

Planning Application ref. 24/01371/FP

Hillcrest and Land at Tussocks, The Causeway Therfield SG8 9PP

Response by Therfield Parish Council to Highways Technical Notes and Drawings, as amended 22 October 2024 and 18 November 2024

The following document has been prepared by myself (Andy Osbourne – Chair) with significant input from one other parish councillor and a retired Highways professional.

Introduction and Overview

It is the Parish Council's view that the highway measures proposed as part of the application are poorly developed, inappropriate to the character of the village and are likely to reduce the safety of The Causeway, resulting in an increased risk of accidents on that road in the vicinity of the proposed development. Although the Parish Council remains opposed to development within the Conservation Area at Tussocks, we would like to work with the parties involved to develop a scheme that suits all stakeholders. We believe that a more sympathetic resolution can be found, using a 'shared surface' intervention.

New Priority Feature – Safety - TPA drawing 2212-005 SK01A

This feature would give priority to northbound traffic, obliging southbound traffic to give way to the opposing traffic flow. It is likely that some approaching southbound drivers, having seen a northbound vehicle, will accelerate in order to beat the oncoming vehicle through the single lane narrowing. This will be in the immediate vicinity of the new section of footway, where vulnerable pedestrians may be present. We accept that most drivers will respect the proposed regime, but a significant minority will not, creating a potentially dangerous conflict.

This section of The Causeway is often subject to extensive on-street parking, for example vehicles dropping off and picking up pupils of the school and on Sundays those visiting the chapel. That parking would be partially displaced by the priority feature but is also likely to result in an additional safety issue due to vehicles parked in the immediate vicinity of the feature.

The drawing fails to show the private accesses to three properties on the west side of The Causeway in the immediate vicinity of the proposed priority feature. The safe use of those accesses would be compromised by the feature as it would force passing traffic in both directions onto the west side of the road, making both entry to and exit from the accesses a more hazardous manoeuvre.

New Priority Feature – Street Furniture - TPA drawing 2212-005 SK01A

The drawing shows the two pairs of signs required to establish the priority regime, but no other details of signage, road markings or lighting. It is our understanding that, as regulatory signs, these will need to be illuminated. There is no street lighting in Therfield and illuminated signs would be entirely out of character for a village in a Conservation Area.

The new proposed footway and kerb line fronting School House would be directly in the path of southbound vehicles and would require signage to warn approaching drivers of its presence. No details of such signage elements are shown on the drawing, but these again would be an inappropriate addition to the existing street scene.

To ensure the effective working of the proposed priority regime, no parking could be permitted in its vicinity. This would require parking restrictions supported by yellow no waiting lines and associated enforcement. Such features would also be most inappropriate to the Conservation Area.

New Footway - Safety- TPA drawing 2212-005 SK01A

At the southern boundary of the application site, the proposed new footway appears to narrow as it abruptly changes alignment towards the centre of the road. This would place pedestrian users directly in the path of southbound vehicles approaching the give way line. Those vehicles are likely to be arriving at that point at or over the signed 30mph speed limit for the road. The risk to those pedestrians at this location and also along the frontage of School House is significant. The proposed layout is inherently far less safe than that which currently exists.

Visibility Splays - TPA drawing 2212-005 VS05

The 2.4m x 43m visibility splays assume a 30mph design speed, which does not appear to have been verified by any site-specific speed surveys. The splay to the south of the proposed new access assumes that the new footway and associated kerb line will be in place. This will need to be re-assessed when the proposed highway measures are revisited.

Stage 1 Safety Audit - Alpha Consultants document AC/TPA/0209241

It is noted that the site visit for this audit took place on 23 August 2024. That date was within the school summer holiday period when there would have been no traffic associated with the nearby Therfield First School and when a significant proportion of the UK population is typically on holiday. Any observations made on that date therefore have no value, casting critical doubt upon the validity of the audit itself. In addition, the audit makes no mention of vehicle speed surveys. Although the speed limit on The Causeway is 30mph, residents' observations indicate that typical speeds are in excess of that figure. Particularly for southbound vehicles, where drivers are still adjusting to the transition from the 60mph approach to the village to the 30mph zone which starts just north of the junction with Mill Lane. A further audit on a school term date, at peak

times and including an analysis of surveys of measured speeds would add greatly to the credibility of the traffic assessment.

For and on behalf of Therfield Parish Council

Andy Osbourne - Chair

Highway Boundary and road widths - TPA drawing 2212-005 SK01A

As observed by Hertfordshire County Council's Highways Development Management Team, a considerable area of the front part of the application site is subject to public highway rights. It is unclear how the currently proposed development works within the highway area can be legally delivered.

The carriageway width through the proposed narrowing appears to be insufficient to accommodate larger agricultural vehicles, which are frequently required to use The Causeway. Evidence of a formal consultation with the farming community needs to be demonstrated if this width is to be considered adequate.

Recommendations

1. Traffic speed surveys to be undertaken during a school term, at times to include AM and PM peaks, as defined by journeys associated with Therfield First School.
2. A further Stage 1 Safety Audit to be undertaken, taking into account the identified shortcomings of the existing audit as outlined above, and a revised report issued.
3. A detailed and comprehensive design drawing to be issued for the proposed narrowing and give way feature, to include road widths, all signage, lighting and road markings.
4. A design meeting to take place between the applicant's designer and the HCC Development Management Team to explore the creation of an effective and safe "shared surface" solution for the street scene in the vicinity of the application site and fronting School House to replace the currently proposed give way layout. With particular consideration given to the proximity of Therfield First School in the context of its access and safety. A report to be issued detailing the outcome of that meeting.