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Ref: IC/3004
VIA PLANNING PORTAL

July, 2025

Head of Planning
North Herts Council

Dear Sir,

PIRTON HALL, SHILLINGTON ROAD, PIRTON HERTFORDSHIRE HG5 3HB

APPLICATION FOR PART DEMOLITION OF PIRTON HALL AND DEMOLITION OF EXISTING GARAGE TO THE EAST OF PIRTON HALL

AND ERECTION OF NEW DETACHED GARAGE ALONGSIDE PIRTON HALL, PLUS TWO DETACHED HOUSES ON LAND TO THE EAST WITH GARAGES

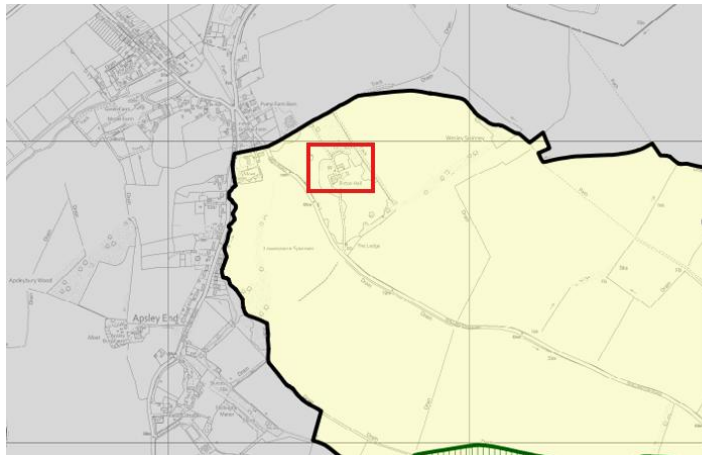
CHANGE OF USE, WITH EXTENSION, OF FORMER COACH HOUSE TO A THREE-BEDROOM DWELLING

PLANNING AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

Pirton Hall lies within its own grounds to the south-east of Apsley End.

It is accessed via a private drive from Shillington Road and the ownership is shown outlined in red and blue on the location plan and this includes extensive grounds. The ownership excludes the gatehouse at the site entrance albeit we suspect that this was originally part of the demise.

The site lies within the open countryside for planning purposes ("rural area beyond the Green Belt") and an extract from the proposals map to the Local Plan is below:



The site comprises the following elements:

- **Pirton Hall:** this is in use as C3 dwellinghouse and is a NDHA (non-designated heritage asset) that has been significantly extended on the eastern side pursuant to its former use as a nursing home;
- **The coach house to the north-east of Pirton Hall:** this historically has an association with the main hall as it was designed to serve it and this ancillary relationship remains. To the north of this is a walled garden which contains domestic paraphernalia to include outbuildings and a swimming pool and these are also all incidental to the main house;
- **There is a former agricultural barn further to the north-east.** Whilst this is within the applicants' ownership it is not a feature of this application.

The application is a joint full application for all three elements, namely:

- the demolition of the later addition to Pirton Hall with the erection of a domestic garage on part of the demolished footprint.
- the two new built detached dwellings; and,
- the change of use, with extension, of the coach house.

We now provide further detail in respect of these three elements as follows.

The demolition of the eastern wing to the hall

This is a later addition (see planning history to follow) and was used pursuant to the nursing home use. Whilst it was designed to reflect the architecture of the hall it is nonetheless a significant later addition with an institutional character both inside and out.

The extent of the demolition amounts to 490 square metres and the eastern flank of the hall will be restored to its original form with bricks to match the existing.

Pirton Hall will continue in its lawful C3 use and so no change of use is sought.

A new single storey detached garage is alongside, plus the existing garage further to the east is to be demolished.

The demolition of the Contemporary Garage

The demolition of an existing garage to the North East of Pirton Hall. The extent of the demolition amounts to 112.8 square metres.

The 2 new builds

These are proposed on a currently lawned area to the east of the main hall.

They are set out a slightly staggered arrangement with the southernmost dwelling sitting slightly further west of the northernmost.

Detached garages are provided within the curtilage as well as additional onside parking.

They are both to be built to the same design and comprise at:

- At ground floor level a large entrance hall, a living room to the frontage on the left hand side, a study and separate utility room on the opposite side of the hall and an open plan kitchen/ living/ dining area to the rear;
- centrally located stairs provide access to 4 double rooms and 2 further rooms within the loft space.

The units have a net internal area of 289.33 square metres (and thew garages are 42 square metres) and the NDSS requires a minimum of 138 square metres for a six-bedroom eight-person dwelling with accommodation over three storeys.

The design comprises a large feature glazed gable to the frontage and two glazed gables to the rear.

Each garden measures, respectively, 1,320.6 square metres and 760.6 square metres.

Materials are confirmed as facing brickwork and concrete tiles together with uPVC windows.

The change of use and extension of the coach house

This is essentially a change of use from a residentially ancillary building to a primary C3 residence.

The building faces south and comprises both single and two-storey elements with a central gable and a single-storey front projection on the eastern side.

It is currently used as storage in association with the main house and 5 separate storage bays are shown on the existing plan.

A single-storey extension on the eastern side facilitates the change of use to a family dwelling comprising a separate lounge, open plan living/ dining area, 3 bedrooms at ground floor level and the forward projection repurposed as a study.

The pre-existing mezzanine level will provide a further bedroom and the curtilage to this property comprises the walled garden to the rear.

The car parking utilises the pre-existing garage to the frontage which will need to be repurposed.

Statutory planning history

The site has a great deal of planning history dating back to 1977 and we briefly summarise the key points as follows.

In 1977 and pursuant to **77/00212/1**, planning permission was granted for a single-storey addition to the existing dwelling, namely Pirton Hall.

In 1982 and pursuant to **82/00106/1**, an application for planning permission was withdrawn in respect of a scheme for a two-storey side extension, however, this was followed four years later in 1986 by the change of use of the dwelling together with the extensions to form a nursing home (**86/01939/01**).

There was a later permission approved on 26th October, 1989 for development described as follows:

Conversion of existing stable building and erection of single and two storey extension to provide 16 residential units for the elderly, car park, garage area and access (revised plans received 16th October 1989) (Outline - design, external appearance and landscaping reserved).

There are various other entries and iterations pursuant to the nursing home use all of which were approved.

The statutory planning register also records a listed building consent for the gatehouse under the terms of **04/00295/1LB** for development described as follows:

Replacement of single window by two windows on east elevation, internal timber repairs, removal of existing render and application of new lime render (renewal of Listed Building Consent Ref: 98/01195/1LB granted on 02/12/1998).

We would add that the extract below from the Historic England website does not show the gatehouse as being a statutorily listed building. Either way this is now within a different ownership and whilst the gatehouse may have been historically associated with Pirton Hall there is no longer any relationship.



The statutory planning register additionally records other various applications in relation to the gatehouse.

In 2012 and under the terms of **12/010898/1** planning permission was granted for the change of use of the nursing home to a single residential dwelling, namely the applicant's home and this reflects the current occupancy.

The triple garage, which is proposed to be removed under the terms of the pre-application scheme was approved on 15th August 2018 pursuant to **18/02205/FPH**. This is the contemporary garage to be demolished: See image below:



The next key iteration recorded is the change of use of the barn to the north to a single residential dwelling and this was approved in 2021 pursuant to **21/01273/FP** and the next series of entries are applications to discharge the relevant conditions as attached to this permission.

[Finally, there is a series of further applications in respect of the lodge to include a refusal in 2024 pursuant to **24/00544** for a two-storey rear extension including a first floor side balcony. We again reiterate that this is outside of our ownership and not part of this pre-app].

Pre application advice

First pre application advice request

There have been two pre application submissions.

Originally a pre-application was submitted in relation to the site back in April 2020 and was described as follows:

Pre Application Advice : Conversion of existing dwelling and outbuildings to create 14 separate dwellings together with an additional dwelling within the existing walled garden and all ancillary works. Creation of agricultural access off Shillington Road.

Pirton Hall, Shillington Road, Pirton, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3HB

20/00726/PRE

The advice described the site in the following terms:

The main vehicular access is located in the south western corner of the site adjacent to The Lodge.

Shillington Road is a classified road maintained by Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority.

There are no rights of way or footpaths that cross the site or are adjacent to the site.

Pirton Grange Farm opposite the site to the west is designated a Local Wildlife site.

The site is located in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt as designated in the current District Local Plan and the Emerging Local Plan (Main Modifications 2011 – 2031). An extract of the ELP is attached below showing the general location of the site.

The advice can broadly be summarised as follows:

- there was support for the conversion of the main building,
- little support for a new dwelling in the walled garden, and;
- the authority formed the view that the location was not sustainable.

Second pre application advice request

We then engaged more recently in the local planning authority's pre-application service and reference **25/00569/PRE** applies with the advice letter being issued by the local planning authority on 16th June, 2025.

The pre-application advice reply was very much based upon the scheme as now submitted albeit we acknowledge a few minor subsequent changes and also various options were presented at pre-application stage.

In respect of the coach house the advice was as follows:

The conversion and limited extension of the Coach House, as shown on the submitted drawings referred to above would in my view comply with parts a, b & c of the policy therefore I would raise no objections in principle to the proposals.

If an application were to be submitted it is advised to consider commissioning an ecology report (to check for any bat roosts for example).

And in respect of the part demolition of Pirton Hall and the 2 new builds the advice was as follows:

Nevertheless I consider that there is considerable merit in the circumstances set out above which are largely predicated on the enhancement of Pirton Hall as a non-designated heritage asset.

In addition to the heritage advantages of the scheme and as alluded to in the covering preapplication letter the removal of the eastern wing is likely to bring an end to any possible return to a more intensive residential conversion scheme

involving multiple apartments – a proposal which may be difficult to prevent on planning policy grounds as previously confirmed in a preapplication submission. It is acknowledged that a residential conversion scheme would generate significant traffic movement as well as other emissions arising from multiple heating systems and other energy use which would be unsustainable in overall terms.

The supporting statement also refers to the Council's lack of a five year housing land supply (currently 3.9 years). This is important in that the tilted balance set out in paragraph 11 (d) of the National Planning Policy Framework will be engaged. In these circumstances, when assessing harm against the benefits of any scheme the LPA should apply the presumption in favour of granting planning permission unless the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas of assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the proposal ; or the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole

Planning policy

The statutory Development Plan comprises the North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 together with the Neighbourhood Plan.

Mindful of the site's location within the rural area beyond the Green Belt and the NDHA status of the main hall, we submit that the following planning policy context is relevant.

Policy SP1 concerns sustainable development in North Hertfordshire and supports the principle of sustainable development where criterion (c) reads as follows:

c) Grant planning permission for proposals that, individually or cumulatively:

- i. deliver an appropriate mix of homes, jobs and facilities that contribute towards the targets and aspirations in this Plan;
- ii. create high-quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings and provide opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices;
- iii. provide the necessary infrastructure required to support an increasing population;
- iv. protect key elements of North Hertfordshire's environment including biodiversity, important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure (including the water environment); and
- v. secure any necessary mitigation measures that reduce the impact of development, including on climate change; and

Policy SP8 is entitled "**Housing**" and this sets the housing figures for the local authority with the most up to date figure comprising an obligation of 11,600 new homes within the Plan period.

Policy SP9 is entitled "**Design and Sustainability**" where criterion (a) confirms that the Council will support new development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its context.

Policy SP13 is entitled **"Historic Environment"**. In view of the NDHA status of the main hall, and also arguably the coach house as an ancillary structure to it, we quote this policy in totality as follows:

Policy SP13: Historic environment

The Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight will be given to the asset's conservation and the management of its setting. We will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through:

- a) Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance;
- b) Identifying sites on the national register of Heritage at Risk or on the Council's 'At Risk' register;
- c) Periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and other locally designated assets; and
- d) Publication of detailed guidance

We now turn to Chapter 6 entitled **"Countryside and the Green Belt"** and the first policy within this chapter reads as follows:

Policy CGB1: Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt

In the Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt, as shown on the Policies Map, planning permission will be granted provided that the development:

- a) Is infilling development which does not extend the built core of a Category B village;
- b) Meets a proven local need for community facilities, services or affordable housing in an appropriate location;
- c) Is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture or forestry;
- d) Relates to an existing rural building;
- e) Is a modest proposal for rural economic development or diversification; or
- f) Would provide land or facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and cemeteries that respect the generally open nature of the rural area

And, in addition, policy CGB4 reads as follows:

Policy CGB4: Existing buildings in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

- a) Planning permission for the re-use, replacement or extension of buildings in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt will be granted provided that:

- b) Any existing building to be converted for re-use does not require major extension or reconstruction;
- c) The resultant building(s) do not have a materially greater impact on the openness, purposes or general policy aims of the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt than the original building(s); and
- d) Any outbuilding(s) are sited as close as possible to the main building(s) and visually subordinate to them.

Policy HS3 is entitled **"Housing Mix"** and seeks an appropriate range of house types and sizes taking into account a series of criteria of which we submit that the following as the most relevant:

- a) An appropriate range of house types and sizes are provided taking into account:
 - iii. the location and accessibility of the site; and
- b) The scheme would provide a density, scale and character of development appropriate to its location and surroundings

The second component of the Development Plan is the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan which was made in 2018 and has a Plan period running from 2011-2031.

The site lies within the northwesternmost part of the designated Plan area.

Policy PNP1 concerns meeting local and wider needs of which the first objective is to:

"encourage mixed housing growth".

PNP1 is supportive of new residential development within the boundary of the village, subject of complying with a number of policy aims.

Policy PNP2 concerns design and character and this is multifaceted policy of which the most relevant component is:

2.1 Recognise, respect and reinforce the distinct local, rural character of both Pirton Village and Parish (as set out in the Character Assessment at Evidence Base 1) in relation to height, scale, spacing, layout, orientation, design, design detail, and building materials, with particular consideration given to these elements reflected in dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development. This should be particularly reflected in areas of high heritage value. Proposals for development that fail to respect this Policy will be refused unless there are special circumstances of an architectural nature that demonstrate innovation in design without impacting adversely on the character and appearance of the area.

We have also had regard to policy PNP4 in respect of hedgerows, trees and verges and PNP5, wildlife.

As we will explain the proposal is supported by the full remit of appropriate preliminary ecological reports and a BNG metric in respect of the loss of habitat associated with the 2 new builds.

Assessment and conclusion

We start with the part-demolition of the main house and the erection of the 2 new builds.

These aspects are interrelated and a condition requiring the demolition of the relevant section of the hall to be undertaken pre the occupation of any of the 2 new builds would be appropriate, necessary and reasonable in view of the planning case presented.

The benefits to the heritage asset are clear.

Pirton Hall does not have the status of a designated heritage asset but is still nonetheless an attractive building of some pedigree.

It is set within significant landscaped grounds at the end of a long treelined avenue and a series of ancillary structures such as the coach house and the walled garden.

As explained earlier the eastern extension significantly increases the bulk and mass of the asset and also presents with an institutional-type character both inside and out.

The loss of this later addition is a clear benefit and as acknowledged in the pre-application submission and subsequent reply from the local planning authority the Hall could potentially be converted into flats but that option is not being followed.

The two new houses in the location that they are proposed effectively restore the heritage asset and taking into account the presence of the coach house create a loose-lit courtyard feel with views through the built form.

The two new houses follow a more modern form of design to complement the more historical architecture of the NDHA.

The two new houses are set back from the mature trees and also set within a landscaped context on an area of land which is currently mown and used as direct domestic curtilage.

As acknowledged in the pre-application reply the two new builds do not readily fall within any of the parameters of CGB1 but the Development Plan should be assessed in the round and this is a unique proposal which puts the NDHA first and foremost.

It is quite exceptionally preferable to the change of use to flats as outlined.

The coach house was dealt with efficiently at pre-application stage.

The proposal is based on a modest extension to the eastern side, the repurposing of the existing garage on the site and utilising the walled garden as the domestic curtilage.

We would add that this is also pre-existing domestic curtilage and so there are no related additional impacts arising from this change.

We also deal with the quality of accommodation efficiently.

All new residential units meet or exceed minimum NDSS standards as set out and a significant amount of private amenity space is also provided. In addition it is noted that the original hall

is not left in deficit in terms of floorspace and will still be an exceptional home. All properties will have attractive views and the site is an exceptional one as a starting point.

There is no overlooking as the 2 new houses will face the flank of the hall at some distance and views to the south from the coach house will be down through the individual properties.

Ecology

Both a BNG assessment with metric and associated PEA (preliminary ecological appraisal) were undertaken in October 2025.

Evidence of bat droppings were found in the main Hall (the element to be demolished and referred to as B1 in the ecological report) and so in 2026 further emergence surveys were undertaken and are submitted

All bats will need to be removed under licence and this can only be obtained after the grant of planning permission.

By way of conclusion the development has been the subject of a positive pre-application reply.

It also noted that this is a tilted balance case as the local planning authority only has a housing supply position of 3.9 years and so the presumption is engaged.

We have acknowledged non-compliance with CGB1 in respect of the two new house proposals yet this is more than adequately counterbalanced by the benefits to the NDHA and the support offered by the provision of 3 new houses within the context of policy SP1.

We do not necessarily rely upon the tilted balance however the benefits of new housing and the loss of the unattractive and sizeable addition to the NDHA are significant factors which outweigh any technical harm arising from non-compliance with this policy.

Ian Coward from these offices is dealing with this matter.

Yours faithfully

**Collins & Coward
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