

18 Crabtree Lane
Pirton
Herts. SG53QE

30/8/25

FAO: Naomi Reynard, Planning Officer, NHDC, Gernon Road Letchworth Garden City

Dear Ms Reynard,

Re: 25/01696/OP

Land East of Drovers Way, Pirton

I OBJECT very strongly to this application. This developer wants to maximise profit from building large properties in a 'village location', ironically ruining the character of the village. The houses will not meet local housing needs for affordable homes needed by first time buyers or older people who wish to downsize. The residents of Pirton (and Holwell) were badly let down by NHDC when the Drovers Way development was permitted. Outline planning was agreed without consideration of the construction route. Apart from the negative impact of the size of Drovers Way, essentially an 'estate' bolted on the edge of the rest of this otherwise delightful community, there was considerable, dangerous disruption to Pirton and Holwell from huge lorries thundering along narrow lanes and village streets without pavements. There have been proportionate areas of development within the village boundary which are acceptable. **This development is not.**

The same applicants applied in 2017 for outline permission for 99 houses, and unsuccessfully appealed the refusal by NHDC. There followed in 2018 a further application for 85 dwellings, also refused by NHDC. The PPC and many residents objected on each occasion.

This application does nothing to address the harms identified in the Decisions on previous applications. In fact, they are exacerbated by the sheer number of dwellings proposed. Whilst the "tilted balance" in the NPPF's paragraph 11 comes back in to play, as the NHDC cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing supply, this does not override where major harms are identified. Thus, planning permission should be refused where the adverse impacts (which we will set out below,) significantly outweigh the benefits.

1. Outside of Pirton's Development Boundary.

The site is outside the Pirton Development Boundary as established by the Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan (PNDP) in 2018; and confirmed in the Local Development Plan for 2011 – 2031. The development boundary helps to prevent "urban sprawl" in a rural context. This application is thus contrary to policies SP2 and CGB1, as well as PNP1.1 and PNP1.2 in the PNDP (development should be within the development boundary, and for no more than 30 dwellings per site). Attention is also drawn to the Pirton Character Assessment that supports the Neighbourhood Plan, and to the Conservation Management Plan 2023, which demonstrates that this proposal is contrary to the development pattern for Pirton.

2. Unsustainable Growth–Numbers.

Since 2011, Pirton has accepted a 28% increase in housing. This is significant for a village that in 2011 had merely 530 dwellings. In percentage terms, Pirton already has accepted more than Hitchin (12%), Letchworth (15%), and Royston (25%). There has been no corresponding expansion in services or infrastructure. A development of 130 dwellings will add a further 8.9% or thereabouts to this total. This is contrary to NPPF (2024) paragraphs 76A and 77.

3. Density

Whilst detailed argument about scale is a reserved matter, as a matter of “harm versus benefit,” 130 dwellings would overwhelm Pirton, and breach SP2 and SP1’s emphasis on proportionate development. Development on the edge of villages should be at a lower density than within the village, to reduce unacceptable visual harms. Clearly NPPF policies are designed to improve the flow of new housing; however, paragraph 129(d) notes the desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting which this proposal clearly does not; and see paragraphs 129 and 130 generally and Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan PNP 2. However, should NHDC be minded to grant this application, we request that a condition be imposed that no dwelling should be more than 9.2 metres in height, the majority to be 8.9 metres and below, in keeping with Pirton’s building pattern.

4. Sustainable Travel

This application does not meet NPPF para 110 in that it does not limit the need to travel or offer a genuine choice of transport modes. The location is equally clearly not designed to promote public transport or give priority to pedestrians and cyclists. Pirton has not been listed for bus improvements in the Herts County Council Bus Strategy to 2031 so there will be no service improvements at least until 2031, and no promise of improvements thereafter. The Inspector at the Planning Appeal noted that sustainable modes of transport were marginal at best, since when there have been no improvements to the bus service or to the network of public footpaths and bridleways. It should be noted also that not all buses go to the Hitchin Railway Station.

5. Inadequate Access and Connectivity

The only access to the proposed development is through Comice Meadows, along Drovers Way and down a small side street, Coopers Elms. This small street, containing only 4 dwellings, was not designed for the volume of traffic which 130 dwellings will engender, (a minimum of 500 additional car journeys a day, not to mention service vehicles, delivery vehicles etc); let alone for construction traffic which will be present for several years. This proposed use of Coopers Elm is also contrary to Local Plan policy D3. Coopers Elms is 5.5 metres wide, the bare minimum standard.

With the width of cars is getting wider every two years (an average 180.3 cm in 2023 as opposed to 177.8cms in 2018) means that, with only a pavement and small front garden between the houses and roadway, the loss of residential amenity is significant.

The situation regarding Drovers Way is more complex. Some of Drovers Way is 5.5m wide, but some only 4.8m wide. Regarding 17/00367/1DOC, an application to discharge the Highways conditions imposed in relation to the original outline permission for Comice Meadows was first rejected by Highways, which was expected to adopt at least part of Drovers Way, precisely because the width of 4.8 metres was unacceptable. It is only when the waste management company agreed waste collection lorries could cope with this width because of the use of “Shared Surfaces” i.e. surfaces also used by pedestrians and cyclists, that Highways appear to have shrugged and conceded the discharge of condition.

We realise that Highways has objected on a number of technical grounds. They may feel inhibited from raising concerns about widths of roads because of their previous position. That was the situation for 77 dwellings. This proposal would see the use of “shared surfaces” for all waste collection and other lorries, servicing 200 dwellings, and by all construction traffic, by enabling such vehicles to utilise surfaces meant for pedestrians. The safety situation is of a different scale.

The means that the proposed access is completely unsuitable. This is contrary to Local Plan Policies T1, D3 and D1.

6.

Also, there should be two access points for schemes exceeding 100 dwellings; see Manual for Streets 2. The proposal creates safety and congestion issues contrary to Local Plan policy T1. The existing Y junction, whilst giving relatively clear sight on leaving Comice Meadows, presents problems for those turning right in to the development as it is a virtually blind bend from this perspective. Furthermore, the only proposed emergency exit is the one created for Comice Meadows, some considerable distance away from this site; meaning all traffic must find the emergency exit down the same narrow bottleneck of Coopers Elms. There should be an emergency exit from this site directly. The proposal for this reason is for contrary to TP1.

7.

The proposal will more than double the use of the Y junction on the Comice Meadows site. The Holwell Road into the village is very narrow with parked cars outside of “The 12 Apostles”, terraced

housing which was once farm labourers' cottages, the front doors of which open directly on to the road. These houses are within the Conservation Area for Pirton. There is no pavement. In the opposite direction, heading for the A600 Bedford Road, all traffic must negotiate Waterloo Lane in Holwell, which contains a blind sharp bend not wide enough for two cars to pass, let alone construction traffic or delivery lorries. The construction traffic, and permanently increased domestic traffic, will put unacceptable strain on this "road", which has no pavement, and on the safety of pedestrians.

8.

Indeed, there is little concern for pedestrians in these proposals. There are no proposals for direct access to the village except along Hambridge Way which is itself often muddy and nigh on impassable in winter, and is to be accessed through a footpath into Comice Meadows own green space. In reality, this is not possible as there is planting for a hedge-line right along this point. Please see para 12 Green Space below. It is a nearly 400 metre walk on partly unpaved roads, including past the 12 Apostles (see above) to the nearest bus stop. Safe connectivity to the main village is very poor, contrary to PNDP policy PNP 12 and Local Plan Policy D1. Also, NPPF 2024 paragraphs 115(B), 115(c) and 130 (f)

9.

The creation of the access road will involve the removal of trees and hedging and breaches the green wildlife corridor established in the approved Cala Homes Scheme. The applicant appears to be uncertain as to how much of the hedge will go. The Ecology Report suggests 10 metres; the Design and Access Statement suggests 12 metres; the plan attached to the application suggests 9.5 metres. This contrasts with the 40 metres that the NHDC Ecology adviser suggested in the applicant's previous application would be necessary if work to include drainage etc is considered. All of this suggests that the mitigation measures suggested in the Ecology Report to replace the proposed losses at this point are at best inadequate, at worst totally unacceptable, with the harm not addressed. This is contrary to Policy NE1 and NE4.

10.

Furthermore, given this loss of hedgerow, the planning Inspector was clear that a development of 99 dwellings on this site would lead to the overall impression of one large development stuck on to the edge of the village and out into the countryside, with adverse impacts on the countryside, users of Hambridge Way and views across the Pirton Lowlands and to and from the Chilterns AONB. How much more so when the proposal now is for 130 dwellings.

11. Parking

We see nothing in the plans submitted nor within the Design and Access Statement to indicate the number and positions of visitor parking. This is contrary to the PNDP policy PNP 13 and Local Plan policy T2.

12. Archaeology and Heritage Constraints.

The application does not conform with NPPF paragraphs 205-207, Local Plan Policy HE1, PNDP Policy 8. We note that the plans and Design and Access Statement do not reflect the Conservation Areas that have been in place since June 2023 and so have not adequately reflected on the impact on Heritage Assets. We support the comments made by Dr. Gil Burleigh of the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society regarding the potential archaeology on this site and the need for more extensive trial trenching, geophysical survey and metal detecting survey.

13.Green Space

The proposals are very lacking in provision for green space, except for some enhancing of hedgerows around the perimeter of the site. There are no open/green spaces within the development itself. The largest section of green space is in fact taken up with the proposed SUDS. This does not reflect the style of the Comice Meadows development. The proposal also appears to rely on connectivity with Comice Meadow's green space which contains a SUDS and playground. Such connectivity does not exist. The boundary has been planted with trees and shrubs as part of the planning permissions granted for the Comice Meadows development, in accordance with their landscaping proposals. Whilst this area has been sadly neglected by Cala Homes, nonetheless, young trees and shrubs are growing. When mature, there will be not connection at all between the two sites at this point. Additionally, wild flowers including horseshoe vetch, teasel, prickly oxtongue, vervain, one or more of the Hawkweeds, knapweed, common nettles and red deadnettle, white deadnettle and many others are thriving in this corner, helping to increase the biodiversity of the Comice Meadows site. The proposals therefor are contrary to Local Plan policy NE6 and D1.

14.

As a matter of note, the Comice Meadows "green space" is now very limited in terms of usable space. Instead of a completely open space with attenuation pond, the "pond" is a deep crater reminiscent of a WW11 bomb crater. It is unclear how much water is in it, as the whole is (pleasingly) filled with self-seeded wild flowers, shrubs, and trees. So dangerous is this "pond" that it is completely fenced off. The children's play area is very small with limited play furniture. It is not designed to cope with the children from 130 dwellings on top of Comice Meadows' own 77 dwellings.

15. Adverse Impact on the Character and Setting of Pirton in the Landscape.

This site lies within the Pirton Lowlands Landscape Character Area (LCA). The Inspector for the Appeal against refusal of planning permission for 99 dwellings in 2018 concluded that the site is visually much more part of a wider landscape rather than of the village fringe, notwithstanding the development of Comice Meadows. The Character Assessment which defines the Pirton Lowlands advises that there may be scope for carefully located and small-scale developments within the LCA but the application for 99 dwellings did not fall within the definition. Neither will an application for 130 dwellings.

Pirton is a rural village, with an identifiable centre and development has been steady and (mostly) small scale covering a wealth of architectural types and periods. An overwhelmingly large development in the countryside, beyond a planned large development, is out of character for Pirton; will adversely affect the symmetry of the village, and urbanise this side of the village.

There will also be an adverse impact on Hambridge Way and the many recreational users of this section of the ancient Icknield Way. A significant adverse impact (agreed by the Appeal Inspector) will be the loss of views across arable land to the Stondon Ridge along with the urbanising of the landscape, and noise.

16.

Furthermore, views from Holwell Road on leaving and entering the village will be compromised, and further north on Holwell Road, the development will be very visible despite the existing trees and planned extra planting. There would be, as the Appeal Inspector noted, a clear perception of development extending out in to the countryside. The Inspector concluded that the proposal would have long term adverse effects, both on the character of the landscape and on its appreciation by users of local roads and footpaths. This would be particularly so because the proposed housing would inevitably be seen in conjunction with Comice Meadows. This would particularly be the case given the proposals for access through Comice Meadows and the reliance placed on access across to Comice Meadows' open space and children's play area. The proposals lead to conflict with NPPF para 128 and 129; Local Plan Policy NE2 and PNDP policy PNP2.1 and 2.4.

17. Water and Drainage

The residents of Comice Meadows already have difficulty with low water pressure, a difficulty yet unresolved. This is not a site that can be considered sustainable for housing development until the issue of water pressure is clarified.

Anglian Water has objected to this application on the grounds that the entire foul water system will not cope with the pressure of another 130 dwellings adding to a system already under considerable strain, with regular zones of flooding and sewage spillage. We support the approach of Anglian Water. We note NPPF para 181 which advised that permission for development should not be approved were it leads to a greater flood risk elsewhere. Clearly, from clean water and foul water service provision to this site, the application means unsustainable development.

18. Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.

The whole of the site is grade 3A agricultural land. The NPPF 2024 is clear that such land should be used as a last resort to meet housing targets; urban sites, brownfield sites and other less productive sites should take precedence. This proposal is therefore contrary to NPPF paragraph 125.

19. Climate Policy and Net Zero Non-Compliance

The application fails to comply with climate targets and policies e.g. • UK Government (Net Zero by 2050):

No solar panels, low-carbon heating, or EV charging proposed No carbon reduction or offset plan.

- Hertfordshire County Council Net Zero Strategy: Little green infrastructure, carbon-efficient design, or renewable energy and,
- North Herts District Council Climate Change Strategy (2022- 27):

No effort to meet zero-carbon standards

No onsite renewables or carbon offsetting

Entirely inconsistent with declared climate emergency

This leads to the conclusion that the site is unsustainable.

20. Carbon Emissions from Construction

Constructing 130 houses will generate an estimated 8,450 tonnes of CO₂e, based on standard UK figures for embodied carbon in construction.

To offset this would require planting approximately 9,602 broadleaf trees, each sequestering 22kg of CO₂ per year over 40 years. There is no indication that this application plans for any form of carbon offsetting including tree planting anything close to the required scale.

This represents a major conflict with Policy D1(sustainable design) and Net zero policies at all government levels and the NPPF's climate objectives. The site is unsustainable for the amount of construction envisaged by the application.

21. Conclusion.

Although the NHDC cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing supply, which triggers the NPPF's "tilted balance", it remains the case that NPPF policies, Local Development Plan policies and policies in the Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan are clearly relevant and carry weight. Paragraph 11(d)(ii) confirms that planning permission should still be refused where the adverse impacts significantly and demonstrably when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole outweigh the benefits. This is the case here, given the sustainability issues, access and highways, ecological, heritage and settlement pattern conflicts; the conflicts arising from the use of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land; the problems with the provision of water and sewage services and the adverse impacts on the character and setting of Pirton, the Pirton Lowlands and the Chilterns AONB.

Maxine Shearer