

15th November 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re Draft Local Plan 2011-2031, CLAYBUSH HILL SITE

In the housing allocation you show that the site on Claybush Hill is suitable for development even though the District Council and an Inspector when considering appeals in both 1987 and 1996 rejected the planning application as being unsuitable for development. In earlier versions of your housing allocation you have also designated the site as 'non-strategic'. It therefore should still be unsuitable for development.

We understand that you will shortly be submitting your preferred options for development to the District Council Cabinet, after which time there will be a full Council meeting on 27th November to consider the plan. A period of consultation will then begin, ending on 6th February 2015.

We write to make it clear in the plainest terms possible that having gauged the opinion of people within the village of Ashwell we object, as a Parish Council and as a village, to any proposed development on the site behind Ashwell Street and Claybush Road for the following reasons other than those cited above:

1. This site is outside the village boundary in an area which the North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment says of the North Baldock chalk Uplands that '[small urban developments] would not be appropriate in much of this character area'. This development would have a fundamentally detrimental impact on the character of the village, in particular one of the southern entrances, not to mention placing a further strain on the infrastructure of Ashwell, yet to be tested by development already planned and incomplete.
2. You have considered planning applications from the landlord of this field on several occasions dating back as far as 1980 and as recently as 1995. On each occasion you have rightly found that the land is not suitable for development. On one occasion the inspector turned down the appeal 'as any building on the proposed land would :
 - Consolidate the ribbon of fringe development into a more dense and intrusive form
 - Be an unsightly incursion into the attractive open land that rises southwards from the village
 - Impose on the privacy of all the occupants of the buildings that abut the land, therefore impacting more than normal'.
3. The inclusion of this site, allocating 33 houses, goes against the following guidelines of the Ashwell Village Design Statement which is NHDC Supplementary Planning Guidance
 - 6c, The general building density of the area of the village should be taken into account
 - 6i, Building density should decrease away from the centre of the village
 - 6n (in line with NHDC policy 29), Housing development should be small-scale, unless it meets a specific, identified local need
 - 6o (in line with NHDC policy 57). New development should be discreetly sited and should not intrude upon the landscape.
4. The NHDC Draft Local Plan Preferred Options (November 2014) document recognises the importance of Rural Areas and accords them similar value to Green Belt. Policies

GGB2 and GGB3 state that 'a development proposal will normally only be allowed if it would meet an identified rural housing need, in compliance with Policy CGB3 'Exception Sites in the Rural Area', and that 'this exception sites policy does not override other policies, notably relating to biodiversity and landscape.' Previous rejections of Planning Applications on the Claybush Hill site have specifically focussed on the landscape impact (1987 Inspector report: 'an unsightly incursion into the attractive open land that rises southwards from the village, and that the protection of the setting of an important historic village override the general presumption in favour of allowing proposals for development').

Ashwell has already made great strides towards fulfilling the housing allocation (2011 to 2031) of 69 units in that some 55 units have been built, brought into use or given planning permission in the period 2011 to November 2014. This represents an increase of 6.6% of the total parish housing stock.

We were thus extremely surprised to hear that the Council is prepared to even consider this site again given its history and the lengths Ashwell has gone to when compared to other villages, to help the Council reach its allocation targets.

We therefore would ask you to remove this site from all considerations in recognition of the above.

We thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

Cllr David Short
For and on behalf of Ashwell Parish Council

cc Sir Oliver Heald MP
Cllr Andrew Young