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North Hertfordshire District Council
Council Offices
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Hertfordshire
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Our ref: AC001 – 6

21 September 2026

Dear Paul

**LAND EAST OF BEDFORD ROAD AND NORTH OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL,
HITCHIN (APPLICATION REFERENCE 25/03234/FP)**

On behalf of Arte Construction Limited and Simon Ward & Richard Horwood, I write with regard to the application for planning permission to create 50 no. one, two, three and four bedroom houses and apartments plus associated landscaping, open space, roads, drainage and other infrastructure on the land to the east of Bedford Road and north of The Priory School, on the northern edge of Hitchin (application reference 25/03234/FP) and further to the comments from your colleagues in the urban design team that we discussed earlier this month.

The update to the proposed scheme submitted on 19 June 2026 included notes on urban design in the covering letter and a separate *Response to the North Herts Design Code*, explaining that the application for planning permission was submitted before the publication of the draft of the *North Herts Design Code* but that many of the principles had been accommodated as part of the principle of a development responding to its context so that it integrates with and enhances the surroundings. Further comments have since been received, highlighting areas where improvements to the proposed scheme could be delivered and most of the suggested comments have been incorporated into a further update to the proposed scheme. Moving clockwise from the northernmost point of the proposed scheme, the updates are:

- The open space sits at a lower level than the new homes, addressing the topography of the site as well as allowing surface water attenuation to be placed against the wall that follows the entrance road, with steps from the street down to the open space added at the last update. However, a step-free route has always been available by heading to Bedford Road and doubling back on the “figure of eight” loop through the open space and while this might be a slightly longer route for residents, it will also encourage neighbours to divert off their walk along the main street and could reduce the demand for recreational use in the nearby nature reserve.

- The basin is for attenuation and not soakage, so it will be available for play most of the time. The submitted design shows it is bunded on the north side because it is so close to the river, which also means that the basin is roughly at ground level and the small slope up and back down into it is no deterrent to informal play, dog exercise or simply sitting out in dry weather. The attenuation function means that it is not landscaped, therefore it is well placed to be the primary “kickabout” area in the open space.
- Plot 50 sits immediately alongside the attenuation basin and has been turned so that the front door faces north, adding informal surveillance and a sense of ownership to the eastern end of the open space. A new and bespoke “HE” house type has been created for the plot so that it continues to sit comfortably with plot 49 as a semi-detached pair and as an end stop to the view into the site, making clear that the public realm turns right when approaching from Bedford Road.
- The scheme differentiates between the street (blacktop) and the parking spaces (permeable paving) so there is variation in the hard landscaping and it does not appear as a continuous surface. Furthermore, the houses are brought forward to the edge of the street so that cars do not dominate the street scene and can only be glimpsed in long views down the street.
- The two blocks of apartments at the southern end of the site are combined to create a single building, still at two storeys tall and drawing a distinct end to the street. Car parking is relocated to the edge of the public realm so it can be seen from the apartment that it serves (the building is only one apartment deep), with space for access paths and street trees to soften the hard surfacing and maintain a landscaped setting for the building. The change also brings the communal amenity space together into a single and therefore larger area that is hidden from the street, with balconies added (including a veranda on the ground floor) so residents also gain private space that faces south. The communal cycle store and refuse store remain under the building, as previously proposed, and the mix of accommodation is unaltered.
- The shared surface cul-de-sac streets are joined to form a loop, maintaining fire access and the allowing delivery vans or a refuse freighter to avoid reversing manoeuvres at the ends of the roads. The change also helps to reduce the extent of impermeable surfacing, reducing the demands on the surface water attenuation system and attenuation basin.
- The frontage to Bedford Road is not intended to provide usable open space: the drainage infrastructure and proximity to the road will not make it an attractive place to spend time and the landscape scheme will be updated to fill it with dense planting so it becomes a visual buffer and a distinct edge to the existing street, with the public encouraged to pass through it via the footpath links at the ends of the east-west sections of the loop.

I trust that you will agree that the updates to the proposed scheme present improvements when compared to the previous scheme and that the comments from your colleagues in the urban design team have played a positive role in helping to emphasise that a well-designed place will be created, reflecting Policy DP3 in the latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework and responding to Policy D1 in the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan. In support of the changes to the proposed scheme that are described above, I would be grateful if you could substitute the following drawings in place of the previous versions submitted in support of the application for planning permission:

1. Detailed Layout	AC001-PL-03 rev. E
2. Parking Layout	AC001-PL-04 rev. F
3. Garden Areas Layout	AC001-PL-05 rev. F
4. Storey Heights Layout	AC001-PL-06 rev. E
5. Refuse Layout	AC001-PL-07 rev. E
6. Materials Layout	AC001-PL-08 rev. E
7. Affordable Housing Location Plan	AC001-PL-09 rev. E
8. Fire Strategy Plan	AC001-PL-10 rev. E
9. Block A Apartment, Floor Plans	AC001-HA-BKA-01 rev. C
10. Block A Apartment, Elevations	AC001-HA-BKA-02 rev. B

Furthermore, the following drawing should be added to the pack of information that supports the proposed scheme:

11. House Type HE, Plans and Elevations	AC001-HA-HD-01 rev. A
12. House Type HE, Plans and Elevations	AC001-HA-HE-01 rev. A

These drawing are submitted by e-mail in PDF format, but if you need paper copies, please let me know.

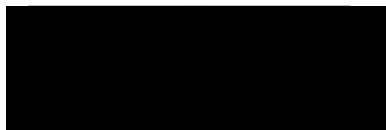
Please note that the landscaping scheme will also be updated to match the revised scheme and that it, together with the coloured Development Layout (which shows the correct positions of the proposed trees and landscaping) will be submitted under separate cover next week.

Outside the discussions on the proposed layout, the applicants note that the preparation of the new local plan is ongoing and that the *Green Belt Assessment for East Herts, North Herts and Stevenage* (prepared by LUC, dated June 2026) has been published. The site is considered as a separate land parcel under reference HN13 and is shown to be outside of any Footnote 7 designation (as defined by the previous version of the National Planning Policy Framework) and “potentially suitable for definition as grey belt land”. This conclusion is reached because the contribution of the site to the purposes of the Green Belt are ranked as “weak/no”: it does not check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (purpose A), does not prevent neighbouring towns from merging (purpose B) and does not preserve the setting and special character of a historic town (purpose D), meaning that it has been found to meet the definition of grey belt as set by the NPPF. It is also found to have weak/no value in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (purpose C).

This application already demonstrates that the site is grey belt and that it is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and the independent report commissioned by North Herts District Council as part of the preparation of the new local plan adds weight to this position. The publication of the new NPPF does not change this conclusion, and the proposal remains compliant with Policy GB7(g) in that it utilises grey belt land and does not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt, there remains evidenced unmet need for new homes in the district, the site is in a sustainable location, and that it complies with Policy GB8 and the Golden Rules (50% affordable housing is proposed, infrastructure improvements will be secured by a Section 106 Agreement and on-site green space is included in the scheme).

I trust that will find that this update to the proposed layout responds to the positive urban design comments and will ensure that a well-designed place will be created, picking up the seven points in NPPF Policy DP3(2). However, if you have any queries or should you require any additional information before you can complete your report to the Planning Control Committee with a recommendation that planning permission be granted for the creation of 50 no. one, two, three and four bedroom houses and apartments plus associated landscaping, open space, roads, drainage and other infrastructure on the land to the east of Bedford Road, Hitchin, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address.

Yours sincerely



MICHAEL SMITH

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