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COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

Highfield Park Village Centre, Hill End Lane, Herts AL4 0RA
Telephone 01727 825 314
Website www.colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk
Email clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk



date	version	
19 March 2024	1	Issued to PINS

Land adjacent to Colney Heath Football Club, Colney Heath, St Albans

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

HERITAGE

Colney Heath Parish Council Rule 6 Party

Planning Inquiry

PINS Ref : APP/B1930/W/23/3333685

LPA REF: 5/2022/0599

Summary

The application site is in close proximity to three Grade II statutory listed buildings. The settings of all these old buildings would be adversely affected by the proposed development in that, rather than being on the edge of the open farmland, they would adjoin an area of tarmac and modern housing. All these listed buildings can be seen from the footpaths in the vicinity, hence the construction of new houses adjacent to the listed buildings would represent a loss of visual amenity for leisure walkers and other users of the footpaths.

The site can be viewed directly from the upper windows of all 3 buildings and the gardens of all directly abut the site, hence the settings of all would be harmed by the proposed development, which would place houses indicatively within 20 – 25m of the gardens. The principal sources of harm would be impacts on the setting of the listed buildings arising from loss of views to and from the open countryside, loss of direct access to the countryside from the gardens, noise from the new residents and the additional traffic they would generate, and light pollution during the hours of darkness. The overall effect of the development would be to change the setting from being wholly rural in character to one which is largely urban. It would irrevocably alter the relationship between the historic buildings and their environment.

Background

1. There are a number of features in and around Colney Heath which make a significant contribution to the historical record and heritage of the village. These include some of the older buildings and also other structures, such as the coal marker posts, which provide details of facets of life in earlier centuries. It is therefore important that these assets are protected from harm in order that they can continue to be appreciated by both residents and visitors.
2. Heritage assets which are deemed to be of particular value may be given statutory protection from harm. This is done through a process of listing on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) which is managed by Historic England. Once listed, an asset, together with its setting in the environment, is given protection from harmful change. Any activity or development which could have an impact on a listed asset and/or its setting, is required to ensure that any potential harms are considered and that mitigation measures are able either to

eliminate or to reduce the harm to an acceptable level. Critical to this are the identification of potential harms, the nature of mitigation measures and a judgement as to the extent of harm resulting from the development.

3. Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance to Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in their determination of planning applications which could have some impact on one or more heritage assets.

The Present Application

4. As indicated above, Colney Heath village includes a number of features which are considered to have some heritage value. Of particular importance are listed buildings which would be impacted by the proposed development. The NHLE details 16 sites within the village, including farmhouses, barns, cottages and coal duty marker posts. It is recognised, however, that most of these would not be adversely affected by the development. This may be because they are at too great a distance from the proposed development site for any visual, noise or pollution effects to be noticeable, or because the site is not visible from these positions due to either buildings or trees being in the lines of sight and any other effects of the development not being of significance.
5. In the present case the NHLE includes three assets which are close to the site. These are the Crooked Billet public house, Apsley Cottage (90 High Street) and Mole End (92 - 94 High Street); all are Grade II listed i.e. they are of special interest.

The Crooked Billet (Figure 1 below)

6. Historic England provides the following details:

Public house. Circa early C19 with later C19 extensions. Weatherboarded timber frame with plain tile roof, hipped on right. Rendered brick extension with slate roofs. Brick axial stacks. Plan: The original house was a 2-room plan weatherboarded cottage with a central axial stack. The right hand (S) bay was added later in C19 and the back range (E) is even later C19 or early C20. There are outshuts on the left (N) and rear (E) of the original cottage. Exterior: 2 storeys. 3-window west front. C19 2-light casements with glazing bars. Panelled

and glazed door to right of centre with small C20 gabled porch; another door on left with glazed door and canopy. Weatherboarded outshut on left and taller brick range at rear. Interior: Boarded dado in centre (original right hand) room, and kitchen in left hand room. Attic chambers ceiled but tie-beams exposed.

7. The 1871 census records that the resident of the Crooked Billet was a publican i.e. the building has been used as a public house for over 150 years. It has the character of a small old-fashioned country pub with mostly wooden seating and flagstone flooring. It has a garden which is well used by customers during the summer months. The pub, a free house, has been in the same ownership for over 30 years.



Figure 1 The Crooked Billet

Apsley Cottage (Figure 2 below)

8. This private residence is described by Historic England as follows:-

House. C18. Timber frame. Roughcast. Steep slate roof. 2 storeys. 2 C20 glazing bar casements in original openings. Gable ends have broad external chimney stacks, the left one with external oven and formerly enclosed by outshut. Circa 1900 door and hood. C20 single storey right extension.



Figure 2 Apsley Collage

Mole End (Figure 3 below)

9. This is believed to be the oldest building in Colney Heath village, previously consisting of two separate cottages, Alpha and Beta; it is a private residence. It is described by Historic England as follows:-

House. Late C17 or early C18. Timber frame. Roughcast walls.

Plain tile roof with 2 gabled dormers. 1 storey and attics. C20 casements and porch. External gable end stacks, the left one enclosed by C20 single storey extension. 2 bays. Chamfered floor beams. Circa 1980 rear extension.



Figure 3 Mole End

10. The relative positions of the three buildings and their environment are shown in Figure 4. This demonstrates the centuries-old relationship between the buildings and their setting in the countryside.

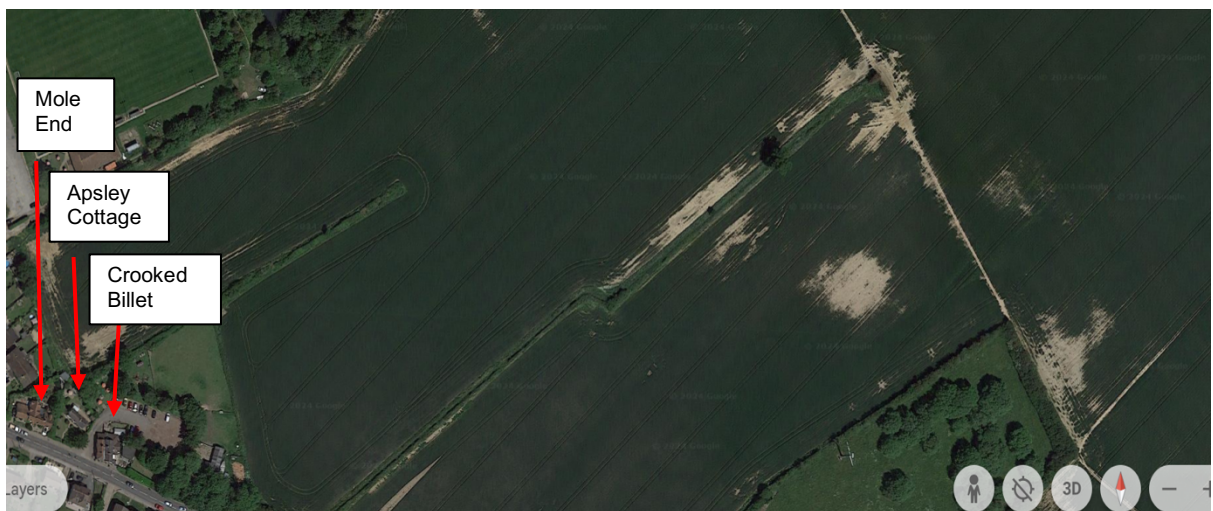


Figure 4: Aerial view of the setting of the listed buildings

11. It is the case that these assets consist not only of the buildings but also of their settings, and paragraph 201 of the NPPF is clear that the impact of a development on the setting of an asset must be also considered in assessing the

extent of harm to the asset. The land has been farmed for many years and it is highly likely that the Crooked Billet has served farm workers throughout its history and also that the two (previously three) cottages were dwellings for these workers. It is the contention of CHPC that the settings of the buildings, and thus the heritage assets, would be harmed by the proposed development. These assets all adjoin the proposed site, which is currently open farmland, hence their settings would be severely impacted by the construction of new buildings on the site.

12. The harms to the listed buildings and their settings which would arise from the proposed development are of two types. Firstly, there are those which relate to the loss of openness and access to open farmland, including the loss of pleasant views to and from the countryside and, secondly, those arising from the proximity of the new dwellings and the activities of the residents. The latter would be expected to include noise from the building works, and from residents after completion, and light pollution from street lighting and houses during the hours of darkness.
13. All have frontage onto the High Street and have gardens which either directly abut the site border or, in the case of the Crooked Billet, are separated from it only by a narrow line of trees/hedgerow. There are openings in this line to permit direct access from the garden to the open land. The centre of this building is c35m from the site border and a further 10m from the nearest buildings. The centres of both Apsley Cottage and Mole End are both c18m from the site border and a further 23m from the nearest buildings. (N.B. All distances are approximate, as measured from Google Earth).
14. The garden of the Crooked Billet, which is widely used by pub customers during the summer months, would be a mere 15m from a new house at the nearest point. Figure 5 shows a view from this garden as it currently is, and Figure 6 shows a photomontage of the same view after construction of the proposed buildings. This would clearly detract from the rural and tranquil setting of the garden, making it much less attractive for customers seeking a relaxing environment. This would be likely to result in adverse consequences for the business of the pub.



Figure 5: Current view from the garden of the Crooked Billet



Figure 6: Photomontage of the view in Figure 5 after completion of the development

15. The edge of the gardens of Apsley Cottage and Mole End are approximately 20m from the nearest buildings on the site. As in the case of the pub garden, the proximity of the houses on the site would result in the loss of the historic rural character of the setting. It would also be likely to detract from residents' enjoyment of their gardens, especially during the summer.

16. The appellant's Heritage Statement notes that Apsley Cottage is set below the level of the site and that the ground floor windows are not visible from it. It does not report that the site is visible from the garden of the cottage, with a clear line of sight towards the football club (Figure 7). It is also the case that there is a view across the site from the upper windows of the cottage (Figure 8).



Figure 7: View across the site from the garden of Apsley Cottage



Figure 8: View across the site from an upper window of Apsley Cottage

17. It is clear that, should the proposed development be approved, the views shown in Figures 7 and 8 would be replaced by a view of one or more houses at distances of around 20m and 40m respectively.
18. The occupants of Mole End also enjoy views across the site from the summer house in the garden (Figure 9) and from the upper windows (Figure 10).



Figure 9: View across the site from the summer house in the garden of Mole End



Figure 10: View across the site from an upper window of Mole End

19. The proposed development would completely destroy the views across the open countryside from the three listed buildings. It would also eliminate views of these historic buildings in their original setting from the open land and particularly from the footpaths in the vicinity. Figure 11 shows a view towards the buildings from the footpath on the western edge of the site; the buildings would be no longer visible from this viewpoint which would be restricted to views of newly built houses. This represents a harm to the listed buildings and their setting and also a loss of amenity for the many people who use the footpaths in the area.

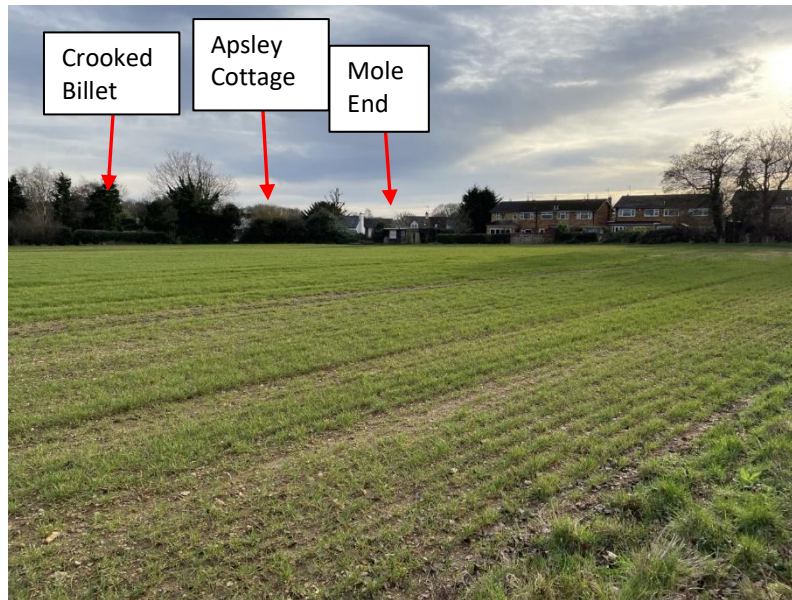


Figure 11: View from the footpath on the western edge of the site looking SE towards the Crooked Billet, Apsley Cottage and Mole End

20. The setting of the Crooked Billet is enhanced by the direct access to the countryside from the garden; this is shown in Figure 12 below. Rather than having access to the open countryside and to the nearby footpaths leading to the wider environment, as has been the case for many years, the proposed development would offer access only to tarmac and modern housing. This represents a significant loss of amenity for pub customers and residents of the listed buildings and a demonstrable harm to their setting.



Figure 12: View across the site from an access point in the garden of the Crooked Billet

21. It is certain that the proposed development would result in a marked change to the setting of the listed buildings. The construction stage would inevitably require many heavy vehicle movements onto and across the land, not only detracting hugely from the visual environment but also creating a substantial amount of noise. This would be greatly to the detriment of the nearby buildings, which are only a few metres from the site border, their setting, and their residents.
22. The impact of noise pollution on the setting would not cease on completion of the building works, but would continue into the indefinite future. The noise generated by residents of the development may well be less intense than that due to construction, but it would be noticeable all day and every day.
23. Based on 2021 census data for Colney Heath, it would be expected that the 45 new dwellings would bring 70 – 75 vehicles to the site. This number of additional vehicles, and their associated movements, would bring a significant level of noise to what has historically been a very quiet area. The listed buildings and their setting would be subject to vehicle movements which are likely to continue from early morning to late evening; they would be particularly unwelcome to High Street residents hoping to enjoy a restful time in their gardens during the summer months
24. In addition to vehicle movements there would inevitably be other sources of noise from the new houses. While it is unlikely that these would reach nuisance level, it is the case that any noise generated would be in excess of the noise levels in that environment at any previous time and would therefore be to the detriment of the existing buildings and their settings.
25. A further adverse consequence of the proposed development for the listed buildings would be light pollution. Other than the street lighting to the front of the buildings and the occasional floodlighting at the football club, there is at the present time, and would historically have been, little perceptible lighting across the site after dusk.
26. The occupation of new houses built close to the rear of the existing buildings would undoubtedly result in lighting which would be clearly visible from these buildings and their gardens. Street lighting would be evident at least until

midnight and the houses themselves would be lit internally and, in some cases, externally as well. This latter form of lighting can be especially intrusive when the lights are triggered by the intermittent movement of people and even domestic animals. The overall impact of the lighting would be to change this aspect of the environment from one of undisturbed rural darkness to one of a well-lit and largely urban character.

27. It can be seen from the above that the proposed development would have a permanent detrimental effect on the setting of the existing buildings. Rather than being at the edge of an extensive area of open farmland, the buildings would be adjacent to newly built houses; the environment would be changed from pleasantly rural to largely urban. The current views across the farmland from the buildings and their gardens would be lost forever, as would the historic relationship between the buildings and the land; views of these buildings from the nearby footpaths would also be lost. What is currently a quiet and peaceful area would be disturbed by the unwelcome noise generated both during construction and subsequent occupation of the houses, and by the lighting on the site. The overall effect of the development would be to cause significant harm to the character of the listed buildings and their settings, and hence to Colney Heath village also.

End