

Kirby Manor Farm
Northfield Road
Ashwell
SG7 5JQ

Development Control Services
North Herts District Council
FAO: Ian Fullstone / Henry Thomas

2nd January 2025

Dear Mr Fullstone and Mr Thomas,

Ref: Planning Application No. 24/02712/PNQ - Kirby Manor Farm, Ashwell SG7 5JQ

We are writing in response to the above planning application. Our property is identified as being most affected by the proposed development as it is the original farmhouse for Kirby Manor Farm and the barns sit directly behind our house and garden.

Following changes to the rules for Class Q applications the new application has been increased from 4 to 8 dwellings - the planning application concludes: *The proposals may be regarded as a significant enhancement of the existing buildings and of the immediate surroundings and of benefit to the existing houses in the setting.* We challenge the applicant to provide evidence of any potential benefit to us as neighbours or to our property.

We have serious concerns about this application as follows.

1. Concerns related to the planning application

Highways - safety and impact

The proposed development provides for an additional 8 households with provision for the parking of c20 cars - there are currently only 4 households in the proximity so this would treble the number of households using the lane on a daily basis exacerbating the issues already experienced, which include:

- Northfield Road is a narrow, 4 mile lane connecting Ashwell with Eyeworth, along which it is impossible to pass two cars - but it has no designated or maintained pull-ins and there are potholes along the sides of the lane.
- It is often covered in mud and is not gritted in winter; there are several blind bends and the lane has no stated speed limit - meaning it is 60mph although users regularly exceed this.
- There is a long straight section which passes the area of the proposed development and existing houses - cars often speed in excess of 60mph along this stretch, making it unsafe to walk and impossible with a buggy/young children/dogs without leaping onto the verge for safety.
- In addition to cars and tractors, the lane is used by many cyclists, runners, walkers and horses.
- Very large tractors - often taking up the entire width of the lane - are present on a daily basis making it difficult and dangerous for other road users.
- The proposed access for Unit 1 is by a private drive which is next to our rear gate/drive - this could pose danger to vehicles accessing both entry points.

If planning permission is granted, serious consideration needs to be given to the mitigation of the risks posed to existing and future users of this lane.

Landscape and visual impact

Our property, the barns and all those in the vicinity were built around 1850 in the local Arlesey Whites bricks. As such we have concerns regarding the aesthetics of the proposal as:

- The application proposes to render and paint the walls in brick red which would be completely out of keeping with the Arlesey White bricks that the barns are constructed in as well as our house and all the surrounding properties.
- Roof material is proposed to be largely zinc with dark grey aluminium windows which is unsympathetic to a rural location given its modern, industrial appearance.

Noise, privacy, disturbance/Neighbour Amenity/Overlooking

The application states that there are no noise impacts for the new residents but totally ignores the significant impact it will have on us as very close neighbours. In addition, the EH report dated 15th November 2024 appears to share this view but we, as very close neighbours, disagree for the following reasons.

Concerns

- The visualisations (notably, 'statement accompanying prior approval submission' and 'document 164 visualisations') have blanked out the large bedroom windows that line the back of our house, suggesting there is no overlooking and misrepresenting the reality of the situation. It should be noted and considered that the windows of four of our bedrooms overlook the barns behind us (see photos) with significant privacy and noise implications for both ourselves and the proposed development.
- 6 gardens out of 8 in the proposed development directly back on to our house / garden with associated noise concerns.
- Windows of one unit look directly into our bedroom windows providing no privacy - and we can see into theirs.
- A large number of cars using the yard as a turning area and parking for 16 cars, brings real concerns about noise and privacy with car lights shining directly into our bedroom windows.
- Parking for Unit 1 is proposed to be through a gate along Northfield Road and directly behind us bringing noise/headlight disturbance from vehicles accessing and turning in this drive.
- Service vehicles - such as refuse lorries - will need to access the site causing additional noise and disturbance.

To be noted

- The planning application visualisations (document 164 Visualisations) show a number of strategically placed tall mature trees where there currently are none and which would take many years to grow to the visualised height and to have any impact in providing screening for privacy to our property and to residents of the proposed dwellings.
- There is only a 6m wide drive to the rear of our house and the barns are on the other side of the bordering wall which is currently c2m high including a wood panel topping. The plans propose erecting a 2m high wall along the boundary which provides insufficient shielding for privacy and the reduction of noise.
- Furthermore, the main turning/parking area and Units 4-8 are on ground that is raised c2ft higher than the ground level of our property and Units 1-3.

Access

- There is a farm track accessed from Northfield Road beyond the top boundary of our garden and down the far side of it - the plans show a gravelled area and access gates for three properties whose gardens back on to our property. We understand the suggestion is that limited access be given to residents to use this track for gardening purposes. We question the necessity of this and are concerned that it would result in cars/other vehicles using it frequently resulting in noise, disturbance, lack of privacy and security to our property which has a post and rail fence, as well as a change of use from agricultural to residential access.

Contamination

- Chemicals for crop spraying have been stored in the farmyard on the proposed development site for at least 40 years - spillages have occurred and a number of trees on our property have died and been replaced by the applicant, raising the question of possible toxicity issues.
- The corrugated roofs covering the majority of the barns are likely to contain asbestos as they have been in place for well over 40 years.

Likelihood of flooding

- Although not on a flood plain we have witnessed flash flooding on the site in the area where gardens for Units 7 & 8 are proposed.

Light Pollution

- This is a rural area with properties in the vicinity of the proposed development being spaced well apart. The addition of a solid block containing 4 properties with proposed roof lights and lanterns, together with an additional 4 properties and all the associated outside lighting and access road lighting would result in a significant uplift in the level of light pollution.

Ecology

- Bats, owls and buzzards roost in the area and are very likely to inhabit the barns.
- In addition, there are many badgers, foxes and muntjac in the vicinity - yet there is no mention of an ecology report.

Provision of utilities

- Sewage: no details have been included regarding siting of sewage tanks - there is no mains water supply.
- Air source heat pumps: no details as to the siting of these have been given and could be a potential noise pollutant depending on number and location of pumps.
- Water: supply is provided by a private pipe running from the applicant's dairy, which has been in place for at least 50 years. We understand that pressure/usage calculations show this supply to be adequate for the additional households but believe this should be thoroughly reviewed and the protection of the water supply we are reliant on carefully considered as low water pressure to our property has been an ongoing issue for many years.
- Broadband: the provision of fast broadband is mentioned - yet the current broadband speed quoted by Ofcom is Standard broadband type with highest available download speed of 4Mbps and highest available upload speed of 1Mbps which concurs with our experience (superfast and ultrafast broadband are unavailable).
- In addition to broadband, electricity and main phone lines are all supplied via overhead cables which are vulnerable to damage in adverse weather.

2. Concerns related to adverse effects of the planned development

In addition to the concerns raised previously, we have the following additional concerns linked to the development works if this scheme goes ahead.

Removal of dangerous chemicals and potential asbestos on the site

- The applicant plans to remove the chemical storage from the farmyard if the development goes ahead - in which case, we request the overseeing of its safe removal, given the close proximity to our property.
- Asbestos - if the roofs or parts of the buildings contain asbestos this will require the safe removal without any possible impact to us given that they are located extremely close to our house. We request the roof coverings and other materials to be properly tested before removal.

Noise, disturbance and potential damage caused by development works

- Our property was built in 1850. As the whole site is concreted over right up to our boundary which will have to be mechanically dug up and removed, there needs to be consideration regarding the possible impact of building works on the house and its foundations, how this will be monitored and any issues addressed..
- Besides concerns regarding damage to the foundations / walls of our home, it will also bring with it a great deal of noise, disturbance and a lot of dust - with resultant health implications for us and our family/visitors, some of whom are asthmatic.
- This is our home in which we live - as such we would expect restrictions to be imposed such as hours/times of day on site, not on weekends, maximum period allowed for the development etc which we request sight of and the right to contest.
- We are also concerned about the possibility of road closures limiting access to our property for ourselves and our family/friends as there is no other way to access our house.

Boundary wall

- The proposal includes the erection of a 2m high boundary wall. We do not consider that to be high enough to provide privacy and dampen noise - we request a wall to be built to maximum height possible.
- This wall should be constructed in the same brick as our house and the barns - Arlesey Whites.

Access

- We request a review of the access for garden maintenance for Units 4, 7 & 8 with proposed re-routing to the north of the development to the side and rear of Units 5, 6, 7, 8.
- We would require access to the garden of Unit 4 in order to maintain our property.

3. Concerns related to legal issues

We have a number of concerns regarding legal matters which need to be resolved before the development could go ahead including:

- Flying freehold: one of the barns (Unit 4) is adjoined to our property - initially a garage and then forms part of our house. This includes c1.3m sited on our land - so becoming a flying freehold.
- The application includes a section of the property forming Unit 4 (adjacent to the flying freehold section) that is outside the proposed boundary wall in the garden of Unit 4. We

would need access to maintain the wall and roof of that section of our property which could only be accessed from the garden of Unit 4.

- Water supply: the pipe for the private water supply runs the length of our large garden with implications regarding the supply of water, repair and maintenance of pipes which significantly impact our property and would need to be properly addressed.
- Oil tank: our oil tank is cited on the proposed development site.
- Postal address: the address for the proposed development is given as Kirby Manor Farm - however, our house is listed on the Royal Mail address file as Kirby Manor Farm. Due attention will need to be given to the addressing of any development.

We understand that the Planning Officer has visited the site and taken photographs - we are attaching photographic evidence to support some of the points we have raised regarding privacy/overlooking.

Finally, if this application is referred to Planning Committee, we request to attend the meeting.

Kind regards,

Michael & Nicolette Holmes