

## **NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE**

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF  
ON THURSDAY, 18TH DECEMBER, 2025 AT 7.00 PM**

#### **MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Nigel Mason (Chair), Emma Fernandes (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Ian Mantle, Bryony May, Louise Peace, Martin Prescott, Tom Tyson and Dave Winstanley.*

**In Attendance:** *Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Paul Chaston (Senior Planning Officer), Sam Dicocco (Principal Planning Officer), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Shaun Greaves (Development and Conservation Manager), Edward Leigh (Senior Transport Policy Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Nazneen Roy (Locum Planning Lawyer).*

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

*Councillor Lisa Nash was in attendance as Member Advocate.*

#### **105 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ruth Brown, Val Bryant and Caroline McDonnell.

#### **106 MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2025**

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 53 seconds*

Councillor Nigel Mason, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ian Mantle seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 November 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### **107 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 36 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

#### **108 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 41 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 confirmed the procedure for moving to debate on an item.
- (5) The Chair advised that Section 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to the meeting.
- (6) The Chair confirmed the cut off procedure should the meeting proceed at length.
- (7) The Chair advised that Item 6 – 25/01766/OP had been withdrawn from the agenda.

## **109 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 2 seconds*

The Chair confirmed that the registered speakers were in attendance.

## **110 25/01766/OP LAND ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF, COWARDS LANE, CODICOTE, HERTFORDSHIRE**

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 7 seconds*

The Chair confirmed that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

## **111 23/01552/OP LAND SOUTH OF, WATTON ROAD, KNEBWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE**

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 41 seconds*

The Senior Planning Officer provided a verbal update on matters relating to Application 23/01552/OP and advised that:

- Two further neighbour objections were received; both were available on the public access hub. The points raised were already addressed in the report.
- There were three errors in the report at Table 3 which needed correcting. Firstly, the land cost for secondary education was not included as part of the Heads of Terms and should be removed, however the overall contribution was stated correctly. Secondly, the project description of 5 to 11 year old childcare contribution should be to increasing facilities at the new primary school or provisions serving the development. Thirdly, the Herts County Council monitoring fee should be £420 per distinct trigger.
- In response to a query raised by Councillor Louise Peace regarding the comparison between the journey times to Lister hospital, with one taking a different route through Stevenage. Having used the same route for both the current and proposed journey time, following the closure of Swangley's Lane, both took 14 minutes.

The Senior Planning Officer then presented the report in respect of Application 23/0152/OP accompanied by a visual presentation consisting of plans and photographs.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Louise Peace

- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Nigel Mason

In response to questions, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised that:

- The bollard-controlled route would be locked by padlock not automatic and would likely be maintained by HCC Highways.
- Any comparison between 2020 and current traffic levels would not be representative due to the Covid lockdowns in 2020.
- The applicant's transport consultant had provided a potential explanation for the increase in westbound morning traffic on Watton Road in the new development at Bradbury End, and other traffic diverting to Watton Road to avoid congestion elsewhere on the road network.
- There were historic concerns around Swangley's Lane, but this was not material to this planning application.
- Potential future scenarios for the road through the development would be dealt with if they arose but were not material to this planning application.
- The ratio of flow to capacity (RFC) in 2028 of the Watton Road arm of the B197 roundabout would increase from 0.79 with other committed development to 1.01 with this development, i.e. over capacity. Other arms would be under capacity, so the appropriate mitigation would be to re-balance flows, perhaps with traffic signals.
- The Bell Close crossing was included to join up footways. The final location and detailed design have yet to be agreed with the Highway Authority.
- There was no space in Swangley's Lane to add a footway.
- The issue of turning heads for larger vehicles within the development site was a reserved matter issue.
- The applicant has suggested a Schools Street on Swangley's Lane to stop parking outside the school during school start and end. Parents would still be able to park, for instance, at St Martins Road car park for free and walk their children to school from there.
- Any School Street would be addressed under the Section 278 agreement and a Traffic Regulation Order.

In response to questions, the Senior Planning Officer advised that in response to the reason for the deferral to address concerns around emergency vehicle access routes following the closure of Swangley's Lane, the Applicant had agreed to install a rising bollard system to allow emergency vehicular access.

In response to questions, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that there had been twelve letters of support from residents on Swangley's Lane.

The Chair invited the first Public Objector, Robert Wilson to speak against the application. Mr Wilson thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- He and his wife lived in Swangley's Farm House and their main concern was the closure of Swangley's Lane and the potential impact this could have to vital emergency journeys he made to Lister Hospital.
- In July the application was deferred to consider options for potentially keeping Swangley's Lane open, while deterring rat running. However, the revised proposal still closed the Lane with a padlocked bollard for emergency vehicles.
- The report outlined that queueing on Watton Road could vary, which contradicted the forecast there would only be one minutes variance caused by the closure of Swangley's Lane.
- In an emergency situation, time was critical and the installation of a lockable bollard did not resolve the risk, but added further uncertainty into the journey.
- The lockable bollards cannot be accessed by local residents in an emergency.

- The traffic impact of the development was unacceptable, where updated counts show Watton Road/Station Road roundabout currently operated within capacity, but the development would push it over capacity.
- In July, Watton Road was closed for 3 days and the traffic was diverted through Swangley's Lane. However, if Watton Road was to close following the closure of Swangley's Lane, this would result in a 12-minute detour around the village.
- The better alternative would be to keep Swangley's Lane open but to deter rat running with junction alignment, turning bays and a 20 MPH speed limit.

The following members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Louise Peace

In response to points of clarification, Mr Wilson advised that:

- Of the twelve letters of support sent by residents only one was a resident of Swangley's Lane.
- He had asked for access to a key for the bollard for emergency use but this had been denied by HCC highways.

The Chair thanked Mr Wilson for their presentation and invited the second Public Objector, Dean Goodman to speak against the application. Mr Goodman thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- He was a representative of Datchworth Parish Council as Chairman of the planning committee.
- He was a retired chartered town planner and highways engineer.
- At the previous meeting in July, Councillors expressed concern regarding intended changes to Swangley's Lane and in response the agent, Mr Ball, agreed to revert to a previous plan which kept Swangley's Lane open.
- Keeping Swangley's Lane open would provide a direct route for Datchworth residents to the heart of Knebworth.
- Datchworth would also become a through road for those leaving the new development.

In response to a point of clarification from Councillor Martin Prescott, Mr Goodman advised that his preferred option to keeping Swangley's Lane open would be to introduce a roundabout and allow two way traffic up the road.

The Chair thanked Mr Goodman for their presentation and invited the Member Advocate, Councillor Lisa Nash to speak against the application. Councillor Nash thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- Residents of Knebworth and the surrounding areas strongly opposed this development.
- As a semi-rural area residents relied on single lane roads such as Swangley's Lane to access amenities.
- Watton Road roundabout would be over capacity and Watton Road residents have raised significant concerns, including having witnessed vehicles mounting the pavement to get by.
- HCC stated that speed safety measures were non-compliant.
- Swangley's Lane was an essential lifeline for Datchworth residents who regularly use shops in Knebworth and closing this would undoubtedly isolate them. This would have a negative impact on businesses in Knebworth.

- The response times for emergency vehicles would be increased to get to the Lister Hospital.
- Many children in Knebworth needed to travel to receive education and, as there was no secondary school and with limited public transport, private cars were one of the only options.
- With few employment opportunities in Knebworth, 200 new dwelling would result in more traffic due to commuting to work.
- The report did not mention the 770 houses being developed nearby including Bradbury End.
- The report also states that Watton Road was 5 – 5.5 meters wide but parts were nearer 4.5 meters.
- A significant amount of the residential footpath is narrow at 1.25 – 1.3 meters wide, which was lower than the recommended minimum of 2 meters wide for walkways.
- Claims that traffic had increased 17% since 2020 were inaccurate.
- The Council should request testing as the peak traffic times were different from the off peak traffic times
- Any impact on Watton Road was going to worsen an existing problem which was awful and traveling through the centre would result in a cumulative effect of traffic, which was non-viable and incomprehensible.

The following members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Martin Prescott

In response to points of clarification, Councillor Nash advised that:

- Most children in the area went to secondary school in Hitchin, with some traveling to Barnwell in Stevenage.
- There was no direct bus from Knebworth to Barnwell Secondary School.
- There was no bus between Knebworth and Datchworth.

In response to an earlier question from Councillor Martin Prescott, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that of the twelve letters of support for the closure of Swangley's Lane received, 9 of these were from residents on St Martin's Road, 1 on Swangley's Lane and 2 on Old Lane.

The Chair thanked Councillor Nash for their presentation and invited the applicant, Chris Ball to speak in favour of the application. Mr Ball thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- The site was allocated in the Local Plan, which was tested through public hearings, and found sound by the Planning Inspector and adopted by the Council.
- This application was located in site KB4.
- Traffic surveys were conducted in September 2025, to avoid the quieter period during the school holidays in August.
- Time was spent with Council planning officers, as well as HCC Highways, to discuss previous reasons for deferral.
- The updated transport assessment concurred with the HCC Highways assessment and supported the closure of Swangley's Lane. However, a change to introduce a collapsable bollard system to allow for emergency vehicle access was now included.
- The approach taken to the new assessment insured the cumulative impact of all developments in Knebworth were understood and was reviewed and accepted by HCC Highways.

- The highways authority suggested a two-strand mitigation approach which was accepted by the Applicant.

The following members asked points of clarification

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Claire Billing
- Councillor Nigel Mason

In response to points of clarification Mr Ball advised:

- HCC Highways objected to the original roundabout option and therefore the closure of Swangley's Lane was introduced.
- The section 106 education contribution would go into HCC approved projects.

In response to points of clarification, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that Council Planning Officers agreed with HCC Highways about the closure of Swangley's Lane.

In response to points of clarification, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised that it would be at the discretion of HCC to provide a key to a resident for the bollards. He confirmed that should there be an obstruction to Watton Road, then the emergency access through Swangley's Lane could be opened for all traffic.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed to grant permission and Councillor Emma Fernandes seconded.

The following members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Emma Fernandes
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Nigel Mason

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was still unclear why the closure of Swangley's Lane was necessary as neighbourhoods need to be liveable for residents.
- Whilst there were still concerns about the proposed closure of Swangley's Lane, the views of the professionals at HCC Highways have to be accepted when considering alternative options.
- This site was allocated in the Local Plan and that should be honoured, despite remaining concerns regarding the transport proposals.
- On balance this development was necessary due to a need to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, which the Council currently did not meet.
- The closure of Swangley's Lane would promote a modal shift to active travel methods and would encourage people to walk to the school. Granting access to local residents in an emergency to Swangley's Lane would be preferable.
- Using the tilted balance there was no significant reason for rejection and therefore planning permission should be granted.
- Highways had provided clear support for a proposal which included the closure of Swangley's Lane and it was important Members took this on board when making decisions.

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

**RESOLVED:** That planning permission is resolved to be **GRANTED** subject to the completion of a satisfactory legal agreement or similar mechanism, with details of delivery of the planning obligations identified at Table 3 and the following conditions and informatives, with any changes to the wording of the conditions or transfer of conditions to S106 planning obligations delegated to the Development and Conservation Manager, and the applicant agreeing to extend the statutory period in order to complete the agreement.

The meeting closed at 8.42 pm

Chair