

Greenbelt sites under consideration for building;

SASM H3: Land east of Netherfield Lane/south of Roydon Road
SASM H4: Land north of Chapelfields/east of St Andrew's Church

Number of Homes required

Here is an excerpt from the Housing and Planning Design document dated 14/10/2020

POLICY SASM H1: Housing Numbers

- I. In accordance with the housing strategy laid out in the District Plan to deliver sustainable development, Stanstead Abbots will accommodate a minimum of 94 new homes between 1 st April 2017 and 31 st March 2033. These will be achieved through a combination of the following and shown on the Policies Map*
- II. Site Allocation Policy SASM H3 Land east Netherfield Lane/south of Roydon Road for approximately 60 homes (sites K and L). GREENBELT*
 - *Site allocation Policy SASM H4, Land north of Chapelfields/east of St Andrew's Church for up to 10 homes (NEW site) GREENBELT*
 - *Site Allocation Policy SASM H5, Land south of South Street for up to 6 homes (sites 5 and 6 amended)*
 - *Site Allocation Policy SASM H6, land to the west of Amwell Lane for up to 10 homes (site 35)*
 - *Site Allocation Policy SASM H7, two garage sites on Abbots Way for approximately 6 homes (sites 32 and 33)*
 - *Site Allocation Policy SASM H8, land to the east of Amwell Lane for approximately 7 homes (site 23)*
 - *Completions of a further 10 homes which have planning permission or are under construction identified in Policy SASM H9 (site 28 and 30b) with the possible addition of a further 4 homes on site 29 pending written confirmation for East Herts District Council that these homes will be included in the target number of 94.*
 - *9 homes which have been built and occupied since April 2017 (sites 30a, 36, 37 and 38).*

II. In the context of paragraph 14 b) of the NPPF (February 2019) neighbourhood plans can meet their housing requirements through allocated sites and a policy for windfall. It is extremely likely that the existing sites with planning permission will all be completed for occupation before 31 st March 2033.

Permitted Development Rights

How many homes have or are being created under the Permitted Development rights under the new Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020. The main driver of change has been a need to enable the repurposing of buildings on high street and have generally been used to change commercial units into residential units without planning permission. How many homes have been counted in the expectation for 2033? What numbers were created in the last 10 years as a guide? Why have they not been taken into account by the Neighbourhood plan?

Definition of Homes

How are 94 homes defined? It could lead to a variable of 94 beds in a single bed home up to 470 beds in a five-bed home. A variable therefore of a population growth of 94 persons up to 564 if they were all five-bed. That's a considerable difference. Is there any adjustment to the 94 homes figure due to house sizes?

Existing sites with planning permission

As commented on; existing sites with planning permission will all be completed for occupation before 31st March 2033. How many homes have they included for windfall? We would suggest 10% so say 10 homes. Has this been built into the numbers by the Neighbourhood plan?

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

Communities have a right in law (The Localism Act 2011) to shape development in their area through the production of a Neighbourhood Plan. Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided. Review planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.

Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure they get the right types of development for their community where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.

A reminder of the Neighbourhood Plan Vision Statement

Our vision is for Stanstead Abbots, St Margarets and The Folly to thrive as a diverse and inclusive rural village that supports varied livelihoods and promotes community cohesion and well-being. We will promote sustainable development that provides locally affordable housing whilst protecting the vibrant historic character of our area, enhancing our riverside and green spaces for wildlife, recreation and natural flood defences, and recognising our place in the wider Lee Valley corridor.

The above statement has been agreed and approved by the Neighbourhood Plan representatives. Under the Draft Housing and Design Policies document that was issued on 14/10/2020, these key objectives have been ignored.

As stated by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee. "The Neighbourhood Plan is not just about housing.... It is also about PROTECTING what is important to us as a community OUR GREEN SPACES, OUR ECOLOGY!

Of the 2 Greenbelt sites that are being considered as building sites there has been much focus on one large site at Netherfield Lane. This would be creating a housing estate and is not within keeping of the character of the village and this is not what the local residents want.

Here we have outline and alternative proposal which we would like to discuss and for this to be considered by the Parish Council.

Netherfield Lane Alternative Proposal

Taking the above into account, this totals around 118 possible homes to be built when only 94 are required! Given the above figures, there only needs to be 26 new homes on the Netherfield site and not 60 as proposed. These homes could easily be built entirely on the Brownfield site as well as the planned B1 (employment site). With the actual requirement currently looking more like 20-30 homes, this could be accommodated within the Brownfield site. It could easily accommodate that number of homes with the appropriate amount of parking.

The fact that this would be less profitable for the developer is not a good enough reason not to consider this proposal. The profit of the developer should not sway a larger development on Netherfield Lane because it is convenient. It does not fulfill the objectives of the Neighbourhood plan or the desires of the parishioners.

We would like to see the house numbers reviewed and incorporated into the consultation process and discussed. Why are 60 houses being proposed?

Road safety of the Roydon Road

There is a very dangerous junction out of Netherfield Lane onto the Roydon Road. By making a smaller number of houses on the Brownfield site only, then there will be a smaller number of vehicles using this access.

The new development of 20-30 homes could be a gated community that is closed off from Netherfield Lane.

Greenfield Mature Trees and Woodland

The Netherfield green site is home to a number of fabulous mature trees. There are 2 oak trees that are more than 100 years old, one to the East close to the Brownfield site and one on the North side by the Roydon Road. The representative of Webster Estates has already outlined plans to remove this magnificent tree as it would be where their proposed entrance to the "housing estate" would be. In addition there are other trees and a large area of woodland. This is home to foxes, badgers and deer as well as many other creatures. In addition we can see owls, cuckoos and bats are nested in that woodland.

This site has matured over hundreds of years and must be saved at all costs!

Give back to the village

The current greenbelt site could be given back to the village. This was originally gifted to the village but now it is owned by the Webster Estate. This should be part of the trade imposed on the Webster Estate, given the huge profit they will be making from the Brownfield development.

The village would at least gain an area of natural beauty. It could become a cherry blossom orchard or other wooded area with grass, left natural and a path mowed into it for walking (like the scout field). This would be further enhanced by the protection of the natural environmental habitat at the rear of the brownfield site which supports a microcosm for the insects and animals not found in other parts of the village. We suggest that for every home built; a minimum of one tree to be donated/planted and paid for by developers; 20 homes = 20 trees. We would suggest that this is one of the key objectives; "enhancing our green spaces for wildlife."

The Search for more Brownfield Sites

The most interesting site which has been missed is the Openreach site near the station and technically in Great Amwell Parish. Modern telephone exchanges don't need big buildings like this - a digital exchange could be accommodated in the redundant signal box and the redundant toilet block could be converted into welfare facilities for the Openreach engineers. We suggest that there could be 8 to 12 flats on this site, preserving the lovely tree in a nice communal garden. We would be interested to know whether the owners have been approached as this may be a viable opportunity.

Many of the comments in the signed petition make the point that all Brownfield sites must be used first. This is the view of the local residents and must be taken into account.

What other Brownfield sites could be identified within or close to the village borders? Has this been considered as part of the Neighbourhood plan?

Almshouses Emergency Access

The Almshouses do not have an emergency access for ambulances. It could as previously suggested, have under grass matting for ambulance access. This would be something that could be done to protect the health and welfare of the Alms house residents. Again giving back to the community!

Here is a comment from our petition from a resident living in the Almshouses;

"We live in the Almshouses next to this green belt land, and if houses are built there, we shall have no privacy. There is also a lot of wild life there which would be destroyed."

Development outside of the Village Boundary

Netherfield Lane has been included as a proposed site but it is outside the village boundary. Why has an exception been made for this and not other areas? Kitten Lane is also outside of the village boundary as is Netherfield Lane and yet this has not been considered as part of the overall neighbourhood plan; why is this?

Ignoring the wishes of Parishioners

It would appear that the current Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Planning Committee are ignoring the wishes of its parishioners. The village voted on it's preferences and (only 4% were in favour of developments greater than 25 homes) 80% of the village voted in favour of small developments. Why is the Neighbourhood Planning Committee now ignoring that and suggesting a housing estate with 60 homes. Surely the PC and the NPC have an obligation to listen to the feedback from the village surveys. Why is this being ignored?

Drainage Issues

By Webster's own admission they have a problem with the current agreement with the Lea Valley and the likely withdrawal of their current agreement to make use of the drainage ditches adjacent to their land. The proposed land identified for development has extremely poor drainage with the surface water draining across the surface clay. Any development that effectively concretes over the green field will lead to a significant increase in surface water with no means of drainage and will lead to flooding of the whole of Netherfield Lane and Roydon Rd. Any failure of the drainage systems will lead to significant pollution to a national nature reserve.

The character of the village

A key objective stated in the Neighbourhood plan proposal was as follows;

"The development should be designed to be sympathetic with the historic grade I and II listed buildings directly to the north of the site."

The Baish Almshouses date from 1653 and are definitely part of the historic character of our village. Building a new housing estate on the field behind the alms houses would not be in keeping with the character of the village. This is green belt land, which should be "enhanced."

Building on Greenbelt

Looking at the wider implications; if this large green belt site is built on, on such a large scale then this will be perceived as a weakness when the gravel pit proposal is reviewed.

Any development allowed in Netherfield Lane will be a catalyst for further infill development down the whole of the lane.

Social /affordable housing

Sites of 10 homes or fewer are exempt from providing affordable housing through section 106 agreements. All sites considered should be designed to accommodate at least 12 -14 smaller houses so that social/affordable house could be spread around the entire village and not just in one location. Small developments of less than 10 houses will inevitably result in 4/5 bed luxury houses rather than being built to help the village and the local community. This contravenes one of the main objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Housing Spread between the 3 Parishes

The focus of the Neighbourhood plan is on one large site in Netherfield Lane. This is entirely within the Stanstead Abbots area of the village. This has an influence on school places at all primary schools are given based on proximity to the nearest school, in this case St Andrews. This school is already oversubscribed. If the new housing was more evenly spread then the nearest schools could also include St John the Baptiste in Great Amwell and schools on the Hoddesdon border and so this would alleviate the pressure on St Andrews. In fact the proposal gives no thought to where children will be educated and the key objective is to provide family homes.

Voting process within the Parishes; unfair process

The Parish is made up of 3 Parishes; Stanstead Abbots, St Margarets and Great Amwell and yet the bulk of the new housing is planned for the Stanstead Abbots part of the village. This is not fair or appropriate. There is potential to develop other sites as listed in the neighbourhood plan proposal that accrued a higher score than the Netherfield Lane site. Netherfield Lane came joint 16th on the possible list of site options and yet all of the focus has been placed on this one site. Discussions have taken place with Websters Estates in January 2020, when efforts should have been focused on finding a number of suitable Brownfield sites.

We understand that 3 Parishes are voting on the plans and yet Great Amwell have been excluded from development and yet they are still able to vote on matters that affect the other 2 Parishes and they are having an equal vote on these key matters; why is this?

It appears that within the current NP St Margret's has little or no development proposals yet this has the largest potential for development without impacting on the residents day to day life. There is potential to develop the land to the west of the sports field and the footpath between the A414 bypass and the B181. Why has this been rejected? This should be something that the village should be consulted on and form part of the referendum?

Issues with the process;

Lack of public information and communication

It is on public record that the development of Netherfield Lane with a proposal for 60 homes was discussed with the developer in January 2020 and yet it was only made public after the Parish meeting on 14/10/2020. This is a public transparent process and we are deeply concerned that information that has been known for most of this year has only just been made public at this time. The NP and PC are working on behalf of the local residents and Parishioners and there is no justification for this delay.

Minutes are taken at each meeting with the NP and PC and yet these are not published for many months. There is no opportunity for residents to see the internal discussions. Why is this so slow?

Public opinion ignored

There is no point in having consultations with local residents if their wishes are then going to be ignored. This has clearly been the case. The village voted on it's preferences and (only 4% were in favour of developments greater than 25 homes) 80% of the village voted in favour of small developments. It seems that it is convenient to put 60 homes in one location but this is not in the best interests of the village.

Communication difficulties

Covid means that local residents are unaware of what is going on. Many meetings have taken place on zoom and many residents do not have either the equipment or the technology to enable them to attend these meetings. What other means have communication have been used (other than internet based communications) since January 2020, nearly a whole year?

We suggest that all consultations and referendums are postponed until the spring when proper meaningful communication can take place. After all, there is until 2033 to have the new homes in place. Why is this being rushed through during a global pandemic?

Summary

These are the views of the residents and it is understandable that there is frustration with the process as communication could have been better. We would like to have answers to our questions and to engage in discussion on the topics raised here. The Protect Netherfield Lane Residents Group would support a sensitive proposal for up to 30 properties on the brownfield site, consisting of medium density terraced 2, 3 and 4 bedroomed housing, but are totally against any Green Belt development.

We would welcome further engagement with you to understand the responses to the issues residents have raised in this document and to find a workable solution that local residents and those who signed the petition would support.