

Chain Cottage  
50 Gardiners Lane  
Ashwell  
Herts SG7 5LZ

31<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Planning Officer  
North Herts District Council  
Gernon Road,  
Letchworth Garden City  
SG6 3JF

Reference : **Planning Objection 25/00581/OP Erection of single dwelling on unused land (all matters reserved except for appearance, layout and scale). Land Between Chain Cottage And 40 Gardiners Lane Ashwell Hertfordshire SG7 5LZ**

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to strongly **object** to outline planning proposal **25/00581/OP** for the Erection of single dwelling on the land adjacent to our Grade II listed property in a Conservation Area which has been our home for 13 years. I am objecting based on conservation, character, and precedent.

The proposal for building a property on the land was recently rejected ref: **23/01984/FP** and several times previously. All that has changed since that application is the proposed property has been moved to the rear of the land. **This does not impact any of the previous rationale for refusal.**

The key issue remains whether a new dwelling would detract from the character of the area. Previous refusals confirm that it would, and repositioning the proposed property does not change this fundamental fact.

To set some context, the open space has always been a welcome transition from the more densely populated centre of the village to feel you are moving out into the open countryside. Over the years it's been a haven for nature with wildflowers and other fauna and marks the exit of the village to locals and visitors. It lies within the "**Visual Character Area**" in the **Ashwell Neighbourhood plan 2021**.

In more recent years (particularly 2019-23) the applicant has been slowly trying to make the site barren, by cutting back and removing trees, removing tons of soil (presumably to lower the ridge line for any building works) and aggressive use of industrial weed killer. This is all in an effort to make it look like a building plot rather than the lovely open space it has been (see photos in appendix). The plot is also relatively small and doesn't lend itself readily to a building being squeezed in. The ridge height would be dominating to both neighbours and impact on our privacy as well as vista.

Whilst I appreciate the need to address the housing crisis, a single in-fill property will do very little to support this drive and there are other large in-flight developments in Ashwell to provide additional housing opportunities. The proposed building would have a value of ~£750k so isn't meeting any affordable housing benefits. In-filling with this property on the outskirts of the village would **detract from the rural character** and the transition to open countryside. It would extend the boundary of the village and go against the objectives set out for the Conservation Area and Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan.

An application was refused (ref:15/00131/1) on the open land on the other side of Gardiners Lane for similar reasons. There have been no developments for a considerable amount of time, and I can't see the need for any more housing in this area which would improve the Conservation Area. It would detract from the focal point of Chain Cottage, a listed building from Gardiners Lane and obscure views in the area.

Therefore, in summary my reasons for objecting to this application are:

- 1) No material changes since the previous rejected application apart from moving the position of the proposed property. The previously rejected grounds and appeals also upheld the decisions are still valid.
- 2) Continued effort by the applicant to make the land barren to get support from local residents, Parish Council and Planning Officers. As mentioned in previous refusals (05/01764/1) "Cynical use of 'impoverished condition' of the site as a reason to allow this development."
- 3) The proposed dwelling, by reason of its location on the outskirts of the village, within a loosely developed area, would substantially detract from the rural character of this part of Ashwell and the transitional nature of the site between the settlement edge and open countryside, undesirably expanding the outer limits of the village by consolidating the existing development along Gardiners Lane.
- 4) The proposal would, therefore, be detrimental to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation Area and the countryside beyond. the benefits of **granting permission would not be significant such that would outweigh the substantial harm to a designated heritage asset** and the surround area of Gardiners Lane as density decreases.
- 5) This proposal appears to be contrary to the provisions of **Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** with respect to "*special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.*". Despite efforts by the applicant to make the site look unattractive, returning the open space to its original natural setting would far outweigh any building.
- 6) I would cite sections from the **Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (2021)**.
  - The location forms part of the one of **the 5 visual character areas of the village:**  
**V1: The "Church and Environs"** preserves the open nature of the church and surrounding farmsteads and meadows to the North of the village.
  - **Section 7.6** - The density of development should create a character that is appropriate to the site's context, including the landscape in which it is set, whilst making best use of the land available. **Lower density housing should be located towards the outer edges of the settlement where it abuts open countryside, to maintain views from and into the individual settlements.**
- 7) Also of relevance is the **North Herts District Local Plan 2011-2031**  
**Policy HE1 : Designated heritage assets**, approval should only be granted where they "**c) Will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, and this harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development.**"

I don't believe the addition of a single new building would outweigh all of the proposed benefits of leaving this open space for the public to enjoy as part of the transition to the open countryside.

In light of the consistent rejection of similar applications, the substantial harm to the area's character, and the lack of any public benefit, we strongly urge you to **refuse** this application in accordance with established precedent.

Yours faithfully,

Mark & Gemma Allan

## Appendix Photos

June 2023 - Wild Flowers/Poppies before applicant applied strong weed killer to whole area



In 2019, larger amounts of soil removed/levelling to make a more attractive “plot” for development



You can see Chain Cottage garden and outbuildings are the last building before open countryside

View of the Grade 1 listed Church from our front garden would be impeded.

