



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW

Date: 14 August 2025
Our ref: 07003

For the attention of: Naomi Reynard

Application ref: 25/01696/OP
Location: Land South East Of Holwell Road And North Of Hambridge Way, Pirton, Herts
Proposal/Description: Outline Application: Outline application for the erection of up to 130 dwellings with public open space, landscaping, sustainable drainage system (SuDS), and associated works with all matters reserved save for access.

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Outline planning application. This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

Summary:

Overall, we have some difference in judgements regarding the conclusions of the LVIA. We have some concerns regarding the visual impact associated with the development and also judge that development could be reduced to offer additional public open space and reduce the density on the settlement edge. We advise that our recommendations regarding the design of the submitted proposals are considered.

Site Context:

The application site is located to the east of Pirton Village, within a rectangular shaped field adjacent to the new development on Drovers Way. The Icknield Way Public Right of Way (PRoW) runs along the southern boundary of the site, connecting Pirton to Hitchin and beyond. The boundaries of the site are defined by tall hedgerows, however they are fragmented in places. Pirton Conservation Area partially adjoins the site on West Lane to the north, however is mostly separated from the area owed to the new adjacent development. The Chilterns National Landscape is located around 800m~ from the site to the south of Pirton village.

Planning Policy Context:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

Policies to be considered that are relevant to landscape include Policy ENV2, ENV3, ENV4, NE1, NE2, NE7, NE8, SP9, SP12 and SP13.

Policy NE3 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is also considered relevant, owed to its location close to the site.

Pirton Neighbourhood Plan (Made April 2018)

The site is located in Visual Character Area 1.

The application should consider Views within the Plan. For example, View 7 from Hambridge Way east across the Pirton Lowlands and Hertfordshire to the Letchworth ridge, which has an expansive view towards the boundary with Hitchin from the ancient Hambridge Way Bridle path (and now cycle track) frequently used by hikers and cyclists.

PNP1 Meeting Local and Wider Needs, PNP2 Design and Character, PNP4 (Hedgerows, Trees and Verges), PNP5 Wildlife, PNP7 Key Views and Vista, PNP12 Connectivity.

Pirton Character Assessment

Within the assessment, the site is located within Important Views 4, 7 and 8. View 7 is the most notable, with the site located in the foreground of long views of the Chilterns escarpment from Hambridge Way.

Review of the LVIA:

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by Icen Projects (May 2025).

Landscape Character

The site is located within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 218 Pirton Lowlands of the North Herts Landscape Study. Key characteristics include the large arable open flat landscape, remnant hedgerows and woodland shelter around settlements.

A summary of the effects on Landscape Character have been included on Pages 44-47 of the LVIA Document 2.

We would have preferred LCA 218 Pirton Lowlands to have been included as a specific landscape receptor, so that the submitted assessment of effects directly relates to the impacts on the characteristics of the relevant LCA.

The effects on the Site (Page 45) are assessed as **minor adverse** at Year 1, and **moderate to minor adverse** at Year 15. Initially, we question how the effects associated with the development increase over the time frame assessed, where we would expect the effects to reduce. We therefore question the success of any mitigation proposed to reduce anticipated effects.

We would also judge that the indirect effects resulting from the development on the site itself would be higher than **minor adverse** at Year 1. Considering the site will no longer be experienced as open arable countryside, we would expect major-moderate adverse effects to occur. We therefore judge that the judgements have been underassessed in this instance.

The development does encroach into the countryside beyond the eastern edge of the site. However, this is adjacent to the settlement edge and is contained to the existing field boundaries of the site which offer some low-level separation to the wider countryside.

Visual Effects

The assessment is accompanied by 37 Type 1 viewpoints. We judge that the selected viewpoints are appropriate and representative of the available views towards the site.

Pages 48-52 of the LVIA Document 2 provide judgements of effects for viewpoint receptors.

Moderate effects are judged from the Icknield Way Trail/Hambridge Way from the south of the site, reducing to **minor-negligible adverse** effects at Year 15. Since the rural character from this important historic route are being impacted by the proposals and could be visible and dominant from this sensitive receptor, we would describe effects to be **major-moderate** from this visual receptor. At Year 15, effects would be no less than **minor adverse**.

Development is extending the built edge of Pirton further east into the countryside and along Hambridge Way/Icknield Way. From the east, the rooflines of existing development on Drovers Way and Strawplaiters Green are observed. Development within the site would bring the built edge closer to the existing vegetated boundary which currently sits between Pirton and views from the east.

All other public viewpoint receptors are judged as no greater than minor adverse at Year 1 and are largely negligible adverse at Year 15. We judge that some of these effects may be judged as greater than that assessed within the LVIA.

We also note that the assessed effects (Page 48) refer to views from Cooper Elms being heavily filtered by the existing vegetation along the west boundary of the site. However, the proposed access to the scheme is obtained through Cooper Elms where this vegetation is proposed for removal. Therefore, the visual effects from here are likely to be more than assessed within the LVIA.

Overall, we judge that the assessed effects may be greater than that assessed within the submitted LVIA. Views from Hambridge Way and the east are considered to be the most impacted by the proposed development, given their recreational function and countryside edge context. Effects on these receptors will be difficult to mitigate owed to the rural context they are situated within.

Review of the Submitted Information:

Prior to this application, two previous applications are relevant to this site:

- Application 17/01543/1 was dismissed at appeal in September 2018.
- Application 17/02563/1 was refused in December 2017.

As part of the above applications, both landscape character and visual impact concerns were raised.

At the time of the above applications, the neighbouring development on Drovers Way had not yet been constructed. The adjacent development has now been inhabited for around 5 years. Within the North Herts Local Plan, the settlement boundary for Pirton now includes the neighbouring Drovers Way development and therefore abuts the site edge.

The previous refused schemes were for 99no. and 84no. dwellings. The proposed development under this application is for 130no. dwellings, which is considered a large increase compared to the previous schemes. We have concerns regarding the overdevelopment of this rural edge site with increased housing densities.

Public Open Space (POS) is limited to a narrow band following the site edges, and an area to the southern boundary. Whilst we agree that proposing POS on the southern boundary would contribute to mitigating the visual effects on the existing POS and Hambridge Way/Ickniel Way, we would judge that a more generous buffer should be provided from this southern boundary. The development edge should be brought back from the southern boundary to allow a wider landscape buffer to the southern edge. To be representative of the minor-negligible judgement presented within the LVIA, we judge that the built edge needs to be set back further from the southern PRoW.

We would also judge that POS is very limited around the site edges. This further relates to our comment above regarding the overdevelopment of the scheme.

Large areas of the POS are also utilised by attenuation ponds. Utilising these features as ponds will contribute to the rural character of the edge of Pirton adjacent to sensitive views along the PRoW, however, this further removes accessible open space for the development. Following on from above, we therefore advise that moving the development edge further north would allow for additional POS to be included within the development.

We consider that given the development of the adjacent parcel on Drovers Way, that the proposed development is less incongruous with the surrounding townscape character. The site also abuts the settlement edge of Pirton and is contained to the rectangular shaped field on the eastern edge. We do however reiterate our judged overdevelopment of the site with limited available POS. If minded for approval, we have the following comments based on the submitted Development Framework Plan and Design and Access Statement (DAS):

- Housing densities should be higher towards the west of the site and less towards the rural edge and Hambridge Way.
- We welcome the proposed native thicket which runs along the site boundaries however we advise this extends to the southern boundary which runs alongside the Hambridge Way/Ickniel Way and is the most sensitive visual receptor.
- There are opportunities for additional small POS throughout the development, as opposed to concentrating most of the open space to the perimeter edges. We note that two focal spaces are proposed within the scheme, however we advise that these spaces are more ambitious in scale and their green infrastructure links to the site edges.
- Frontages should be orientated to front on to the open spaces which follow the outer edges of the scheme, to ensure there are limited exposed rear gardens.

- A pedestrian link onto Hambridge Way/Ickniel Way would be a beneficial addition. Desire lines through the south-east corner are likely to establish over time and therefore an entry point in this location would be a beneficial addition, which could also form part of a small circular route within the development.
- Mown paths should be proposed through the meadow area to provide more publicly accessible spaces.
- A pedestrian access should be proposed at the north-west corner on to Holwell Road.
- No fencing should be proposed around the attenuation ponds. Planting should be proposed on the banks and around the basin to act as a soft boundary.
- The use of parking courts should be avoided, unless they are designed to include significant landscaping. If proposed, they should be designed to provide safe and secure parking and access to properties whilst also providing suitable soft and hard landscaping that ensures the space is of high quality and in turn remains actively used.
- In respect of SuDS design, we would expect the ground contouring, planting and inlet and outlet design to be carefully considered to maximise biodiversity and amenity value. A standard approach of precast concrete and galvanised handrail for inlets/outlets should be avoided and a range of vegetation types such as wildflowers and other nectar rich plants, grasses of various heights, drought tolerant species as well as marginal aquatics and wet grassland should be used.
- A predominance of one species or variety should be avoided in order to minimise the risk of widespread biotic threats to the urban forest and to increase species diversity. Preference should be given to native trees and shrubs, though the use of naturalised trees and shrubs, which are not necessarily native but are the correct tree for site conditions and would add landscape and arboricultural value could be used where appropriate and justified.
- Trees are proposed in close proximity to hard surfaces areas. We therefore advise that details of tree pits are submitted for review.
- We would like to see the inclusion of on-street swales, rain gardens/bio-retention areas.

Submission Documents

If minded for approval, the below submission documents should be submitted:

- Landscape Strategy/GI Strategy. This document should set the overarching principles proposed as part of the scheme. This should include detail on mitigation measures (highlighted in the LVIA), retained landscape features, landscape enhancements and demonstrate how new green infrastructure links to existing GI/habitat corridors.
- Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan (LMMP)/Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).
- Hard landscaping – The surface treatment to footpaths, public realm and highways should be aligned with the character of the development.
- SUDs strategy (including existing watercourses) – Ditches, rain gardens, swales, ditches, rills, ponds, etc.
- Planting strategy – High quality planting along access roads, boundaries, public spaces.

- Ecological enhancements, bird / bat boxes and habitat hibernacula proposals.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries in relation to this advice.

Place Services – Landscape Team

Email: landscape@essex.gov.uk



Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of North Herts Council.

Please note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.