



Design & Access Statement

Ashwell Tennis Courts, Rollys Lane, Ashwell, Baldock, SG7

Construction of two detached dwellings.

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1.1 Executive Summary

1.1.1 This Design Statement has been prepared to support a full planning application within the North Herts District and should be read in conjunction with the submitted planning drawings.

- 1566-G2-P001 – Site location and block plan
- 1566-G2-P001.1 – Existing site plan
- 1566-G2-P001.2 – Proposed site plan
- 1566-G2-P001.3 – Proposed site plan – first floor
- 1566-G2-P002.2 – Proposed rear and side elevations
- 1566-G2-P002.3 – Refuse and cycle store plan
- 1566-G2-P003.1 – Proposed floor plans
- 1566-G2-P003.2 – Proposed front and side elevation
- 1566-G2-P003.3 – Proposed rear and side elevation
- 1566-G2-P004.1 – Proposed floor plans
- 1566-G2-P004.2 – Proposed front and side elevation
- 1566-G2-P004.2 – Proposed rear and side elevation

1.1.2 Summary of works: Construction of two detached dwellings.



Ashwell Tennis Courts, Rollys Lane, Ashwell, Baldock, SG7

2.1 Location and Character

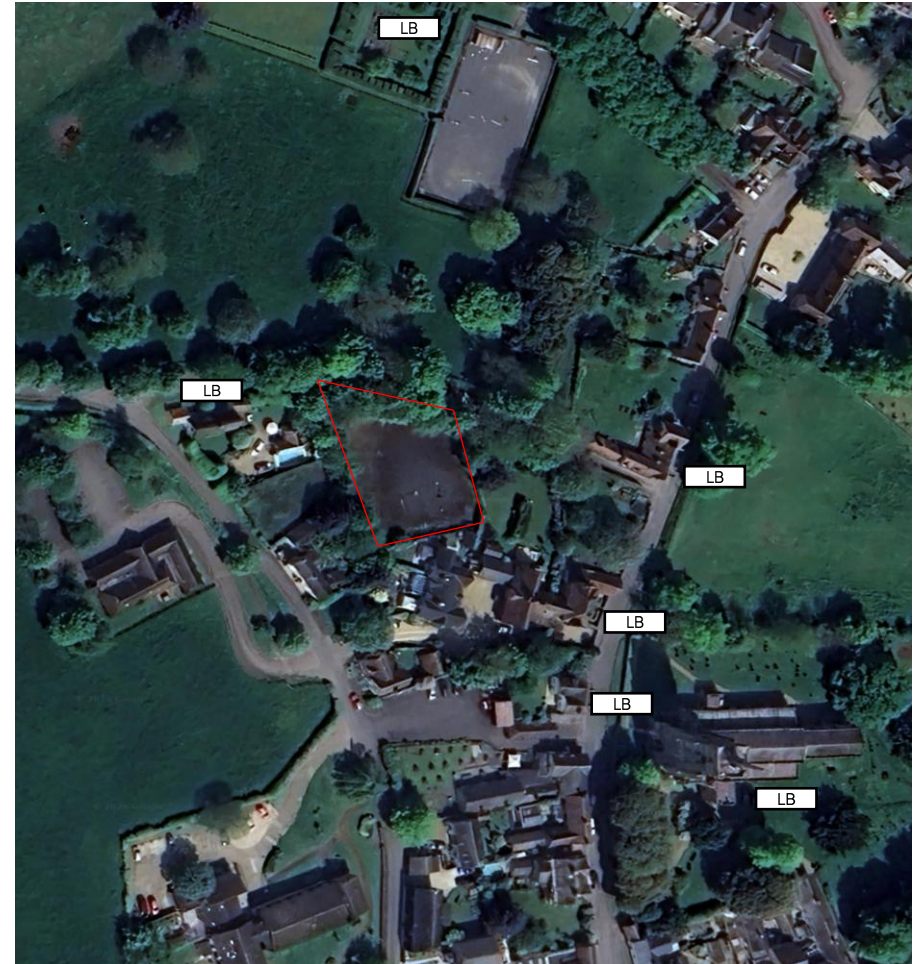
The application site comprises the existing Ashwell Tennis Courts located off Rollys Lane, Ashwell (SG7). The site lies within the Ashwell Conservation Area. Whilst the wider setting is strongly landscape-led, the courts themselves comprise a defined area of hardstanding (tarmac) with associated fencing and access, set within trees and hedgerows which create a green enclosure and filter longer views.

The tennis courts read as an established but underutilised recreational facility within the wider open space. Built form in the surrounding area is generally two-storey and village-scale, with development arranged along lanes and within small clusters typical of a historic settlement pattern. The prevalence of greenery, boundary planting and mature trees contributes to a soft-edged townscape.

The site sits within the setting of several designated heritage assets. Nearby listed buildings include Chain Cottage to the west, Ashwell Further Education Centre to the south-east, and 29, 31 and 33 Mill Street to the east. The Grade I Church of St Mary lies further to the south-east and is a prominent village landmark, experienced in wider views and as a backdrop when walking east along Rollys Lane where it can be seen in some filtered views beyond the former Merchant Taylors' school buildings and the houses of Merchant Taylors Close.

Immediately to the south, the site adjoins the boundary of the completed residential development known as Merchant Taylors Close. This development was delivered following planning permissions 02/01665/1 and 04/00552/1 at the Former Merchant Taylors School, Mill Street. The resulting dwellings are of a traditional, village-appropriate character, with pitched roofs, gable features and a palette of brickwork with lighter rendered elements and crisp detailing, demonstrating how new development can sit comfortably within the wider historic environment when scale, form and materials respond to local character.

Overall, the site's context is defined by recreation use within a sensitive heritage setting, with the existing hardstanding courts forming a functional, contained element within an otherwise green landscape framework. The presence of the Conservation Area designation and nearby listed buildings means that any proposals should be informed by the surrounding character, maintain the green landscaped boundaries, and preserve the significance and setting of nearby heritage assets, including key landmark views where relevant.



Satellite image of Rollys Lane Tennis Courts.

2.2 Site Photos



Satellite image of Rollys Lane

Photo references can be seen on the following pages.

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 1

Western view from Rollys Lane



Photo 2

Site access from Rollys Lane

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 3

Site access from Rollys Lane



Photo 4

Eastern view from Rollys Lane

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 5

North-West view from Rollys Lane



Photo 6

Northern view from Rollys Lane

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 7

North-Eastern view from Rollys Lane



Photo 8

North-Eastern view from Rollys Lane

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 9

View South (within application site)



Photo 10

View South (within application site)

2.2 Site Photos



Photo 11

View South-West (within application site)



Photo 12

View North (within application site)

3.0 Pre-application Feedback Summary

3.1 Council Advice & Design Evolution.

A formal pre-application enquiry was undertaken with North Hertfordshire District Council under reference 25/00186/PRE, dated 15 May 2025. The pre-application sought advice on redevelopment of the site to provide three detached dwellings with associated access, parking, landscaping and ancillary works.

The Council confirmed that, in principle, residential development is supported within the settlement boundary of Ashwell (Category A village), and that development of the site for housing would be supported in principle as windfall development, subject to detailed design and policy compliance.

However, the pre-application response and Conservation Officer comments identified a number of key constraints and design concerns, primarily relating to the site's sensitive position within the Ashwell Conservation Area, its role as a transition area between village and countryside, and the relationship with nearby heritage assets and locally significant views.

In response, the proposals have been comprehensively reviewed in collaboration with the Heritage Consultant, resulting in a reduced scale and intensity and a revised scheme for two dwellings with a detached single garage structure, improved spacing, and a design approach rooted in local form, materials and detailing. The current scheme also embeds practical measures for privacy, servicing, and sustainability, and is supported by a landscape-led site strategy.

Summary of key pre-application points and the design response

Principle of development

Council point: The principle of residential development was supported within Ashwell's settlement boundary (Category A village), subject to detailed considerations.

Design response: The revised proposals maintain a residential-led redevelopment of a previously developed site, but with significantly reduced intensity to better reflect the sensitive Conservation Area context and the transition character described by officers.

Conservation Area character and "transition" setting

Council point: The Conservation Officer advised the site forms an integral part of the transition area between the village and countryside, noted for scattered buildings. The earlier proposal for three dwellings was considered to consolidate built form, reduce openness/spaciousness, and have an unwelcome and assertive presence, harming the character of this part of the Ashwell Conservation Area and the setting/significance of nearby designated heritage assets.

Design response: The scheme has been reduced from three dwellings to two, directly aligning with the Council's stated direction that a more modest form of development (including the potential for a pair of modest cottages) would be less harmful and would better maintain the pattern of scattered built form. The layout now provides clearer spacing around buildings and reinforces a landscape-led character through retained green edges and complementary boundary treatments, reducing the perception of consolidation and suburbanisation.



Proposed Site Plan (Pre-application)



Proposed Site Plan (Revised following pre-application feedback)

3.1 Council Advice & Design Evolution.

Locally significant view and sensitivity of roof heights (St Mary's Church)

Council point: The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan identifies a locally significant view (SV3) where St Mary's Church is sensitive to roof heights to avoid obscuring the church. Officers noted that roof form could still impact this important view where the church is currently unfettered by new development.

Design response: The revised scheme adopts a traditional roofscape with pitched gables and dormer elements that break down the overall massing and reduce visual dominance. The siting, orientation and height of the dwellings have also been carefully tested to protect the continued legibility of the Church of St Mary as a local landmark.

This was verified using 3D survey information, with a point cloud model of the church positioned accurately within the design model to test proposed ridge/eaves lines against key view lines. Together with input from the Heritage Consultant, this has informed the final massing and provides confidence that views towards the church are retained and not unduly interrupted by the new development.

Design critique of the earlier scheme (repetition, integral garages, wide dormers/ windows)

Council point: The pre-app feedback highlighted that repetition of three similar 4-bed dwellings, integral garages, wide 3-casement windows and wide dormer cheeks contributed to an assertive, suburbanising appearance that did not reflect better local traditional precedents.

Design response: The revised proposals remove integral garages and instead provide a detached garage building serving both properties, ensuring the ancillary-built form reads as secondary and allowing the dwellings to retain more traditional proportions.

The elevations and roof forms are now designed with a more locally appropriate vernacular language (simple pitched roofs, gables and dormers with restrained detailing) and a coherent traditional palette of materials.

Plot size, garden depth and relationship to boundary trees

Council point: Officers considered that the earlier dwellings were too large for the plots, with gardens too narrow in depth and too close to boundary trees, likely resulting in future pressure/conflict with retained trees.

Design response: Reducing the number of dwellings has created a more comfortable relationship between built form and private amenity space. The revised layout provides larger, more usable gardens relative to the house footprints, reducing the potential for future conflict with boundary vegetation. Plot 1 provides a site area of 731.2m² with 482.4m² of amenity space (house footprint 97.6m²), and Plot 2 provides a site area of 564.6m² with 316.5m² of amenity space (house footprint 101m²), with detached garaging provided as a secondary element (31m² per plot).

This approach supports a lower-density form of development that better reflects the "transition" character described at pre-app.



Proposed view from Rollys Lane looking eastwards

3.1 Council Advice & Design Evolution.

Residential amenity and privacy (flank glazing)

Council point: Officers advised that side windows should be avoided or obscure glazed and non-opening to prevent overlooking and loss of privacy.

Design response: The proposals incorporate obscured side windows, with openings restricted to high level (openable from 1700mm above finished floor level), as shown on the submitted drawings.

Highways, parking and cycle provision

Council point: The Highway Authority had not been consulted as part of the pre-app; officers advised discussion with Hertfordshire Highways via their pre-application service to establish the credibility of the access arrangement. Officers also highlighted the need to demonstrate compliant parking and cycle provision.

Design response: The site benefits from an existing point of access off Rollys Lane; however, this will need to be upgraded to support residential use. The proposed access arrangements have been appraised by transport/highways consultant, and developed in line with advice received from Herts Highways as a result of the pre-app with HCC. The layout also allows for appropriate on-plot parking provision, with parking bays and dedicated cycle storage incorporated within the scheme.

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

Council point: The Council's ecologist advised there would be no ecological objection in principle due to the previously developed nature of the site, but a future application would need an ecological appraisal. Officers confirmed mandatory 10% BNG, with a metric calculation required, and noted the potential need for pre-degradation baseline if vegetation was removed after 30 January 2020.

Design response: The revised scheme is landscape-led and retains/enhances green edges. The submission will be supported by an ecological appraisal and BNG metric, and the design approach allows for integrated enhancements (e.g., bat/bird/bee features and connectivity measures) in line with the pre-app advice.

Sustainability and climate change response

Council point: Officers encouraged high environmental performance and confirmed that a detailed Energy Assessment would be required, highlighting EV charging and renewable technologies such as solar and heat pumps.

Design response: The proposed layout includes EV charging provision and air source heat pumps for each dwelling, embedding low-carbon measures at the outset whilst maintaining a traditional external appearance appropriate to the Conservation Area.

Waste, servicing and collection strategy

Council point: The Council's waste guidance was referenced, including bin storage and collection distances and the need to facilitate refuse vehicle access/turning requirements.

Design response: The scheme provides timber refuse stores for each plot and identifies a refuse collection point on the proposed site plan, ensuring a clear and practical servicing arrangement.

4.1 Design Principles

Introduction

The proposals comprise two new dwellings (House Type 1 and House Type 2) with a detached garage serving both properties. The design has been developed as a modest, heritage-led response which takes cues from the established village character and the nearby implemented development at Merchant Taylors Close, ensuring the scheme reads as a natural evolution of its surroundings rather than an overtly contemporary intervention.

External Design

The overall massing has been carefully composed to remain domestic in scale and visually recessive. Each dwelling is articulated with traditional pitched roofs, gable elements and modest dormers to break down the perceived bulk and create a familiar roofscape appropriate to the Conservation Area setting.

Particular attention has been paid to the building siting, orientation and height strategy to retain the legibility of key local landmarks within the wider townscape, including views towards the Church of St Mary. The roof profiles and building envelopes have been designed to remain subordinate within the wider setting and to avoid unnecessary interruption of these wider views.

Materials and detailing are intentionally traditional and locally familiar, supporting a high-quality vernacular appearance. The palette includes handmade red brickwork (including a brick plinth), cream lime-render, cream painted timber weatherboarding, orange/brown handmade roof tiles, stone cills, light cream painted timber windows with cross mullions, white fascia/soffits, and black metal rainwater goods. Entrances are expressed with an oak canopy porch, with restrained traditional detailing such as segmented brick arches and gable features.



Elevational view from Rollys Lane



Plot 1



Plot 2

4.1 Design Principles

Internal design and inclusivity

The proposed dwellings (House Type 1 and House Type 2) are arranged as practical, family homes with a clear and efficient internal layout that supports modern living while sitting within a traditional external form. Both house types are organised around a generous kitchen/living/dining space with direct access to the rear gardens via central timber bi-fold doors, creating a strong relationship between the primary living accommodation and generous private outdoor space.

At ground floor, each dwelling provides a balanced mix of open plan and separate rooms, including a front-facing snug, a utility room and a WC. This arrangement supports day-to-day family use and flexibility over time, including home working, visiting guests and multi-generational living.

At first floor, the layouts provide three double bedrooms, with dedicated bathroom provision, an en-suite to the principal bedroom, and a study to support home working.

Inclusivity has informed the internal planning from the outset. The dwellings are intended to meet Building Regulations Part M4(1) (Visible Dwellings), including suitable approach and entrance arrangements, level/accessible thresholds where achievable, appropriate internal circulation, and a ground floor WC to support a broad range of users, including those with reduced mobility. This ensures the homes are welcoming, usable and adaptable over their lifetime.



Plot 1 – House Type 1



Plot 2 – House Type 2

5.1 Conclusion Summary

Conclusion

The proposed development at Ashwell Tennis Courts, Rollys Lane has been conceived as a modest, context-led scheme that responds positively to its sensitive setting within the Ashwell Conservation Area and the wider village-edge landscape character. The proposals deliver two well-proportioned dwellings with detached garaging, reducing development intensity and providing a comfortable relationship between built form, amenity space and the established green edges.

The design approach is rooted in local precedent, with traditional massing, roof forms and a restrained palette of materials and detailing that reflect the character of Ashwell and the nearby implemented development at Merchant Taylors Close. The siting and height strategy have been carefully considered to ensure the development remains visually recessive and does not compete with key heritage features in the wider townscape. In particular, the design has been tested to retain the continued legibility of the Church of St Mary as a landmark in longer views.

The scheme has evolved in direct response to pre-application feedback, including a reduction from three to two dwellings, removal of integral garages, and refinement of massing and layout to better reflect the transition character identified by the Council. Practical matters such as privacy, cycle/refuse storage, parking provision and access have been incorporated within a clear and legible layout, informed by transport/ highways advice.

Internally, the dwellings provide inclusive, family-friendly accommodation intended to meet Building Regulations Part M4(1), with flexible spaces supporting modern living and home working.

Sustainability has also informed the proposals, with the intention to deliver energy-efficient homes incorporating low-carbon technologies (including air source heat pumps) and EV charging provision, helping to reduce operational energy demand whilst maintaining a traditional external appearance appropriate to the Conservation Area setting.

Overall, the proposals are considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and to respect the setting of nearby designated heritage assets, while delivering high-quality, sustainable new homes in a manner that is sympathetic, well-crafted and proportionate to its surroundings.

