

Weston Parish Council Response to Planning Application 24/02889/FP

Residential development of 281 dwellings and associated roads, parking, realignment of Back Lane, drainage, landscaping, open space, servicing facilities and associated works.

Land at Roundwood, Back Lane, Graveley, Hertfordshire (GA1).

Weston Parish Council is opposed to the planning application unless and until the following points are addressed:

1. Traffic implications for Back Lane and Weston

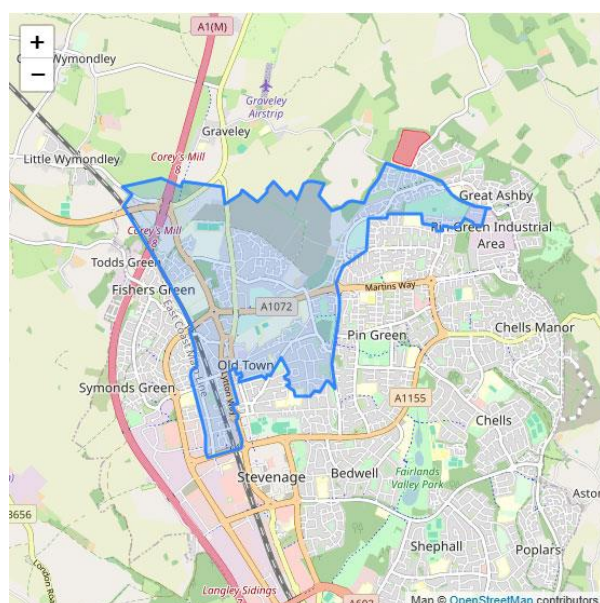
The methodology adopted for estimating the incremental volume of traffic that will use Back Lane as a result of the development is flawed.

To estimate the volume of traffic likely to use Back Lane the application begins by using 2011 census data to establish the means by which people in Stevenage areas 001 and 002 travel to work. The results are shown in the following table which is taken from the Travel Plan¹.

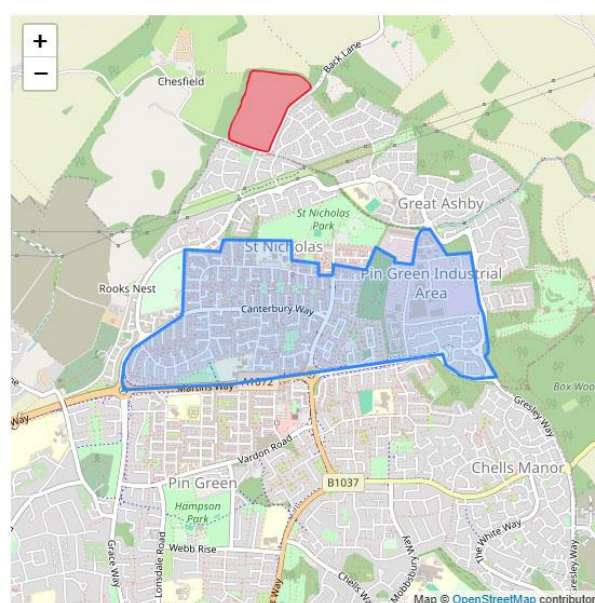
Method of travel to work	Proportions		
	'Stevenage 001'	'Stevenage 002'	Combined
Rail	6.3%	11.0%	9.3%
Bus, minibus or coach	8.8%	3.0%	5.1%
Driving a car or van	66.2%	64.0%	64.8%
Passenger in a car or van	7.1%	5.5%	6.1%
Bicycle	2.6%	2.5%	2.5%
On foot	7.1%	12.3%	10.5%
Other method of travel	1.9%	1.7%	1.7%

The areas covered by Stevenage 001 and 002 are shown below:

Stevenage 001



Stevenage 002



¹ 2105-037-TP-02 - Travel Plan, p16

Both of these sites bear stark differences from the GA1 site (shown in pink). Stevenage 001 includes dwellings that are adjacent to the town centre, the railway station and the industrial area along Gunnells Wood Road. Stevenage 002 includes dwellings that are adjacent to the Pin Green Industrial estate. The data is also questionable as it claims that 11% of residents travel to work by rail, whereas the closest railway station is approximately 3 miles away from the centre of this zone, making it likely that they drive to the station before catching the train.

Given that the GA1 site does not include any industrial or commercial units and that the railway station and the centre of Stevenage are approximately 3 miles from the centre of the site, it is highly unlikely that any of the residents will be walking to work. Since it does not include a railway station, it must also be assumed that the people whose commute includes a rail journey will travel to the station by car. A more realistic interpretation of the 2011 census data for the GA1 site is therefore provided below:

Method of travel to work	Proportions		
	Stevenage 001	Stevenage 002	Average
Rail			
Bus,minibus or coach	8.8%	3.0%	5.9%
Driving a car or van	79.6%	87.3%	83.5%
Passenger in a car or van	7.1%	5.5%	6.3%
Bicycle	2.6%	2.5%	2.6%
On foot			
Other method of travel	1.9%	1.7%	1.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The combination of drivers plus vehicle passengers suggests that around 90% of residents of GA1 will use a car or van to travel to work. As the 96 dwellings along the rerouted Back Lane will be the furthest from the bus service, their propensity for car usage is likely to be even higher.

Conclusion: The application significantly underestimates the proportion of residents that will use cars or vans to travel to work. A figure of 90% is far more realistic than the 71% suggested.

In Table 8.7 of the Transport Assessment² the applicants provide a summary of the 2011 census journey to work data, with the raw data provided in Appendix S. The table is confusing as the applicants appear to have confused the incomplete “route” to work information provided in the tables with the “destination”. On the basis of this erroneous analysis, the applicants conclude in paragraph 8.21 of the same document that only 10% of the development traffic will access Back Lane for reasons of travelling to work.

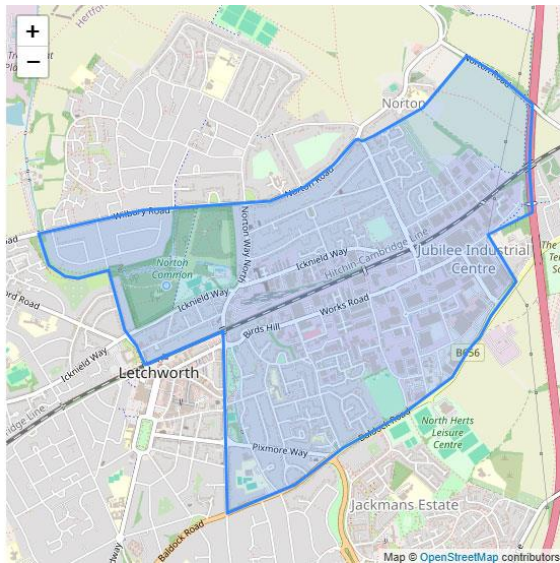
It should be noted that their figure of 10% is precisely double the estimate they gave in their previous application (23/02492/FP) in 2023, despite the fact that the direct link between Haybluff Drive and Back Lane has now been removed. This fact alone calls into question the competency of their analysis.

For our analysis, we took the raw 2011 census data provided in Appendix S³ and plotted routes to the stated work destinations using the navigation tools in Google Maps. The following illustrations are provided as examples:

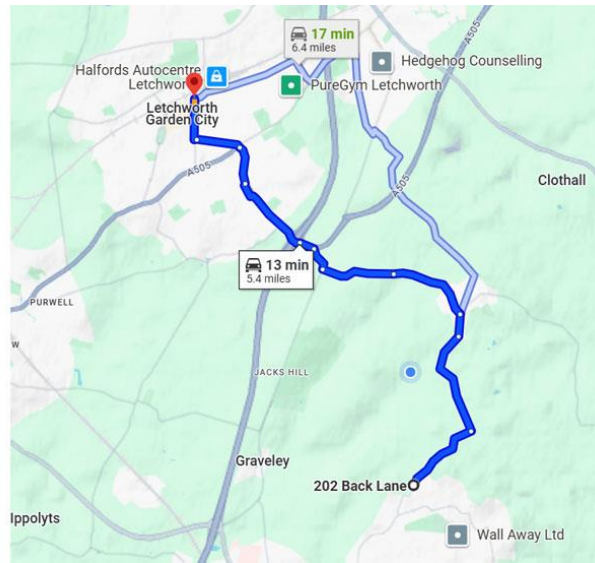
² 1. 2105-037 Transport Assessment TA02 - Final Issue (Text and Drawings 1_3) (Part 1 of 8)

³ 7. 2105-037 Transport Assessment TA02 - Final Issue (Appendix O - T) (Part 7 of 8)

North Hertfordshire 006 ID 45987

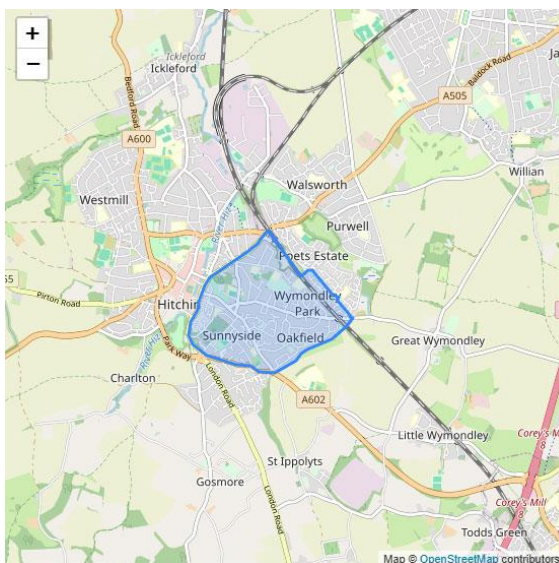


Google suggested route from GA1

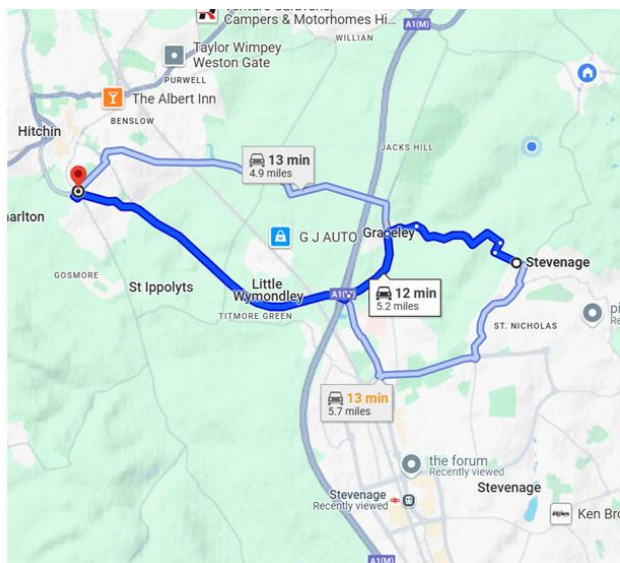


In this example the fastest route suggested from a point on Back Lane adjacent to the GA1 site to any location in North Hertfordshire 006 (Letchworth) routes vehicles along Back Lane through Weston.

North Hertfordshire 006 ID 38800



Google suggested route from GA1



In this example the fastest route suggested from a point on Back Lane adjacent to the GA1 site to any location in North Hertfordshire 013 (Hitchin) routes vehicles along Back Lane through Graveley.

This analysis suggests that in excess of 20% of development residents who drive to work will do so along Back Lane, which is double the 10% predicted by the applicant.

Moreover, as this data only includes trips for the purpose of work, the applicant suggested doubling it to account for trips for other purposes such as education, shopping leisure etc.⁴ Therefore, by the applicant's own suggestion, it should be assumed that at least 40% of the vehicle movements from the development will be along Back Lane.

⁴ 1. 2105-037 Transport Assessment TA02 - Final Issue (Text and Drawings 1_3) (Part 1 of 8) Para 8.01

This figure will of course be higher with regard to the 96 dwellings located on Back Lane, especially since their vehicular access route to Stevenage and Great Ashby will be along the single-track road Calder Way, a route **specifically designed to deter traffic**.

Indeed, it is quite likely that these residents will use Back Lane far more than the developers envisage for the following reasons:

- Tesco in Baldock will be quicker to get to than Tesco in Stevenage during busy times of the day, and it's less than 2 miles further.
- It is the same distance to the nearest Sainsbury's at Cory's Mill whether going via Calder Way or Back Lane via Graveley.
- The nearest Garden Centre is in Graveley.
- There are lovely pubs in both Weston and Graveley that already get much of their business from Great Ashby.
- Google suggests that the quickest route to Stanstead Airport is via Weston, and to Luton Airport via Graveley.
- Parking at Baldock Station is £4 per day cheaper than at Stevenage station.
- Round Diamond primary school is generally over-subscribed whereas there is capacity in Weston, where many Great Ashby children already attend.

Conclusion: Analysis of the data provided in the Transport Assessment suggest that the applicants have under-estimated the incremental vehicle movements along Back Lane by at least 50%.

2. Emergency access

As noted at various points in the applicant's documents, a major objection to the initial plans was the access via Haybluff Drive onto Back Lane and the consequential likelihood that it would open the floodgates to 'rat running' along Back Lane.

By dividing the access routes for the site between Haybluff Drive (two-thirds of the dwellings) and Calder Way/Back Lane (one-third of the dwellings), this plan is significantly better.

However, the one potential problem is the emergency access route that is proposed at the junction of Back Lane and the extended Haybluff Drive in the north-west corner of the site, with the proposal being that it will be secured with a bollard⁵. Unfortunately, past planning commitments have sometimes been broken, such as the no right turn from Great Ashby Way into Orwell Avenue and the planning condition of noise-reducing asphalt on the Baldock bypass. For this reason, we believe it essential that if the emergency access is to be retained a mechanism will need to be found to guarantee its permanence as an emergency only access.

One suggestion would be that ransom strips with appropriate covenants could be transferred to Weston and Graveley Parish Councils.

If such a mechanism is not possible, then we suggest that the design in this location is altered to make such future access impossible. While that would eliminate the emergency access route, a second access route is not a requirement for developments of this size, and the Back Lane properties would be on the emergency access route that is being proposed for the GA2 development.

Conclusion: A mechanism needs to be found to make it impossible for the emergency access route between Back Lane and Haybluff Drive to ever be used for vehicular access in anything other than emergency circumstances.

⁵ Planning Statement V2, para 6.10.2

3. Road users and pedestrian safety

Policy T1 in the Local Plan states that planning permission will only be granted where;

'Development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network'.

Policy 5 (g) of Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan 2018 states that Herts County Council will:

'Resist development that would either severely affect the rural or residential character of a road or other right of way, or which would severely affect safety on rural roads, local roads and rights of way especially for vulnerable road users.'

Given the inadequacy of the roads connecting the proposed development and lack of kerbing and pedestrian pavements on all but Haybluff Drive, there are absolutely no grounds for claiming that the plans, as currently presented, meet either of these policy criteria.

The 'rural character' of Back Lane will quite clearly be 'severely affected' as it will be routed through a housing estate with 96 properties fronting directly onto it, and the safety of 'vulnerable road users' such as the cyclists, joggers, walkers and horse riders that regularly use the full length of the road from Weston to Graveley will clearly be impacted by the consequential increase in traffic volumes, yet the application is silent on how the safety of these legitimate highway users is to be maintained.

As evidenced earlier, a significant proportion of the incremental vehicle movements will pass through Weston. At the southern entrance to the village (Photograph 1) there are no pedestrian pavements and traffic passes round a blind bend past houses and The Cricketers public house. The first pedestrian pavement is roughly 150 metres further along Damask Green Road.

This is already a dangerous bend where the Parish Council frequently receive complaints of speeding traffic and dangerous driving.

Once in the village, the majority of the through traffic will pass down Hitchin Road (Photograph 2) towards Letchworth and A1M J9, or along Fore Street (Photograph 3) towards Baldock.

Both of these roads have significant stretches with no pedestrian pavements. Hitchin Road is a particular safety concern as a large proportion of the village children use it to walk to and from either the primary school or the pick-up point for the bus to the secondary school in Baldock.

There are actually 108 houses in Weston that front onto the roads that will be most affected by this development (Damask Green Road, Hitchin Road, Fore Street and Hatch Lane). Many of these, such as the ones shown in photographs 2 and 3 exit straight onto the road without any pavement or verge for protection.



Photograph 1



Photograph 2



Photograph 3

Safety measures

Narrow roads, absence of pavements and the ever-increasing volumes of traffic have made pedestrian safety a cause for concern within the Parish of Weston for some time.

Research conducted into potential measures to improve safety in 2020 was followed by a feasibility study, costed proposal from Herts Highways and further consultation with parish residents in 2021.

Some of the proposed work has since been implemented but, if this planning application is approved, it will be essential that the following measures be implemented to mitigate increase in traffic volumes on Damask Green Road, Hitchin Road, Fore Street and Hatch Lane.

- (a) Traffic speed reduction at entry points. The entry point to Weston from Back Lane would be best served by a speed table to ensure vehicles slow to a sensible speed before passing round the blind bend with no pedestrian footpaths. A similar situation exists at the entrance to the village on Hitchin Road, and Hatch Lane.
- (b) Pedestrian protection along Hitchin Road and Fore Street. Significant portions of these roads have no footpaths to protect pedestrians. The suggestion is that raised tables be installed along with some protection to separate vehicles from pedestrians at key points.

Further details of these measure are included with our request for S106 funding.

Conclusion: Some work will be necessary in Weston to mitigate the additional dangers to residents that this development will cause.

4. Construction traffic

The Transport Assessment document states that all construction traffic will be routed from Martins Way, onto Canterbury Way, Great Ashby Way, Bray Drive, Mendip Way and Haybluff Drive⁶.

Although this is not ideal, we would like to reiterate our vociferous opposition to any construction traffic passing through the narrow and pavementless streets of either Weston or Graveley, or along any sections of obviously unsuitable Back Lane.

Conclusion: The Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) needs to stipulate that no construction traffic should access the site from either the West or the North, and that suitable signage should be installed for the duration of the build to ensure compliance.

⁶ 1. 2105-037 Transport Assessment TA02 - Final Issue (Text and Drawings 1_3) (Part 1 of 8), para 6.56, p65

Appendix A

Analysis of 2011 census data providing usual residence and place of work by car or van.

Place of work	Nearest place name	Place of residence		
		Stevenage 001	Stevenage 003	Stevenage 004
North Hertfordshire 001	Baldock		4	
North Hertfordshire 002	Royston	13	4	9
North Hertfordshire 003	Letchworth			
North Hertfordshire 004	Baldock	14	4	19
	Rural Baldock to			
North Hertfordshire 005	Royston	26	50	44
North Hertfordshire 006	Letchworth	54	43	54
North Hertfordshire 007	Letchworth	3		
North Hertfordshire 008	Letchworth	16	13	22
North Hertfordshire 009	Letchworth	7	4	
North Hertfordshire 010	Hitchin	29	38	50
North Hertfordshire 011	Purwell	5	5	4
North Hertfordshire 012	Hitchin	39	44	48
North Hertfordshire 013	Hitchin	8	6	4
North Hertfordshire 014	Kingshot	8	9	17
North Hertfordshire 015	Kimpton	20	17	27
Huntingdonshire		13	8	8
Luton		42	42	41
Cambridge		8	11	10
South Cambridgeshire		18	12	15
Central Bedfordshire		57	29	42
Bedford			9	13
Milton Keynes		11	7	16
Total journeys to work via Back Lane		391	359	443
Total of all journeys to work		1815	1774	2271
Percentage via Back Lane		22%	20%	20%

Source: 7. 2105-037 Transport Assessment TA02 - Final Issue (Appendix O - T) (Part 7 of 8) Appendix S