

GA2 - Land North-East of Great Ashby

25/03080/HYA - May 2026 - Urban Design Comments

Advice is provided on submitted material with an expectation that the applicant will work collaboratively with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to make positive changes/updates to documents in-line with the following recommendations.

Comments take into account the professional opinion of the NHDC Urban Designers, material from the [DRAFT] North Herts Design Code alongside other relevant nationally prescribed design guidance including but not limited to:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The National Model Design Code (NMDC)
- Building for a Healthy Life (BFL)
- NHDC Local Plan Policies (commonly SP9, D1, NE4)
- HCC Policies & Guidance

North Hertfordshire Design Code

The applicant is advised that any future Reserved Matters Application (RMA) submitted for this site will be required to demonstrate full compliance with the North Hertfordshire Design Code, which is anticipated to be adopted in June 2026. Once adopted, the Design Code will carry material weight in the determination of subsequent applications.

In this context, it would be prudent for the applicant to anticipate and respond to the forthcoming Design Code requirements at this outline stage where they are relevant to this scale/level of detail, treating them as a material consideration within the submitted information.

Doing so will help ensure that any outline permission granted remains relevant, effective, and capable of being implemented through future RMAs without fundamental redesign or avoidable conflict with the adopted design framework.

For clarity and continuity, comments are ordered as per previous discussions at the pre-application stage.

Access to Play

Drawing No. DL26 (noting that this drawing number appears to be duplicated elsewhere in the submission) seeks to demonstrate access to play through the use of radial distance markers.

In order for access to play to be compliant with Fields in Trust (FiT) standards, particularly in the context of this site, these distances must be presented as true isochrones. Distances must be calculated along realistic and achievable pedestrian routes and must take account of actual physical constraints, including areas of inaccessible woodland, retained hedgerows and other barriers to movement.

Having tested the drawing by sketching over the proposed isochrones, it is evident that some residential areas are not within acceptable walking distance of lower-order play provision, specifically Local Areas for Play (LAPs), which form part of Tier 1 open spaces within the North Hertfordshire Design Code.

Every dwelling must be located within a 100 metre walking distance of a Tier 1 open space

containing a LAP or LAP-equivalent provision. On the basis of the information currently presented, this requirement is not consistently met.

By contrast, access to higher-order play provision (LEAPs and NEAPs) is considered to be broadly adequate. However, this does not mitigate the identified shortfall in LAP/Tier 1 provision. LAPs are a critical doorstep play element, particularly for toddlers and younger children, and play an essential role in supporting imaginative, inclusive and easily accessible play opportunities within the wider network of open spaces. Their provision and distribution therefore requires particular scrutiny.

The drawing should also be limited strictly to illustrating access to play. In its current form, it is overly complex, with heavy colour blocks and background information that obscure the isochrones and hinder assessment. Residential development blocks should be added in the background in a subtle shade, with the play spaces identified with an icon (rather than an illustrative area/shape) and corresponding isochrone. Some of the open space information shown is also inaccurate, however this will be properly addressed through the Green Infrastructure framework plan drawing comments below. This plan should therefore be simplified, with all irrelevant background information removed, so that the play access isochrones can be clearly and accurately assessed.

I would also recommend this drawing be given a new drawing number and be named simply 'Access to Play Framework Plan'.

The applicant is required to review and amend this drawing accordingly.

Open Space

The submitted Green Infrastructure plan identifies the broad typologies of open space across the site, together with some vegetative features and indicative character areas. While this provides a useful overview, the plan does not currently allow for clear assessment against adopted requirements.

The key to this plan should be revised so that it explicitly identifies each open space typology as defined by the North Hertfordshire Design Code [OS01] and FiT standards, and crucially, sets out the area (in hectares) attributed to each typology. For the avoidance of doubt, the minimum open space requirements for GA2 are as follows:

Parks and Gardens: 1.23 ha

Amenity Greenspace: 0.92 ha

Natural/Semi-Natural Open Space: 27.7 ha

Equipped Play: 0.38 ha

Informal Play: 0.46 ha

Allotments: 0.46 ha

Based on my initial analysis, it appears that the scheme is broadly capable of meeting the required quantum for each of these categories, with the exception of Natural/Semi-Natural Open Space. In particular, areas of woodland that are inaccessible to the public cannot be counted towards this requirement. The plan must clearly and unequivocally distinguish between accessible and inaccessible woodland, as this distinction is fundamental to the area calculations.

Only open space that is publicly accessible can be counted towards compliance with the quantitative standards. That said, a limited shortfall in Natural/Semi-Natural Open Space may be considered acceptable in this specific case, given the site's countryside edge location and its relationship with the wider landscape. This is conditional on clear and convenient access to the surrounding natural environment via public footpaths, which already connect into the wider Natural and Semi-Natural green infrastructure network.

Should the application be granted, a Site Specific Design Code (SSDC) condition would be attached to the outline permission. This will make explicit that maintaining and prioritising these connections to the surrounding landscape must be a key consideration of any future Reserved Matters Application.

Across the suite of submitted Parameter and Framework plans, there are clear inconsistencies in the way ancient woodland is represented. In some drawings it is shown as forming part of the open space network, while in others it is depicted as a separate component. This lack of consistency creates confusion and undermines the clarity and reliability of the plans as a coordinated set.

Where woodland, particularly ancient woodland, is not publicly accessible, it must not be included within areas identified as public open space. Such areas should be clearly distinguished from accessible open spaces and excluded from open space calculations. On all relevant plans, inaccessible woodland should therefore be removed from the green open space shading and instead shown in a neutral or a greyed-out tone to avoid any implication that it contributes to the site's open space provision.

The applicant is required to correct this approach across all drawings to ensure that ancient woodland is represented consistently, accurately, and transparently, and that only genuinely accessible land is identified as open space.

Illustrative Masterplan

It is considered acceptable for the illustrative masterplan to remain within the DAS in its current form for the limited purpose of demonstrating that the site allocation is capable of accommodating the proposed number of homes. However, no weight will be attached to this in decision-making. It is purely diagrammatic and does not establish an approved layout, form or detailed design parameters at this stage.

Key Principles (separate document)

The LPA requires the submission of a clear and concise 'Key Design Principles' document as a standalone piece of work. This document should distil the core placeshaping principles set out in Chapter 6 of the DAS into a focused and accessible format.

The principles should be presented as a short, bullet-pointed document limited to a few A4 pages max. This document will form the basis of the Site-Specific Design Code (SSDC) condition attached to any outline planning permission granted for the site and will therefore carry significant weight in guiding all subsequent Reserved Matters submissions.