

Comments on planning Application 24/01444/FP, Land between Hunts Ridge and Ashwell House 5, High St. Ashwell.

I am a resident of Ashwell and know this site extremely well, as Ashwell Street is the main pedestrian route into the village from my home, also one of my regular dog walking routes. I beg you to take time to read my comments which are based on a thorough study of the Application, intimate knowledge of the area and experience as a retired town planner.

I am very ambivalent about the application and have comments both in favour and in opposition.

1. New Housing in Ashwell.

- There is very strong feeling in the village about the loss of green spaces and the development of new housing on fields within the rural, pastoral village boundary.
- There have recently been two new estates approved on fields at the east end of the village which are both of large 'executive' type of houses of 4-5 bedrooms which are too expensive for local people to afford and do not meet our need for smaller, cheaper dwellings – (and which are, of course, too unprofitable for developers to build).
- The current applicants have tried hard to meet local need with 4 'affordable homes' (unfortunately a contested concept....) proposed. They have also tried very hard to counteract all previous criticisms re. environmental loss with very extensive and admirable planting proposals, bird and bat boxes etc. They have also reduced density and tried hard (mostly successfully) to develop housing styles to fit with the local vernacular as well as reducing heights to retain views from Ashwell Street (a.k.a. The Ruddy) on the South side across the village Northwards.
- There is increasing pressure at several political levels, including the new Government, for more house building, and this could mean a higher density development on this site in future if this one were to be refused now. In other words we 'could do worse'!

HOWEVER, there are still serious issues which I would draw your attention to.

2. Carbon Reduction and Climate Change.

- Although the proposals (Planning Statement 5.4 and 5.5) are to be 'energy efficient' i.e. glazing and water efficient, the building materials to be sustainably sourced and include waste reduction measures, there is no mention of ways to actually *reduce* energy consumption by future homeowners e.g. by installation of solar panels or air/ground source heat pumps, or high levels of insulation. These should automatically be included in all new housing developments at this point in the climate crisis.
- I am also concerned that with the increase in hard surfaces in the field, in the event of (increasingly likely) extreme weather, i.e. a heavy storm, rather than the water retention capacity of the existing surface, a massive volume of flood water could flow directly into the properties on Lucas Lane.

3. Access.

My main concern, however, and one which I find very hard to find anything positive to say about is the access to the field from the North via Ashwell Street/The Ruddy. I would therefore ask if you could please ask the Highways Authority to reconsider their approval of the proposed solution here, for the following reasons:

- The comments in the Planning Statement (5.4.25 and 5.4.26) that the access proposals “would not fundamentally change the character and appearance of Ashwell Street” and is a “modest intervention” is, frankly, nonsense. Section 5.1.4 of the Arboricultural Impact assessment opines that the removal of trees on Ashwell Street is “unlikely to have any significant impact on the street scene”, sorry, but also nonsense! On the contrary I would argue that major damage will be inflicted on both heritage and visual assets and amenities.
- Firstly the felling of between 8 and 11 very large, tall old trees, plus the removal of a lot of hedging shrubs and substantial ancient hedge banks for the new vehicular access (with requisite sightlines) together with two pedestrian accesses will completely destroy the nature of this ancient trackway. This part of the track is one of the very few remaining tree lined part of Ashwell Street.(see photo)



- This is taken from the west going ‘up’ The Ruddy towards Woodforde Close from Station Road. The site is on the right hand side - from the point the photo taken to the light at the end ALL the vegetation and the bank on the right side of the track will be removed, losing the beautiful ‘tunnel’ effect of the greenery in summer.
- As well as destruction of the appearance, damage will also be devastating to the wildlife, plants, insects, small mammals, birds – and the end of a wildlife corridor at this point.
- The access road plan aims to reduce traffic exiting from the site turning left, in other words preventing people from driving *down* the unmade track towards Station Road, using some sort of restriction. However, it will not be easy to stop drivers taking this short cut to Ashwell Station if they work out of the village, the way round via Kingsland Way and Lucas Lane would take much longer. Indeed, the Transport Note (4.3.6) accepts that “this is a legitimate manoeuvre for vehicles exiting the site”. In other words extra traffic going down the unmade track.
- The track is widely used by pedestrians, +/- dogs and children, runners, cyclists, horse riders. I would argue that more traffic results in loss of amenity *and* safety. I was trapped in a very narrow part of the track just down from the site last week by about 10 large cars going quite fast past me in a convoy when traffic was diverted through Ashwell to avoid an accident on the A505, clearly some satnavs recommended Ashwell Street as an alternative. It was frankly terrifying, and dangerous.(see photo below)



- Attempts to slow traffic down are to be welcomed, but vehicle *size* must also be taken into consideration. Our compromised safety, and the destruction of trees and hedge banks by the development is bad enough if just cars are involved, but would be made 10 times worse during the construction phase of the development. Huge cranes, cement lorries, low loaders transporting machinery and building materials will all be needed and there is no guarantee that drivers of these care about heritage or wildlife. Destruction of even more vegetation, combined with the need to dig trenches in the track for utilities will be inevitable and irreparable.

Thank you for reading.

Anne Fletcher

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