

ICKLEFORD PARISH COUNCIL



www.icklefordpc.com

Woodview House, Luton Road, Great Offley, Herts. SG5 3DR

Email: Clerk@ickleford-pc.gov.uk Tel: 01462 337009



Mr Paul Chaston
Senior Planning Officer
Major Projects
North Hertfordshire Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6H

Date:

Dear Mr Chaston

Re: Outline Application 25/02401/OP: Erection of up to 100 dwellings with means of access from Turnpike Lane including associated landscaping, drainage, car parking; infrastructure and all ancillary and enabling works following demolition of all existing structures (all matters reserved except means of access) Land South of Turnpike Lane, Ickleford, Hertfordshire.

We advise you that Ickleford Parish Council **STRONGLY OBJECTS** to this Planning Application. Please see below, the categories and reasons for our objections.

1. The Land

This land, which is of excellent grass/grazing quality, although considered by the Developer as being downgraded to 'grey', is definitely and without question well within the 'Green Belt' which is of the greatest importance and necessity to the Village and Residents of Ickleford.

Although once belonging to the Lord of the Manor and used, up until the 1970's, as a football pitch for the good of the Village; it is now the natural barrier, both in Ecology and Biodiversity, along with the green sward south of Bowman's Mill, the land running East and that of The Paddocks, to the West of the Parish, between Ickleford and the urban sprawl of Hitchin.

The grass itself is maintained by the grazing of horses.

Surrounded by trees and shrubs and supported by a neighbouring river dependent pond, it gives a natural habitat for every species of animal and insect, some of which were displaced when land near Manor Close/Lodge Court, which was also part of the Village's natural barrier, was privately sold for housing.

With the ever-increasing pollution from traffic and industry, this land, to keep the important natural barrier afforded to Ickleford, could be the opportunity for Local

Councils, Parish, North Herts and Hertfordshire CC, to fulfil the Government's aims in creating Woodland, which have far-reaching benefits for us, the land, the environment and for future generations.

The land is also of such significance, with its ecology and biodiversity, to be added to the North Herts Council's 'Habitat Bank' with improved public access.

Bordered by the River Oughton, a natural chalk stream, to the South; climate change, which is with us now, brings about disgorging run-off water into the river, through the mismanagement of out flows from the Development to the West of the Bedford Road, which inevitably leads to this land becoming flooded, as historically witnessed many times.

Unlike all the authorities who have been asked to comment on this land, the majority of whom have done so by 'desktop' observations only, we the Parish Council, representing the Village and Parish, know the land and its importance. We don't require numbers to tell us about the land and whether it is liable to flooding, it floods; the ecology and biodiversity exist; the trees and shrubs that are of no significance to the developer, are vital for our clean air, our environment and the animals and insects that rely on them for their habitats.

But of most importance and stated earlier, the land is our natural 'green belt barrier' that protects our existence as a village from the ever-increasing urban sprawl of Hitchin. We need it for our health, welfare and the privilege of being able to bear witness to nature and its natural habitat, which in this day and age is sadly diminishing.

2. The Development

Like many these days, the Developer is laying out his application to appeal to the 'Local Plan', saying the words that every Planning Councillor wants to hear, which is 'Affordable Housing'.

We have seen in Ickleford these same words mentioned many times in the initial Planning Application, only to see at the final stage, houses being built that no one in this area, especially the first-time buyer, will ever be able to afford.

Previous final developments have shown that the aim is to appeal to those who are looking to downsize, probably from London and who can afford to look for the four plus bedroomed homes that succeed the £million asking price.

3. Drainage, Sewage and Wastewater

As the majority of Council Planners are aware, since the installation of its sewerage system during the Victorian era, Ickleford's growth has seen this system unable to cope with modern day builds and development.

Consisting of a single pipe designed to only cope with sewage alone, it has become almost impossible, as climate change takes hold, for this single pipe to now deal with waste and run-off water from houses and roads.

The Parish Council have requested from North Herts Council that all new housing development be put on hold, until Anglian Water can improve its system by incorporating a new pipe to deal with run-off water alone.

However, this Development will only exacerbate the situation with its planned 100 houses, inevitably leading to more sewage/waste and run-off water being gorged into gardens and homes, as is the case at present.

Although it has been suggested that all sewage and wastewater will be directed towards Hitchin via a pumping station; with its natural fall towards the Victorian system, it will be a much cheaper prospect and one that was already taken for granted when the new development Ickleford Manor, was built at the top of Turnpike Lane.

Anglian Water has no choice but to accept and supply the necessary usage of their sewerage piping system for the development, but no figures can account for the amount of run-off water to be forecast and how much degradation is to be expected by the residents who suffer the outpouring of sewage into their gardens and homes.

Developers always assume that their run-off water can be naturally aimed towards local rivers. With the River Oughton being located alongside the development, this will naturally be taken for granted to be the case here. We must, therefore, categorically point out that this will not be allowed.

No amount of purification will be good enough to make the polluted run-off water pure enough to enter the River Oughton which is one of only 283 pure chalk streams left in England. The River Oughton is a tributary to the River Hiz, which is also a pure chalk stream and along with the Oughton and its other tributary the Purwell, bears witness to river trout, kingfishers, otters, river voles, as well as the many other species reliant on pure fresh water.

The River Hiz Conservation Group who have worked hard to maintain the river to its pure and healthy condition have put forward the following statement:

“The River Hiz and its tributaries hold significant environmental importance in the area’s ecological system.

The River Hiz Conservation Group is concerned that the proposed residential development will negatively affect this precious watercourse. We hold the opinion that any developer’s ‘Flood Risk Summary Statement and the Sustainable Surface Water Drainage Strategy’ will not adequately consider the environmental impact in line with regulatory requirements.

The River Hiz is fed from water held within an underlying chalk bedrock. As a chalk stream it is a globally rare and special habitat present only in England, France and Denmark. 283 chalk streams are found in England, which represents 85% of the global total. Most are located in the South and East of

England. The alkaline nature of the watercourse provides a particular character and ecology. The filter process ensures the water is clear, pure, and fortified with many inorganic nutrients that provide essential building blocks for life. These characteristics allow a huge diversity of aquatic plants to thrive, supporting many fish, invertebrates, and other species.

Any proposed drainage strategy increases the risk of 'urban diffuse pollution'. This includes run-off from roads, roofs and pavements and contains a high number of fine sediments. This form of pollution also carries potentially toxic chemicals from human activities, such as copper from car brake pads and zinc from car tyre wear. Without careful planning to ensure run-off is captured and treated at source, any proposed drainage strategy will increase the amount of polluting run-off flowing into the River Hiz and adversely affect the rivers ecological system.

The River Hiz Conservation Group therefore objects to this development and insist that any proposal is urgently reviewed to ensure regulatory and environmental requirements are achieved to the highest possible standard."

4. Archaeology

We feel that the archaeology for this particular development, bearing in mind its location, although subject to flooding, could be positive.

Located near to the Icknield Way and findings in Ickleford already located of both the Iron and Bronze age, this site could be of historical interest.

5. Ecology

As stated earlier, with the Manor Close/Lodge Court development, all animals and insects that lived within that area, were driven out towards this green belt natural barrier and beyond. These consisted of fox, deer, rabbit, squirrel, hedgehog, slow worms, grass snakes and many more, including all species of birds, some of which are on the 'amber' listed endangered species, including Stock Doves, Kestrels and Starlings.

During 2007 a Barn Owl project group was set up to help protect the dwindling numbers of Barn Owls. Many landowners in Ickleford, were encouraged to support this programme by permitting the use of specific trees to carry the necessary boxes. It was because of this project that a box was fitted on neighbouring land to this site, to encourage the natural habitat on all surrounding grassland, including the proposed development.

Up until very recently, the Barn Owl too was on the 'Amber' list. If, for any reason, the Barn Owl box is vacated, it is witnessed to soon becoming the home for Stock Doves and Kestrels.

The people of Ickleford, are entitled to bear witness to such flora and fauna within their own Parish. With the decimation of what 'green belt' remains around the Parish, for housing, that no one local can afford, the flora and fauna will be lost for all future generations.

6. Infrastructure

With the intention of exiting onto Turnpike Lane, this confirms that this development raises serious concerns for the Village.

Ickleford is already drowning in vehicle congestion, with the Arlesey Road and Turnpike Lane constantly being used as a 'rat run' for vehicles from Arlesey, Stotfold, Letchworth and further afield when travelling to Hitchin, Luton Airport and beyond, added to the vehicles from Ickleford's existing and future housing, majority of which are exiting at the Turnpike Lane/Bedford Road roundabout.

The major impact on our wellbeing is becoming critical, because of the dangers to life and the pollution that everyone, but more importantly our children, are having to inhale, every day, on their way to and from school and work.

The increased traffic (approximately 200+) from this development, would have serious consequences to the already congested area, particularly during peak commuting and school hours.

The Village's infrastructure, with its roads, parking, schools, social facilities and utilities, is not designed to accommodate a development of this scale.

We have to ask the questions, why should the village of Ickleford, lose its identity as a village, and more importantly, why should its residents have to suffer, the incongruence of a large development, once again, impacting on their quality of life and health, just to fulfil the want of a Developer.

Instead, we should be realising that a development of this scale, in an area that is part of the 'lungs' and protective 'barrier' of the community, is not proportionate to the needs of the Village and will erode the community that defines Ickleford.

7. Travel Plan

With car driving being the inevitable means of transport, bearing in mind that public transport does not cater for the after school curriculum or evening entertainment, the risk of using bicycles as a form of transport, will be almost impossible, given the dangers that exist on the roads within Ickleford and the surrounding areas, especially during peak times and school hours.

Hitchin Rail Station is 2 miles away and would take approximately 8 minutes by car. 35 minutes approximately to walk. However, by public transport, you would need to catch 2 buses, unless you are willing to commence your journey at 07.05am. The two-bus journey could take anything up to 1 hour to complete, depending on the time of departure. All in all, this would lead to, once again, the use of the car.

Unfortunately, the Rail Station cannot accommodate further parking requirements, with its carparks and bike facilities being already full to capacity.

With the Ickleford School being unable to cater for such an influx of children from new and unaccounted for developments, (over and above those already calculated for the first round of the Local Plan), it would mean children would have to travel further afield for education. This would undoubtedly lead to the use of the car to fulfil this requirement.

With modern developments accommodating for the electric vehicle by installing the required charging units, unfortunately with garages being unable to facilitate the modern and very large car and parking facilities catering only for the calculated two cars per household, once again the Developer has forgotten the teenager who too wants to own and drive their own vehicle.

These extra vehicles will add to the already approximated 200 cars trying to exit and enter the Site, leading to more congestion on Turnpike Lane.

IN CONCLUSION

Five new sites have already been identified, since the initiation of the Local Plan and, in some cases, have already been built, namely Green Man Close and Ickleford Manor, numbering 27 houses. The other three sites, Tudor Court, Arnolds Farm and Bowmans Mill (one nearing completion, one about to commence and in the case of Bowman's Mill, the Planning Application has now been received) all numbering 72. With IC2 and its 48 homes completed and the expected IC1 and IC3 with their quoted 100+ homes, this brings a total of approximately 348 homes plus to Ickleford since 2018, far outweighing the agreed numbers of the Local Plan and more than any Village in North Herts should be expected to accommodate.

The Ickleford Parish Council, therefore, urge the Planning Authority to reject this proposal and that the information given above significantly and demonstrably far outweighs the benefits of new homes being built on this 'green belt' site and we therefore reiterate that we **STRONGLY OBJECT** to this Planning Application.

Yours sincerely

Steven Patmore

Clerk/RFO
Ickleford Parish Council

Cc: District Councillor Louise Peace
County Councillor David Barnard