

**Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside**

Anne McDonald  
Planning and Building Control  
North Hertfordshire District Council  
PO Box 480  
Herts  
M33 0DE

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

7<sup>th</sup> September 2016 (by email)

Dear Ms. McDonald,

**Application No 16/01797/1**  
**33 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space**  
**on Land rear of 4 -14 Claybush Road, Ashwell, SG7 5RA.**

Notwithstanding its inclusion as site AS1 in the Council's Preferred Options consultations and, following the Council meeting of 20 July 2016, the proposed submission version of the Local Plan, CPRE maintains that this site is unsuitable for housing development of this nature.

The inadequacies of the site have been reflected in the overwhelming opposition among the local community to its development and the case against site AS1 was eloquently put by Councillor David Short at the meeting on 20 July. The only minuted argument against the points which he raised was the statement from the Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise that the draft Plan set a target to provide at least 14,975 new homes for North Hertfordshire's own needs, with the implication that this overrides all other considerations. We also note the Executive Member's point that *"each proposed site allocation would be accompanied by a set of criteria which would need to be taken into account by any development proposals."* As far as we are aware the criteria for AS1 (or any other site) have yet to be published.

On the point of housing targets, we have previously advised the Council that we consider their assessed figures to be overstated. There is no 'requirement' on the Council to set such a figure and ministerial statements have been clear that housing figures do not over-ride Green Belt policies and that the overall quantum of housing should be adjusted to reflect that. This lowers the figure, which impacts on the Rural Area Beyond The Green Belt, in which this site lies.

In the planning statement which accompanies the application the applicant repeatedly refers to the Council's inability to demonstrate a five year housing land supply and the implicit limited weight which can be given to policies in the current Local Plan as a result. In the recent Uttlesford case (APP/C1570/A/14/2213025) August 2016, the Secretary of


State found that policies which aim to protect the Rural Area Beyond The Green Belt should attract significant weight notwithstanding that the Plan was out of date as a result of there being no 5-year housing land supply. Consequently the Council should be giving due weight to the National Planning Policy Framework and the relevant Local Plan Policies in assessing the planning balance when determining this application and noting that the lack of a five year housing supply does not constitute a reason to justify development. Under those policies, development of this site would be inappropriate. Policy 6 would completely rule out the application due to the number of units proposed and Policy 7 requires that the development site lies within the main area of the village, is in line with the policy aims for visual character areas and maintains or enhances the character or visual quality of the village. The development is outside the settlement boundary and in our view would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The pattern along both Claybush Road and Ashwell Street is not one of backland development and the proposals would be intrusive and clearly visible from the fields to the south and west.

There are concerns about the accessibility of the site to pedestrians and the disabled. Claybush Road is a hill, with no footway access on either side. There appear to be no proposals in the application for this to be addressed as part of the development.

In terms of community infrastructure, it is now well documented that both healthcare and educational facilities in the village are under stress and have limited capacity to deal with the increase in population which this proposal would create. Again this is not addressed in the application.

The Council has rejected previous applications for development on this site as it is unsuitable for residential use, decisions which were upheld on appeal. Consequently, as nothing has materially changed, it appears inconsistent to now include it as a 'preferred' option in the emerging Local Plan. We do not see any justification for changing the Council's previous position or for approving this application in advance of the emerging Local Plan's scrutiny at the Enquiry in Public.

Yours sincerely,



David Irving