

Affordable Housing Statement

Land at Station Road, Ashwell

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Job No: 24/L/061

Version: 1

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1. Introduction to the Proposals

- 1.1. This document sets out the details of the proposed affordable housing that will be provided with the planning application for 36 new dwellings on land off Station Road, in the village of Ashwell.
- 1.2. The scheme proposes 36 new residential dwellings, of which a proportion will be proposed as 'affordable' homes and secured through legal agreement.
- 1.3. This report is submitted alongside the full planning application for the new development, with forms and plans supported by a Planning Support Statement and Design & Access Statement, all of which provide further details on the amount, type, appearance and tenure of the proposed affordable housing and how they are integrated into the overall development scheme.
- 1.4. An extract from the layout of the scheme is shown in Figure 1 below, with plots 1 – 14 being those proposed as affordable housing. These lie closest to the entrance on Station Road and show a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units. The mix of units has been proposed based on housing need and the location chosen in design terms to make use of the position closest to the bus stop and footpath connection into the centre of the village.



Figure 1: Proposed Site Layout Plan Extract showing plots 1-14 to left of site access

2. Planning Policy and Guidance

National Guidance

- 2.1. National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) confirms that planning obligations, such as affordable housing, may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission if they are: necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind.
- 2.2. Providing affordable homes is included within paragraph 11dii of the NPPF as a specific benefit to be given particular regard when weighing development proposals within the titled balance of paragraph 11.
- 2.3. Paragraph 66 clarifies that decisions should expect that the mix of affordable housing required for major developments meets identified local needs, across Social Rent, other affordable housing for rent and affordable home ownership tenures.

Local Guidance

- 2.4. The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in November 2022. Policy SP8: Housing – of the Local Plan states that the Council will support a range of housing tenures, types and sizes measured against targets to provide 33% of all homes over the plan period as Affordable Housing for local needs with targets to deliver up to 40% Affordable Housing where viable.
- 2.5. Policy HS2: Affordable Housing state that planning permission for new homes will be granted provided that affordable housing is provided in accordance with specific targets, subject to viability. The target for schemes of 25 or more dwellings is set in this policy at 40%.

2.6. The policy also states that the affordable housing should be delivered on-site, unless robustly justified, and genuinely affordable to local people where rents or prices are linked to open-market values.

2.7. The policy also caveats the size, type and tenure of affordable housing that will be granted. This includes:

- I. an expectation that 65% of the affordable housing will be rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing.
- II. the housing needs of the area including needs identified by relevant authority housing register data, Neighbourhood Plans or any local surveys or assessments.
- III. Where they meet policy in relation to housing mix.

2.8. It also requires that affordable housing is secured for first and subsequent occupiers through an appropriate condition or legal agreement and in accordance with relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan

2.9. The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan states, at paragraph 5.20 that the plan seeks to increase the net number of affordable housing units available in the Parish.

2.10. Policy ASH2 Housing Mix - of the Neighbourhood Plan states that developers of major development should submit a neighbourhood area-specific Affordable Housing and Dwellings Mix Strategy with any planning application. It notes this should be based on the Housing

Survey 2015 conclusions or any more recent local survey, and demonstrate how the proposed development addressed those needs, in particular meeting needs of older residents (60+) and younger people entering the housing market in general terms and through the delivery of one and two-bedroom houses in particular; and helps to address housing under-occupancy in the Parish. It also notes that affordable housing must be visually indistinguishable from the market housing.

2.11. Paragraph 5.16 of the Neighbourhood Plan lists priorities for future housing development in Ashwell as follows:

- On sites geographically close to the central village amenities.
- On sites that are reasonably flat and capable of providing safe and sustainable access for all to the central village amenities and access to local transport.
- Comprising mostly one or two bedroom bungalows or low rise apartments (with lifts) that are suitable for older people or those with restricted mobility.
- For sale or rent at a cost within the means of the average person seeking accommodation within the Parish. This does not just mean those meeting the eligibility criteria according to the Common Housing Allocation Scheme but a wider category of individuals on median incomes or below.

Supplementary Planning Document

2.12. The Council has an adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Development Contributions, adopted in January 2023. This document encourages the submission of an Affordable Housing Statement alongside a planning application. It confirms the Policy requirement from the Local Plan and notes that when calculating the number of affordable units, the general approach will be to round the requirement to the nearest whole number.

2.13. Page 20 of the SPD states that affordable housing is normally delivered in partnership with Registered Providers, and repeats the Council's preference for provision to be made on site. The SPD also includes guidance regarding ensuring affordability and affordable housing

tenures, repeating the expectation that 65% will be for rent, with 35% as other forms of affordable housing.

Housing Needs Surveys

- 2.14. The North Hertfordshire Housing Needs Survey from 2013 states that for most authorities the greatest pressure on the Social Housing stock is for larger dwellings. However, North Hertfordshire contains a significant number of three-bedroom Social Rented properties with over 50% of the stock containing at least three bedrooms; the highest number of households in need are seeking one and two bedroom properties.
- 2.15. The Parish Council's own Housing Survey from 2015 shows a preference for smaller homes, including 1-2 and 3-4 bedroom properties. The Parish Council's summary of comments in this survey also called for smaller housing (up to 3 bedrooms) to attract young couples/families and for those who wanted to downsize. There was also a clear preference for affordable homes to be delivered in the village.

3. Justification of Affordable Housing Provision

- 3.1. This document forms the affordable housing statement setting out the applicants clear willingness to provide a development compliant with national and local policy. During the course of the planning application we, as the agent for the applicant, seek discussion with relevant housing officers as to the tenure of the 14 affordable dwellings prior to determination and to allow a suitable legal agreement to be drawn up to meet the 40% affordable requirement under Policy HS2 on site.
- 3.2. Calculating 40% of 36 dwellings equals 14.4, which rounds to 14 as the nearest whole number. These will be provided on site, and are shown on the planning layout at plots 1-14 and agreement to this is included within the Heads of Terms submitted with the planning application.
- 3.3. In terms of looking specifically at the neighbourhood area to define the affordable housing and dwellings mix strategy, set out in policy ASH2, it is acknowledged that the preference is for reasonably flat locations close to the central village amenities and comprising mostly one or two bedroom units. The affordable units have been located closest to the main footway along Station Road and closer to the public transport connections, and has been designed to specifically include one and two bedroom units.
- 3.4. In preparing the proposal, we also considered the pending application at High Street in Ashwell, reviewing comments from the Housing Officer. These repeated policy from the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan and were considered in determining the size and types of affordable housing, which are 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units. The location and style of the affordable units is fundamental to the design of the overall scheme, which seeks to balance the competing requirements and considerations for new housing to integrate into the village setting and the landscape.

- 3.5. The affordable units are indistinguishable from the market units in terms of style and design, albeit the market units are generally larger. This is largely due to the need for smaller affordable units in the area, as set out in policy.
- 3.6. The applicant has interest from a registered provider for the affordable units and would seek to engage with the Housing Officer during the course of the application to discuss this and the legal agreement subsequently required.



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