

## Comments

### Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan - Main Modifications Consultation (19/03/21 to 30/04/21)

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Please use a separate form for each representation.

**Which Main Modification, change to the Policies Map or section of the Sustainability Appraisal Report Addendum or Habitat Regulations Assessment Addendum does your comment relate to?**

**Response from Ashley Parish Council to Exam 19 and the Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan - Main Modifications Consultation ref Ashley village categorisation and HVI002 & HVI081**

Please use a separate form for each representation.

#### Representation

**FAO: Elaine Worthington**

**Date 29-04-2021**

Ashley Parish Council (APC) wishes to comment on the recommendations of the examination of the Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan with respect to two issues:

- 1 Re-categorisation of Ashley from a "restricted infill" village to a category A village.
- 2 The removal of HVI002 & HVI081 from the list of proposed HVI/LGS list.

#### **1. Categorisation of Ashley: APC response**

According to the designations developed as part of saved policy RA3, Ashley was categorised as a "Restricted Infill Village". We note that the current proposal is to designate Ashley as a category A village (infill village). We suggest that a category B (limited infill) categorisation would be more appropriate designation for Ashley. This is for three reasons, firstly the limited physical space within the village, secondly the village is linear, infill/ backfill will destroy the character and traditional layout. Finally, Ashley's architectural history and close associations with the eminent Victorian architect, Sir Gilbert Scott, who re-modelled the heart of the village which is dominated by the Grade 1 listed church.

We would also draw attention to the Ashley Development Principles as set out in Policy ASH1 which are, in our opinion, entirely consistent with a category B village as opposed to a category A village, and which we reiterate here (in their amended form):

#### **Ashley Development Principles**

Development in Ashley will:

- a. Be limited and follow the existing linear form of the village. Development should not be set-back from the public highway, maintain a sense of enclosure and use boundary treatments sympathetic to those currently in use throughout the village, i.e. stone walls.;

- b.(Protect the unique historic character of the village, the setting of its numerous Listed Buildings and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.) deleted
- b.c. Ensure that where historic stone walls are present, new development should be avoided where this would involve removal or alteration of any part of these walls.;
- d.(Maintain the 'soft' edges around the village boundary and avoid new development with high close-boarded fencing or brick walls which mark boundaries with the open countryside or at gateways to the village.) deleted
- c.e. Improve the gateway to the village from the west to better reflect the overall historic and rural character of the rest of the village.;
- d.f. Retain views of the church throughout the village.;
- e.g. Protect the green space that runs between Green Lane and Main Street and improve the connectivity of properties off Green Lane to the rest of the village. This could include an informal footpath through the central green space and along the river.;
- h.(Contribute, where appropriate, towards additional outdoor sports, open space, and allotments.) deleted
- .( Preserve views out to the open countryside, reflecting the density, design and layout of existing development in the area.) deleted
- f.j. Use high quality materials which respond to the local vernacular in order to preserve and enhance the historic character of the settlement. Appropriate materials may include traditional red brick/natural ironstone, natural blue/black Slate and/or Collyweston Slate, dependent on the individual site and its specific setting within the village; and
- g.k. Ensure that fenestration is of a high quality and uses natural materials that reflects the historic character of Ashley.

*Supporting evidence: Historical background* The Ashley Village Design Statement (ADS), a village project to explain the architectural history of Ashley which has been adopted by KBC and shared with Historic England, describes the historical significance of the village in some detail and its implications for future planning. Ashley is regarded as a 'remodelled village' because of the extensive demolition and re-building which took place between 1854 and 1888 when the wealthy rector, the Rev. R.T. Pulteney, commissioned the architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott to improve the existing infrastructure and create a number of new buildings. Consequently, the village has a notable Gothic Revival heritage, as well as many older houses of architectural interest. There are many Grade 1 and 2 listed buildings and monuments throughout the village which have been carefully preserved despite many attempted challenges over the years. Part of the village is a designated conservation area, one of the earliest granted.

As part of the remodelling of Ashley, Sir Gilbert Scott's vision (who was responsible for the design of St Pancras station and the Albert Memorial), widened and straightened Main Street to create a grander approach through the village, leading up to the redesigned Church. The Chancel of St Mary's Church, which dates back to the eleventh century, is described by English Heritage as 'An outstanding example of the Victorian Gothic style at its height'. The wall paintings in the chancel are Victorian and the work of Albert Bell.

### **1 Policy NEH3 (Historically and Visually important sites and Local Green Spaces): APC response**

With regard to the proposal not to designate spaces HVI002 and HVI081 as Local Green Spaces (LGSs), APC would like to submit the following general comments for consideration.

- (i) In redrafting sections of Kettering's Site Specific Local Plan (Part 2) and reaching their conclusions about the designation of protected spaces within the Borough, including in the village of Ashley, the Local Plan Examiner has repeatedly deferred to national policy, an argument that appears to negate the current drive towards "localism" in matters relating to planning policy. On this basis we would argue that there is room for a greater degree of "self-determinism", and that greater weight be given to the views of local communities in planning issues, including the need for protected green spaces within the village envelope and in its immediate environs.
- ii) In consulting with the village and compiling evidence to support of the protection of certain green field sites bordering the village, since 2012, APC has worked – as directed by KBC – towards meeting

the definition of an HVI. To find that this work is now “insufficient to meet the criteria of a LGS”, which are much stricter, does seem unfair and we feel that we are being unreasonably penalised for a situation that was not of our making. Moreover, it is hard to imagine what level of supporting evidence from the community would be considered sufficient to meet the LGS criteria of having been “identified by the community”, over and above that which we have already done over the years. Since 1995, and at each and every SSLDP consultation stage, APC has consulted widely with villagers and both HVI002 and HVI081 have been strongly supported by both the Parish Council and villagers alike. The Village Design Statement, mentioned above, also makes mention of the importance of green spaces and open vistas to the preservation of the character and charm of the village. We believe we have demonstrated a strong community desire to see these two sites earmarked as “special” and worthy of protection.

With regard to the two sites under question HV1002 (field on the Western edge of the village) and HVI081 (land behind the church), we re-iterate our case for designating each of these as LGSs below.

### **Ref HVI002 Ashley**

*Historical background: why this land is distinctly important to the people of Ashley*

This site has a unique history and as such is much valued by the village community. We would draw your attention to Policy 185 d of the NPPF, which states:

- 1 Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account: d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

The land, which sits at the edge of the village, was once part of the living for the historic adjacent chapel and Manse and is known as Meeting House field. The land is ridge and furrow (which is increasingly rare), was farmed but was also used for village events associated with the Chapel. The former Congregational Meeting House and The Manse are listed. In recent renovations English Heritage, The Victorian Society and the Chapel Society all went to great lengths to protect the look and the setting against the open field. Historically the chapel was always considered to be outside the village boundary and not recognised by the Church of England and the “well to do”, yet the building is one of the oldest in the village. It served as the chapel for twelve other villages in the area.

Worshippers of chapels were not allowed to walk past a Church of England Church on Sundays. People from the other villages used to get to chapel across the fields. Therefore all the footpaths leading into Ashley by-passed the Church and came into the village in front of the chapel across Meeting House field (HVI002) and still do! It functions as both the walking and driving gateway to the western (main) approach to Ashley.

In the reign of Queen Ann, the Rector of the Anglican Church was so angry at the large congregations attending the chapel, that he took up a new law which allowed him to raise the Militia and level non-conformist chapels. The worshippers fought back and a battle took place on the field.

The Congregational Chapel and Manse is noted as being the second oldest chapel in Northamptonshire and in the top ten oldest in England. It is thought to have started in Cromwell's time though the building with arrow slits is possibly much older.

### *Consultation history*

Ashley Parish Council consulted the village prior to the first submission to the plan as to what the villagers saw as being important features of the village that should be included. We had been informed by KBC that improving village gateways was an important aim as part of the consultation/ borough plan process (see ASH1/C). APC also worked with the authors of the Village Design Statement, (which has been adopted by KBC as being of material significance when considering planning applications). There was strong feedback from residents, which APC fully supported, that HVI002 was a much-valued piece of land. This was because of its unique history, its role as the western gateway setting of the village as well as being very significant open green space on the edge of the village. That it still retains traditional ridge and furrow and has an open aspect through which walkers enter the village and drivers look across when entering the village. Villagers were very concerned that this much valued, well used gateway, once so well kept, was being deliberately “let go” by the current owner for purposes of engineering its development potential.

### **Ref HVI081 Ashley (land behind church)**

*Background: why this land is distinctly important to the people of Ashley*

The primary reason for identifying site HVI081 as a site worthy of protection was, and still is, to preserve the open nature of the setting of the church. Since the 1950s, the requirement to preserve the dominance of the church within the street scene, by maintaining open space and clear, uninterrupted views of the church has guided planning decisions and has limited permitted development in the immediate environs. For example, In the 1960s permission to build a dwelling next to the church was only granted on the condition that it was single storey only so as to not unduly detract from the view of the church.

This site is unique in its position, lying due north of the church, and its retention as an open green space would ensure that the church would retain its visual dominance – in line with Sir Gilbert Scott's original vision for this part of the village. In short, it is of special importance to the village as it frames, and provides the setting for, a much valued building of architectural merit. It also boasts traditional ridge and furrow markings, a feature which is in overall decline in the Northampton area, and thus merits preservation wherever possible.

To your comment in Exam 19 (appendix), we would like point out that site HVI081 was originally one field; it has only recently been divided into two fields following the sale of the land by the landowner. Thus when HVI081 first was put forward, it was a single unit, not two. APC's interest is in the area that is directly behind the church, that is, a smaller area than originally proposed.

#### *Consultation history*

We accept that evidence of support from the village for the designation of site HVI081 is perhaps less strong relative to other sites under consideration, but this stems partially from the historical lack of awareness of the need to compile such a rigorous portfolio of evidence (see point 2 above) and partially from the only relatively recent upturn in the development pressure on green field sites in Northamptonshire embodied by the phrase "presumption in favour of sustainable development". The latter factor in a particular has prompted APC in more recent years to reflect more carefully on its development priorities and which fields merit greater protection, so that 50 years from now the village still boasts those features for which it is so prized today.

APC believes that the two above-mentioned sites meet national guidelines and criteria for LGSs. The NPPF supports the designation of LGS, for the following purposes:

- ensuring the space remains open and its community value is maintained;
- protecting the character of the area, including historic areas; and
- securing a natural corridor through development that enables people and wildlife to travel in and through or to link to surrounding paths.

We would argue that we have demonstrated that both nominated sites fulfil these functions, and meet the majority of LGS criteria, specifically:

Both sites border the edge of the village boundary and are therefore, "reasonably close to the community they serve"; s'.

The sites are "demonstrably special to a local community" and both were originally promoted and put forward by the community.

The sites both have "beauty, historic significance, recreational value", are "rich in wildlife" and "tranquil" and are "local in character".

Neither are extensive tracts of land.

Both are on the edge of the village conservation zone and provide a setting and balance to the conservation zone as well as being of importance and value in their own right.

#### **Concluding statement**

We would urge that the designation of Ashley as an A category village be reviewed and consideration given to a category B listing. We do not consider that we were consulted on this decision and believe that Ashley has more in common with the other category B villages.

APC also requests that the decisions pertaining to sites HVI002 and HVI081 be reviewed and that due consideration be given to designating these sites as LGSs. HVI002 is valued because of its historical associations and its role as both a setting and gateway to the western end of Ashley. HVI081, with its ridge and furrow vista, enhances the setting of an architecturally important grade 1 listed Church. In both cases, submissions are locally driven in origin were and have garnered a good deal of support.

**Do you wish to be notified?**

When the Inspector's Report is published?