



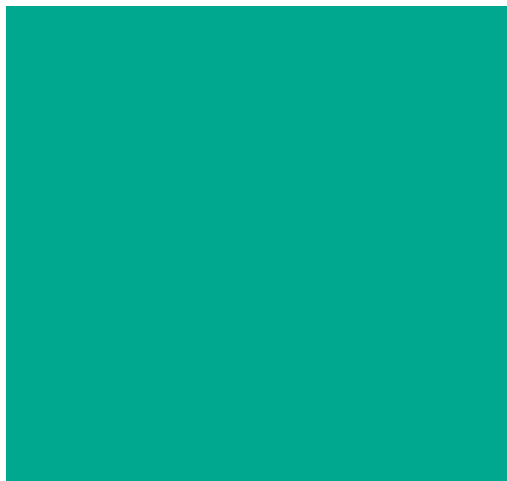
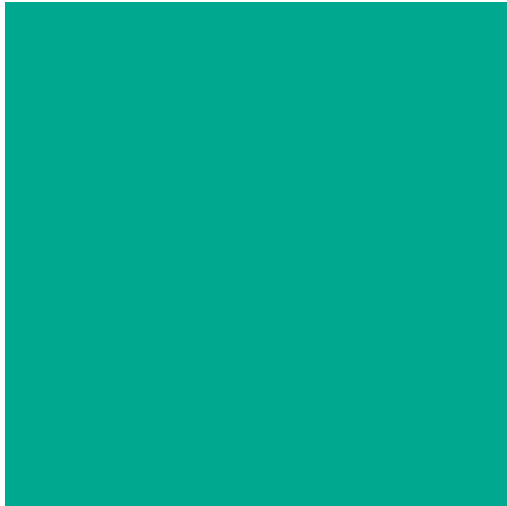
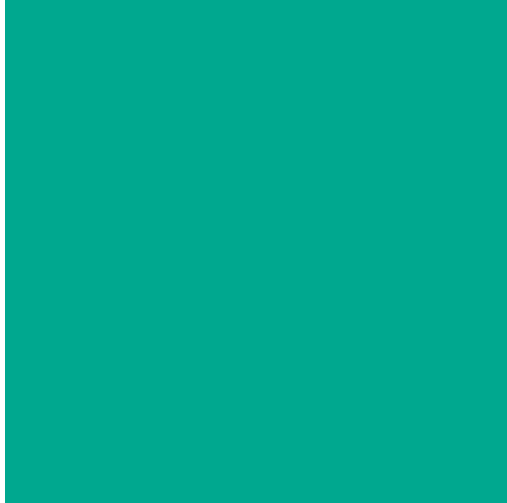
PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Site: 90 Walsworth Road, Hitchin, SG4 9SX

For: Professional Vision Services

Project Ref: 24083

Date: January 2025



Prepared by:

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PLANS AND DOCUMENTS ACCOMPANYING THE APPLICATION

PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT, PREPARED BY BARKER PARRY
1123-01C EXISTING PLANS, ELEVATIONS AND SECTIONS
1123-02A SITE LOCATION PLANS
1123-PL01A PROPOSED PLANS
1123-PL02 PROPOSED ELEVATIONS

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, Professional Vision Services, to support an application for full planning permission at 90 Walsworth Road, Hitchin, SG4 9SX for:

“Erection of two storey extension to rear of existing building, incorporating undercroft parking along with the change of use of ground floor office (Class E) and alteration of first floor flat to provide three additional flats.”

1.2 This Statement seeks to demonstrate that the proposed scheme will deliver four new dwellings to help meet local housing needs whilst retaining the character and quality of the area. This application is for the extension and redevelopment of 90 Walsworth Road to convert the building from a ground floor office and first floor 4-bed flat to a residential block providing four dwellings.

1.3 Section 2 of this Statement outlines the context of the Site, including its designations and planning history. Section 3 sets out the details of the proposed works, whilst Section 4 summarises the relevant local and national policy. A planning assessment can be found at Section 5, and the conclusions of this Statement are discussed at Section 6.

2.0 SITE CONTEXT

The Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 Hitchin is one of four main settlements within the North Herts area, housing over 70% of the District's population. The Application Site is located in the centre of the town approximately 300 metres from the railway station. The 2024 Google Map image at Figure 1 below shows the location of Site, marked by a red dot, in relation to the wider context of Hitchin, including the train station. Whilst the image at Figure 2 shows an enlarged view with the Site approximately outlined in red.

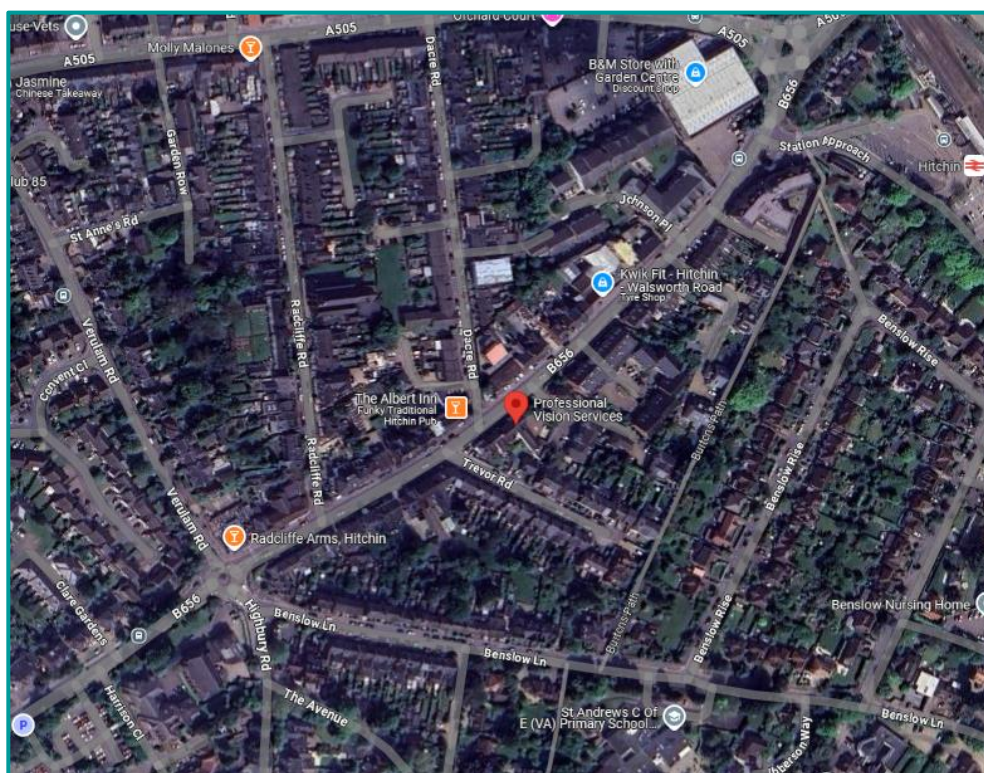


Figure 1 - Google Earth image of Hitchin, identifying Site Location

- 2.2 Where it fronts Walsworth Road, the application building is two-storey and finished in white render and clay roof tiles. It has a traditional double fronted arrangement with a central access door. To the rear of this, the built form continues for the full depth of the site in a 'T' arrangement, except the ground floor garage element which is single storage jutting into the courtyard area.

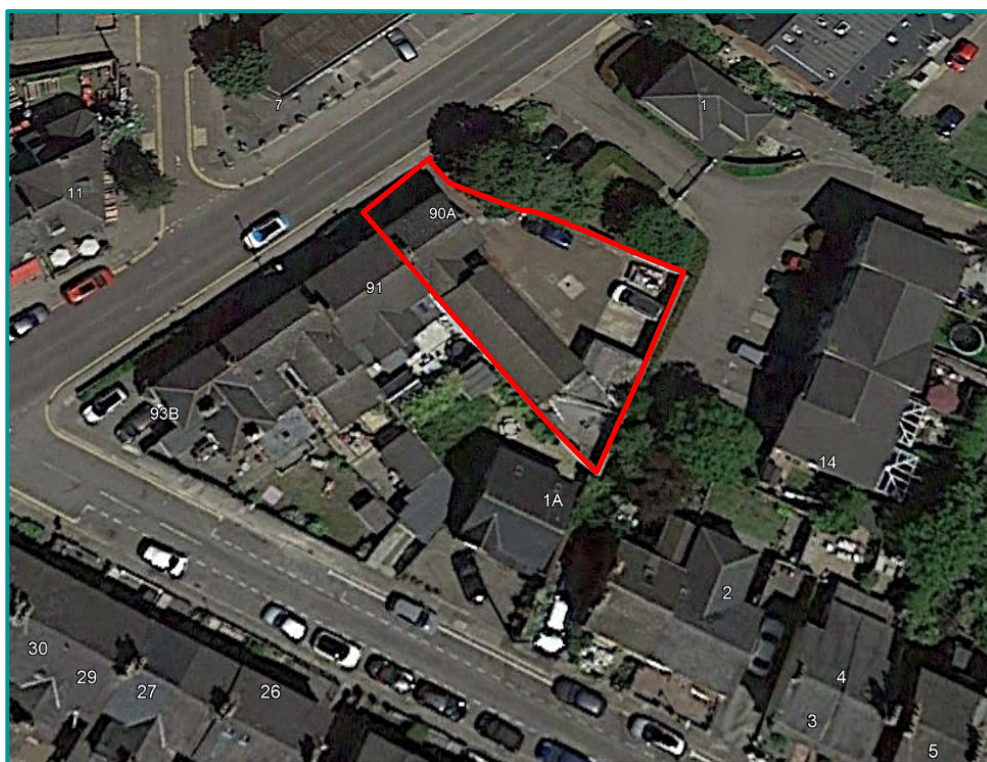


Figure 2 - Google Earth Image of Application Site

- 2.3 At ground floor the existing site comprises a commercial unit, used for the last 20+ years as an office for a mobility equipment supplier, as well as parking on the frontage and walled rear parking court with garage. At first floor there is a four-bedroom flat which is accessed from an external ground floor entrance door. At present, all parking belongs to the commercial unit with no residential parking.



Figure 3 - Images of the Application Site

2.4 The Site is located within the settlement boundary of Hitchin. It is outside of the town centre boundary but within a 'local centre'.

2.5 The site does not fall within Hitchin Conservation Area, but is very close to its boundary (seen on figure 4 below).

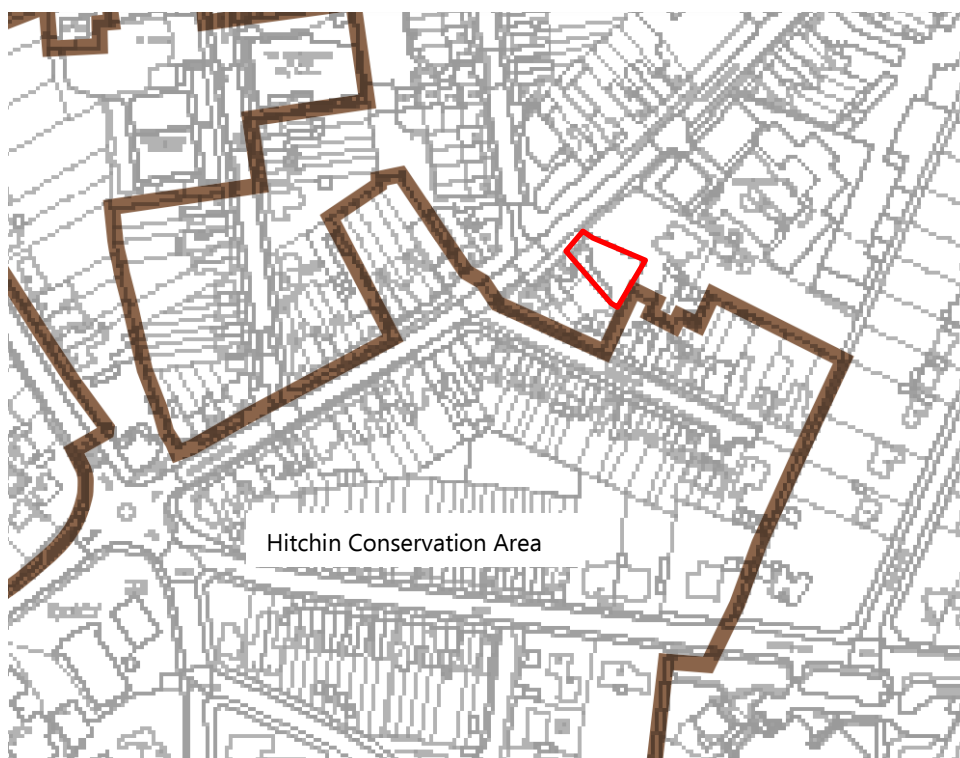


Figure 4 – Extract of the Hitchin Conservation Area Map with site indicated in red.

Planning History

2.6 There is no relevant planning history directly associated with the application site.

3.0 **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS**

3.1 Full planning permission is sought for:

"Erection of two storey extension to rear of existing building, incorporating undercroft parking along with the change of use of ground floor office (Class E) and alteration of first floor flat to provide three additional flats."

3.2 The proposed scheme comprises the following elements:

- Erection of a two-storey rear extension.
- Change of use of ground floor commercial unit.
- Provision of four new dwellings following alteration of existing flat (net gain of 3 dwellings) as 3no. 2-bed and 1no. 1-bed flats.
- One parking space provided per each dwelling as well as external bin storage.

3.3 The existing ground floor commercial unit with store and garage as well as the current first floor 4-bedroom flat will be lost as part of the redevelopment. The extended building will house four independently accessible flats across ground and first floor.

3.4 The existing Site benefits from a parking space on the frontage as well as a parking area with three parking spaces located in the rear yard area, currently all allocated to the commercial unit. Each of the new flats will have one dedicated parking space.

3.5 The entire site at present contains building footprint or hardstanding (block paving and concrete) with no existing habitat value. The application therefore benefits from the exemption to provide a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY**

The Development Plan

4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for development must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 For the purposes of this application, the relevant Development Plan document is the North Herts Local Plan (NHLP), adopted in 2022.

4.3 The following are considered to be the most relevant policies against which to assess the proposal:

- **T2: Parking** – the LPA will support residential development that accords with the minimum parking standards and has regard to the relevant SPD.
- **HS3: Housing mix** – permission will be granted for new homes that provide an appropriate range of types and size and provide a density, scale and character of development appropriate to their location and surroundings.
- **D1: Sustainable design** – development proposals will be required to respond positively to the site's local context, have regard to the Design SPD, and meet or exceed nationally described space standards.
- **D3: Protecting living conditions** – unacceptable harm to living conditions should not be caused by development proposals. Where living conditions would be affected by a proposed development, the Council will consider where there are any measures to mitigate the harm to an acceptable level.

Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance

Vehicle Parking at New Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2011

- 4.4 This document is a review of the previous SPD published in 2006 and updated to reflect then-recent changes to national policy. Reference is made to the Council's now-superseded Core Strategy so it can be considered as somewhat out of date, however limited weight is still applied to it.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

- 4.5 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It is underpinned by the aim of achieving sustainable development. The following chapters are of particular relevance to this proposal:

- Chapter 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- Chapter 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Chapter 7 – Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- Chapter 11 – Making effective use of land

- 4.6 In approaching decision-making, the NPPF is clear that LPAs should take a positive approach and work proactively with applicants to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.

- 4.7 Presently, proposals for new housing in North Hertfordshire are to be assessed with the tilted balanced under Paragraph 11d) engaged due to the LPA's lack of a five-year housing land supply. This means granting planning permission unless:

- i. the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

4.8 Paragraph 73 also recognises that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, are essential for SME housebuilders to deliver new homes, and are often built-out relatively quickly. Further that LPAs should support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes.

5.0 **PLANNING ASSESSMENT**

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The site lies in the settlement boundary of Hitchin, one of the Districts largest settlements within which new development is focused and encouraged. Therefore, the principle of intensification of the site for additional housing should be supported.
- 5.2 The site is also within a Local Centre where, under Policy ETC6, planning permission will be granted if:
- a) It is for a shop, financial and professional services, café or restaurant, pub or drinking establishment, takeaway or use classes F1 or F2 at ground floor level; and
 - b) The centre would continue to provide a range of uses including shops to meet day-to-day needs and the vitality and viability of the centre would be maintained.
- 5.3 Policy ETC6 does not set out specific guidance on how to assess proposals which result in the loss of commercial ground floor uses. The ground floor of 90 Walsworth Way has been used as the offices for a specialist visual impairment equipment supplier (Professional Visions Services) for at least the last 15 years and therefore does not currently fall within one of the uses listed in part a) of Policy ETC6. The existing use is more of a national service provider and not a local service, with members of the public unable to simply walk in off the street. As such, the site makes no contribution to the range of shops to meet day-to-day needs or the vitality of the local centre. Additionally, the site meets all relevant criteria for a Class MA prior approval conversion of the ground floor to residential use. Within this context the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes and loss of the office use should be supported in principle.

5.4 The Site is in a highly sustainable location with immediate access to multiple bus stops, and Hitchin Railway Station, approximately 300 metres away, is within very close walking distance. Both local and national policy strongly supports the principle of the intensification of existing urban sites to provide an uplift in housing within a sustainable urban area. As such, this weighs positively in favour of the proposed scheme.

5.5 Housing need and delivery is also an ongoing issue within the District. The latest NHC publication of the five-year housing land supply (5yhls) position (May 2024) recognised that the authority can only demonstrate a 3.9-year supply of housing against the currently adopted housing requirement (which is lower than the new standard method). Further, as a result of the December 2024 publication of new method of housing requirement, North Hertfordshire now require 1,018 dwellings to be delivered per annum, an increase from 910 dwellings per year.

5.6 This continues to place housing delivery as a critical issue and the lack of 5yhls that paragraph 11d) of the NPPF is engaged in the determination of this application. The following sub-sections demonstrate that there are no adverse impacts arising from the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land and securing well-designed places. As such, the proposed scheme should be granted.

Heritage

5.7 Chapter 16, paragraph 194 of the NPPF requires that where proposals have the potential to affect a heritage asset, the significance of that asset should be described including any contribution made by their setting, with the level of detail proportionate to the asset's importance. The Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset, but its 'setting' is not easily definable.

5.8 The site is not located within Hitchin Conservation Area (HCA) but it is probable that it could be considered as within the wider setting given the proximity to its boundary. The application site is closest to Character Area 4 (Windmill Hill and Walsworth Road) of the Conservation Area. Most of the significance of this area of the Conservation Area arises from Windmill Hill itself and the views afforded from it, with Walsworth Road making a lesser contribution as a historic route with examples of mid to late 19th century villas.

5.9 It is considered that the proposed development will not result in any change to the character or significance of the Conservation Area. The development sits within the context of the modern, flatted, three-storey development at Sanders Place and Rose Cottage Gardens, which already affect the wider setting of the Conservation Area in this location. Therefore, the constrained additions to the existing two-storey built form at the application site to add to the first floor is not considered to materially affect the setting of the adjacent Conservation Area. As such the proposals comply with Chapter 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1.

Design

5.10 Policy D1 of the Local Plan outlines that planning permission will be granted for development proposals which respond positively to the site's local context and take all reasonable opportunities, consistent with the nature and scale of the scheme to meet a range of criteria, including to create or enhance the public realm and design-out opportunities for crime.

5.11 The development involves the addition of a first floor to the rear of the existing built form. Part of this is to be constructed over the existing single storey element to the rear, but a further element will be first floor only over the current yard area with undercroft parking below. The new built form does not extend fully into the south-east corner of the site to protect the amenities

of No.1A Trevor Road and enable additional lighting to Unit 1 at ground floor. No changes are proposed to the principal elevation fronting Walsworth Road and therefore the character of the streetscene will be maintained. The extension will be finished in white render and roof tiles to match the existing building with doors and windows comprising painted timber. The roof form of the extension is also to be pitched to reflect the existing building form.

- 5.12 Overall, it is considered that the proposed scheme comprises gentle densification of this urban site to makes most efficient use of land whilst respecting and maintaining the character and appearance of the area.

Residential Amenity

- 5.13 Policy D1 of the NHLP requires that proposals for residential schemes meet or exceed the nationally described space standards (NDSS), whilst having regard to the Council's Design SPD.
- 5.14 The below table sets out a comparison between the proposed units in terms of type and size against the relevant required NDSS standard. This demonstrates that all dwellings notably exceed the minimum standards, the proposed plans also show that all bedrooms exceed minimum standard. All ground floor bedroom windows which front the courtyard area will benefit from defensible planting outside. As such, the proposed scheme will provide a high quality of internal accommodation.

No.	Size/Type	Required min. GIA	Proposed GIA
1	2B3P	61sqm	79sqm
2	1B2P	50sqm	56sqm
3	2B4P	70sqm	89sqm
4	2B4P	70sqm	89sqm

- 5.15 Owing to the existing constraints of the site, the flatted scheme will not benefit from private amenity space for the units. At present there is already

a large four-bed flat at the site which has no amenity space. Therefore, the provision of smaller units in this highly sustainable town centre location is considered more appropriate and acceptable than the existing situation. The site is in very short walking distance to Windmill Hill Park and Bancroft Recreation Ground, providing good access to outdoor amenity space.

Access and Parking

- 5.16 Each dwelling will be independently accessed. Unit 2 will be accessed via the existing entrance fronting Walsworth Road (currently the commercial unit entrance). Unit 1 will be accessed directly from the rear courtyard area. Unit 3 will be accessed maisonette style from the rear courtyard, although at ground floor the door also provides access to the resident cycle store. Unit 4 will be accessed as per the existing access arrangement to the current first floor flat via an entrance door/stair near the gate to the rear courtyard.
- 5.17 Four car parking spaces are to be provided, one per each unit. These are located as existing except the rear parking spaces become undercroft due to the first-floor extension. This provision, whilst slightly below the expectations of Appendix 4 of the Local Plan is considered appropriate given the flatted nature of the scheme in a highly accessible location in close walking distance to the train station and town centre. A cycle store is proposed adjacent to the undercroft parking which will provide a seven space semi-vertical cycle parking rack (W: 2430 x D 1100). This will provide two cycle parking per each 2-bed unit and one space for the 1-bed unit in accordance with Appendix 4 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.18 The entire site at present contains building footprint or hardstanding (block paving and concrete) with no existing habitat value. The application therefore benefits from the exemption to provide a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

6.0 **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 This application is for the extension and redevelopment of 90 Walsworth Road to convert the building from a ground floor office and first floor 4-bed flat to a residential block providing four dwellings.

6.2 The proposal is also supported by national policy which encourages the reuse of under-utilised buildings, especially where land supply for housing is constrained. The proposal also benefits from the titled balance under paragraph 11d) and this statement has demonstrated that the proposal:

- Will not impact upon the wider setting of the adjacent Conservation Area.
- Will deliver a net gain of 3-dwellings in an urban area to help meet local housing needs.
- Makes best use of high sustainable urban land to increase density.
- Will provide sufficient amenity, parking and bin storage for future residents.
- Will not impact upon the vitality of the local centre.
- Will not have an unacceptable detrimental impact on the residential amenity of surrounding residential properties.

6.3 This Statement has demonstrated that both local and national policy have been followed and complied with and, overall, the development proposal is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. As such, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies and we respectfully request that planning permission is granted.