

Ms Naomi Reynard
Planning Officer
Council Offices
North Herts District Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

1 Apostles Close
Pirton
Hertfordshire
SG5 3EX

20 August 2025

Dear Ms Reynard,

Reference: 25/01696/OP Land East of Drovers Way, Pirton, North Hertfordshire, SG5 3EQ

I wish to register my **objection** to the above application. My planning reasons for refusal are:

Nothing has changed:

Application reference 17/01543/1 in respect of this site (described then as land off Holwell Road) was considered and rejected by the Council's planning committee on 14 September 2017. The applicant subsequently lodged an unsuccessful appeal with The Planning Inspectorate considered at a hearing in September 2018.

I acknowledge that there have been many statements by Government, the media and other bodies alluding to probable changes in planning legislation. North Herts District Council (NHDC) has itself similarly indicated that the current Adopted Development Plan needs to be reviewed. As far as I am aware, none of these proposals have materialised in the form of legislation or applicable and approved policies at national or local level.

Until any such changes, proposed, or otherwise, are entered onto the statute book, or are adopted by the local planning authority, this application still has to be determined in line with the current adopted Local Plan, the plan policies and all current planning legislation. In my view it should not, and cannot be assessed against what might emerge from any proposed changes, which carry no statutory weight.

I therefore contend that this application needs to be determined in line with the same Development Plan, policies and legislation as that used when the original application was considered. The application for the same site was rejected both by the Council's planning committee and upon appeal to the the Governments Planning Inspectorate in 2018.

On that basis surely the Council cannot reach any other decision but to reject the current application on the same grounds as it did in 2017. Given that this current application proposes the construction of even more dwellings than that proposed in the original application, that surely reinforces those grounds for refusal. It would be incongruous to conceive of any other outcome.

The Applicant has failed to make a ‘Case of Very Special Circumstances’:

The site identified in this application is designated as a ‘Rural Area beyond the Green Belt’ in the Council’s adopted Local Plan 2011 to 2035. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines the principles that must be satisfied for development in rural areas before applications can be approved. Those principles set out in the NPPF have therefore, quite properly, been reflected in the policies and conditions contained in both the local plan itself and the Neighbourhood Plan for Pirton.

Council Planning policy SP5 states that rural areas beyond the green belt are policy designations restricting the types and amount of new development that can occur. In terms of intrinsic character and beauty, such areas contain some of the highest quality countryside in this part of Hertfordshire, no less evident than here in Pirton. Outside of the defined village envelope shown in the Development Plan map, amongst other considerations, this site is not well located in relation to key services. SP5 therefore seeks to restrain the types of development allowed and this application falls squarely within this category.

It is therefore incumbent upon the applicant to demonstrate a very compelling case of special circumstances to justify development in this area. Section 13 of the NPPF sets out the reasons for such justification and the ‘Golden rules’ which applicants should satisfy in their applications. Those provisions were amended in December 2024 but essentially the principles remain.

This application has not complied with these requirements, particularly in relation to infrastructure improvements, and fails to make a case of special circumstances to justify encroachment into the designated rural area surrounding Pirton. It therefore fails these key tests and should, in my view, be rejected.

The existing Transport & Highways infrastructure cannot accommodate further growth:

There is one bus service serving Pirton. Bus journeys from the village towards Hitchin, the main shopping, commercial and the main source of employment locally, are confined to the mornings into the mid afternoons on weekdays. There are just 8 times scheduled at sporadic intervals. Similarly, return journeys from Hitchin to Pirton are mostly confined to the afternoons into the early evenings, again at sporadic intervals. The service is reduced further on Saturdays and there is no service at all on Sundays.

There are just 3 highway routes into and out of the village. They are all classified as minor roads and are narrow, making passing traffic difficult to navigate in some locations, not least for the bus service.

Within the village itself, there is a small shop only able to stock the most basic provisions. Were it not for the incorporation of a Post Office, the shop would likely prove financially unsustainable, evidenced recently when it was offered for sale. There is a primary school, but no junior or middle school. There is very limited local employment, save for local maintenance services, no Doctors surgery or pharmacy. In short Pirton has nothing much to offer its local inhabitants.

This means that private motorised travel forms a daily necessity for very many of Pirton's residents, either to take children to schools, go to work, shop, and seek commercial, social, and entertainment pursuits. They cannot rely on the sporadic bus service and the roads are already hazardous and becoming ever more congested as further developments emerge further afield.

The proposed development will add a further impact to that already unsustainable traffic and transport situation. I therefore cannot see that a strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal can find favour in the proposal, that being a requirement enshrined not only in Government Guidance, but also a feature of the Local Plan Policies adopted by NHDC.

Overdevelopment:

The Pirton Parish Council makes the point in their objection to this proposal, that the village has already accepted a 28% increase in housing since 2011. I concur with their view that this is significant for a village that had just 530 dwellings before then.

In percentage terms the Parish Council calculates that Pirton has already has accepted more housing development than Hitchin (12%), Letchworth (15%), and Royston (25%). Further development of 130 dwellings will add a further 8.9%. This would clearly be overdevelopment.

Whilst the NPPF does not provide a direct, single definition for “over-development”, it addresses the concept through policies that guide local authorities to make efficient use of land and to ensure that development is well-designed, attractive, and sympathetic to its surroundings.

Overdevelopment is typically assessed by whether a development would cause significant harm to the local area, considering factors like the prevailing character and setting, the capacity of existing infrastructure, and the design's visual appeal.

Amongst the key principles, LPA's are required to consider infrastructure capacity. I have made reference to the limited services etc., Pirton has to offer in my paragraph on Highways and Transportation above, and this proposed development offers nothing to reinforce or improve those services and will clearly place an unacceptable strain on what is currently available.

I therefore object to the proposal because of the significant over-development it will create in return for no improvement in local services.

I would be grateful if you could incorporate my objection into the planning committee report for the Members consideration please.

Thank you.

Ronald Higgins

26 August 2025