



Historic England

Mr Alex Howard
North Herts Council
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Our ref: P01579611

29 July 2024

Dear Mr Howard

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**LAND BETWEEN HUNTSRIDGE AND ASHWELL HOUSE, 5 HIGH STREET,
ASHWELL, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG7 5RU
Application No. 24/01444/FP**

Thank you for your letter of 10 July 2024 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

This application proposes the development of 14 houses on a field in part of the Ashwell conservation area. We consider this would result in harm to the historic significance of the conservation area in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Council should consider any public benefit that might result from the proposed new housing but we would not support the granting of consent on heritage grounds.

Historic England Advice

This application proposes the erection of 14 dwellings and follows previous schemes submitted as planning applications 20/00126/FP and 22/03094/FP on which we advised the Council. In our letter of 13th December 2022 concerning the latter application we described how the site is an attractive area of open land on a sloping valley side leading down to the bottom of the valley and that the elevated location of the top of the site facing Ashwell Street gives far reaching views across the landscape showing clearly how Ashwell village is nestled at the bottom of a valley and associated closely with the stream. This patch of open ground is probably the



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only location from which this view, mostly undisturbed by recent development, can be appreciated.

Ashwell Street is also a medieval trackway and being situated on higher ground than the village the site represents an important link between the understanding of the routeway and the growth of the village. Historic maps indicate that Ashwell grew up to respect the historic trackway of Ashwell Street with gardens and agricultural land associated with the village bordering it. The thin strips of almost burgage plot style dwellings stop at Ashwell Street and wider agricultural land continues to the south of it. This indicates its continued importance as a route serving the land around the village. Historic maps indicate that this land has always been open, undeveloped and with open views across to the wider landscape. Ashwell is a conservation area and the land in question is contained within the designated boundary and noted as one of the key views in the conservation area appraisal.

Our previous advice has consistently noted the significance of the site as part of the conservation area and the harm to the area which could result in it being built on. We note the Heritage Statement included with the current application considers the scheme to addresses the various heritage objections to the previous versions. We do note that almost half the site would remain undeveloped and this would allow views from the northern end of the field, although the presence of a building at the northern edge of the western half of the site rather detracts from this. However, developing this land will (as stated before) reduce the contribution the plot makes to the significance of the conservation area and so result in harm to that significance.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 establishes that in considering applications for planning permission for development special attention shall also be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area in the exercise of any powers under the planning Acts (paragraph 72). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development and that protection and enhancement of the historic environment is an overarching objective in this (paragraphs 7 and 8). The significance of conservation areas can be harmed or lost by alteration to them. The NPPF states that clear and convincing justification should be made for any such harm and that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of conservation areas irrespective of the level of harm caused (paragraphs 199 and 200). Paragraph 206 also states that the Council should favour those proposals for development which preserve those elements of setting that make a positive contribution to the heritage asset of better reveal its significance.

We have considered this application in terms of this policy and are concerned that development of the application site would result in 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the conservation area in terms of the NPPF paragraphs 199 and 206. Paragraph 202 requires the Council to consider any public benefit which might be delivered by the proposals and weigh this against the harmful impact. We would accept that the development of the proposed housing could be such a public benefit and leave this matter to the Council but would object to the application on heritage grounds.



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Recommendation

Historic England objects to the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the application does not meet the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 7, 8, 199 and 200. In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If you propose to determine the application in its current form, please inform us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity. Please contact me if we can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

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