



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
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Our ref: 13715
Date: 02 February 2026

For the attention of: Paul Chaston

Application ref: 25/03234/FP
Location: Land East Of Bedford Road And North Of The Priory School
Hitchin Hertfordshire

Proposal/Description: Creation of 50 no. one, two, three and four bedroom houses and apartments plus associated landscaping, open space, roads, drainage and other infrastructure.

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Full 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.

1.0. Site Context

The site is located to the north of Hitchin. The site comprises a singular rectangular grass field surrounded by trees and hedgerows of varying condition. The River Oughton runs close to the northern boundary. Bedford Lane forms the west boundary, Hitchin Town Youth Football Club forms the east, and the car park for The Priory School forms the south.

2.0. Planning Policy Context

2.1. North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

Policies to be considered that are relevant to landscape include Policy ENV3, ENV5, NE1, NE2, NE6, NE7, NE8, SP9 and SP12. The Site is also located within the Green Belt and therefore Policy SP5 is relevant.

2.2. Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan (Made 2024)

The site is not within the Ickleford Plan area, however Policy E1: Maintaining Separation states; *“Development proposals should respect the undeveloped gap between Ickleford and Hitchin”*.

3.0. Review of the LVIA:

- 3.1. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted to accompany the application, undertaken by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy, dated 28th November 2025. A summary of the effects is included on Page 48 and 57.

Landscape Character

- 3.2. Within the North Herts and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment, the application site is located within Landscape Character Area 217 River Oughton and Purwell Valleys. Key characteristics of this LCA that are relevant to the site include the meandering watercourse with associated ponds and water bodies. The strategy for this LCA is to 'improve and conserve'.
- 3.3. The following guidelines are therefore advised:
- *"Promote and encourage maintenance of existing pastureland within the river valley*
 - *Promote the creation of new and retention of existing ditches connecting to the river valley*
 - *Promote and encourage the biodiversity of locally native species*
 - *Promote and maintain semi-natural habitats along the river*
 - *Promote the planting of trees including appropriate protection within grazing areas*
 - *Where appropriate promote and encourage public access to the river*
 - *Avoid damage to the riverbanks as a result of agricultural or other practices*
 - *Do not clear vegetation from riverbanks where evidence of use for perching and nesting"*
- 3.4. Para 6.2.4-6 states that The Site has a low sensitivity, combined with a medium magnitude of change to form an overall slight/moderate adverse overall landscape effect. The proposed developable area covers most of the site, and therefore results in a complete change of character compared to the open grass field at present. Whilst the boundary vegetation largely remains, we judge that a medium magnitude of change is too low. We judge that a **high** magnitude of change combined with **low** sensitivity would result in **moderate** adverse effects.
- 3.5. Further to the above, the justification makes reference to the site being located on the settlement edge of Hitchin. Development of the site would contribute to the coalescence of Hitchin and Ickleford, where the separation between the two settlements is already compromised. As per Policy E1 Maintaining Separation of the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan, the proposals do not retain the undeveloped gap between the two settlements.
- 3.6. Para 4.19.2 assesses the value of the site as low, based on the criteria within the Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations.

3.7. The Site is located within the Herts Chalk Focus Area of the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS, 2025), which identifies the rivers and associated wetlands as at risk of being degraded by urban development. Action 4 “*Create more good quality acidic grassland and heathland*” and Action 1 “*Restore and renaturalise Hertfordshire’s rivers (incl. chalk streams, winterbournes and other headwaters)*” are also both relevant to the site. We judge that the LVIA does not recognise the nature recovery value associated with the site, and that the site functions as an area that forms an important part of a multifunctional Green Infrastructure network providing visual break and physical separation between the settlements of Ickleford and Hitchin.

3.8. We therefore disagree that the overall value of the site is low.

Visual Amenity

- 3.9. 5no. visual receptors have been included within the assessment and submitted as part of Appendix A3 Figures Volume. Only near-distance viewpoint receptors have been identified, however we recognise that the surrounding settlements and vegetation limits any mid- to long-distance views of the site.
- 3.10. The photography was undertaken in August 2025, when vegetation was in full leaf cover. The vegetation provides more screening than photographs taken in winter, and therefore the photography is not representative of the worst-case scenario. However, reduced leaf cover is acknowledged within the assessment, for example in Para 7.4.2.
- 3.11. Section 7.4 relates to the assessed effects for Public Rights of Way, other paths, and public open spaces. However, the pavements alongside roads are not considered as visual receptors within this section of the assessment. Bedford Road and Burford Way are only considered as vehicular receptors, where the susceptibility would be judged as lower. We therefore consider this an omission from the assessment, where the pedestrians alongside these roads would have a higher susceptibility than assessed within the assessment. We would however judge that effects on pedestrians would not exceed **moderate** adverse.
- 3.12. Para 7.2.1-2 outlines justification for the slight adverse effects associated with Bedford Road and Burford Way. Whilst we acknowledge that the site is viewed within the urban context of Hitchin, we also judge that the concerns for coalescence also need to be recognised here. The Site functions as a visual break between Ickleford and Hitchin, which has not been recognised within the assessment, and would therefore increase the value and sensitivity of the site.
- 3.13. As users travel from Hitchin north to Ickleford, it is important to visually recognise the departure from one settlement and the arrival in another. We judge that the effects from these receptors may be higher than judged in the LVIA with this in mind.

4.0. Review of the Proposals:

- 4.1. On review of both landscape character and visual effects, concerns regarding the physical and visual coalescence of Ickleford and Hitchin is raised. Policy E1 Maintaining Separation within the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan emphasises respecting the undeveloped gap between settlements. Since the site is partially open to the west, the site contributes to the perceptual separation between settlements.
- 4.2. We therefore judge that the proposed layout of development within the site should respond to the coalescence concerns and maintain northern views from Bedford Road across the north-west corner to the vegetation along the edge of the River Oughton. This would maintain the perceptual sense of separation between Ickleford and Hitchin. At present, developing close to the north and the north-west corner risks the sense of separation between these two settlements being lost.
- 4.3. On the western side of Bedford Road, houses have a significant setback from this road, which contributes to the sense of separation between settlements. The development within the site should also consider providing a sense of openness in the north-west corner which contributes to maintaining this perceived separation.
- 4.4. The attenuation basin is currently located very close to the perimeter vegetation on the eastern edge of the site. This vegetated boundary provides important green infrastructure connections and further visual enclosure, and therefore its longevity must be considered through design which does not impact on the roots. We therefore advise earthworks are not located in such close proximity to the vegetated boundary and protective fencing is used.
- 4.5. An impenetrable boundary in the rear gardens on the eastern boundary of the site should be replaced with an alternative boundary treatment, such as a post and rail, as this will continue to allow free movement of wildlife and respond more appropriately with the rural edge.
- 4.6. Vegetative screening should be focused on the south-west corner of the site, surrounding the apartment blocks. Planting in this corner will provide screening of the largest development, with opportunities to provide openings in the vegetation further north along Bedford Road to allow views across towards Ickleford and the River Oughton, for reasons stated above.
- 4.7. We recommend that *Viburnum tinus* is removed from the planting palette. The species can be severely damaged by Viburnum beetle and often produces an unpleasant smell particularly when the foliage is wet.

- 4.8. The northern POS is mostly fenced off from the development, with access only available from the western edge. To enhance the permeability of the site with further access into the POS, we advise that gaps are provided in the boundary treatment to make this space more accessible. Steps or a ramp may be required for level changes.
- 4.9. Further to Para 6.22 of the Landscape Specification and Management Plan, removal of tree guards once the tree has established should be included within the plan.
- 4.10. A small number of trees are proposed within the 6m gas easement located within the POS. These should be located outside of the easement, to ensure their longevity and retention.
- 4.11. We question whether the location of the swale could be amended to allow for the retention of more of the trees along the south-west corner. These trees, although young, provide good screening of the apartment blocks in this corner of the site and also provide maturity to the scheme, instead of the young replacement tree stock proposed in the same area.

5.0. Summary:

- 5.1. Overall, we judge that there is capacity for some development within the application site. The site is located on the settlement edge of Hitchin and is largely contained by the field boundaries and surrounding land uses.
- 5.2. We judge that the submitted LVIA underassesses some of the landscape and visual effects associated with the proposed development.
- 5.3. The physical and visual coalescence of Ickleford and Hitchin is a key concern with development of this site. Policy E1 Maintaining Separation within the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan should be further reflected within the proposals. We advise that views across the north-west corner of the site from Bedford Road are integrated into the proposals, with further setback from this edge to maintain some sense of departure from one settlement and arrival in another.
- 5.4. We also advise that above recommendations are considered within the proposals.

Please 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.

We are unable to respond directly to applicants/agents or other interested parties. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant/agent or other interested parties may have, must be directed to the Planning Officer at the relevant LPA, who will seek further advice from us where appropriate.

