

**Chain Cottage
50 Gardiners Lane
Ashwell
Herts SG7 5LZ**

17th April 2026

PLANNING OBJECTION : Application: 26/00760/FP

Land At Former Merchant Taylors School

Introduction

This representation is submitted in respect of the above application and should be read in full.

Rollys Lane is a quiet, narrow lane located at the edge of the settlement, characterised by minimal traffic, the absence of formal footways, and a low-intensity, semi-rural character. The lane functions as a transitional route between the built form of the village and the surrounding countryside.

The application site sits within this sensitive context and is experienced as part of an open stretch of land that contributes to the setting of nearby heritage assets, including Ashwell Bury (Grade II listed park and garden), Chain Cottage (Grade II listed), and the Old Schoolhouse (Grade II listed).

This part of the village is not defined by continuous frontage development. The absence of built form along this stretch is a defining component of its character and its role as a transitional edge to the settlement.

The site has historically been associated with recreational use for children within the village. While it is no longer in active use, it remains capable of accommodating community or youth-focused use. Suggestions for alternative uses have not been meaningfully explored.

1. Character, Openness and Settlement Edge

The application site occupies a sensitive position at the edge of the settlement, forming part of a transitional area between the built form of Ashwell and the surrounding countryside.

Notwithstanding its current condition as a disused hard-surfaced sports court, the site contributes to:

- the perception of openness along Rollys Lane, and
- the loose, low-density and transitional character of this part of the village

The contribution of the site to character derives from the absence of built form, rather than its surface condition.

The application site may be described as previously developed land; however, this does not diminish its contribution to openness or its role within the transitional character of the settlement edge. The site is experienced as an undeveloped parcel within the street scene.

The proposed development would:

- introduce permanent residential built form along an open stretch of lane
- establish a new domestic frontage where none currently exists
- erode the visual and spatial transition between village and countryside

The result would be a clear shift from openness to enclosure and the consolidation of built form along the settlement edge, introducing a suburbanising influence that is not reflective of the existing character of the area.

The proposal therefore fails to respond appropriately to local character and fails to maintain a strong sense of place, contrary to **NPPF paragraph 135(c)** and **Local Plan Policy SP2**.

2. Fragile Transitional Character

This part of Ashwell performs an important role as a transitional landscape where the balance between built form and openness is particularly sensitive.

The proposal would:

- consolidate development along Rollys Lane, and
- erode the transition between the village and the surrounding countryside

This would result in incremental urbanisation of a currently transitional area.

The proposal is therefore contrary to **NPPF paragraph 187(b)**, which recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

3. Relevant Planning History and Consistency

Planning application Ref: **25/00581/OP** for residential development on nearby land was refused by North Hertfordshire District Council in June 2025.

The Council concluded that development would:

- occur within a relatively fragile transitional area
- shift the balance between open and built elements
- consolidate development along the settlement edge

It was also concluded that:

- even a modest and carefully sited dwelling would result in harm
- the limited public benefits would not outweigh that harm

The current application site occupies the same transitional context and performs a comparable role in maintaining openness and spatial separation.

The characteristics identified as sensitive — including:

- the fragmented pattern of development
- the presence of open gaps
- the relationship with surrounding countryside

are equally applicable in this case.

The revised scheme does not address the fundamental issue identified in the previous refusal — namely the loss of an open parcel and the resulting consolidation of development.

Granting permission would conflict with the Council's recent findings and result in an inconsistent approach to decision-making.

4. Heritage and Statutory Duties

The site lies within the Ashwell Conservation Area and within the setting of a number of designated heritage assets, including:

- Ashwell Bury (Grade II listed park and garden)
- Chain Cottage (Grade II listed)
- Old Schoolhouse (Grade II listed)

These assets form part of a wider historic grouping whose significance is experienced through their spatial relationship with surrounding land and their position within a transitional edge-of-settlement context.

A key component of that significance is the presence of openness and the absence of continuous built frontage along this part of Rollys Lane.

Under:

- **Section 66(1)** and
- **Section 72(1)** of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

the decision-maker must give special regard to:

- the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their setting
- the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

The proposal would introduce new built form into an open parcel that contributes to that setting, reducing spatial separation and eroding the character that underpins the significance of these assets.

The proposal would fail to preserve:

- the setting of listed buildings
- the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

This constitutes harm to the significance of designated heritage assets.

Under:

- **NPPF paragraph 212**, great weight should be given to their conservation
- **NPPF paragraph 213**, any harm requires clear and convincing justification

Even where harm is less than substantial, **NPPF paragraph 215** requires that harm be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The proposal would deliver only two dwellings and no specific need for development in this location has been identified.

The previous refusal in this locality was informed by clear conclusions regarding harm to heritage and transitional character. In the absence of evidence that these concerns have been resolved, those findings remain directly applicable.

The proposal is also contrary to **Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan Policy ASH3**, which requires development to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and respect its historic setting, including the importance of open spaces and gaps.

5. Transport, Accessibility and Sustainability

The proposal would be predominantly car-dependent, conflicting with:

- **NPPF paragraph 110(a)**
- **Local Plan Policy SP6**

Rollys Lane is:

- narrow
- without footways
- used by pedestrians within the carriageway

Even limited increases in vehicle movements would increase conflict and erode the quiet, rural character of the lane.

The proposal does not demonstrate safe and suitable access for all users in accordance with **NPPF paragraph 115**.

6. Loss of Community Potential Use

The site has historically been associated with recreational use for children within the village.

There is no evidence that alternative community or youth uses have been meaningfully explored.

The proposal would result in the permanent loss of a site capable of accommodating community or youth-focused use.

7. Housing Need and Planning Balance

The proposal would deliver two additional dwellings.

The applicant refers to the potential for financial proceeds from development to be used in other ways to benefit children. While noted, this does not represent a direct land-use planning benefit arising from development of the site itself.

The planning system is concerned with the use of land and the impacts of development in its location. The redistribution of financial proceeds to unspecified or off-site initiatives does not address the identified harm to character, openness and heritage assets.

No clear, site-related public benefits have been identified that offset the impacts of the proposal.

Under **NPPF paragraph 11(d)**, the identified harm provides a clear basis for refusal.

8. Incremental Change and Cumulative Impact

The introduction of development on this site would:

- reduce openness along Rollys Lane
- establish a new pattern of built form along a currently undeveloped stretch

This would increase pressure for further development and lead to cumulative erosion of the settlement edge.

9. Conclusion

The proposal would result in:

- harm to character and openness
- harm to designated heritage assets
- erosion of a sensitive settlement edge
- cumulative development pressure

These impacts conflict with:

- the National Planning Policy Framework
- statutory duties under Sections 66 and 72
- Local Plan Policies SP2 and SP6
- Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan Policy ASH3

Planning permission should be refused.

Kind Regards,

Mark & Gemma Allan