

Residential Development of 42 Dwellings together with associated public open space, access roads, garaging and car parking

After the last meeting, at which this application was deferred for further work on the safety issues, I expected evidence of significant effort and clear application of Highways engineering skill. I feel that the new proposals fall far short of those needed to persuade the community that the development is acceptable and to ensure the requirements of the NPPF are met.

The community have for many years been concerned at the hazards that exist in the area of the Mill Lane to Main Road junction, particularly in front of Street Farm, the Grade II listed Kings Cottage and The Pump House. These are pre-existing issues but point to significant safety problems. These limit future residents' use of sustainable means of transport to the local facilities: the village shop, recreation ground, village hall and primary school.

At the previous meeting the issues: a narrow road carrying substantial traffic including that from Wattisham, with no footway, on a bend and overhung by the listed buildings, were discussed. Visibility through the bend is severely constrained and a vehicle entering from either end can't see further than about halfway through the section.

At the previous meeting several possible solutions to the problem were proposed informally:

- a) A one-way system with flow control combined with a footway,
- b) a footway on an existing right of way uphill towards the allotments and a "back entrance" to the proposed development
- c) a 20-mph zone to reduce risk.

I had hoped that such suggestions would be examined in detail by Highways engineers and produce a significant reduction in the risk to pedestrians walking to the school from the new development.

The solution produced appears flawed. It should be judged in accordance with the NPPF and "refused on highways grounds if ***there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impact on the road network would be severe.***" Judgement appears to be made against the second criteria, but the first relating to safety is given little weight.

There appears to have been no engagement with the community and indeed a Highways email appears to state that there is no resource to accomplish that, despite the value of the development. This is just not acceptable.

The current proposal

You have before you a proposal to put the footway on the right of way in place together with a painted footway on the Stocks Hill side of Main Road and an "informal one-way system". As you will hear, residents are not impressed. The footway is on a steep rise at the Main Road end and appears to be on private land not under the applicant's control.

The on-road footway, a shared space, is as County Highways point out, narrow but its main issue is that pedestrians are unprotected. Paint on the road provides little security. Physical kerbs would be preferable but are difficult to place as they would compromise road use by large vehicles. The footway is 30 metres long and it would take 22.5 seconds for a fit pedestrian, unimpeded by a child or a mobility difficulty, to pass. If they set off in a gap in the traffic, which they could see at best some 220 metres away, a vehicle at 30 mph would travel 300 metres towards them.

The footway placed as proposed would move traffic towards the listed buildings which have an overhang known to be vulnerable. It would appear more appropriate on the Kings Cottage side as there it would move traffic away and protect the overhang.

The one-way system is “informal” as drivers entering either end, those with priority or not, would not be able to see vehicles entering from the opposite end. It is difficult to see how we might imagine that would work. Some form of signalling between ends would appear to be essential if this set up is to have any value. Traffic controlled lights would appear essential although they are not normally acceptable in a rural village.

This analysis suggests to me that clearly ***there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety*** were the development to go ahead with highways measures as they are currently defined.

I am reluctant to propose improvements as I am not a highways engineer. However, the parish believe that a minor re-alignment to Main Road on the development side of Kings Cottage and placement of the footway on the Kings Cottage side of the road would allow vehicle inter-visibility and the priority one-way system to be implemented safely. That would allow residents of the development to adopt sustainable modes of transport.

If the meeting is determined to proceed with the current highway design, then at minimum a 20 mph zone should be put in place to improve a pedestrians chance of survival if or when an accident occurs.

Conclusion

The revisions to this application do not address adequately the issues of the unacceptable impact on highway safety that arise from the need for pedestrian traffic from the proposed development to transit the section of Main Road in front of Kings Cottage and The Pump House. The application should be rejected.



Figure 1 & 2 Road at Kings Cottage Somersham Informal photos. Mobile Phone positioned at end of right of way