

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON THURSDAY, 13TH FEBRUARY, 2025 AT 7.00 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Nigel Mason (Chair), Ruth Brown, Emma Fernandes, Ian Mantle, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Louise Peace, Tom Tyson, Martin Prescott and Mick Debenham.*

In Attendance: *Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Shaun Greaves (Development and Conservation Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Tom Rea (Senior Planning Officer) and Sonia Sharp (Senior Planning Solicitor, Locum).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

118 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 53 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Amy Allen, Sadie Billing and Elizabeth Dennis.

Having given due consideration, Councillor Mick Debenham substituted for Councillor Allen.

119 MINUTES - 16 JANUARY 2025

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 13 seconds

Councillor Bryony May advised that she had given apologies prior to the Planning Control Committee meeting on 16 January 2025 but was listed as being present in the Minutes of that meeting.

Councillor Nigel Mason, as Chair, proposed, as amended, and Councillor Emma Fernandes seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2025 be approved, as amended as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

120 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 24 seconds

There was no other business notified.

121 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 39 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair clarified matters for the registered speakers.
- (4) The Chair advised that Section 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to the meeting.

122 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 5 minutes 16 seconds

The Chair confirmed that the registered speakers were in attendance.

123 24/01371/FP HILLCREST AND LAND AT TUSSOCKS, THE CAUSEWAY, THERFIELD, SG8 9PP

Audio recording – 5 minutes 54 seconds

N.B. Councillor Martin Prescott moved to the public speaking gallery at the start of this item to act as an Objector Member Advocate.

The Senior Planning Officer notified Members that a letter from a member of the public in objection to the application had been received since the agenda pack had been circulated. A summary of the concerns of objectors was also read out. Members were finally advised that if the development was approved, it would be subject to the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain condition as mentioned in paragraph 4.3.5 of the report.

Following this, the Senior Planning Officer presented the report in respect of Application 24/01371/FP supported by a visual presentation consisting of photographs and plans.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Nigel Mason

In response to questions, the Senior Planning Officer advised that:

- The Silver Birch tree which was currently at the centre of the site would be retained as per the outline landscape proposals.
- It was unclear whether solar panels would be installed on every house in the development, however, if permission for the development was granted, it would be subject to condition 27 in the recommendation which would require a sustainability strategy to be submitted prior to the commencement of the development.
- The applicant would have to purchase biodiversity credits from a land bank company to meet the national requirement of a 10% biodiversity net gain for the development. A

certificate proving the purchase of the biodiversity credits would have to be submitted to the planning authority.

- The first stage of the Road Safety Audit had already been carried out and the second and third stages would be undertaken. Issues such as on-street parking along The Causeway would be considered, along with measures like double-yellow lines.
- Cars would not be allowed to park in the narrowest part of The Causeway where the proposed footpath would extend into the road.
- The Road Safety Audit indicated that 2-3 vehicles might be displaced because of this, which could add to the on-street parking in nearby roads such as Peddlers Lane.
- The owners of the vehicles that were parked outside the proposed access point as shown in the photos accompanying the presentation were unknown, however, the photos were taken during school time.

The Chair invited Therfield Parish Councillor, Andy Osbourne, to speak against the application. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation. They advised that:

- They were Chair of Therfield Parish Council.
- The housing structure in Therfield was mostly low density and complemented by open green spaces, of which the land at Tussocks was one.
- The Parish Council acknowledged that the application was within the village boundary.
- They realised that the Hillcrest portion of the proposed site needed development.
- No dialogue between the developer and the Parish Council had taken place since the Parish Council had requested for decreased housing density on the development.
- The density of the development was not in keeping with the rest of the village, particularly on The Causeway.
- An additional fifty vehicles on the roads through Therfield would have major implications for on-street parking and the safety of both vehicle and pedestrian road users.
- The Parish Council would support a shared surface scheme which would negate the need to halve the width of The Causeway which was regularly used by large agricultural vehicles with machinery.
- A consultation for the proposed traffic management scheme had not been carried out but should have been in the opinion of the Parish Council.
- The development would contravene the Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document adopted by the Council which recognised the importance of chalk streams as the development would contribute more sewage to a sewage treatment system facility that released 245 hours of untreated sewage into the River Rib in 2023 according to the Environment Agency.
- The development would also go against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which stated that new developments should enhance the local and natural environment by preventing the contribution to unacceptable levels of water pollution.

In response to a point of clarification raised by Councillor Mick Debenham, Parish Councillor Osbourne advised that the figure of fifty extra vehicles was the anticipated number that residents from this development and the Grange Meadow development in Therfield would bring.

The Chair thanked Councillor Osbourne for his presentation and invited Therfield Parish Councillor Tim Jeffries to speak against the application. Parish Councillor Jeffries thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation. They advised that:

- They were a resident on The Causeway.

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- The pre-application for the Tussocks portion of the development was previously rejected in 2018 on the grounds that it would damage the open nature of the village.
- The three proposed terraced houses should be semi-detached and have parking at the side of the properties to be in keeping with the rest of the area.
- The detached houses proposed on the Tussocks portion of the site would present little opportunity for first time buyers.
- The development would bring more vehicles to The Causeway which was already a busy road in which traffic often exceeded the speed limit.
- Homeowners of units 1-3 would be likely to park on The Causeway itself, contributing to the already crowded on-street parking along the road.
- They had photo evidence that vehicles parked on The Causeway not just during school drop-off and pickup times, but on chapel days, local walking group days and during the summer in general.
- The parking proposals were in keeping with national guidelines but were not appropriate for residents of Therfield as the only way to travel to nearby towns with ease was by car, meaning that family households could have in surplus of three cars.
- Traffic data in the report had inappropriately compared Therfield with suburban areas where services were in walking distance.

There were no points of clarification from Members.

The Chair thanked Tim Jeffries for his presentation and invited Mr Stephen Greenhill to speak on behalf of Therfield Parish Council against the application. Mr Greenhill thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation. They advised that:

- They had lived very close to the application site for the last 21 years.
- They were formerly the Highways Manager for Hertfordshire County Council.
- The proposed priority traffic measure had not been properly consulted upon, whereas priority traffic measures in other Hertfordshire villages quoted in the report of the Senior Planning Officer were part of community driven traffic calming schemes which had received extensive consultation.
- There were site specific risks to the priority feature including three bends and six junctions just to the south and a crest just before the give way point of the narrowing to the north.
- These would increase the likelihood of sudden braking, impacts and collisions with the new curb extension in the southbound vehicle path.
- Delays resulting from the priority feature would encourage drivers to use Peddlers Lane and Kelshall Tops which had no footway provision and blind bends, increasing the risk to pedestrians on these roads.
- Access to existing houses on The Causeway that would be within the area of the priority traffic measure had not been addressed by the first stage of Road Safety Audit despite being highlighted by the Parish Council.
- They urged the Committee to reject the application on the grounds that the highways proposals were inadequate and lacked proper safety scrutiny.

In response to a point of clarification from Councillor Louise Peace, Stephen Greenhill advised that the Parish Council was in support of the footway as part of the proposed application, however it could be delivered without the need for a traffic priority measure. After correspondence with the developer, it was clear that the priority measure was to allow the developer to facilitate an acceptable visibility display from the development.

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The Chair thanked Mr Greenhill for his presentation and invited the Objector Member Advocate, Councillor Martin Prescott to speak against the application. He advised that:

- There had been last minute modifications to the application since it had been called in for discussion at the Committee.
- The road traffic survey had been carried out in August when the school was closed.
- A full public consultation on the traffic priority measure should have taken place.
- Illuminated signs would need to be installed as part of the traffic calming measure which would create problems as Therfield lacked comprehensive street lighting.

There were no points of clarification from Members.

N.B. Following the conclusion of the speaking time, Councillor Martin Prescott left the Chamber at 19:48.

The Chair invited the Applicant Representatives, Mr Peter Biggs and Mr Nathan Hanks to speak in support of the application. They advised that:

- Lengthy and informative discussions with Council officers had taken place to ensure that third parties had been accounted for when considering the design and application process of the development.
- The original application had been for a ten-dwelling development, but was withdrawn and resubmitted as a lower density, seven-dwelling development after considering the comments that were given at a Therfield Parish Council meeting in 2023 in which they had presented the development to Members and residents.
- Council Planning Officers had deemed the application to be well designed and with a positive response to the conservation area within the village.
- A Heritage Consultant had been involved to assist with the assessment of the development on the surrounding heritage assets.
- Drainage and highways issues resulting from the development had been assessed and addressed in specialist reports and these also informed how the development would provide net biodiversity gains.
- No objections to the application had been raised by flood risk management authorities, Thames Water, the Highways Authority or specialist advisors such as conservation and ecological officers that had been involved.
- The development would address the identified housing shortfall in the district and would help to support the future viability of the village school.
- The proposed footpath and priority traffic measure would assist with reducing vehicle speeds along this part of The Causeway.
- The proposed development was deemed acceptable in Highways terms following an independent road safety audit which conducted two site visits, one during term time and another during school holidays. It was common practice for one site visit to take place as part of an audit, and thus the two site visits in this case gave the audit more credibility.
- Car parking on the proposed development would be in line with North Hertfordshire parking standards.
- A new pedestrian footway would be built along the front of the development to link to the school which would comply with the County Council Sustainable Transport Scheme and would protect pedestrians.
- Hertfordshire Highways were content with the proposals as confirmed in their final consultation response.
- Path analysis had been undertaken for the larger vehicles using the road and the footway would narrow the road by the same or less than a parked car would, having a lesser impact on passing traffic than existing on-street parking.
- The proposed development would have negligible impact on traffic and would enhance highways safety, therefore, there would be no grounds for refusal on highways issues based on the NPPF.

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In response to a question from Councillor Mick Debenham, the Senior Planning Officer advised that he could not confirm that the vehicles were there all the time, but every time he had been to visit the site, the parked cars were there. Councillor Ruth Brown noted that she often cycled through the village and the cars were regularly parked on The Causeway.

In response to a question from Councillor Mick Debenham and other points raised, the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Officer, Mr Senober Khan advised that:

- There was no extensive reasoning for northbound traffic to have priority rather than southbound traffic, it was based on the Road Safety Audit deeming it to be acceptable.
- National guidance stated that priority had to go to pedestrians and cyclists and both the priority traffic measure and the footway that would link to the school as part of the development would ensure this.
- Approximately three parked vehicles would be affected by the priority traffic measure, however the footpath would not affect parked vehicles as it would be outside of the carriageway.
- Pedestrian safety would be improved as the traffic calming measure would discourage traffic that currently sped through the area as Parish Councillors had highlighted.

In response to points raised by the public speakers, the Senior Planning Officer advised that the site was not part of any open space designation in the Conservation Area Character Statement.

Councillor Ian Mantle proposed to grant permission, and this was seconded by Councillor Louise Peace.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Louise Peace

Points raised in the debate included:

- Public green spaces that the village possessed would not be affected by the development.
- Terraced houses in the development would be in keeping with Fordham Terrace and be a big improvement to the Hillcrest portion of the site which was observed to be an eyesore.
- A priority traffic measure would improve road safety for cyclists and pedestrians, especially outside the school at drop-off and pickup times.
- Sewage was a concern, however Thames Water had a statutory responsibility to accommodate the extra houses and they had not made an objection to the development.
- Parked cars outside the School House effectively made the road into a priority system and the new proposed priority traffic measure would formalise this.
- The Headteacher of Therfield First School had commented in support of the application.
- New families moving onto the development would help to reduce the traffic problems resulting from those travelling from outside Therfield for the school as they would use the footpath to walk to the school instead.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 24/01371/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission subject to the reasons and conditions set out in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager, plus the standard Net Biodiversity condition.

N.B. Following the conclusion of the item, Councillor Martin Prescott returned to the Chamber at 20:11.

124 APPEALS

Audio recording – 1 hour 10 minutes 44 seconds

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Planning Appeals and informed the Committee that:

- 3 appealed decisions had been decided, of which 2 had been dismissed and 1 had been part allowed, part dismissed.
- 2 appeals had been lodged, one of which was for a 42-dwelling development on Land East of Royston Road, Baldock which had been upgraded to a public inquiry that would be held on 29 April for 4 sitting days. The other was a householder appeal at Blackmoore End.

The Following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tom Tyson

In response to questions, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that:

- The Public Inquiry would be held at the District Council Offices and Members were welcome to attend.
- The appeal had been upgraded to a Public Inquiry by the Inspector dealing with the case, who deemed that cross examination of the expert witnesses was needed. The appellants originally requested a Public Inquiry, whereas the Council had requested a Hearing.

The meeting closed at 8.16 pm

Chair