



Response to Netherfield Lane residents from the Neighbourhood Plan Group

Thank you for raising these issues with us. We appreciate you feel strongly about the decision to put forward the Netherfield Lane site for consultation and fully sympathise with your anxiety about this. However, this isn't a decision we reached without due consideration and after a long process, as I hope you can see from this response.

Taking your points in turn:

1. Permitted Development

We have no record of any units produced under permitted development in the village, nor are we aware of any proposed. East Herts have in fact agreed to implement something called Article 4 Directions on employment sites in our village. This will mean that permitted development rights no longer apply in these areas. This is why the Neighbourhood Plan has not taken this into account.

2. How are 94 homes defined?

There is no fixed definition in terms of bedroom size; all we have been required to do is find sites for 94 homes. However, East Herts will have a preferred housing mix and it will most likely be a combination of 2, 3 and 4 beds as the site is for general needs housing (as are all our sites, which is reflected in our policies). It is extremely improbable that it will be made up of one particular type of housing.

3. Existing sites with planning permission

The sites we have identified either with planning permission, under construction or already constructed, will supply around 20 homes. There is no indication there will be any "windfall" homes extra to those for which the developers have been given planning permission on those sites, and even if there are this will in all likelihood make a miniscule difference of one or two homes. The term "windfall sites" is used to refer to those sites which become available for development unexpectedly and are therefore not included as allocated land in a planning authority's development plan.

4. The Neighbourhood Plan

We cannot see that you have demonstrated that we have ignored the key objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. There are many green and open spaces within the village that have been identified by and are covered by the Plan; protecting every part of the Green Belt which surrounds the village from any development whatsoever has never been part of the Plan. This is not something we are happy about; nobody joined the steering group with the aim of building on Green Belt, but there simply are not sufficient brownfield sites within the settlement boundary available to fulfill our quota. It is interesting that one of the sites you promote as an alternative – the site in Kitten Lane – is also a precious and much-appreciated green space, situated partly within the conservation area and with abundant wildlife including owls, buzzards, deer and rabbits.



5. Alternative Proposals

You are correct to state that our proposed sites amount to 118 homes. We have explained several times that we have built in a “buffer” of surplus sites as, a number of the sites within the village boundary are far from certain to deliver as planned. On only three of the sites considered suitable and achievable – the Netherfield Lane site, the Chapelfields garages and the site behind the Church on Cappell Lane – have we found landowners who are fully prepared to develop their sites. On the other sites, the landlords have shown some willingness to consider development when we proposed it to them but have no advanced plans. It must be emphasized that landowners have to be willing to develop in order for us to include in the plan.

6. Road safety of the Roydon Road

We fully agree that this junction is dangerous, which is why Websters have proposed to create an alternative access to the site, as you are aware. This would enable the current Netherfield Lane to become a cul-de-sac which would also mean that there is much less likelihood of this road being used to access the A414 for quarry vehicles. We are strongly opposed to a smaller “gated” development on the brownfield part of the site, which is not in the best interests of the community, particularly since it would include no affordable housing.

7. Greenfield Mature Trees and Woodland

We absolutely do not want to lose any more trees, particularly mature trees, on any of our sites, which is why the policy states that “All existing trees should be retained, enhanced and integrated with the development and there should be a net gain in biodiversity.” Websters have proposed to create more planting on this field (which, at the moment is mainly green open space with some trees on the boundaries). We understand that there may be some impact on trees behind the Almshouses, due to creating the access to the site, however.

8. The Search for more Brownfield Sites

We have been working on this plan since 2016. In that time, we have identified around 64 sites through:

- Surveys of the village
- Walkabouts carried out over a number of months
- Open days where the community was asked for their views
- Formal “call for sites”

The exception to this is the Amwell garages site which belongs to East Herts Council – they have not yet told us whether they will make this available for development, but crucially they have not refused permission so far. If they do it will be taken out of the plan.

It seems probable that any possible site has already been identified and considered. The site you specifically mention has indeed been explored. It was ranked quite high on our original site ranking list but the owner (BT) has told us they have no intentions of developing the site for residential occupation during the lifetime of the Plan. If it does become available, we will work with the owners to find the best use of the site though it seems unlikely we would get as many as 12 homes on the site.



9. Almshouses Emergency Access

Websters' plans for the Netherfield site include putting in a road which can be used as emergency access for the Almshouses. They also plan to create a kind of "courtyard" at the back so that there is no building right up to the Almshouses themselves.

10. Development outside of the Village Boundary

East Herts Council criteria for site selection are that a site must be either within or immediately adjacent to the village boundary. We defined "immediately adjacent" to mean within 50-100m of the boundary. The joint Netherfield Lane site (greenfield and brownfield) is within 50m of the settlement boundary, so no exception has been made for it. The Kitten Lane site is not immediately adjacent to the boundary.

11. Ignoring the wishes of Parishioners

The village has not at any time "voted for its preferences". Of those who responded to our survey, it was clear that most were not in favour of developing on the Green Belt (though it should be pointed out that at our open days last year, a number of people identified sites in the Green Belt as preferences for development). Most people also wanted small developments on brownfield sites of between 2-10 homes. Our initial focus therefore was on finding small brownfield sites within the village settlement boundary. Most of these were ruled out fairly quickly due to size or lack of willingness of the landowner to develop. Of the six sites we have selected, four are within the within the village boundary and are small sites. However, we have also had to try to reconcile conflicting views. Whilst people preferred small brownfield sites, they also expressed a strong preference for the provision of affordable housing. As is noted in point 15 below, only sites of more than 10 houses have to include affordable housing (and the government has recently proposed that this limit be raised to 40-50 homes). We therefore were faced with the very real possibility that we would end up with a number of small sites scattered throughout the village, with no affordable housing at all in the mix. As it is, we simply could not find enough suitable and achievable sites within the village boundary to meet our quota from these alone.

12. Drainage Issues

We would expect Websters to find a solution to the drainage problem. If Websters are unable to agree about use of ditches adjacent to their site then they will be required to find a solution within their site boundaries. If they are unable to do so, they will not get planning permission to build. ***It must be 4 remembered that our selection of the site in our Plan does not guarantee planning permission will be given by East Herts; all sites will still be subject to the usual processes.***



13. The character of the village

Websters have committed to working with the Baesh Arms Trust to develop around 6 properties for community housing that could be rented to low-income residents of the village. Given the unique character of the Almshouses we cannot expect them to mirror their development exactly, but we would be requiring them to be at the very least sympathetic in design.

There are a number of housing estates around the edges of the village – the Folly estate, Thele estate (just across the road from Netherfield), Chapelfields, etc., so it cannot really be argued that building an estate on this field is in itself out of character with the surrounding houses.

14. Building on Greenbelt

We cannot agree that allowing development in Netherfield Lane is likely to be “a catalyst for further infill development down the whole of the lane”. Given that we struggled to find sites within the village settlement area to accommodate our quota, we took the decision to look at the Green Belt sites immediately adjacent to the boundary and Netherfield Lane was the most suitable for development under the terms of the Plan. As is stated in our housing policy, District Plan Policy VILL1 allows a Group 1 village preparing a neighbourhood plan to review and redraw its boundaries to accommodate additional housing development. The designated Stanstead Abbots Village Development Boundary separates the village from the Green Belt. Paragraph 136 of the NPPF allows neighbourhood plans to make changes to the Green Belt boundary established in the strategic policies, where needed. Our focus was on making that boundary as defensible as possible. If the brownfield site at Netherfield was to receive planning permission for building, as seems probable, then the greenfield site would be surrounded on all sides by building and would thus become vulnerable to development as the Green belt boundary would have been breached. Therefore, redrawing the boundary to include the whole of the site (both brownfield and greenfield) is a logical step. Taking control of the redrawing of the boundary ourselves means that we can resist demands from developers to build further extensions onto the village.

15. Social /affordable housing

We are very well aware of the rules regarding the provision of affordable housing on sites of 10 homes or fewer and our preference would always be for sites large enough to provide some proportion of affordable housing. However, given the extreme constraints we operated under in terms of site selection (the surrounding Green Belt, the situation of much of the village in Flood Zone 3, the very built up nature of the village itself), essentially we had very little choice in the matter. The sites we have been able to select within the village boundary are mostly not large enough to accommodate more than 10 homes; we are looking at a minimum of 30 dph (dwellings per hectare) for all sites. This will prevent the kind of development you suggest of 5 bed luxury homes.⁵ You should also be aware that developers can legally escape their responsibility to include affordable housing on their sites by claiming lack of viability (i.e. they cannot make the kind of profit they require due to high costs of development). The brownfield site at Netherfield Lane is contaminated and will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to clear; this means that Websters cannot make it stack up financially with affordable housing in the mix. Only if it is made a joint site with the green field does it become viable to include affordable housing.



16. Housing Spread between the 3 Parishes and Voting Rights

The Neighbourhood Plan covers three parishes; the whole of Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets but only part of Great Amwell – the Folly Estate. Great Amwell is a group 2 village and as such is not required by East Herts to accommodate any further building; however, we were asked by East Herts to include the Folly in our plan and Gt Amwell agreed to this. Consequently they have voting rights as a parish in the formulation of the plan; though it must be stressed that ONLY the residents of the Folly will be able to vote on the final plan in the referendum. This has meant that we were able to search for potential sites on the Folly and we have been able to include 3 completed dwellings on that estate towards our quota. As stated before, given the constraints on our choice of sites it would be simply impracticable to insist that the housing be spread evenly throughout the village – though in fact, of the sites within the settlement boundary (not including those under construction/completed) , 2 are in Stanstead Abbots, and 2 in Gt Amwell. We are being asked to find sites for 94 homes; there is nothing in national or local planning policy that gives us scope to take into consideration the impact on local primary schools for such a limited number, in terms of ruling out sites in particular areas. It must also be remembered that all the significant new development in the village has taken place in St Margarets (the Granary, Lawrence Avenue and Sanville Gardens), with Rivermeads and Timber Close being constructed in Gt Amwell within the last 30 years. All 20 of the completed/under construction dwellings are also at that end of the village as are two of the proposed sites. There is no site which scored higher in our original ranking which is not being put forward for consultation, with the exception of two sites where the landowner expressed unwillingness to develop (the Granary and the BT site). We are expected as a Neighbourhood Plan to have discussions with developers on what they can build on sites we select. This is not something underhand. We understand that you as a Residents Group have met several times with Websters to discuss their plans.

17. Communication with Residents

COVID -19 has impacted heavily on us in terms of our ability to communicate with residents during the process of site selection. You will be aware that we held a series of events in 2019, including open days and presentations to various forums where our plans were discussed. We had another exhibition and open day planned for 28th March this year (you may have seen the posters in the High Street) at which 6 we would have displayed our policies, including those for sites, for residents to view and comment upon. This had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.

We were also posting regular updates in the parish magazine, which has also stopped printing.

Our steering group meetings have been open to the public for some time and the minutes are posted on our website. It is only since the pandemic that these have been held on Zoom. We recognise that not everyone has the technology to enable them to join online meetings but we cannot delay work on our plan until such time as meetings can be held in person; we have already had our deadline to produce a plan extended into 2022.