

Comments are given with the acknowledgement of the cooperation of the applicant and their chosen design team to work proactively with the LPA by way of numerous pre-application submissions and meetings to reach a proposal that is coherent with planning policy, is strong in terms of design and architectural interest and can be justified under Paragraph 84 (NPPF) as an isolated dwelling in the countryside.

Support Under Paragraph 84 (NPPF)

Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides guidance on the development of isolated homes in the countryside under specific circumstances:

84. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:
- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;
 - b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;
 - c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;
 - d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or
 - e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - i. is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
 - ii. would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

Extract from National Planning Policy framework (Dec 2024)

This application is considered to fully satisfy the requirements of subsection e)i and e)ii for the following reasons:

The proposed architecture can be regarded as outstanding, reflecting the highest standards of contemporary design in the UK. It demonstrates a level of quality that would raise architectural and design standards both locally and nationally within the rural vernacular.

The building's immediate setting will be enhanced through the applicant's careful approach to ecology and context-led design decisions. The landscape strategy reinforces this by introducing diverse and robust planting, strengthening the site's character. The proposal is sensitive to its surroundings, employing an architectural language that responds to local context. The form and massing have been developed through a clear and well-documented design narrative, resulting in a scheme that is both distinctive and appropriate for this site.

Further detailed comments on subsequent pages provide additional support for this position and highlight specific aspects of the submission that demonstrate design quality.

Site Layout/ Landscape Design

The main residential building thoughtfully reflects the triangular shape of the site while respecting ecological buffers to minimize disturbance to existing wildlife.

Its placement feels well-justified, and the surrounding surfacing, planting, and landscaping have been carefully designed to create a sympathetic and responsive setting.

Ancillary structures, including the garage and bin/bike stores, are positioned where an existing agricultural building stands, making good use of the current scale and footprint. Additional planting along the hedgerow will screen these elements from the road and strengthen the ecological corridor.

Access is sensibly located at the existing field entrance, near the widest part of the site and close to the main house. This position also benefits from the best visibility along the road, making it a logical and safe choice.

The primary amenity space around the house is lightly paved, blending seamlessly into informal planting and the wider landscape. The absence of rigid boundaries—aside from a single north-south stone wall anchoring the architecture—creates a fluid transition between garden, wildflower meadow, and orchard. This approach enhances biodiversity, encourages pollinators, and offers a far more sensitive treatment of the land than its current agricultural use.

The inclusion of ponds further enriches habitat diversity, attracting a wide range of flora and fauna.

Overall, the layout and landscape design demonstrate a clear rationale, a strong understanding of context, and an exemplary approach to enhancing the site's natural character while making best use of its orientation and features.

Character and Building Design

The proposed design for the main residential building has been thoughtfully considered, combining simplicity with a clear focus on creating high-quality living spaces and functional sleeping accommodation. The internal layout responds sensitively to the site and its landscape context, with formal living areas positioned to the south of the plan with views predominantly towards the south and east. This arrangement ensures privacy while turning away from the main road along the western boundary. Other ground-floor functional family spaces are strategically placed to capture key views across the site.

A continuous north–south flint wall runs along the western side of the house and acts as a strong architectural anchor, providing visual order. This then extends into the landscape to the south, beyond the house's fabric, to form a boundary wall and create a sense of enclosure. This feature reinforces the connection between the building and its setting.

The submitted design material includes detailed diagrams illustrating the rigorous approach taken to form and massing. The design draws inspiration from traditional rural British typologies, historic local precedents, and agricultural forms, reinterpreted in a contemporary manner to create a modern family home that feels rooted in its context. This level of design consideration is welcomed and I applaud the applicant team for making a strong case for high-quality good design practices.

Materiality

The material strategy has been developed with care and precision to ensure it reflects local character and contributes meaningfully to the site's design narrative. Each material has been selected for its ability to harmonise within a cohesive architectural language that feels authentically rooted in North Hertfordshire and reflective of British rural traditions.

The proposed palette: flint, reclaimed Arlesey brick, black timber, and black corrugated steel, draws directly from the vernacular of the surrounding area. These materials evoke a sense of rural architectural heritage while responding to the site's existing context, creating a design that feels contemporary and deeply connected to its place.

Key Policies Satisfied

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 130

The design is visually attractive, well-laid out, and sympathetic to local character while embracing innovation through contemporary interpretation of rural forms.

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 174

The landscape strategy conserves and enhances biodiversity, integrates ponds and wildflower planting, and strengthens ecological corridors.

- [Aligned with] National Model Design Code (NMDC)

The scheme reflects local identity through materiality (flint, reclaimed brick, timber), responds to site context, and promotes green infrastructure and biodiversity.

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy D1 - Sustainable Design

The proposal demonstrates high-quality design that responds positively to local character, site constraints, and landscape setting.

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy NE1 - Landscape and Biodiversity

Enhances ecological networks with hedgerow planting, ponds, and meadow areas, supporting biodiversity and habitat creation.

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy SP1 - Sustainable Development

Makes efficient use of land while respecting environmental constraints and delivering a design-led approach.

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy SP9 - Design and Sustainability

Promotes a distinctive, contextually appropriate design that integrates sustainability principles.

Urban Design Summary

This proposal exemplifies the value of investing in high-quality design. Proactive commitment to design excellence benefits everyone, the resident, the wider community, and the local authority, by creating places that are sustainable, distinctive, and enduring.

The level of design rigour demonstrated here, through a clear narrative, robust policy justification, and thoughtful material and landscape choices, should be the standard we expect across all applications. North Hertfordshire deserves developments that not only meet policy requirements but actively contribute to the identity and quality of our built environment. This scheme shows that good design is not an optional extra; it is fundamental to delivering places of lasting value.



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