

HERITAGE ASSET STATEMENT & IMPACT ASSESSMENT

THE FORMER TENNIS COURT SITE, ROLLYS LANE,
ASHWELL SG7 5LF

PROPOSED 2 NO. DETACHED, ONE & HALF STOREY, 3-BEDROOM HOUSES; DETACHED PAIR OF GARAGES; & ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING & DEFINITION OF FRONT BOUNDARY TO ROLLYS LANE

Introduction

The purpose of this **Heritage Asset Statement & Impact Assessment** is to support & to inform the application for Planning Permission. The statement will provide a description of the former tennis courts, its setting at the rural edge of the village, also including an appraisal of the settings of the nearby listed buildings & the Registered Park & Garden of Ashwell Bury, within the wider context of this part of the Ashwell Conservation Area. An assessment of the **impact of the proposals** on the special interest, character, appearance & significance of the designated heritage assets will be considered & evaluated.

The statement has special regard to sections 66(1) & 72(1) of the Planning (Listed buildings and conservation areas) Act 1990, as the site includes the settings of listed buildings & is within the designated conservation area; & is to satisfy the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (December 2024) in particular 16- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment & also 12- Achieving well-designed places; & to accord with the requirements of North Herts Council local planning policy, current design guidance & also the Ashwell CA Character Appraisal & Management Plan (2023) & the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan April 2022).

This **Heritage Asset Statement & Impact Assessment** concentrates specifically on the conservation area impacts & those to the nearby historic environment & is to be read alongside the Design & Access Statement, the detailed annotated drawings & the architectural design detail of the proposed houses & the site in total.



Background- site location, setting & wider village context

The application site- now the redundant former tennis courts of The Merchant Taylors School- comprises a roughly irregular, mostly blacktop paved, currently rather neglected & moss-covered, rectangular shaped area, slightly skewed & elongated along the road frontage to the north-west corner. The old tennis courts are located at the south side of Rollys Lane, between Chain Cottage (50 Gardiners Lane- at the corner with Rollys Lane), to the west, & the rear garden of Old School House, to the east (both Grade II listed buildings).

To the rear of the application site are Deans Cottage, Library Cottage & the Lodge- these houses all have vehicular access from Gardiners Lane, to the south. At the south-west site boundary is an access point to the footpath which follows the garden boundary of 40 Gardiners Lane, as a pedestrian link between the application site & Gardiners Lane.

There are many large mature trees around the site except to the rear south boundary.

The official list descriptions of Chain Cottage & Old School House (part of the former Ashwell FE Centre) are copied below.

ASHWELL GARDINERS LANE (North east side) No 50 (**Chain Cottage**)

(Formerly listed as Chains Cottage)

II

Cottage, formerly a pair. Early C18. Wings added at front corners in mid C19. Timber frame with plastered walls. Thatched roof. South elevation has two eaves dormer windows cut into thatch, the ground floor with four leaded casements, paired together at outsides and with small bracketed hoods. North elevation has C20 door and pentice. Central C18 ridge stack. Wings each side are single storey. Painted clunch walls, pantile roofs. Small red brick stacks.

ASHWELL MILL STREET (West side) Ashwell 8/51 **No. 23** 9.6.52 (**Ashwell Further Education Centre**) (formerly listed as The Schoolmaster's House)

GV II

Built as school by Merchant Taylor's Company, London, 1681. Extended at front in C18 and at rear c.1870. Main block is in local C17 red and white brick, repaired in C19. Plain tile hipped roof. 2 storeys and attics. Large external chimney stacks on both ends. Moulded brick floor band, returning as plain band across flanks. 2 triple-hung sash windows with gauged brick heads. Fielded and flush panel door with flat bracketed hood. Twin leaded hipped dormer casements. Above door is a pedimented stone plaque inscribed, 'This school was built by the Merchant Taylor's Company London 1681, being the gift of Mr. Henry Colbron, late of London scriveners, deceased. Edward Bushell Master, John Taylor, Robert Kaye, John Short, John Brett wardens'. Single storey front right extension of late C18: 1 sash, 1 casement. T-shaped rear extension, the back range with louvred tiled belfry. Ornamental ridge tiles. Gothic windows.

Rollys Lane is at the northern edge of the village, with rural agricultural & the relatively open parkland landscape of Aswell Bury (Grade II Registered Park & Garden) beyond to the north & to the south-west of the low valley of the R Rhee (Cam), which defines the boundary of the RP&G & the Ashwell Conservation Area.

To the east of the application site, is the junction of Rollys Lane with Mill Street (nos. 29, 31 & 33 Mill Street are Grade II listed) & nearby is the medieval, Grade I listed, Parish Church of St Mary, with its prominent landmark tower & distinctive lead clad spike.

The summarised official list descriptions of: Ashwell Bury, nos. 29, 31 & 33 Mill Street, the relevant parts of St Mary's Church & Ashwell Bury RP&G (the especially relevant sentence-relating to **views towards Rollys Lane**- is emboldened) are copied below.

ASHWELL MILL STREET (North west side) Ashwell 2/54 **Ashwell Bury**- II

Small country house. Early C19, extended late C19. Altered and extended by Sir Edwin Lutyens 1922-26. White brick, rendered in white cement. Stone quoins and floor band. Slate hipped roof. 4 red brick stone-dressed chimney stacks. 2 storeys. 5 sash windows. Central Doric style doorcase with segmental open pediment and fluted consoles. Above is a triple sash window. To left end is a single storey addition with stone corner pilasters and moulded stone cornice. Triple sash window. Lead urns. Rear elevation with blank Tuscan Serliana motif. The house has a deep eaves soffit with moulded architrave. Interior has a large square staircase hall top-lit by octagonal dome. Upper walls have glazing bar casements each side, the rear ones with mirrors. Front left room with panelling and good classical fireplace by Lutyens. Another Lutyens fireplace on rear left. (PEVSNER (1977)).

ASHWELL MILL STREET (West side) Ashwell 8/52 **Nos. 29, 31 and 33** GV II

Pair of houses. C16 or earlier. Broad C17 cross wing on N end. Timber frame. Clunch and brick base. C20 pargetted cement walls, all painted white. Plain tile roof. 2 storeys, the cross wing with attic. 4 windows, all square and diamond leaded casements in C17 metal frames. 2 C20 plank doors. Wide S gable end with exposed floor plates, ground floor with 4-light casement, 1st floor with 3-light casement. To left No. 29 is late C16. 1 storey and attics with 3 similar leaded casements and 2 gabled attic dormers. Machine tile roof. Front range has 2 C20 red brick stacks.

ASHWELL MILL STREET (East side) Ashwell 8/46 **Church of St. Mary** GV I

Parish Church. C14 (completed 1381). C15 N porch and aisle windows. Large building with exceptionally big W tower. Clunch. Flint rubble. Some red brick. Low pitched slate roofs behind parapets. 4-stage W tower has deeply projecting stepped angle buttresses. Leaded spike with crenellated octagonal base. Lowest stage has 4-light Decorated-style traceried window; belfry stage has paired pointed arches with traceried panels. N and S aisles have 3-light traceried windows; hood moulds; cinquefoiled lights. Chancel with 3-light restored C14 windows. N porch is single storey. Original door arch and windows. 2-storey S porch has C19 restored gabled front. Lierne vault with naturalistic foliage bosses.

Ashwell Bury Registered Park & Garden

Gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll to plans dated 1907-8, surrounding a country house remodelled 1922-3 by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Ashwell Bury house was built in the early C19 and extended in the later C19 for the Fordham family who owned the adjacent brewery. In 1907-8 Gertrude Jekyll was commissioned to produce plans for the gardens (NMR), these being dated 1908 and 1909, and these appear to have been laid out largely as she indicated. In 1922-3 Sir Edwin Lutyens extended and remodelled the house. The gardens have been developed and modified during the mid to late C20. The house remains (1999) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ashwell Bury lies on the northern edge of the village of Ashwell, 7km north of Baldock. The c 6ha site is bounded to the south by Gardiner's Lane, and to the west by an extension northwards of the same. To the north it is bounded by the River Rhee and beyond this by Elbrook House and its surrounding parkland. To the east lies Mill Street and the adjacent former brewery buildings which were associated with the site during the C19 and early C20. The ground is largely level. The setting is rural, with agricultural land and parkland to the north, west and south-west, and the village lying to the south and east. The brewery yard and buildings lying adjacent to the north-east have been converted to domestic use.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters c 120m south-east of the house, off Mill Street, between two brick piers flanked by a brick wall. A brick and white-painted house (c early C20) stands at the south end of the wall, while to the north (outside the area here registered) stands a two-storey lodge, part of the former approach to the brewery. The drive extends c 70m north-west flanked by an avenue of lime trees, bounded to the south by a paddock and to the north-east by a brick wall separating the drive from the former brewery premises, the area immediately beyond the wall now developed as housing.

The drive turns west 50m from the house, passing the hedged kitchen garden to the south. To the north lies a lawn planted with mature *Quercus ilex*. A narrow border punctuated by pyramidal clipped yews is separated from the gravel drive by a strip of lawn. The drive arrives at a rectangular forecourt on the south, entrance front of the house, bounded by the south lawn to the south and overlooking parkland beyond this, with the hedged kitchen garden enclosure to the south-east. The Jekyll plans show her design for the layout of the informal lawn north of the drive much as survives today (1999), although she appears to have suggested a hedge in place of the border which now exists.

A spur off the drive 50m east of the house enters a service yard adjacent to the north-east corner of the house. In the late C19 (OS 1897) only the western section of the drive existed, giving direct access to the brewery yard and building complex to the east, now separated by the boundary wall extending north from the north-west end of the avenue.

In the late C19 (OS 1897) the main approach was from the south, via a drive off the lane connecting Gardiner's Lane and Mill Street, crossing the south park, curving around to approach the south front from the south-west. This approach was straightened when the drive was moved some metres west in the early C20 (OS 1920s), and now appears to have fallen into disuse.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Ashwell Bury (early C19, extended late C19, work 1922-3 by Sir E Lutyens, listed grade II) stands towards the north-east corner of the site. The two-storey building is of white brick and largely rendered (except the north, service front), with stone dressings, and with a low pitched roof and prominent eaves, chimneys and shutters.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens lie to the west and north-west of the house, divided into two main parallel sections by a low bank, planted as a border, extending c 30m west from the north-west corner of the house, with access between the two sections provided by a flight of low stone steps.

French windows lead from the west front onto a raised, stone-paved terrace, partly bounded by a balustrade, overlooking a lawn extending c 30m westwards to the park, from which it is separated by a wooden fence. The south side of the lawn is bounded by a broad, clipped yew hedge with recesses cut into it, screening the lawn from the parkland to the south. A gap in the hedge leads south to a narrow lawn running parallel, leading east alongside the park to a gravel path which enters the forecourt (the path possibly the remains of the north end of the C19 south drive). The north side of the lawn is bounded by the planted bank, at the centre of which are the stone steps leading down to a further lawn. The upper lawn was referred to by Miss Jekyll on her plans as a bowling green, and the recesses in the hedge to the south were intended to be filled with small beds.

The lower lawn to the north is dominated by a formal rose garden, at the centre of which lies a low grass mound enclosed by a clipped box hedge and approached through central gaps in each side of the hedge. The north/south entrances to the mound lie on an axis with the stone steps down from the lawn to the south. The west/east entrances lie on an axis with a box-hedged enclosure to the west, surrounding a small circular lawn, at the centre of which stands a planter on a stone plinth. The lawn runs north, dropping at the north edge to the River Rhee, the approach broken by informal borders, with, at the north-west corner, an informal inlet from the river enclosed by grass banks. Views extend north to Elbrook House and park, and west over the Bury parkland to the countryside beyond. A hard tennis court lies west of the lower lawn, adjacent to the west park.

Miss Jekyll's plans show that she intended that the features on the lower lawn should be linked by axial walks. The area was to be entered from the bowling green to the south. The steps down, flanked by a border designed by her, led to the central square hedged feature (extant 1999) surrounded by formal borders. From here a walk led west to the circular hedged feature (extant 1999), and a further walk led north-west to steps down to the inlet. From the inlet a formal hedged walk returned east alongside the river, turning south and leading to the north side of the central square feature.

In the late C19 (OS 1897) the house was enclosed mainly to the east and north by a smaller garden. A path led north from the house to a riverside walk which at the north-west corner of the garden crossed the river via a bridge, continuing north across Elbrook House park. A path from the east front of Ashwell Bury gave direct access to the brewery complex.

PARK The small park, laid to pasture with scattered mature parkland trees, lies to the west and south of the house. **Views extend south-east towards the church and village**, and south and west over agricultural land.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies close to the south-east corner of the house, enclosed by a clipped yew hedge with gaps cut in it for access. The extent and hedging appears to reflect Gertrude Jekyll's design, but the interior pattern of beds has changed.

Proposals affecting heritage assets

The proposed development is for **2 detached, 1 & a half storey houses** & a separate detached **pair of garages**, together with the associated landscaping, alterations to the vehicular & pedestrian entrance & definition of the front garden boundary (to Rollys Lane).

The designated heritage assets most immediately affected are: The settings of the 2 nearby listed buildings- Chain Cottage & Old School House; the Ashwell Conservation Area (Character Area 2- Northern Rural Periphery & Ashwell Bury Estate), which includes the site & the adjacent surrounding area; the setting of the Ashwell Bury RP&G.

Considering potential impacts

The design of the 2 houses & the site in total, now proposed, seeks to respond positively to the helpful pre-application advice- 25/00186/PRE (Melissa Tyler, 15 May 2025)- which related to the development of 3 houses, garages & associated works- & in particular the critical points raised in the comments of the Conservation Officer & in the Conclusion.

The application site, now currently rather neglected & in a somewhat dilapidated condition, is in a sensitive edge of village location within the conservation area, between listed buildings, both close to the site & within the wider site context- in particular with important longer views to the landmark tower of the Parish Church of St Mary- & the setting of the parkland of Ashwell Bury Registered Park & Garden.

The **scale, form, massing & bulk** of the now proposed 2 houses & the garages has been very carefully considered & reduced- in the light of the valid critical issues & concerns raised in the pre-application advice- & the silhouette of the rooflines amended accordingly.

The **layout** of the new proposed buildings, set back within the site, has been rigorously reviewed & actively modelled to allow for continued significant key views across the site to the *exceptionally big west tower* with its characteristic distinctive leaded spike.



In terms of **house design**, the form of the dwellings is loosely based on a contemporary thoughtful approach to typical Arts & Crafts style domestic forms & architectural detailing, with a subtle range of textures & a mix of external materials of construction, that reflect the traditional finishes & materials prevalent in the historic core of Ashwell. This approach is seeking to sympathise comfortably with the nearby houses & to be a good neighbour, aiming to be thoughtfully woven into the built form of the village & the fabric of this part of the conservation area, at the vulnerable junction of village with the surrounding open parkland & rural agricultural countryside, beyond.

The **landscape treatment** generally, with mainly indigenous planting behind the line of estate railing & the relatively informal boundary definition of the Rollys Lane frontage, aims to gently integrate the site into this sensitive location & the settings of the listed buildings nearby.

Beyond the site, the settings of the Designated Heritage Assets directly affected: Chain Cottage & Old School House, though adjacent to the site, are distinct spatially & separated to a reasonable extent- & other the listed buildings are at some distance from the application site. Any degree of potentially damaging relationship or intervisibility is thereby much limited & restricted.

The proposed works would, in terms of NPPF paragraph 215, have no actual impact or potential (*less than substantial*) harm to this group of heritage assets within this part of the conservation area. The application site itself would be, it is considered, enhanced by the viable re-use of the sensitive but now neglected, redundant, disused space & land.

Change is inevitable. Permanence is an illusion. The character & appearance of the site location, in this part of the conservation area, is proposed to be beneficially re-used for much-needed local housing & thus would be positively adapted for existing & future generations, providing a meaningful, viable & sustainable long-term future.



View from the centre of the site looking east towards the rear garden of Old School House

Conclusion & comment

Conservation should be about positive change for the future and not be seen as being about resisting change... A creative, pragmatic and flexible approach, with informed judgements and thoughtful compromises to encourage the best overall outcomes...

(Conservation Professional Practice Principles, IHBC 2017, re-issued 2021 & 2024).

In the light of this principle, it is considered that the sympathetic design of the new houses & the treatment of the site in general, are fully justified, follow the advice provided in the pre-application submission & amount to a balanced, harmonious development- with, realistically, relatively limited low impact- to the spirit of the place & would be thus be entirely positive in this sensitive conservation area context. They would result in only a minimal degree of actual change to the area.

The distinctive character, appearance, historic interest & significance of Rollys Lane & the nearby surroundings would be, it is considered, thoughtfully maintained & sympathetically enhanced in the proposed development for 2 new houses- adding positively to the ongoing story of the adaptation & evolution of Ashwell for this & for future generations to appreciate & enjoy for their contribution to the quality of life.