

I am submitting this by email because I am writing on behalf of my elderly mother, Pauline Adams (almost 93), who is resident at 8 Lucas Lane Ashwell SG7 5LN, immediately adjacent to the proposed application and also the proposed new pedestrian route through to Lucas Lane, about which she is very worried.

Her profession was an Architect and a Town Planner, and she has discussed this response with me. She is unable to type or use email. I have not included responses on traffic as she is unable to drive, and these have been covered succinctly by others.

General objection:

This is now the third application on this site since January 2020 and it is very wearing to constantly have to defend against those set on extracting capital for their own benefit from a single beautiful meadow when the houses proposed are clearly not needed or wanted in a small town that has been massively overdeveloped in recent years and is suffering from overstretched and oversubscribed public services and a lack of public transport. Each application depletes the resources of the Local Authority and wastes the time and energy of the local community. The reasons for refusal for the 2022 application were clearly set out in the Planning Officer's report and Decision Notice. The new application Design & Access Statement claims *'Although this scheme was refused in January 2024, the principle of residential dwellings was **acceptable**. This was confirmed by officers at the planning control committee.'* Is this an accurate statement? It is certainly not reflected in the listed reasons for refusal. If this is not accurate, then it is a gross misrepresentation to imply that the application is merely about layout / style / housing tenure and that eventual approval is a foregone conclusion. **I would appreciate this point being clarified.**

As stated in our previous response to 22/03094/FP:

Despite the inclusion of this field within the village envelope in the now published Local Plan, North Herts DC & Ashwell Parish Council should think VERY HARD before sleepwalking into a non-reversible destruction of pastureland that has been intact and undeveloped for the lifetime of the village. This field, on a prominent hill, is one of the delights of the village and contributes to its emblematic patchwork quality and ragged edge - bringing in greenery and landscape amongst the village houses and built environment. By filling in this gap, Ashwell will have a continuous hard boundary between the residential settlement and farmland along the high, ancient visible line of Ashwell St, and all sense of organic development over the last centuries will be irrevocably lost.

This is a purely speculative application, cashing in on the special character of Ashwell to line the pockets of the landowner and developer, regardless of the overwhelming lack of support from the community upon which it will be foisted. The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan has clearly set out how the recent amount of housing development (some still being built) more than satisfies district wide housing allocations. Nor is this a sustainable proposal - additional housing just can't be supported by the current amenities and infrastructure of the village, which are already struggling (in particular the GP's and the school). It will increase the already high car use to reach other amenities at a time when this should actively be being reduced. Planning should be strategic - It is a time to build resilient and sustainable communities with plentiful public transport links, rather than overburden isolated communities.

Particular issues with the new application:

Housing design, typology and site layout. The adoption of a 'farm courtyard' typology is naively and inexpertly applied to this site. A farm courtyard would typically develop in a cluster associated with low lying land and local accessibility (in fact, 'nestled', like Ashwell). Its constituent buildings would be built using the natural economy of building **along** the land contours. In this case, however, the large barn type forms on plots 10, 11, 12 march up the steep slope, across the contours, weirdly and incongruously conjoined into a long, climbing single building form (Street Scene A). What has been proposed will look completely out of place, as well as being very prominent on the hill when viewed from the village. The sequence of barn houses marching up the hill give evidence to the lie or conceit that is this an organic/ piecemeal development. Barns would never be built like this. A farm or a village just wouldn't develop like this, and it is wrong to suggest that this is an appropriate layout that will look acceptable from the village.

Particular issues still unresolved with the new application:

a.

The proposals include a substantial area of **Public Open Space**. At the site meeting in 2022, it was implied that the freehold of this land parcel would be offered to either the District Council, the Parish Council or a management company to maintain in perpetuity. Ownership is everything in this. A potential condition on an approval to maintain this as open space is not enough of a protection against a future application to remove that condition, or indeed a future landowner to apply for a completely different scheme covering the whole site. If the owner / developer is serious in their desire to provide public open space for Ashwell, then that ownership should be transferred NOW.

b.

Secured by Design. The DAS sets out compliance with these guidelines in relation to the proposed housing layout, but (obvious by its omission) it does not tackle the clearly vulnerable situation that is created by the new pedestrian access to Lucas Lane between the gardens of no 8 and no 4. This is NOT 'well surveyed' at all. This brings a public access path to within 2-3m of the windowed gable end of a bungalow lived in by a 92 year-old widow - in a location that is not easily visible to passers-by. In addition, the application provides no information on street lighting, fence construction / heights, boundary ownership and maintenance - all things which are causing immense anxiety to the elderly owner. IF the application is approved, we would like to see it conditioned that the boundaries to the existing bungalows either side of the path are full height brick walls that can't be easily scaled and that there is low level lighting along the path.

c.

Ecological Impact Statement

This does not mention deer, which frequently visit the gardens of Lucas Lane bungalows, and use the field as route between the gardens. Presumably they live in the scrub / hedgerow. How was this missed and what will happen to them if the field is developed? This information should be added to the EIS. The opening up of the path access between the bungalows to Lucas Lane will sever the current wildlife corridor that the scrub and hedge

provides for small mammals. How will this be mitigated? 10% biodiversity net gain is all very well, but existing wildlife will be disturbed by construction / development and will no longer be able to utilise the routes that exist now.