



## ASHWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Office at Bear Farm 6A Back Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts, SG7 5PE  
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 Clerk: Jane Porter, Deputy Clerk: Annie Clifford  
 Chairman: Mark White ☎07977 099951

### Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-3031 Matter 11: The housing allocations and the settlement boundaries/ The Category A Villages/Ashwell.

#### 11.1 Is the proposed housing allocation deliverable?

Yes, but not on this site.

#### In particular, is it:

#### a) confirmed by all of the landowners involved as being available for the use proposed?

The owner of AS1 is working actively with developers to get it included in the Local Plan.

#### b) supported by evidence to demonstrate that safe and appropriate access for vehicles and pedestrians can be provided?

Site AS1 fails to comply with the requirements for **highway safety** to protect pedestrians and other road users as defined in both National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC's own current and emerging planning policy for Highway Safety (Policy T1).

- i. There is no footpath on Claybush Road from the proposed entrance to AS1 to Ashwell Street. This junction is very tight and dangerous.
- ii. The existing footpath network extending from the village centre to the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street includes x19 steps.
- iii. Bear Lane itself is narrow and usually has cars parked on it. As such it dangerous for those with pushchairs, wheelchairs, mobility scooters, etc. There is significant traffic flow and a steep gradient that is particularly hazardous in icy conditions.
- iv. The requirement for adequate pedestrian access to and from the site itself is also unachievable. The proposed route is along a private, un-adopted, unmade, single track road opening onto a complex junction with no pavement provision. Council waste/recycling vehicles servicing this limb of Ashwell Street need to reverse along the road and across the junction.
- v. The current development of the adjacent brownfield site (Cooke Engineering) for seven housing units will exacerbate these concerns.

**c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?**

Constraints:

- i. **Pedestrian access** -see 11.1 (b) above.
- ii. **Landscape:** Site AS1 fails to meet the requirements to protect valued landscapes. The site is within the North Baldock Chalk Uplands Character Area 224 and development is restricted under National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC's own local planning policy, both current and emerging.
- iii. **Heritage:** Site AS1 fails to meet the requirements to protect the historic environment. The site is within the setting of the scheduled ancient monument Arbury Banks and is protected by NPPF and NHDC policy (SP13, para 4.151). The Supporting Evidence commissioned by NHDC, ie the *Heritage Impact Assessment (July 2016)*, says 'Development should be limited to the north west of the proposal site'. Past planning applications have been turned down on national appeal for this reason.

**11.2 Is the proposed housing allocations justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?**

Yes, and the emerging Neighbourhood Plan has identified available sites to meet the identified needs -see below.

**11.3 Is the proposed allocation the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?**

- i. No. AS1 does not comply with heritage, landscape or highway safety policy.
- ii. Reasonable, and available, alternative sites exist that do comply with policy.  
These sites, identified by the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, include two brownfield sites. Together the three identified sites would meet identified housing needs including assisted living units. The land owners of these sites have confirmed their availability. NHDC was made aware of them in December 2015 as part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan process. These three sites more than satisfy the proposed allocation of 33 units.

**11.4 Is the proposed settlement boundary:**

**a) consistent with the methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries?**

Two specific questions have been put by the Parish Council to NHDC strategic planning officers on this point.

- i. What was the methodology?  
NHDC's response: *"There is no specific written methodology for identifying settlement boundaries outside the green belt. The village boundaries were reviewed by way of site visits and conclusions on the possible land allocations for each settlement - which are set out in the SHLAA."*
- ii. After the concern was logged with the Inspector the Parish Council asked NHDC for further clarification. Their response was:  
*"Re. No 5430 - The proposed settlement boundary for Ashwell formed part of the most recent consultation and your comments will be considered as part of the examination process. The boundary shown on the map is not an error. You are correct that there would be 'in principle' support for general development on land / sites within the village boundary under our proposed Policy SP2. Plainly this is subject to all the usual considerations (heritage, design, highways, ecology etc.). Given Ashwell's location beyond the Green Belt, the village boundary is an issue which can be further considered through any Neighbourhood Plan."*

This raises two points, (i) the boundary was put around all the sites identified in the original Land Allocation process. When most of these were rejected as not meeting the set criteria the boundary was not redrawn. This is an error. (ii) Our understanding is that it is not within the powers of the Neighbourhood Plan to redraw the boundary to where it was previously.

**b) appropriate and justified?**

NHDC has failed to consult on the proposals to extend the settlement boundary in locations other than AS1 (within which there would be a presumption in favour of development; Policy SP2) and has not responded adequately to representations.