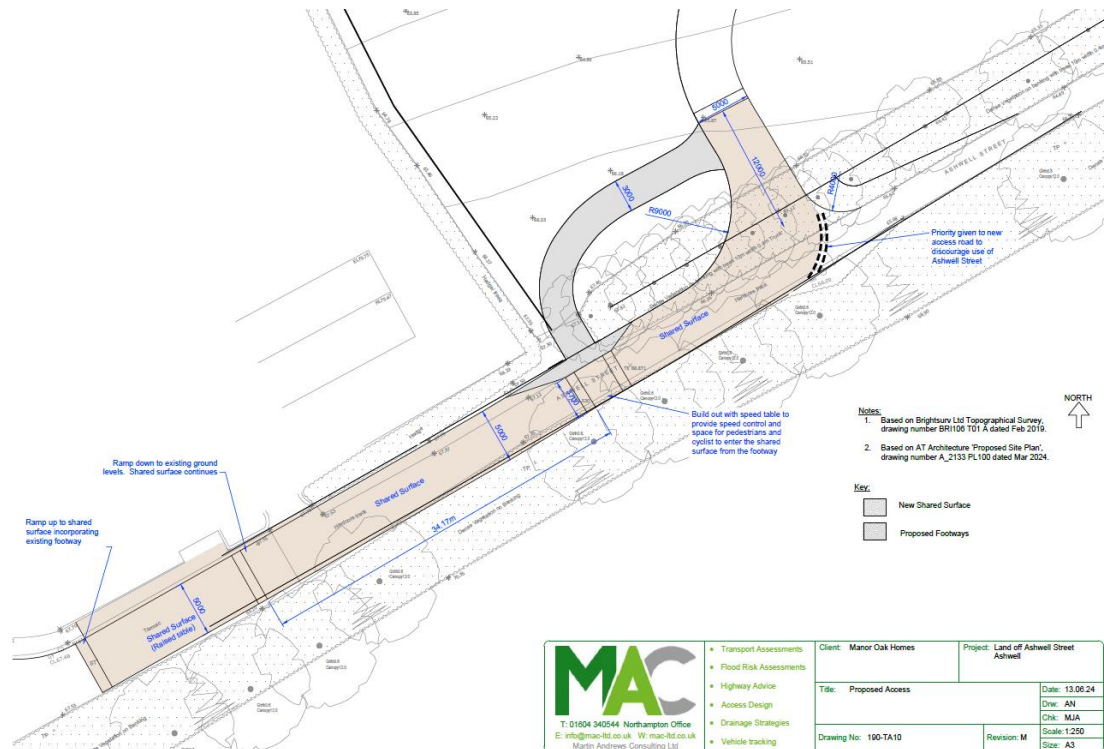


Figure 10: Extract of Proposed Access plan (drawing no.190-TA10 rev M)

- 3.5.2 An updated Transport Statement has been prepared by Martin Andrews Consulting, together with a framework residential travel plan, and these documents accompany this application.
- 3.5.3 The proposed access junction was considered acceptable by the County Highways Authority for the previous scheme and so the junction design has been maintained. The internal spine road and shared surface area are sufficient to enable a refuse vehicle or emergency vehicle to enter the site and leave in forward gear. Bin collection points will be provided within the required drag and collection distances.
- 3.5.4 The application site is well served by existing bus routes along Lucas Lane/High Street that provide services to Royston and Letchworth, as well as the railway station at Ashwell & Morden, and provide opportunities for sustainable travel. The new footway/cycle path link from the application site through to Lucas Lane will provide an easy, convenient route to the existing bus stops and facilities within the village in a few minutes' walk of all the new dwellings.
- 3.5.5 In addition, a technical note has also been prepared and submitted, which demonstrates that an alternative vehicular access from Lucas Lane would not be technically possible and would have a significant adverse impact on the residential amenity of the occupiers of the properties either side (no.4 and no.8 Lucas Lane). Therefore, the proposed access from Ashwell Street is the only viable option to accessing the site to serve the proposed development.

3.6 Flood Risk and Drainage

- 3.6.1 As outlined above, the application site is located within Flood Zone 1 (lowest risk). On this basis, the site is sequentially appropriate for the proposed development.
- 3.6.2 Due to the size of the application site, a Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy has been prepared by Martin Andrews Consulting, which demonstrates that the development would not result in an increase of flood risk elsewhere. This assessment has also investigated the possibility of groundwater flooding and flooding from other sources at the site. It is considered that there is a low risk of groundwater flooding and flooding from other sources across the site.

3.6.3 To establish the drainage strategy infiltration testing found that the geology of the site comprises topsoil overlying 'zig-zag' chalk formation. Ground water was not encountered during the investigations. Infiltration testing was undertaken at five locations within the site, three of which were undertaken at depths of 1.7 metres to 2.25 metres below ground level. The results show that infiltration is a viable option for the disposal of surface water, and that therefore other methods of drainage do not need to be considered. Surface water discharge from the proposed development outfall will therefore be disposed of using soak-ways, designed in accordance with the Building Regulations.

3.6.4 Foul water will discharge to Anglian Water's foul sewer located within Lucas Lane to the north of the application site.

3.7 Planning History

3.7.1 This planning application follows two previous applications for residential development on the site. The first application (ref: 20/00126/FP) was for 24 dwellings on the site and was determined prior to the adoption of the current Local Plan.

3.7.2 The application was presented to the Council's Planning Control Committee on 19 November 2020 with an officer recommendation for refusal, and the committee resolved to unanimously refuse the application. The refusal notice was dated 19 November 2020, and contained three main grounds for refusal; harm to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area; poor design and harm to the character of the countryside; and lack of S106 agreement.

3.7.3 A subsequent planning application (22/03094/FP) was submitted with a significantly revised proposal of 14 dwellings. The application was thought to have addressed the main concerns raised in the previous application by providing significantly more open space through the reduction in dwellings, reducing the number of dwellings adjacent to Ashwell Street, and retaining the key view from the field gate towards Lucas Lane. The application was again presented to Planning Control Committee with an officer recommendation for refusal, and the committee resolved to narrowly refuse the application. The case officer's report confirmed that the refusal was essentially based on the Conservation Officer's objection to the proposal.

3.7.4 Crucially, at the committee meeting, it was accepted that the principle of residential development was acceptable on the site. As some members felt the revised scheme addressed the previous concerns, the vote to refuse the application was narrow (5 against, 4 in favour and 1 abstention). The application was refused on three main grounds which were similar to the previous refusal. In view of the close decision to refuse the application, the applicant applied to seek pre-application advice from the Council.

3.7.5 As part of the pre-application process, a site visit with the previous case officer and Development and Conservation Manager was arranged to discuss the key features of the site, and better understand the site context in terms of what could be acceptable. During the site meeting, officers recommended considering a farmstead and converted barn typology for the site, which they felt would respond better to the site context, and provided some examples of such schemes (Example 1: The Rookery in Great Offley for 6 dwellings; and Example 2: Police Row, Therfield for 10 dwellings).

3.7.6 Following consideration of the examples provided and further consideration of the refusal reasons, the site layout and house-type designs was materially changed. The recommended typology resulted in a materially different layout from the previous scheme. Whilst most of the development was located on the eastern side of the site, the layout moved the housing away from the southern boundary. The revised layout also introduced development across the northern boundary to create an attractive vista from the field gate.

- 3.7.7 Along with a revised layout, an illustrative street scene was produced showing the concept elevations and how the development related to the slope of the site. The elevations in the street scene consists of barn-style dwellings using a combination of black timber and brick and varied roof styles and architectural features such as cat slide dormers.
- 3.7.8 A follow up design workshop meeting was arranged with the officers on 18 March 2024 to discuss and receive feedback on the revised plans. The following key points were raised by officers at the meeting for consideration:
1. To carry out an assessment to demonstrate whether or not the vehicular access into the site can be achieved via Lucas Lane via the proposed footpath link;
 2. To carry out an assessment into the option of purchasing a property/properties along Lucas Lane to create a suitable access into the site;
 3. The farmstead layout should be designed to reflect how it has organically grown and include cottages particularly for plots 7, 6 and 13 and 14;
 4. Officers raised concerns with the proposed scale of plots 1 and 2 but not their location along the northern boundary, and recommended these plots to have a stronger design to the rest of the site. Officers recommended that plots 1 and 2 should have a 'farmhouse appearance' in an 'arts and craft' style;
 5. Officers recommended the rest of the built form should appear as barns and workers cottages, and provide connectivity between the dwellings;
 6. The single storey scale and design of plots 3, 4 and 5 was acceptable as they also reduced the impact on the properties in Lucas Lane; and
 7. Clear consideration should be given to how the hard landscaping relates to the soft landscaping within the site.
- 3.7.9 Following the design workshop meeting, an updated site plan and further street scene options were submitted for officers consideration on 8 April 2024. The written pre-application response letter from the case officer was received on 24 April 2024. Officers stated the proposal was moving in a positive direction and would be supported, as the revised proposal is a "*better quality housing development*" but would need to be fully assessed with consultation from consultees including the Conservation Officer. A copy of the Council's pre-application response letter dated 24 April 2024 is contained in Appendix A.
- 3.7.10 The proposed scheme has been updated to take on board the advice from officers including the possibility of accessing the site from Lucas Lane. This and the other recommendations are discussed in more detail in Section 5.

4 Planning Policy Considerations

4.1.1 This section considers the provisions of the current adopted Development Plan and other material considerations that are specifically relevant to the application.

4.2 The Development Plan

4.2.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that a planning application must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2.2 The site is located within North Hertfordshire District Council's administrative area and as such any planning applications should be assessed against the policies that comprise the North Hertfordshire adopted development plan.

- The Development Plan for North Hertfordshire District Council consists:
- North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan and Proposals Map (November 2022);
- Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (April 2022); and
- Minerals Local Plan (2007) and Waste Development Framework (2012) – both are in the process of being updated as part of a joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

4.3 North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031)

4.3.1 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan replaced the 1996 Local Plan and Saved Policies, and cover the period up to 2031, setting targets for employment, housing and commercial development whilst identifying land where these developments should be built.

4.3.2 The key policies within the Local Plan that are relevant to the consideration of the proposed development are set out below:

- Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire;
- Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy;
- Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport;
- Policy SP7: Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions;
- Policy SP8: Housing;
- Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability;
- Policy SP10: Healthy Communities;
- Policy SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability;
- Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape;
- Policy SP13: Historic Environment;
- Policy ETC7: Scattered local shops and services in towns and villages;
- Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters;
- Policy T2: Parking;
- Policy HS2: Affordable Housing;
- Policy HS3: Housing Mix;
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design;

- Policy D3: Living Conditions;
- Policy NE1: Landscape;
- Policy NE2: Green Infrastructure;
- Policy NE6: New and improved public open space and biodiversity;
- Policy NE10: Water Framework Directive and wastewater infrastructure;
- Policy NE12: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development;
- Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets;
- Policy HE4: Archaeology.

4.4 Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan

4.4.1 The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) was ‘made’ on April 2022 and forms part of the development plan. The ANP also incorporates the site within the settlement boundary and sets out the key objectives and policies for future growth in Ashwell. The ANP provides an up to date position of the local requirements for development in terms of how and where future development is to be delivered within Ashwell. The ANP acknowledges that the parish has an aging population and there is a need for smaller homes including affordable ones which are suited to young people and families as well as those seeking to downsize. Also, affordability of housing is a key issue with house prices being out of reach for many local residents, which is driven in part by a shortage of suitable housing stock in the village.

4.4.2 They key objectives relevant to this application are:

- Objective 1: **To encourage sustainable development that reflects the needs of the village** and ensures that the community can develop and evolve in an appropriate way.
- Objective 2: To support sustainable local businesses and **encourage the development of a strong local economy.**
- Objective 7: **To ensure that the village can support the changing needs of the residents** by providing improved accessibility and enhancements to key village facilities.
- Objective 8: **To conserve and enhance the historic character** of the village and its rural setting.
- Objective 9: **To conserve and enhance the natural environment** of the parish, its flora and its fauna.
- Objective 10: **To reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by using renewable and low carbon energy technologies in new housing and infrastructure developments

4.4.3 The key policies in the ANP relevant to this application are:

- ASH1 – Location of Development
- ASH2 – Housing Mix;
- ASH3 – Character of Development;
- ASH4 – Design of Development;
- ASH6 – Sustainable Water Supply;
- ASH7 – Environmentally Sustainable Design;
- ASH8 – Protecting Historic Assets;

- ASH9 – Locally Significant Views;
- ASH10 – Natural Landscape and Rural Character;
- ASH11 – Natural wildlife assets, wildlife corridors and green infrastructure;
- ASH20 – Accessible paths in the village and rural areas;

4.5 National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is an important material consideration¹ in the determination of the proposed development, and relevant policies within the NPPF must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications.
- 4.5.2 The NPPF states² that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):
- a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and opens spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and current well-being;
 - c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 4.5.3 The NPPF stresses³ that these objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework. It also notes that these objectives are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged, and that planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions by taking local circumstances into account – to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.
- 4.5.4 So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the NPPF is a '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*', which should be applied to both plan-making and decision-taking⁴. For plan-making this means that plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area, and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change. Strategic policies should, as a minimum provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses. For decision-making this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay, or where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting planning permission, unless any adverse impacts of doing

¹ NPPF paragraph 224

² NPPF paragraph 7

³ NPPF paragraph 9

⁴ NPPF paragraph 11

so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole, or specific policies in the NPPF (in respect of protected areas or assets⁵), indicate that development should be restricted.

4.5.5 The NPPF sets out the means to delivering sustainable development. The following sections of the NPPF and their policies are therefore relevant to the consideration of all proposals for residential development:

- Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Building a strong competitive economy
- Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Promoting sustainable transport
- Making effective use of land
- Achieving well-designed places
- Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment

4.5.6 The NPPF stresses the need for choice in housing provision, in particular to meet local housing need. Section 5 of the NPPF identifies the ongoing national need to significantly boost the supply of homes. This includes the amount and variety to meet the needs of different groups with specific housing requirement. The context, size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. This is to include, but is not limited to, those who require affordable housing and others⁶.

4.5.7 In terms of identifying land for new homes, paragraph 68 of the NPPF emphasises that strategic plan-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability. Planning policies are required to identify a supply of:

- a) Specific, **deliverable** sites for years one to five of the plan period (with an appropriate buffer); and,
- b) Specific **developable** sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6–10 and, where possible, for years 11–15 of the plan.

4.5.8 Annex 2 of the NPPF sets out a glossary of definitions, which includes ‘deliverable’ and ‘developable’. The definition of ‘deliverable’ was revised in the 2021 version of the NPPF to set out stricter deliverability criteria. The definition now states that where a site has outline planning permission for major development, has been allocated in a development plan, has a grant of ‘permission in principle’, or is identified on a brownfield register, it should only be considered deliverable where there is clear evidence that housing completions will begin on site within five years. To be considered ‘developable’, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.

⁵ NPPF Footnote 7 (page 6)

⁶ NPPF paragraph 63

- 4.5.9 Section 6 of the NPPF is headed ‘Building a Strong, Competitive Economy’ and it emphasises the need for planning policies to be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.
- 4.5.10 Section 8 of the NPPF is headed ‘Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities’ and it stresses that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe communities which: promote social interaction; are safe and accessible; and enable and support healthy lifestyles. Paragraph 96 also notes the importance of providing access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity.
- 4.5.11 Section 9 of the NPPF concerns ‘Promoting Sustainable Transport’ and notes that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that: potential impacts can be addressed; opportunities from existing and proposed transport infrastructure can be realised; walking, cycling and use of public transport can be promoted; the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure can be identified, assessed and taken into account; and patterns of movement can be integrated into the design of schemes.
- 4.5.12 Section 11 of the NPPF is headed ‘Making Effective Use of Land’ and it stresses that planning policies and decisions should promote the effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.
- 4.5.13 Section 11 also acknowledges that planning policy and decisions encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside⁷.
- 4.5.14 Paragraph 123 of the NPPF stresses that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account: the identified need for different types of housing; local market conditions and viability; the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services; the desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting; and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.
- 4.5.15 Section 12 of the NPPF concerns ‘Achieving Well-Designed and Beautiful Places’ and states fundamental to the planning and development process is to achieve high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places.
- 4.5.16 Paragraph 135 states that decisions should ensure that developments:
- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
 - c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
 - d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

⁷ NPPF paragraph 124(a)

- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and,
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

4.5.17 Paragraph 136 also makes specific reference the important contribution that trees make to the character and quality of the urban environment and to help mitigate and adapt to climate change.

4.5.18 Paragraph 137 states that design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals and early discussions between the applicant, local planning authority and local community about the design and style of the emerging scheme is important. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

4.5.19 Paragraph 139 states that significant weight should be given to development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents, and where development helps to raise the standard of design more generally in an area as long as it fits within the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

4.5.20 Section 15 of the NPPF is entitled ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’ and it states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value; recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast; minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity; preventing new and existing development from contributing to, or being put at unacceptable risk from, unacceptable levels of pollution or land instability; and remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

4.5.21 Section 16 of the NPPF is entitled ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’ and concerns ‘heritage assets’, which are defined within the NPPF⁸ as:

“a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage assets include designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).”

4.5.22 Heritage assets therefore comprise:

- **Designated heritage assets** – World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Historic Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields, or Protected (Marine) Wreck Sites; and,
- **Non-designated heritage assets** – buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes that have been identified by local planning authorities as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated heritage assets - e.g. locally listed buildings, buildings of local interest, etc.

4.5.23 The term ‘significance’ in the context of heritage policy is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

⁸ Annex 2 Glossary

“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations, because of its heritage interest. This interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site’s Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance”.

4.5.24 Paragraph 200 of the NPPF states that:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance...”

4.5.25 When considering potential impacts, paragraph 208 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits including.

4.5.26 In the context of the application site, the designated heritage assets that would be affected by the proposed development include: the Ashwell Conservation Area. Full details and an assessment of the significance of these heritage assets, and the potential impact of the proposed development on that significance, are contained in the Heritage Assessment, which accompanies this planning application.

4.6 Other Material Planning Considerations

4.6.1 North Hertfordshire District Council also has a number of other Supplementary Planning Documents. The documents considered most relevant to the determination of this application are set out as follows:

- Ashwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (CACAMP, 2022);
- Ashwell Conservation Area Character Statement (CACS, 2019).
- Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (2011);
- Design Guide SPD (2011); and
- Planning Obligations SPD (2023);

4.6.2 A full assessment of compliance of the proposals with adopted planning policy considerations, at both a local and national level is set out within Section 5 of this Statement, Design and Access Statement, Heritage Assessment and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

5 Planning Assessment

- 5.1.1 Section 4 of this statement sets out the relevant planning policy context in which this application should be considered, and this section now analyses the proposals within that policy context.
- 5.1.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (PCPA) 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is also material planning consideration.
- 5.1.3 The NPPF states⁹ that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, and that at a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as *“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*.
- 5.1.4 This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of 14no. dwellings including a new vehicular and pedestrian access from Ashwell Street, new footpath link from Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane, extensive areas of public open space, extensive soft landscaping and on site biodiversity net gain, on land north of Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.
- 5.1.5 The key issues for consideration in relation to this planning application are considered to be as follows:
- The principle of the development and whether the proposal is in accordance with national and local policies, having regard to its location within the settlement boundary for Ashwell in the Local Plan and Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan,
 - The potential impact of the development on the significance of designated heritage assets; and
 - Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development;
- Other matters also include:
- The layout, scale and detailing of the proposed dwellings with regard to the character and appearance of the local context;
 - The potential impacts on ecology and biodiversity;
 - The potential impacts on existing trees and the wider landscape setting;
 - Highways, access and parking arrangements;
 - Surface water drainage and flood risk;
 - Impact on residential amenity of existing and future occupiers;
 - Archaeology.

5.2 Principle of Development and Policy Context

- 5.2.1 As set out in Paragraph 7 of the NPPF, the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF explains that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic; social; and environmental; which are interdependent and need to be pursued in

⁹ NPPF paragraph 7

mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives).

- 5.2.2 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF outlines that planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area. In addition, paragraph 38 of the NPPF prescribes that local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way and that decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Paragraph 39 encourage early engagement on proposal in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planning applications as good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination and improves the outcome for the local community.
- 5.2.3 Policy SP1 of the Local Plan supports the principles of sustainable development and will ensure the long term vitality of the District's villages by supporting growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities. It goes on to state that planning permission will be granted for proposals that deliver an appropriate mix of homes, create high quality development that respects and improves their surroundings and provides for healthy lifestyles, provides for necessary infrastructure to support an increasing population, protects key elements of the District's environment including biodiversity, important landscape, heritage assets and green infrastructure, and mitigates the impact on climate change.
- 5.2.4 Para 4.4 also acknowledges the key role villages will play in the Council's growth strategy and states villages provide highly valued environments in which to live away from the main towns, yet also have provided opportunities for sensitive growth over time.
- 5.2.5 In terms of growth in villages, para 4.8 states *"Local housing allocations and, beyond the Green Belt, village boundaries are examples of issues which are open to debate and change through the Neighbourhood Planning system. Local communities will be able to supplement the policies in this Plan or identify alternate approaches whilst adhering to the key principles we have set out"*.
- 5.2.6 Policy SP2 defines Ashwell as a 'Category A' village. This is the third tier within the settlement hierarchy below the towns and larger villages. Policy SP2 confirms that within Category A villages *"general development will be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries"*.
- 5.2.7 In the section of the Local Plan titled 'Ashwell', it states in para 13.5 that *"A development boundary is shown on the Policies Map to indicate the area within which further development will be allowed. The boundary has been drawn so as to allow for Ashwell's development needs during this Plan period."* The site is located within the settlement boundary of Ashwell in the Local Plan as shown in *"Map D Northern Areas and Baldock"* of the adopted Proposals Map.
- 5.2.8 The ANP, which also forms part of the development plan, does not identify any specific housing sites in Ashwell either. Part A of Policy ASH1 states that the location of development will be focused within the extended settlement boundary [my underlining]. The application site falls within the boundary extension area as shown below in 'Figure 5.1' taken from the ANP.

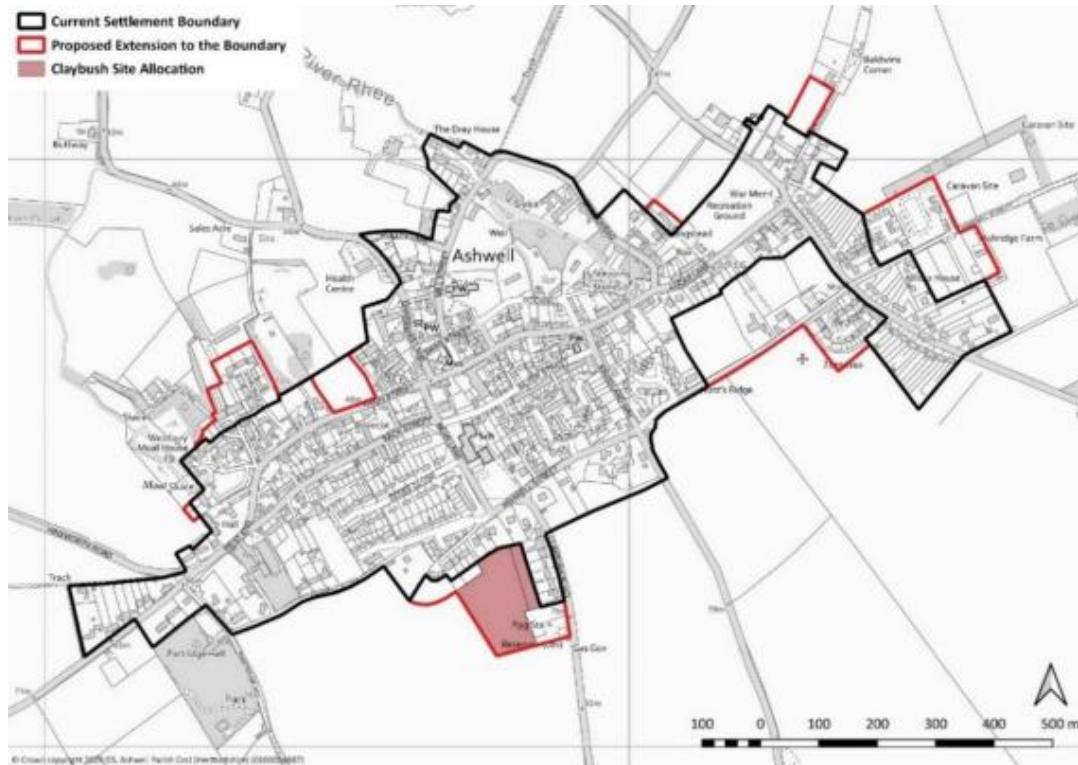


Figure 5.1 Ashwell Settlement Boundary (green line: Saved Plan 1996, red line: Emerging Local Plan)

Figure 11: Extract of Ashwell Settlement Boundary map from ANP

- 5.2.9 In Part B of the policy, it also states that development of greenfield land while there is available brownfield land will not be supported, and Part C states a strong presumption against development proposals outside of the settlement boundary.
- 5.2.10 Furthermore, Figure 15.2 on page 84 of the ANP identifies five “Visual Character Areas” in Ashwell but none cover the application site, and the site is also not designated as “Green Infrastructure”. The site is also not protected or designated for any particularly use such as Local Green Space or Wildlife Corridor as many other open fields within or adjacent to the settlement boundary have been. Therefore, by incorporating the application site into the Ashwell settlement boundary and not protecting the site with any designation, it is an acknowledgement by the District Council and Parish Council that the site will come forward for development to meet future housing needs of Ashwell, as required by policy SP2 of the Local Plan and policy ASH1 of the ANP.
- 5.2.11 If the Council and Parish Council did not consider that the application site a suitable location for development and wanted to discourage development, then it should not have been brought into the settlement boundary. Leaving the site outside the settlement boundary or protecting it with a designation would have sent a clear message that the site is too ‘valuable’ and is to be protected from development.
- 5.2.12 It has however been clarified by officers at the Planning Control Committee for the previous application that the principle of residential development is now considered acceptable. This has been further reinforced by officers in their pre-application response to the revised proposal.
- 5.2.13 It has been demonstrated without doubt that the principle of residential development on the site is acceptable by virtue of there being no new housing allocations in Ashwell, the application site being purposely incorporated into the extended settlement boundary area, and policies in the new Local Plan and ANP supporting new housing growth to come forward within the

extended settlement boundary. The site is well integrated into the built form of the settlement being flanked on three sides by housing development. Therefore, the key considerations will be whether the proposed development is acceptable in terms of its layout, design and scale and impact on the heritage significance of the Ashwell Conservation Area.

- 5.2.14 Therefore, the principle of residential development on the application is acceptable, as it is supported by, and compliant with, Local Plan policy SP2 (including para 13.5) and ANP policy AHS1.

5.3 Sustainable Development

- 5.3.1 Paragraph 10 of the NPPF states the presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of the Framework.
- 5.3.2 Ashwell is considered to be a wholly sustainable settlement in terms of the range of local services and facilities and has excellent links to major road networks such as the A1 and A505. The importance of the village's facilities is recognised by Policy SP4, which classes Ashwell as one of only three villages in the district (along with Knebworth and Codicote) which have sufficient facilities to be classed as 'local centres'.
- 5.3.3 The site itself is centrally located within the village and the inclusion of the proposed pedestrian link means that future residents will be within walking distance of the existing services and facilities available. Figure 3 in Section 2 sets out the range of services and facilities in Ashwell. Therefore, the close proximity of the site to local services and community facility within the village and proposed footpath through the site, will discourage car travel and reduce the number of vehicle movements within the village.
- 5.3.4 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF identifies three objectives to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The following sections set out how this application meets those objectives, which is an important consideration when considering the principle of development. Policy SP1 of the new Local Plan and Objective 1 of the ANP are consistent with paragraph 8 of the NPPF in that they encourage development sustainable that reflects the needs of the district and villages.

Economic

- 5.3.5 The proposed development will promote the local economy through the boost in supply of housing within the village due to future occupiers spending within the local economy helping to maintain local shops and services.
- 5.3.6 In addition, the development will provide opportunities for local businesses during the construction phase, thereby creating and supporting local jobs.
- 5.3.7 The Strategic Economic Plan produced by Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership recognises the importance of housing development and by seeking to provide 16,600 new homes by 2030, the LEP will provide funding to encourage house building. The supply of housing will be key in the creation of an attractive housing market whilst creating employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth and additional spend in the local community which in turn will enable existing facilities to remain viable.
- 5.3.8 Despite not forming part of the District's development plan, the Strategic Economic Plan is a material consideration in the determination of planning application, as it seeks to promote economic growth through the creation of jobs and new houses.
- 5.3.9 The proposed development would provide housing for local people and new residents who would contribute towards local infrastructure and services through Council Tax receipts and

spending in the village which unlike other villages has a designated local centre. Therefore, the proposal would meet the economic objective of sustainable development.

Social

- 5.3.10 The ANP was made in April 2022 and set out the key objectives and policies for future growth in Ashwell. The ANP provides an up to date reflection of the local requirements for development and how future development is to be provided. The supporting text for Policy ASH2 of the ANP acknowledges that the parish has an aging population and there is a need for smaller homes including affordable homes, which are suited to young people and families as well as those seeking to downsize. Also, affordability of housing is a key issue with house prices being out of reach for many local residents which is driven in part by a shortage of small and suitable housing stock in the village.
- 5.3.11 A mixture of market and affordable housing with a focus on smaller 2 and 3 bed units as required by the ANP will contribute towards addressing the local housing need issue, particularly for young people trying to buy a home and older people looking to downsize. The proposal would therefore directly respond to and comply with Policy ASH2.
- 5.3.12 In terms of affordable housing, policy HS2 requires proposals for between 11-14 dwellings to provide 25% affordable housing. This would equate to 4 affordable homes on the site. Along with the housing mix, the proposal would also provide 4 affordable houses of which two would be bungalows. In the Council's latest Monitoring Report (2022-2023), the Council delivered fewer affordable homes against the policy target of 33%. The Council delivered 31%. The Council has not delivered enough affordable housing since 2011-12 and in the previous monitoring year (2021-22) the Council only delivered 74 affordable dwellings (21%) which means the Council has a significant cumulative shortfall in affordable housing and therefore any affordable housing provision should be given significant weight in the planning balance.
- 5.3.13 The lack of affordable housing and small dwellings have resulted in a significant uplift in house prices due to lack of supply. The Government's Housing Price Affordability Ratio, published in March 2024, shows that for North Hertfordshire the median house price to median gross annual salary ratio is over 10.66. The provision of smaller houses and affordable housing is therefore key to addressing housing need and inequality in the district, particularly Ashwell.
- 5.3.14 The proposal will also provide different types of housing such as bungalows and homes that achieve M4(2) and M43 accessible standard, which is over that required by policy HS5 of the new Local Plan. The proposal would therefore comply with policy ASH2 of the ANP which requires a high proportion of one, two and three bed dwellings (including bungalow) within the settlement boundary, which would meet the needs to older and younger people and help to encourage/facilitate downsizing within the village.
- 5.3.15 Therefore, the delivery, in the short terms, of much needed smaller dwellings (2-3 bed), affordable housing including accessible standard housing are significant social benefits in favour of the proposal.
- 5.3.16 The proposal will also provide extensive area of open space and landscaping, and pedestrian connectivity to the wider area and a high quality living environment for future occupiers which will promote healthy living and well being. Therefore, the proposal would achieve the social objective of sustainable development.

Environmental

- 5.3.17 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states that policies and decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and support thriving rural communities within it.

- 5.3.18 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been prepared to support this application and concludes that the application site is well contained and the proposal has taken a landscape-led approach which has responded positively to the concerns raised in the previous application. Also, the introduction of the proposed access from Ashwell Street is also not considered significant in landscape terms and is entirely in keeping with the character of the adjacent houses. Whilst there will be some tree loss to facilitate the access the appraisal considers the degree of removal is not significant and the replacement tree planting with native stock would be of better quality.
- 5.3.19 The proposals include extensive soft landscaping throughout the site and around the areas of open space to create a well-landscaped layout, which will also help to complement and soften the appearance of the housing development. The proposal will also achieve above the 10% requirement for biodiversity net gain, which is more than what is required by the policy SP9 of the Local Plan. This is another significant benefit of the scheme from an environmental and public benefit perspective.
- 5.3.20 It is considered that the provision for supplementary planting and new pedestrian link are in accordance with ANP policy ASH9 that the requires development to improve cycling and pedestrian provision that are physically separated from vehicular traffic. This also complies with Paragraph 61 of the NPPF as the design approach will *'... address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.'*
- 5.3.21 In terms of the built environment, the proposed development responds to the setting of the site and through sensitive design and detailing, and will create a development that will complement the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area and respect the wider settings of nearby listed buildings. The layout has also been designed to open up views of St Mary's Church from within the site.
- 5.3.22 Therefore, the proposals are considered to be fully consistent with the three dimensions and objectives of sustainable development and will enable housing development to be delivered within the settlement, which is supported by the housing policies in the adopted Local Plan and ANP.

5.4 Impact on Heritage Assets

- 5.4.1 As outlined above, the principle of residential development on the site is acceptable in planning policy terms. The key considerations therefore should be whether the proposed development is acceptable in all other matters including heritage impact.
- 5.4.2 In heritage terms, the application site is situated within the Ashwell Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings directly adjacent to the site. Policy HE1 of the Local Plan states planning permission for development will be granted where it incorporates a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character and where it leads to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, the harm would need to be outweighed by the public benefits of the development. To assess the potential heritage impact of the proposed scheme, a Heritage Statement has been prepared by Asset Heritage Consulting and the report accompanies this application.
- 5.4.3 The Heritage Statement sets out a detailed assessment of the site's position within the Conservation Area and the effect the proposed development would have on the Conservation Area, when viewed as a whole. The assessment concludes that the proposed development would have less than substantial harm on the significance of the Conservation Area. The below section therefore does not seek to repeat the assessment, instead expand upon it by assessing the public benefits of the proposal in respect of para 208 of the NPPF.

- 5.4.4 The NPPF¹⁰ notes that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, and that this is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
- 5.4.5 It was identified in the proposal in the previous planning application would result in '*less than substantial harm*' to the heritage significance of the Ashwell Conservation Area. Therefore, in accordance with para 208 of the NPPF, where development proposals lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (the Ashwell Conservation Area in this case), the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
- 5.4.6 The first and second reasons for refusal in the previous application, which were drafted by the Conservation Officer, contains six areas of concern, which are alleged to have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and surrounding built environment and landscape; *1) the site's very positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area; 2) the site represents the last area that could be developed along Ashwell Street; 3) the substantial removal of the sole remaining opportunity to experience the village to the north and unfettered by development; 4) impairment of views toward an area to the east of the historic core and impact, the impact upon the high degree of inter-visibility between Townsend House, 5 High Street and St Mary Church; 5) adverse impact on the character of the medieval route that is Ashwell Street; and 6) removal of trees and surface upgrading would have a transformational impact on the western end of the 'Ruddery'.*
- 5.4.7 The combined effects of these concerns were assessed as having '*less than substantial harm*' to the significance of the Ashwell Conservation Area. The Officers have since acknowledged that the principle of residential development on the site is considered acceptable, which is a material consideration. Therefore, the focus of consideration should be on the assessment of the proposed details for the proposed development and the public benefits.
- 5.4.8 In accordance with para 208 of the NPPF, it is considered that the public benefits from the revised scheme, which are; the provision of mainly 2 and 3 bed housing (including affordable housing) that meets an identified local need; housing that can be delivered in the short term and will create employment opportunities; sustainable housing growth to support local services and facilities; significant overprovision of public open space; a material change to the overall design that visually responds to the rural characteristic of the site as requested by officers; substantially retaining the view (KV23 and SV12 in the ANP) of the River Valley from the field gate; a new publicly accessible footpath link between Ashwell Street and Lucas Lane, which introduces views towards the historic core of Ashwell; extensive soft landscaping including orchard; and ecological enhancement and biodiversity net gain above policy requirement, should be considered enough to outweigh the less than substantial harm previously identified by the Council's Conservation Officer.
- 5.4.9 The proposed development has been revised and takes on board the feedback received from officers during the pre-application stage. This has resulted in a materially different design and layout for the site. The revised layout has a rural character to reflect the site use and mitigates the visual appearance of development from Ashwell Street.
- 5.4.10 The proposed layout focuses the majority of the development on the eastern side of the site and the dwellings have been set back from the southern boundary to reduce the visual impact on Ashwell Street. This has resulted in a large area of open space on the western and southern sides of the site, which increases the perception of openness. A significant amount of the view

¹⁰ Paragraph 205, NPPF 2021

from the field gate would be over the extensive area of open space, the rooftops of some of the properties in Lucas Lane and the countryside beyond would be retained.

5.4.11 Plots 1 and 2 have been designed with a 'farmhouse' appearance in the 'arts and craft' style, which in our view would positively contribute to the view and experience from the field gate rather than detract from it. The rest of the built form has been designed to appear as ancillary/subservient farm buildings and 'farmworkers' cottages, which are variable in scale and have a softer materials palette.

5.4.12 A wireframe viewpoint 1 which is contained in the LVIA provides a useful illustration of how the view from the field gate would be affected by the proposed development. In addition to this, an illustration of the proposed scheme within the site has also been produced of this view to give a fuller understanding on the impact on the view from the field gate.



Figure 12: Extract from Illustrative View from Site Entrance (drawing no.A_2133 PL410)

5.4.13 It is clear from the above illustration that a significant amount of the view would still be retained, and the agrarian design of the proposed development would in our view complement the view without appearing visually intrusive or out of character. Open space area would maintain the sense of openness of the site and views of the roof tops of the properties in Lucas Lane and the River Valley beyond would largely be maintained. Furthermore the Site Context Plan (drawing no.A_2133 PL180) illustrates how the proposed layout would blend into the site and surrounding built form. It also picks up on other similar examples of farmstead style features and layouts in Ashwell.

5.4.14 The proposed scheme would provide a publicly accessible view along the new pedestrian link from the south-east corner of the site towards St Mary's Church, Townsend House, 5 High Street and the historic core of Ashwell. The introduction of this new publicly accessible view would provide a high degree of inter-visibility between no.5 and St Mary's Church from within the site that would not otherwise be possible without the development. This is not a view that is currently publicly available, but one which will be made available as part of the scheme, opening up a new public view of the church from within the Conservation Area.

5.4.15 Therefore, alongside retaining a large area of open space in front existing key view and providing views towards Ashwell's historic core, the proposed scheme would provide significant public benefit and mitigate the impact on this part of the Conservation Area. The proposal is considered to make a positive contribution by opening up public views over the historic core from a location that is currently not accessible to the public. This would enhance the experience of the Conservation Area from this location. The proposal would therefore comply with policy ASH8 of the ANP which requires development to be designed in a way to safeguard the locally significant view.

5.4.16 In terms of the impact on Ashwell Street, the proposed development will add to the existing development along Ashwell Street and so would not be seen as out of character. Whilst there

will be some visual impact from new development, the proposed layout has been carefully arranged so that there is a broken building line adjacent to the southern boundary with Ashwell Street. The site's topography, proposed soft landscaping and setting back of development would further contribute towards reducing any perceived visual appearance and dominance of the built form from Ashwell Street, particularly during summer months.

- 5.4.17 Due to the site being visually contained there would be very limited visual impact of the proposals from Lucas Lane. The setting back of development from Ashwell Street and additional soft landscaping would also reduce the visual impact on the character and appearance of Ashwell Street. Moreover, there is very limited views of the site from within the Conservation Area with the field gate being the only location that provides a view over the site. A wireframe viewpoint from the recreation ground has been prepared, as this is the only location other than Ashwell Street, that any part of the site is visible from. The wireframe illustrates the proposed development nestled in with existing rooftops and not visually intrusive such that it would have a detrimental impact on the significance of the heritage asset. Therefore, the proposed development would enhance the experience of the Conservation Area and preserve the character and appearance of the heritage significance of the Conservation Area.
- 5.4.18 No significant impact was noted on the significance or setting of the listed buildings in Lucas Lane with the previous scheme. As such no reference to these properties were made in the refusal reasons.
- 5.4.19 In these terms, therefore, the Heritage Statement (HS) concludes that the impact on the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area would be reduced from the previous scheme due to the layout and which has resulted in shifting the development further off the southern boundary. Whilst there would be some limited impact on the key view from the field gate which would result in less than substantial harm, the revised layout and revised design would mitigate the harm to a relatively low level. The HS also refers to the proposal making publicly available the view of St Mary's Church from within the site, which would not otherwise be possible from Ashwell Street, and as such *"bestow a sense of place on the new development at this eastern edge of the historic settlement, indicating the relationship between the two"*. In terms of design, the HS states that the revised architectural style would enable the scheme to site well within its existing context and avoids any suggestion of a uniform appearance with recent developments. The proposed farmstead typology 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 are both considered acceptable for this site.
- 5.4.20 Therefore, change to the way in which the view is experienced and the limited impact on the semi-rural character of Ashwell Street would result in a degree of less than substantial harm. In accordance with paragraph 208 of the NPPF, where less than substantial harm is found, it requires that the harm is weighted against the public benefit of the proposal.
- 5.4.21 In view of the less than substantial harm that has been identified in the Heritage Statement, and as required by para 208 of the NPPF, below is a table setting out a summary of key public benefits that would arise from the proposed development and the weighting that should be afforded to each:

Public Benefits	Weight
Housing development within the settlement boundary, in a sustainable location and outside Green Belt;	Significant – presumption in favour of sustainable development within the settlement boundary and close to local amenities.

Public Benefits	Weight
Housing mix of mainly smaller units and bungalows that target the housing need requirements of the policy HS3 of the Local Plan and policy ASH2 of the ANP;	Significant – directly addressing the identified in the ANP for housing needs of Ashwell.
Affordable Housing provision in line with policy HS2 of the Local Plan and policy ASH2 of the ANP;	Significant – providing policy compliant affordable housing that directly responds to the identified local need. This is significant given the Council has not been able to meet its affordable housing target over the last 10 years.
50% of the dwellings will achieve M4(2). 14% (two dwellings) have been designed to achieve M4(3) accessible standard housing above the requirement in policy HS5 of the Local Plan.	Significant – providing accessible housing over what is required by policy to meet the current housing need and provide future proof housing to meet future needs for residents.
Extensive soft landscaping including tree and hedgerow planting and significantly above 10% on site Biodiversity Net Gain above policies SP9 and SP12 of the Local Plan and policy ASH10 of the ANP.	Significant – providing a landscape-led development that provides over 10% BNG on site significant above what is required by policy.
Extensive areas of publicly accessible open space above requires in policy NE6 of the Local Plan, and extensive soft landscaping including 3 metre wide landscape buffers along the side boundaries and Orchard in accordance with policy NE2 of the Local Plan.	Significant – publicly accessible open space and providing a link through the site from Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane. The provision of open space would be above policy requirement. The proposed orchard would also provide socio-environmental benefits to the local community.
Retention of largely uninterrupted key view (KV23) across the site from the field gate in the south-west corner of the site;	Moderate – the majority of the key view from the field gate will be over open space and views towards the roof tops of properties in Lucas Lane and the River Valley beyond would be maintained. The field gate area will be enhanced and provide a pedestrian access point into the site. The farmstead design will provide an attractive vista that will contribute to the viewing experience from the field gate rather than detract from it.
A new publicly accessible pedestrian link would provide views towards St Mary's church (Grade I Listed) and the historic core;	Significant – without the development this new view corridor experience would not be publicly accessible. The view corridor is considered to be an enhancement to experience of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Public Benefits	Weight
A new pedestrian access route from Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane.	Significant – as with the above, this access would also provide convenient and safe connectivity into Ashwell Street and reduce the need for future occupiers to have to travel by car which would reduce traffic in the village.
Energy efficient dwellings in terms of glazing and water efficiency fittings, and electric vehicle charging for all dwellings.	Significant – no Local Plan or ANP requirement for housing scheme to provide EV charging. This is an important provision to tackle emissions and climate change. This will also future proof the development.

Figure 13: Public benefits and weighting schedule

- 5.4.22 The public benefits listed above would equate to a significant amount of public benefits that would be delivered by the proposed development. These benefits would also be significant social, economic and environmental benefits that would be delivered by the proposed development. Furthermore, the identified public benefits do not include the planning obligations that would be provided to education, contribution towards local highway improvements, contribution towards local community services, and fire and rescue. These would be additional benefits that would be delivered by the proposed development which would off-set any impact on local services.
- 5.4.23 The proposed development would allow Ashwell to grow sustainably and take the pressure off needing to find housing allocations or sites within the Green Belt to meet housing need. The proposal would therefore contribute towards protecting the Green Belt.
- 5.4.24 The proposal scheme would also provide significantly over the pending mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement on site and provide an extensive area of open space with soft landscaping including a 3 metre wide landscape buffers to the east and west boundaries and ecological enhancements. The overprovision of BNG would also exceed what is required by policy SP9 of the Local Plan and policy ASH11 of the ANP, which do not set a specific/minimum amount/target for net gain. Therefore, this would also result in significant public benefit arising from the proposed scheme.
- 5.4.25 The proposal includes extensive soft landscape around the perimeter of the site as well as an orchard, tree planting as well as street-trees and landscape reinforcement of the southern boundary with Ashwell Street. The proposed landscaping along with the setting back of the development from Ashwell Street, which would not only limit views of the development but also preserve the semi-rural character of Ashwell Street.
- 5.4.26 The upgrading of the track along Ashwell Street would continue to the character of Ashwell Street when viewed from the west. The approach from Kingland Way is of a highway standard tarmac road leading to the over-engineered junction serving Woodforde Close. This junction is only a few metres from the proposed surface upgrading and so would not significantly change the character of Ashwell Street when viewed from this point. The proposed access into the site has been designed as a modest intervention from Ashwell Street and would discourage left-turning. Therefore, the combination of the surface upgrading and modest access junction design would not fundamentally change the character and appearance of Ashwell Street.
- 5.4.27 The introduction of housing into the field of view from the field gate is considered to be acceptable and would not have a detrimental impact on the existing view. Plots 1 and 2 have been designed to appear as the main 'farmhouse' using an 'art and craft' style which introduces visual interest and respond to surrounding built form, such as Queen Anne House, which is

adjacent to the western boundary. The plots would therefore comfortably assimilate into the site and contribute harmoniously to the view from the field gate. The view of the rooftops in Lucas Lane would still be visible and the views towards the River Valley beyond the settlement will not be affected. The key elements of the view would therefore be maintained, and the proposal would contribute positively to the view.

5.4.28 The proposal to introduce of a new, publicly accessible view corridor to appreciate the view of St Mary's Church and the historic core of Ashwell, which also link Ashwell Street to Lucas Lane, would also be a significant public benefit. The new pedestrian access would not only enhance connectivity and permeability through the site and to local services and facilities but would also enhance the viewing experience from Ashwell Street of the Ashwell Conservation Area.

5.4.29 Therefore, it has been demonstrated that the public benefits that would arise from the development would significantly outweigh the perceived harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The incorporation of the site within the Ashwell settlement boundary adds further weight to proposed scheme, as it materially changes how the site is seen from a developable perspective. Particularly as no new housing allocations are proposed in Ashwell and the Local Plan and ANP seeks housing growth to be provided within the settlement boundary.

5.4.30 It has been concluded within this planning statement that the proposed development has been designed to respect and respond positively to its historic and modern context, and to complement the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Its impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings, in so far as it could affect them, will be low and localised. The Design and Access Statement provides a detailed analysis of the design rationale for the site layout and house-types, which have been carefully designed to respond to local context and built form.

5.4.31 The recent planning application for 9 dwellings (land at junction of Ashwell Street and Station Road, Ashwell – 19/00455/FP), which was approved on 19/09/2019 also involved open land within this part of the Conservation Area and is located only 125 metres to the east of the application site. The officer's report noted that:

"The site is almost wholly undeveloped, and does not have vehicular access onto Station Road. The proposal would break through the existing hedge on the Station Road boundary with a vehicular crossover, and would result in an urbanising effect on this site of agricultural land with the dwellings being visible to some extent from both Station Road and Ashwell Street. This would be in contrast to its undeveloped character, which is a visual break between development on this west side of Station Road. It is considered that developing the site would result in less than substantial harm 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. The Council's Conservation officer has verbally given the view that the development would result in less than substantial harm."

5.4.32 Overall, it is considered that whilst the proposed development would lead to 'less than substantial harm' to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area, the identified public benefits of the scheme would significantly outweigh any harm. The development of the site for housing should also be viewed as being a more optimal use for the land within the settlement boundary and would relieve the pressure on having to consider sites outside the settlement boundary.

5.4.33 For the reasons set out above, the proposed would not cause substantial harm the character and appearance of the locality or the significance of the Conservation Area when considered as a whole.

- 5.4.34 In addition, and for the detailed reasons set out in the Heritage Statement prepared by Asset Heritage Consulting, the proposed scheme is considered to be compatible with the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area and would not adversely affect the wider settings of any listed buildings in the area surrounding the application site.

5.5 Layout, Scale and Design

- 5.5.1 Local Plan policies SP9 (Design and Sustainability) states the Council considers good design a key aspect of sustainable development and policy D1 (Sustainable Design) states proposals should respond positively to the site's local context. This is further reinforced by ANP policies ASH3 (Character of development) and ASH4 (Design of Development) that states development will be supported where it demonstrates high quality design which responds, reinforces and integrates well with its surroundings, local character and meets the changing needs of residents.
- 5.5.2 A detailed site layout has been prepared by AT Architecture and accompanies this application, alongside a Design and Access Statement, setting out the evolution of the design and layout, and what has been amended to response to the concerns of the previous application and following the pre-application process. The DAS also provides a detailed assessment of the local context which has informed and influenced the proposed development. It demonstrates that the proposed development responds sympathetically to the local context and introduces opportunities for enhancements within and out of the site.
- 5.5.3 The application site comprises undeveloped land that is enclosed on three sides by existing residential development. This eastern part of Ashwell Street had a transitional character of higher density residential areas of Woodforde Close and Angell's Meadow to the west, and the lower density residential areas towards Station Road to the east. However, this transitional character has been diluted by the recently built housing development on land at the corner of Ashwell Street and Station Road. The recent housing site has changed the transitional character of the built form along Ashwell Street and now gives the appearance of high density development 'book ending' the stretch of Ashwell Street between Kingsland Way and Station Road. Nevertheless, the proposed scheme would be in keeping with the surrounding built form.
- 5.5.4 The proposed layout and design have been designed to sympathetically reflect the character of the area through changing the house typology to an agrarian style, which respond to the rural character of the site and Ashwell Street. The agrarian style and the composition of softer materials would add visual interest without appearing visually intrusive. As the illustrative impression shows in Figure 11, plots 1 and 2 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.
- 5.5.5 The proposed development is for 14, which given the size of the site (1.18 hectares), would not be excessive when compared to existing nearby residential development. The development would have a density of 12 dwellings per hectare (dph), which compares favourably to other recently built and approved developments in the village – e.g. Philosophers Gate (27.9 dph); Walkden's (26 dph); Claybush Road (18 dwellings per hectare) and Townsend Meadow off Station Road (15 dph). This density of development on the site has been further reduced by removing garages from the site to provide a more open feel to the development.
- 5.5.6 Whilst the density is low, the proposal would make efficient use of the site to ensure it addresses and responds to the competing issues and constraints. The proposal housing mix of 2, 1 ½ storey and single storey dwellings not only adds visual interest but also responds to the surrounding built form. On balance, therefore, 14 dwellings is considered a suitable amount of development on the site.

- 5.5.7 The height and location of the dwellings proposed has also been informed by the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), prepared by Aspect Landscape. The LVIA has carried out a detailed analysis of the site from several viewpoints to assess its visibility and the impact of the development on the site from a wider context.
- 5.5.8 The layout also seeks to establish a series of built frontages that will enclose the street-scene along the spine road to provide natural surveillance of the open space as well as the access road. This will ensure a safe, accessible and pleasant environment throughout the site.
- 5.5.9 The proposed development will incorporate a range of measures to reduce carbon emissions, mitigating the effects of climate change, and adaptation measures to ensure the long-term resilience of the development to the effects of climate change. Aside from proposing housing in a sustainable location outside the Green Belt, not within the countryside or flood zone 2 or 3, the measures include electric vehicle charging for each dwelling, cycle parking provision for each dwellings, water efficient fittings to reduce water consumption to 110 litres per person per day, energy efficient windows and doors, accessible and adaptable homes. The proposed homes will also be built using sustainable materials and the construction phase will seek to reduce waste through a waste and minimisation management strategy.
- 5.5.10 Therefore, the proposed layout, scale and design of the dwellings have been designed to respond sensitively to the surrounding context by taking opportunities to create extensive areas of public realm, which would have good natural surveillance, retains existing vegetation and increases social connectivity and accessibility within and through the site. The proposal would also be future proofed in terms of providing accessible and energy efficient home and, a mix of homes for local needs.
- 5.5.11 It has been demonstrated that the proposed development in terms of its layout, scale and design, and impact on the character of the area would be in accordance with policies SP9, D1 and HE1 of the Local Plan and policies ASH2, ASH3 and ASH4 of the ANP.

5.6 Highway Access and Parking

- 5.6.1 Paragraph 35 of the NPPF seeks to encourage sustainable transport modes, including giving priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and access to public transport facilities. Policy T1 of the new Local Plan, relates to an Assessment of Transport Matters and outlines that planning permission will be granted where *'development would not adversely impact upon highway safety'*.
- 5.6.2 As outlined above, the development will be served off a single new access point from Ashwell Street, close to the south-west corner of the site. The junction into the site has been designed to discourage left turns along Ashwell Street. The proposed access and junction design were considered to be acceptable previously by North Hertfordshire County Council Highways. The proposed access is therefore considered to be in full accordance with policy T1 of the Local Plan.
- 5.6.3 However, in order to response to the previous heritage concern with using Ashwell Street to access the site, during pre-application discussions, officers requested consideration be given to providing the main access via Lucas Lane instead of Ashwell Street.
- 5.6.4 As part of the assessment, the applicant considered two potential options; option 1 to see if the proposed pedestrian access onto Lucas Lane could be turned into a vehicular access that meets highway standards; and option 2 to consider purchasing one of the properties adjacent to the northern boundary to demolish and provide a new access.
- 5.6.5 For option 1, the transport consultant has carried out a technical review of using the proposed pedestrian access onto Lucas Lane as the main vehicular access. The review has concluded that

due to the level's constraints and requirement for extensive retaining walls either side, which would have a detrimental impact on existing residents, a vehicular access via the proposed pedestrian link is not technically viable. A copy of the transport consultant's Technical Note on the alternative access including proposed access plan are included as part of the application submission.

- 5.6.6 For option 2, none of the properties adjacent to the northern boundary with Lucas Lane are currently for sale. Nevertheless, some of the properties do appear on Rightmove.com from when they were last sold. We have also looked at the estimated value of some of the properties using the online valuation tool on the Rightmove website. Below are the estimated values of the properties and their last sold price:

Address	Estimated value	Previous sold price
2 Lucas Lane	£759,000	£213,000 (June 2000)
4 Lucas Lane	£765,000	£630,000 (December 2019)
8 Lucas Lane	£595,000	£376,900 (October 2014)
10 Lucas Lane	£520,000	£420,000 (July 2017)
12 Lucas Lane	£882,000	n/a
14 Lucas Lane	£933,000	£500,000 (June 2003)

Figure 14: Estimated property values in Lucas Lane, Ashwell

- 5.6.7 Based upon the above valuations, the average price of the properties adjacent to the site is £742,000. Therefore, to try buy one of the properties, which are not for sale, just to knock it down in order to facilitate an access to the site, would significantly impact the viability of the scheme, and so is not a viable option. This is supported by a Viability Report by Ceres.
- 5.6.8 Ashwell Street is an existing roadway (BOAT) that is already used by vehicles and provides access to existing dwellings in Woodforde Close and the detached dwelling at Hunts Lodge. The proposal would require a small section of Ashwell Street to be upgraded in order to facilitate the access road and access junction, which has been designed to appear modest and discourages left turning. Therefore, the proposed access from Ashwell Street represents the most logical and practical option to access the site, as it has already been agreed with the County Highways Authority. Therefore, the applicant has demonstrated that all alternative options to accessing the site have been explored.
- 5.6.9 As part of the development proposals, a new footpath/cycleway will be provided from the site through to Lucas Lane. This will enable more direct access for pedestrians and cyclists from the application site and Ashwell Street to the centre of the village and its services and facilities. This would comply with policy SP6 which encourages development in locations which enable sustainable journeys to be made to key services and facilities. This is further supported by policy SP9 which requires development to provide pedestrian friendly streets and well-connected footpaths and cycleways integrated with the wider built and natural environment and communities. This is consistent with policy ASH19 of the ANP.
- 5.6.10 Policy T2 states that development will be required to provide off street vehicle parking in accordance with the minimum standards set out in the Plan. Car and cycle parking policies are set out in North Hertfordshire's 'Vehicle Parking at New Development Supplementary Planning Document', published in September 2011. The current parking requirements are set out below, and further detailed information is contained in the Transport Note by Martin Andrews Consulting (MAC):

Table 4.1: Parking Standards		
Class Use C3	Car Parking Standard	Minimum Cycling Standard
1 bedroom	1 space per dwelling minimum	1 secure covered space per dwelling. None if garage or secure area provided within curtilage of dwelling
2 + bedroom	2 spaces per dwelling minimum	

Figure 15: Parking Standards for New Residential Development

5.6.11 To comply with Hertfordshire County Council's LTP4 Policy 8 (Active Travel-cycling) cycle parking above these standards will be required. The aims of the development will be to provide cycle parking as follows:

- Minimum two cycle parking spaces per dwelling;
- Garage parking will provide, a floorspace requirement of 1.25m x 2m for each bicycle;
- Long stay cycle parking should be in the form of lit, lockable and weather resistant store(s) and be easily accessible;
- 5% of the total bicycle provision for each type of cycle parking (residents, visitors, etc.) should be designed for non-standard bicycles like cargo bikes, inclusive mobility bicycles, tricycles, etc. (more information can be found here: <https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/>).
- Cycle parking provided should be of high quality - conveniently located, secure (especially long term spaces) and with natural surveillance for short term spaces to increase security, lit, covered (long term spaces definitely), visible (especially short term/visitor spaces), easy to access (if not at ground level, no steps and ramps only of appropriate gradients), etc.

5.6.12 The proposed vehicular access, pedestrian link and parking provision would be in accordance with policies SP6, SP9, T1 and T2 of the Local Plan and policies ASH19 and ASH20 of the ANP.

5.7 Housing Mix and Provision of Affordable Housing

5.7.1 The proposed development would provide a suitable mix of housing including affordable housing provision. The proposed housing mix has been informed specifically by the ANP, which sets out the housing needs for Ashwell. Policy ASH2 (Housing Mix) states that proposal should include a high proportion of one, two and three bed dwellings. Over 71% of the dwellings would be two or three bed, which would increase the affordability of housing to younger people. The table below sets out the proposed mix, size and tenure of housing to be provided.

Type	2 bed bungalow	3 bed bungalow	2 bed house	3 bed house	4 bed house	Total
Market	1			5	4	9
Affordable Rent/Shared Ownership	1	1	2			4
TOTAL	1		3	6	4	14

Figure 16: Housing mix table

5.7.2 The proposal contains mainly smaller units aimed at addressing the housing need identified in policy ASH2 of the ANP. The proposal would provide a mixed typology of mainly 2 and 3 bed dwellings including three single storey bungalows. The housing mix will directly meet the

identified housing needs of older residents looking to downsize and younger people looking to enter the housing market.

- 5.7.3 The smaller units would also help to address the housing under occupancy issue and facilitate local residents to downsize freeing up family homes as required by policy ASH2. This is also supported by policy HS3 (Housing Mix) and para supporting 8.18 which states “*Current evidence suggests it is most appropriate to target a broad balance between smaller (defined as 2-bed or less) and larger (3-bed or more) homes over the plan period.*” This is consistent with Policy AHS2 (Housing mix) of the ANP, which states proposals should include a high proportion of one, two and three bed dwellings within the neighbourhood area. The proposal also includes three single storey bungalows (1x3bed and 2x2bed) and two 2bed semi-detached cottages aimed at older people looking to downsize or those people looking to enter the housing market. Therefore, the proposed housing mix would make a direct contribution to local need and result in a significant benefit of the proposed scheme.
- 5.7.4 Policy HS2 of the Local Plan requires housing scheme between 11 and 14 dwellings to provide 25% of the total number of dwellings to be affordable and provided on-site. In the case of the proposed development, a total of 4 dwellings are proposed. The affordable housing tenure will be split between rented and shared ownership. Policy HS2 requires the split to be 65% rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing.
- 5.7.5 The proposal would also provide 4 affordable homes (rented and shared ownership) in accordance with policy HS2 of the Local Plan. However, it is shown in the Council’s Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2022-2023 that the Council has failed to meet its affordable housing target of 33% over the last 12 years, and therefore there is a significant build up of under provision that needs to be met. Below is the affordable housing completion table since 2011-2012 which is contained in the Council’s latest AMR:

Monitoring year	Affordable completions	% of all completions
2011/12	122	29%
2012/13	71	23%
2013/14	60	22%
2014/15	49	20%
2015/16	44	12%
2016/17	118	21%
2017/18	34	10%
2018/19	24	10%
2019/20	51	15%
2020/21	166	28%
2021/22	74	21%
2022/23	148	31%

Figure 17: Extract from AMR (2022-2023): Affordable Housing Completions table

- 5.7.6 Therefore, any affordable housing that is provided as part of a residential development, which also specifically responds to the local housing need for an area should be given significant weight in the planning balance.
- 5.7.7 Policy ASH2 also requires housing to support the needs of older people including people with mobility issues and wheelchair users as the dwellings will be designed to achieve M4(1), 4 dwellings will achieve M4(2) and 2 dwelling will achieve M4(3) accessible standards. The provision of affordable housing in a sustainable location and M4(2) and M4(3) accessible housing provision are significant public benefit of the proposed scheme and would make a value contribution to the identified local housing needs of Ashwell.

5.7.8 The Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2015 (Volume II – updated August 2016) also considers housing mix (size and tenure). Figure 28 sets out the need for market housing and affordable housing of different types (in terms of flats and houses) and sizes (in terms of number of bedrooms). Figure 28 is set out below:

Figure 28: Housing mix of OAN for market and affordable housing by local authority (Source: ORS Housing Model. Note: Figures may not sum exactly due to arithmetic rounding)

		Stevenage Number	Stevenage Percentage	North Hertfordshire Number	North Hertfordshire Percentage	TOTAL
MARKET HOUSING						
Flat	1 bedroom	30	0.8%	200	2.0%	230
	2+ bedrooms	30	0.8%	360	3.6%	390
House	2 bedrooms	320	8.2%	840	8.4%	1,160
	3 bedrooms	2,960	75.9%	5,300	53.0%	8,260
	4 bedrooms	520	13.3%	2,540	25.4%	3,050
	5+ bedrooms	40	1.0%	790	7.9%	830
Total Market Housing		3,900	100%	10,000	100%	13,900
AFFORDABLE HOUSING						
Flat	1 bedroom	550	16.2%	740	16.8%	1,280
	2+ bedrooms	300	8.8%	470	10.7%	760
House	2 bedrooms	840	24.7%	1,010	23.0%	1,850
	3 bedrooms	1,470	43.2%	1,810	41.1%	3,280
	4+ bedrooms	250	7.4%	330	7.5%	580
Total Affordable Housing		3,400	100%	4,400	100%	7,800
TOTAL		7,300		14,400		21,700

Figure 18: Extract from Strategic Housing Market Update, Volume 2, Figure 28

5.7.9 For North Hertfordshire, therefore, in terms of market housing, it is suggested that 53% of the total number of new dwellings should comprise 3 bedroom properties, and 14% should be 1 and 2 bedroom properties. Further, 33.3% should be four or more bedroom properties. The proposed development would provide 9 market houses and 4 affordable homes, as follows:

Market	Beds	Affordable	Beds
1	2 (7%)	3	2 (21%)
5	3 (35%)	1	3 (7%)
4	4 (28%)		

Figure 19: Affordable housing mix table

5.7.10 The proposed mix for market housing is therefore broadly in accordance with the range/mix specified in the SHMA (August 2016 update). However, overall the proposed housing mix is in accordance with the local housing need identified in the more recent ANP, especially given the relatively low number of dwellings being provided. The proposed housing mix would therefore be fully compliant with the housing mix policies in the Local Plan and ANP.

5.8 Public Open Space

5.8.1 Policy NE6 of the Local Plan (New and improved open space), and states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

- meets the needs arising from the development having regard to the Council's open space standards and other relevant guidance;

- contributes towards improving the provision, quality and accessibility of open space; and
- incorporate any necessary open space buffer(s) for landscape, visual, ecological or air quality reasons.

5.8.2 Policy ASH10 of the ANP states development should provide appropriate levels of open space that is usable, not fragmented, safe, easily accessible, accessible to the general public, creates a safe environment and complemented by landscaping.

5.8.3 According to the open space standards in the Development Contributions SPD (January 2023), the standard for Amenity Green Space is 0.6 hectares per 1,000 persons. On the basis the proposal would generate 34 occupiers (based upon 2.4 people per household), this would result in a requirement for 0.18 hectares of open space for the proposed development. The total area of public open space proposed within the development amounts to approximately 5,550m² which is approximately 50% of the site area. This would significantly exceed the open space requirements for new developments. This should be weighed as a significant public benefit of the scheme.

5.8.4 The proposed area of open space would be accessible to local residents via the main entrance on Ashwell Street or the pedestrian link from Lucas Lane. The area of open space would be largely open so that it is a useable space but complemented with landscaping including wildflower areas and trees. This would have the added benefit of providing biodiversity enhancements. The open space and landscaping on the site will be managed by a management company. The majority of the proposed dwellings would also face on to the open space providing some natural surveillance. The open space would also complement the recreation field to the north-east by providing a more informal and active space.

5.8.5 The proposed open space provision would be in accordance with the requirement of policy NE6 of the Local Plan, the Development Contributions SPD and policy ASH10 of the ANP.

5.9 Arboriculture and Landscape

5.9.1 National planning policy requires the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes¹¹. Policy NE2 (Landscape) of the Local Plan, seeks to achieve this aim by ensuring planning permission is granted for development proposals that comply with the following:

- Respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area and accord with guidelines identified for built development and landscape management;
- Do not have detrimental impact on the appearance of their immediate surroundings and the landscape character area unless suitable mitigation measures can satisfactorily address the adverse impact;
- Are designed and located to ensure the health and retention of important landscape features; and
- Have considered the long term management and maintenance of existing and proposed landscaping.

5.9.2 The application site is bounded by mature hedgerows and trees on its northern, eastern and western boundaries which the proposals seek to retain where possible and enhance with supplementary landscaping, to provide an attractive development. The proposal will result in the loss of 6 Category C trees along the southern boundary to facilitate the access which is

¹¹ Paragraph 174 of the NPPF, 2019

considered to be acceptable in arboricultural terms. Full details of trees to be removed/maintained is contained within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, prepared by Origin Environmental.

- 5.9.3 As shown on the Landscape Strategy Plan, a variety of supplementary landscaping has been proposed including the following: tree planting within the open space area, along the pedestrian access with Lucas Lane, on the borders of the site and along the spine road; tree and shrub planting within garden areas of the proposed dwellings; and a 3 metre wide landscape buffer along the eastern, and western boundaries of the site. The proposal included extensive soft landscaping which will not only complement the layout of the site but also soften and screen the appearance of the development from wider viewpoints including Ashwell Street. The appearance of development from along Ashwell Street will be reduced by the intervening green space with orchard and enhancement of the southern boundary with reinforcement planting. The proposal would therefore be in accordance with policy NE1 of the Local Plan and ASH10 of the ANP.
- 5.9.4 In landscape terms, the site is not identified within a sensitive landscape designation saved for the key view from the field gate which is a localised view. Therefore, for the purposes of the NPPF, the site is not considered to be a 'valued landscape'.
- 5.9.5 A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared to assess the magnitude of the change that would be experienced from the proposed development and provides a set of wireframe viewpoints illustrating the predicted impact of the proposed development from 2 key viewpoints including the field gate. Table 4 of the LVIA provides a summary of the viewpoints (1 to 10) and the magnitude of change and the significance of effect at 1 and 10 years. Overall the assessment does not identify any magnitude of change resulting the proposed development that would not cause any significant harm to the landscape and landscape setting of the site. Overall, it is considered that the proposals can be integrated within the site's context and would not give rise to significant long term adverse effects upon the localised or wider landscape setting and visual environment. It is considered that the high quality proposals respond positively to the localised landscape and settlement edge setting and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

5.10 Ecology and Biodiversity

- 5.10.1 Further to the above arboricultural and landscape considerations, it is important to also consider the impact of the proposed development on the ecology of the application site and the opportunities for enhancement.
- 5.10.2 On 12 February 2024, all major and minor developments (subject to exemption) are required to demonstrate 10% biodiversity net gain.
- 5.10.3 Policy NE4 states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that appropriately protect, enhance and manage biodiversity. It goes on to state that all development should deliver measurable net gain for biodiversity to contribute to ecological network. Similarly, Policy ASH10 of the ANP states that as appropriate to the scale, nature and location development proposal are expected to demonstrate net biodiversity gain using the latest biodiversity Metric and improve connectivity between wildlife areas and green spaces through nesting boxes and fruit trees in planting mixes.
- 5.10.4 An Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) has been prepared by Blackstone Ecology Ltd to provide an assessment of the likely impacts the proposed scheme might have upon notable and/or protected species and habitats and, where such features might be affected, to identify the need for any follow up detailed/specialist surveys and/or mitigation to ameliorate the potential impacts.

- 5.10.5 The EclA confirms the site has limited ecological value to support protected species and is not within any statutory or non-statutory ecological designation. Therefore the EclA provides a series of recommendations and enhancements aimed at achieving an overall net gain in biodiversity, which will be followed as part of the development. These are:
- To carry out site clearance work outside of bird nesting season;
 - Take appropriate measures for the protection of retained trees and hedgerows during the construction stage;
 - To ensure any lighting associated with the development is designed to avoid light spill into the hedgerows and trees;
 - Updated survey work in respect of badgers is recommended should be development not commence within one year of the dates of the assessment;
 - Introduce biodiversity enhancement measures including bat roosting and bird nesting boxes, and landscaping including the creation of herb-rich grassland with trees and shrubs.
 - An assessment using the latest Natural England's Metric (February 2024) has been carried out which demonstrates that biodiversity net gain will be achieved within the site.
- 5.10.6 If the recommendations within the EclA report are followed, no significant ecological impact is likely to arise from the proposed development and overall, there will be a significant uplift and enhancement for biodiversity.
- 5.10.7 In terms of BNG, an assessment submitted with the application from Blackstone Ecology Ltd concludes that BNG will be achieved on site. The Metric and Biodiversity Statement concludes that the proposal will achieve post development value of 6.73 habitat biodiversity units on site and 2.17 hedgerow biodiversity units on site, which represents gains of 91.38% and 26.83% is significantly over the 10% mandatory requirement. This is therefore a significant overprovision against policy and benefit of the scheme.
- 5.10.8 The proposed development has incorporated all the recommendations and demonstrates that the site will achieve biodiversity net gain. The proposed development would therefore accord and exceed the requirement of policy NE4 of the Local Plan and policy AHS10 of the ANP.

5.11 Drainage/Flood Risk

- 5.11.1 Policy NE8 Sustainable Drainage Systems states that planning permission will be granted provided that the most appropriate sustainable drainage solution is used, it aims to mimic natural drainage patterns and follows the drainage hierarchy.
- 5.11.2 The application site is situated within Flood Zone 1, where a residential use is considered to be appropriate due to the extremely low risk of fluvial flooding. On this basis, it is considered that the site is appropriate for the development proposals forming this application.
- 5.11.3 A Flood Risk Assessment and proposed drainage strategy plan has been prepared by Martin Andrews Consulting (MAC) and accompanies this application. This strategy confirms that the proposed development will be able to drain surface water via infiltration and that all areas of hard surfacing within the development would drain via permeable paving.
- 5.11.4 These conclusions are based on soakage testing that has been carried out by Geo-Environmental Services Ltd and their recommendations are contained in an appendix to the detailed report by MAC that accompanies this planning application. The report also confirms that the proposed development can be constructed and operated without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

- 5.11.5 Foul water from the proposed development can discharge to the adopted sewer located in Lucas Lane, to the north of the development site.

5.12 Potential Impact on Neighbouring Properties

- 5.12.1 Policy D3 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions.
- 5.12.2 The proposed layout demonstrates that the dwellings would not harm the amenities of any adjacent properties to the site. This is because wherever possible, where new dwellings are located close to the boundary of the site, they are orientated so that only rear or side gardens adjoin existing rear gardens, and that no properties that will directly face into the gardens of any adjacent properties. The 1 ½ storey scale of the dwellings and 3 metre off-set would also reduce their dominance particularly on the occupiers to the east in Townsend House. In terms of the properties in Lucas Lane, plots 3 to 5 are bungalows and so would not have any adverse impact on terms of appearing dominant or causing any overlooking. Plots 1 and 2 are two storey but due to the level of separation between the rear elevations of the properties in Lucas Lane and existing trees, these plots would not have any adverse impact on the residential amenity of the existing occupiers. Furthermore, the first floor windows in plots 1 and 2 are limited to a bedroom window in plot 1 and a bathroom window (which will be obscure glazed) in plot 2. Therefore, this will mitigate any overlooking of adjacent properties.
- 5.12.3 The occupiers to the west of the site are set a significant distance from the proposed dwellings with the intervening open space and landscaping. Plot 1 at the northern end of site has been positioned side on to the northern boundary and there are no windows in the side elevation that would overlook the dwellings adjacent to the western boundary.
- 5.12.4 It is also noted that significant lengths of the site boundary contain existing trees and hedgerow, which provide natural screening of views from the site into adjacent gardens (see photo below). The boundary will be reinforced with additional tree planting to screen views of the dwellings and overall development.



Figure 20 View of Northern Boundary of Site looking towards Lucas Lane

- 5.12.5 The scale of the proposed development is such that it would be very limited impact on nearby residents. There would be no overlooking issues due to the way the dwellings have been laid out. There would be no overbearing or overshadowing issues due to the size of the dwellings and distance from the boundary and existing dwellings. The proposed development would respect the amenity of existing residents.

- 5.12.6 In terms of future occupiers, the proposed development has been designed to provide a high quality living environment but providing generous private gardens, well designed and proportioned, energy efficient dwellings to meet a variety of needs, access to landscaped open space, and convenient and safe access to local services. The proposal would also include electric vehicle charging for each dwelling to future proof the site.

5.13 Archaeology

- 5.13.1 Policy HE4: Archaeology, requires an appropriate desk-based assessment to be submitted for developments affecting heritage assets with archaeological interest.
- 5.13.2 The applicants appointed the Northampton office of the Museum of London Archaeology unit (MOLA) to carry out this work and their report (dated September 2019) accompanies this planning application.
- 5.13.3 An archaeological investigation was also carried out during September 2019 by MOLA (Northampton), based on a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), agreed with the County Council's Archaeology Team. A Trial Trenching Report was also prepared which has been submitted with the application.

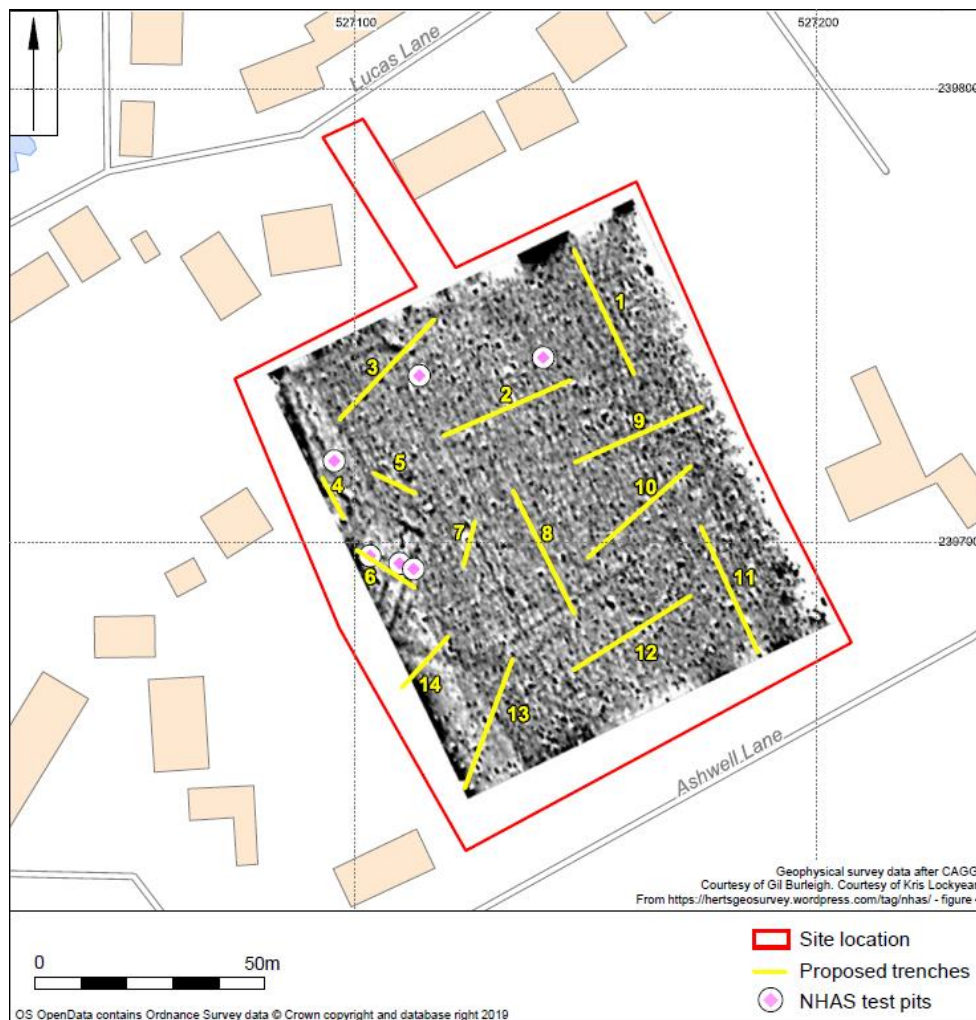


Figure 21: Extract from MOLA WSI showing location of trenches

- 5.13.4 The MOLA desk-based assessment notes that there are several designated heritage assets within a 500 metre radius of the application site, and that the site lies within a complex prehistoric landscape, dominated by dispersed burial monuments of the Neolithic period, which provided

the focus for the construction of a Bronze Age barrow cemetery and demonstrates a continuum of ritual activity during that time. The natural springs in Ashwell and the surrounding landscape have held significance over several millennia and have attracted settlement to the area, particularly during the Roman period. Ashwell Street is likely to be a Roman road which lies on the south-east side of a group of features which lie on the site, to the south-west and to the north-east. The eastern side of a double-ditched angular enclosure was recently found on the site and contained pottery and a bow brooch and may be of Roman date. Roadside ditches have been found further east near Station Road, on the south-eastern side of Ashwell Street.

- 5.13.5 Limited evidence of Saxon occupation is known from within Ashwell but evidence suggests that it is likely to have been settled during this time. Remains have been found further to the east and beyond the western limits of the village. A high status sword chape was discovered on the site and a large hollow found within the possible Roman enclosure contained Saxon pottery.
- 5.13.6 The historic medieval and post-medieval village is centred to the west and northwest of the site around the church and to the south-west of the springs. Cartographic evidence suggests that the application site formed part of the agricultural landscape of Ashwell throughout the post-medieval period.
- 5.13.7 There are records relating to a WWII aircraft crash within this general area of the village including the application site, although there is no evidence to suggest that the crash was actually within the application site.
- 5.13.8 The trial trenching report confirmed some of the conclusion reached during the desk based assessment.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1 This planning application seeks full planning permission for the erection of 14 dwellings, provision of new access from Ashwell Street, associated infrastructure, public open space and landscaping, on land north of Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.
- 6.1.2 This planning application follows the refusal of the previous application (22/03094/FP) for 14 dwellings, which was refused on 30 January 2024 and subsequent pre-application engagement with officers.
- 6.1.3 Since the previous refusal, it has been accepted that the principle of residential development on the site would be acceptable and would meet housing need for the residents in Ashwell which is supported by Local Plan and ANP policies. Through the pre-application engagement, the applicant has worked collaboratively with officers to devise a scheme that is acceptable in terms of design, scale and layout that responds sympathetically with the site constraints and local context.
- 6.1.4 The proposed scheme has been revised to carefully respond to the concerns previously raised and takes on board the pre-application advice from officers including housing examples they provided. The revised design and layout reflects a 'farmstead' typology that visually responds to the rural character of the site and the historic character of this part of Ashwell Street.
- 6.1.5 Furthermore, the housing mix for the scheme has been proposed to directly address the identified local housing need as set out in the ANP. The proposal includes mainly smaller units (2 and 3 bed) including bungalows to provide housing for older people looking to downsize and younger people looking to enter the housing market. 50% of the dwellings would be made accessible housing M4(2) compliant and whilst there is no requirement to provide housing to meet M4(3) the proposed scheme would provide 2 units to that would achieve M4(3) standard which is above the requirement in Local Plan policy HS5. The 4 affordable houses consist of a mix of house-types which would directly meet the identified housing need in the ANP. The proposed dwellings have also been future proofed as they would all be energy efficient and include electric vehicle charging points.
- 6.1.6 The proposal consists of a range of dwelling sizes from 2, 1 ½ storey and single storey which provide architectural interest and would reduce the dominance and appearance of development within the site and from the wider context. The Design and Access Statement provides a contextual analysis of the layout and design evolution from the refused scheme.
- 6.1.7 The proposed layout has been carefully designed to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The site would retain a sense of openness due to the amount and location of open space within the site. The development has been set back from Ashwell Street to reduce the appearance of development. This would maintain the rural character of Ashwell Street. The existing key view from the field gate on Ashwell Street would be largely retained and complemented by the proposed agrarian design and scale of the proposed development and use of a softer materials palette.
- 6.1.8 It is important to note that the proposal only relates to a small section of Ashwell Street, which extends well beyond the site (east and west) and varies in appearance and character along its entire length. The western end of Ashwell Street is materially different in appearance to the eastern end, which links onto Station Road. It would therefore be unreasonable to argue the proposal would have a significant adverse or "transformational" effect on Ashwell Street as a whole. Moreover, the redevelopment of the site which is well contained and only visible from

Ashwell Street, would not significantly change or harm the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area, when viewed as a whole.

- 6.1.9 We have also demonstrated that Ashwell Street represents the only viable option to access the site, and the highway improvements have been designed to minimise their impact, as far as possible, on the character and appearance of Ashwell Street whilst meeting highway technical standards.
- 6.1.10 A second pedestrian access point would be provided in the south-east corner of the site, which would provide elevated views towards the historic core of Ashwell including the spire of St Mary's Church. This view would not be possible without the development coming forward and would enhance the experience of the Conservation Area.
- 6.1.11 The Heritage Assessment advises that the proposed development would result in '*less than substantial harm*' to the Conservation Area. Therefore, under para 208 of the NPPF and policy HE1 of the Local Plan, the *less than substantial harm* should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme including securing its optimal reuse. It has been demonstrated in Section 5 that the proposed development would introduce significant public benefits that would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area.
- 6.1.12 In terms of delivery, there are no significant site constraints that would restrict the development coming forward. The site is available for development and could provide additional housing in a sustainable location that responds local housing needs in the short term. As demonstrated within this statement, there are also strong planning policy considerations in favour of granting planning permission.
- 6.1.13 In addition, the proposed development would bring forward a range of other benefits for the local community and district such as:
- 6.1.14 Economic benefits arising from both the construction and operational phases of development, including new jobs and local spending within the existing village and other local businesses;
- 6.1.15 Social benefits including the provision of a mixture of housing to meet identified local housing needs in the area, which includes affordable housing and accessible housing. The future occupiers of this housing development will contribute to the local economy and in turn enhance the overall vitality of the village and surrounding settlements; and
- 6.1.16 Environmental benefits include the creation of a new area of public open space, extensive soft landscaping and biodiversity mitigation and enhancements, which will result in providing biodiversity net gain on the site.
- 6.1.17 The scheme will see the creation of a high quality and attractive development, in keeping with the character and appearance of this part of the village Conservation Area and will create a high quality landscaped setting respecting the existing residential amenities of properties that adjoin the site.
- 6.1.18 A range of technical reports have also been prepared, which demonstrates that the proposals are acceptable and accord with the relevant planning policies having regard to transport/highways, flood risk and drainage, landscape, arboriculture and ecological and biodiversity considerations.
- 6.1.19 In conclusion, the site is deliverable in the short term and represents a suitable location for sustainable development to assist with meeting the housing needs of Ashwell. The proposals are accordance with the overall objectives of the NPPF and compliant with the relevant policies from both the Local Plan and ANP when viewing both plans as a whole.

- 6.1.20 It is therefore respectfully requested that the Council positively considers this planning application and grants planning permission.

Draft Heads of Terms

The following heads of terms of are considered to be relevant and subject to the application being recommended for approval the applicant's solicitor is ready to assist in the drafting of an agreement to cover the obligations:

- Affordable Housing
- Education contribution;
- On site open space provision;
- Waste and recycling;
- Library service and youth service;
- Sustainable Transport;

In considering planning obligations in relation to this development the NPPF (paragraph 56) advises that:

"Planning obligations should only be sought where they meet all of the following tests:

- **necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;**
- **directly related to the development; and**
- **fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development."**

The Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 (regulation 122) coincides with the above requirements of the NPPF. Therefore, any obligations sought will need to demonstrated with evidence they are required and compliant with para 56 and CIL regs 122.

