

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Thomas Howe.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
26/00047/PIP	Demolition of existing stable building and erection of up to 9 dwellings.	Land At Grange Farm Hitchin Road Great Wymondley Hertfordshire

Submitted Plan Nos

05

1.0 Policies

HE1	Designated heritage assets
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T1	Assessment of transport matters
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SP2	Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distrib
SP5	Countryside and Green Belt
SP1	Sustainable development in North Herts
SECN12	Achieving well-designed places
SECN13	Protecting Green Belt Land
SECN14	Meeting climate change,coastal,flooding
SECN15	Conserve + enhance natural environment
SECN16	Conserve + enhance historic environment

2.0 **Site History**

2.1 No relevant history.

3.0 **Representations**

3.1 **Neighbour Consultation** – 42x Objections:

- Traffic generation concerns.
- Traffic harm exacerbation.
- Safety of site access is insufficient.
- Site is not vacant or underutilised and will remove land presently used for horses to live and graze on.
- Will harm character and appearance of the village.
- Land is in the Green Belt and Conservation Area.

- Not a sustainable location.
- Setting of village will be harmed.
- Poor amenities within area.
- Loss of heritage and rural character.
- Errors within the submitted documents including the Planning Statement.
- Seeks reference to the Great Wymondley Conservation Area Character Statement.
- Insufficient utilities including water supply.
- Lack of boundary treatment to screen or act as a buffer.
- Land would not be Grey Belt.
- Conflicts with purposes of the Green Belt.
- Location is not sustainable.
- Contrary with Great Wymondley Parish Council's 'traffic emergency' designation.
- Loss of outlook and views.
- No identified need for housing.
- Harms to site habitats.
- Lack of community engagement.
- Poor pedestrian and cycle links.
- Technical matters (stage 2) will be unacceptable and may make location of development unacceptable.
- Questions nature of enclosure of site by development.
- Harm to Listed Building.
- Conflicts with Neighbourhood Plan.
- School capacity has been reached. Possible oversubscription issues.
- Existing access issues would be exacerbated.
- Harm to use of residential gardens during construction and when occupied.
- Harm to protected species.
- Conflict between pedestrians and vehicle traffic.
- Noise, odour and vermin issues from adjacent farm.
- No shop within the village.

3.2 **Anglian Water** – No assets are within the site boundary. The nearby Water Recycling Centre benefits from sufficient capacity for waste treatment and flows. Any connection to the used water network would require notice being served. Objects on surface water disposal due to no surface water strategy being provided. Objects to any connection to a designated foul sewer for surface water discharge, risking flooding and pollution. The existing foul water sewer could not accommodate the surface water flows. Recommends seeking alternative methods of surface water disposal.

3.3 **Archaeology** - No information was provided, but it is recommended that conditions be attached to a decision given the presence of assets near to the site.

3.4 **Ecology** – No Objection. Any development would be bound by nationally required 10% of BNG. A bat survey is necessary to mitigate harm during demolition. "The site is recognised in the Hertfordshire LNRS as an action to 'Manage existing grassland and heathland to maintain the biodiversity of existing good quality habitats and enhance poor quality sites.'"

3.5 **Environmental Health** –

Noise: No comment.

Contamination: No Objection. Would require submission of a phased land contamination investigation.

Air Quality: No Objection.

- 3.6 **Highways** – Challenges conclusions within Planning Statement that the site is sustainable. Raising concern with regards to Arch Road being a traffic sensitive road, from 7:00 to 9:30 and 16:00 to 18:30 Mon-Fri. Therefore, it would not provide a safe or suitable route for pedestrians, especially for vulnerable highway users. Specific concern is raised regarding walking to Hitchin Road bus stops, with poor lighting during the winter months causing conflict. If the proposal came forward at technical stages, it would be objected to.

3.7 **Parish Council** – Objection

- No community engagement was undertaken.
- Harm to leaseholder and associated equestrian operation within the site.
- Questions boundary treatment and densities.
- Harm to the settings of listed buildings around the site.
- Drainage and flooding issues from the hardstanding.
- Potential conflict between occupants and adjacent cattle farm.
- Poor outlook onto large barn at Grange Farm.
- Traffic conflicts with nearby junction. Peaceful environment serving 1-6 Hitchin Road would be harmed.
- Inability to achieve visibility splays.
- Not a sustainable location.
- Inability to access wider area by foot
- Development is not utilising under utilised land due to existing equestrian use.
- Site is not within the built up area of the village.
- Fails to comply with Policy SP2 of the Local Plan.
- Challenges whether this would comprise limited infilling in a village.
- Harm to openness of the Green Belt and to setting of Heritage Assets.

3.8 **Waste** – Requires further information.

- 3.9 **Conservation** – Objection. *“No specific significance has been identified other than the site having archaeological interest and having had an established character of openness (notwithstanding built forms beyond the site’s boundaries). I agree that substantial harm would not arise from this development. However, considering the density, cul-de-sac arrangement, almost continuous built form on the eastern edge and the relationship particularly of units 4, 5 and 6 to the working farm alongside, I still consider that the scheme would occasion a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the GWCA and for this reason I consider that the proposal is **OBJECTIONABLE**.”*

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 The application site comprises a parcel of land to the rear of No. 1-6 Hitchin Road and to the side of Grange Farm. It is within Great Wymondley and is brushed over by the Green

Belt. It is also within the Conservation Area and some listed buildings are close to the site.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 Demolition of existing stable building and erection of up to 9 dwellings.

4.3 **Key Issues**

- 4.3.1 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains that permission in principle is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing led development as part of a two-stage procedure. Permission in principle applications involve two stages. Stage 1 ('permission in principle stage'), is limited to the consideration of location, land use and the amount of development which, in the event of an approval, would leave the remaining matters to be considered in a technical details application (Stage 2) (i.e. the 'technical details consent').
- 4.3.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission, and therefore appeals and permission in principle, must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This application is a Stage 1 Permission in Principle application therefore the following matters are for consideration:

Principle of Development in the Green Belt:

- 4.3.3 The site is located within the Green Belt, where in accordance with Policy SP5 of the Local Plan and Section 13 of the NPPF, new buildings are regarded as inappropriate development unless they comply with certain exceptions outlined in paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF. Policy SP2 defines Great Wymondley as a Category B Village, wherein infilling development that does not extend the built core of the village would be permitted. The site is greenfield land, with a large barn to its west, a terrace of dwellings to the north, a village hall, tennis court and residential dwelling(s) to the east, and a residential dwelling to the south. I consider that Arch Road is the primary route through the village, with Hitchin Road sweeping west off this. The public house would be to the north-eastern corner of the site, and the village hall and church are in relative proximity to the site. Overall, I consider that the site can be considered as being within the built core of the village. I do not consider that it would extend the built core given that the site is bound by development to each of its boundaries, and the lack of projection by the site beyond the outer most building lines of this part of Great Wymondley. Therefore, it is considered to comply with Policy SP2 of the North Herts Local Plan.

Grey Belt:

- 4.3.4 The submitted planning statement has made an assessment of the development's compliance with Grey Belt policy. Given that this has been proposed, I consider it is prudent to assess this.
- 4.3.5 The December 2024 version of the NPPF introduced the concept of 'Grey Belt', with the exceptions out in Paragraph 155 below:

“The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all the following apply:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and*
- d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.”*

The NPPF Definition for Grey Belt is:

“For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey belt’ excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.”

The five purposes of the Green Belt are set out below:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 4.3.6 The North Herts Green Belt review 2016 identifies the site as being within Sector 10C of the Green Belt, identified as making a strong contribution to purposes A and B and a low contribution to purpose D. Given that the development would be within the built core of Great Wymondley and would not enable the sprawl of neither Hitchin nor Stevenage, I do not consider that purpose A would be conflicted with. Great Wymondley sits directly between Hitchin and Stevenage, and whilst the development would be intensifying and densifying the residential nature of the village, I do not consider that the proposal would enable the merging of these two towns together. The setting of Hitchin is not considered to be harmed or undermined by the proposed development. The delivery of housing, in the context of the district’s housing land supply being less than 5 years is considered to meet an unmet need for the district. The site is within Great Wymondley, with amenities in physical proximity. Concern is raised with regards the ability for pedestrians to walk into the centre of the village, given their need to step into the carriageway to access Arch Road. It is noted that Highways have objected to the sustainability of the site, however, it is considered that the site’s location in physical proximity to the centre of Great Wymondley would not render it to be unsustainable. It would also run contrary to the conclusions reached given the site’s location in relation to a Category B village, categorised as such due to the presence of amenities and facilities. Therefore, the concerns in terms of pedestrian access would rest on safety rather than on sustainability

factors. The site would therefore be sustainable, and the development would comprise development in the Grey Belt, as it would comply with the provisions set by Paragraph 155 of the NPPF.

Location/Land Use:

- 4.3.7 The application site is considered to be within Great Wymondley, in physical proximity to the public house, village hall and church. Bus stops are also present nearby. It is noted that representations have raised concern with regard the site being adjacent to a farm. Although Environmental Health have not objected, I am concerned by the potential conflict that would arise whereby residents could complain about the farming operation and apply pressure to either change the operation or cause it to cease altogether. The potential for noise disruption and from odour generation, particularly if dwellings are proposed adjacent to the farm would not be acceptable in this location. It is noted that information supplied by the applicant appears to show the farm as being mothballed or not operating at present. The Parish Council and other representations advise that the farm is in use, either for cattle and/or for hay storage. In the future there is the possibility that an intensive farm operation could return to the site, and cause conflict with occupants. This is considered to be contrary to Policy D3 of the Local Plan due to the prospective harms to living conditions.
- 4.3.8 The National Planning Policy Framework supports achieving sustainable development provided the economic, social and environmental objectives are met. Highways have raised objections based on the prospective safety issues for pedestrians walking into the centre of Great Wymondley, particularly along Hitchin Road onto Arch Road. They consider a conflict would arise whereby pedestrian and cyclists would be forced to walk in the carriageway, posing a potential safety issue. The response from the applicant showing pedestrians could walk to the northern boundary of the public house and onto its grounds are noted, however, this would nonetheless require stepping into the carriageway, resulting in a potential conflict with vehicles. Therefore, given the potential for conflict between pedestrians and road users, the location of the development and the use for residential development is considered to be unacceptable and would pose an unacceptable risk to safety. It is noted that the applicant advises of the possibility to remove a section of hedging between the public house car park and the gate onto Hitchin Road, concluding that this could be resolved at the technical matters stage. Given that lies outside of the red line area, it would not be within the scope to be secured by way of a technical matters application and is therefore not material to this application. In the round, it is considered that the site would be suitably sustainable given the designation of the Category B village and the compliance with Policy SP2. Amenities and services would be nearby, and therefore, the LPA is satisfied with the sustainability of its location. Nonetheless, the proposed scheme would result in unacceptable harm to pedestrians that could pose safety risks, and are therefore considered to be objectionable.

Amount of Development:

- 4.3.9 Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted provided that development responds positively to the site's local context in addition to other criteria. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan further considers that new development will be supported where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context. These considerations are echoed in Section 12 of the NPPF.

4.3.10 At present, the site comprises a paddock with a stable and grassland. Mature trees are present to the boundaries. To the west is an operating cattle farm, and residential uses and the public house and village hall are present to the north, east and south. The terrace of dwellings to the north is a relatively dense form of development not found immediate around the site, with another example to the east, over Arch Road. An indicative layout plan is provided, and this shows the density of the proposed development and the potential layout and curtilages of the dwellings and their scales. Although indicative, the Conservation Officer has objected to the proposed density and layout of the units, raising particular concern to the continuous form of development that this would introduce and the likely proximity of the dwellings to the adjacent farm and boundaries. This would occasion a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the Great Wymondley Conservation Area. The degree of moderate harm on the less than substantial harm continuum is considered justified, and as per Paragraph 11d i) of the NPPF, it is considered that the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance (designated heritage assets) provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed, which disengages the tilted balance in line with Paragraph 215 of the NPPF. This assessment will be undertaken at the end of the report.

Other Matters:

4.3.11 Matters such as vehicular access, parking, scale, design and appearance, landscaping, relationship with neighbours and environmental matters such as land contamination, flood risk and ecological issues would be considered at the technical details stage should permission in principle be granted.

4.4 Conclusion and Planning Balance

4.4.1 At the time of writing the Council's five-year housing land supply is less than 5 years and is therefore presently a shortfall. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged in accordance with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, where permission should be granted unless; i: the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or ii: any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

4.4.2 The site is within the Great Wymondley Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset), and the application of policies which protect heritage assets must provide a strong reason for refusal in order to dis-engage the tilted balance. The consultation response from the Council's Conservation Officer offers a convincing view that, the proposed development would result in moderate harm on the less than substantial harm continuum to, and as a result would fail to preserve or enhance, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This is deemed contrary to the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan, providing a strong reason for refusing development on heritage grounds, which should be attributed significant weight in the planning balance. Therefore, given that the application of footnote 7 policies provides a strong reason for refusal, the tilted balance is disengaged, and the neutral balance is engaged, where it is still necessary for the decision taker to weigh up all other

considerations and the benefits of the proposal must outweigh the harm, in line with paragraph 215 of the NPPF.

- 4.4.3 The five-year land supply shortfall and the fact that up to 9 dwellings are proposed is a favourable consideration for the principle of this development. The scheme would be a modest addition to the Council's housing supply shortfall and would have limited social/economic benefits locally, which should be afforded modest weight. The site is located within a Category B village and the Green Belt within the Local Plan, where infill development is acceptable where it does not extend the built core of a village. Although the settlement has services to accommodate limited growth and increased housing numbers, concern is raised with regards the ability for residents to access these services on foot. There is also concern in terms of the site's location adjacent to a farm and the prospective noise and odour issues that could arise from this. However, the moderate harm on the less than substantial harm continuum to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is an important material consideration in this instance. Great weight must be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.
- 4.4.4 As such, addressing all relevant matters in the neutral balance, it is considered that this identified harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the prospective pedestrian access harms that could not be designed out of the scheme and potential amenity concerns in relation to the farm, are not outweighed by the benefits of the scheme, which is limited to the delivery of 9 dwellings against the 5-year land supply and modest local social/economic benefits.
- 4.4.5 In accordance with paragraph 215 of the NPPF, the less than substantial harm occasioned by this development is not outweighed by the public benefits, which would dictate that planning permission be refused.
- 4.4.6 The proposed development would result in unacceptable harm to the Great Wymondley Conservation Area, and would not be in a suitable location due to its proximity to a farm and the inability for pedestrians to walk into the village in a safe capacity. This would therefore be contrary to the provisions of Policy HE1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 and Section 16 of the NPPF, and Policies D3 and T1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 and Local Transport Plan 4. Refuse permission.

4.5 **Alternative Options**

- 4.5.1 None applicable.

5.0 **Recommendation**

- 5.1 That planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reason:

- 1. The proposed amount of development would occasion a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the Great Wymondley Conservation area and would therefore be contrary to the provisions of Policy HE1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 and Section 16 of the NPPF.

2. The proposed location of the development, adjacent to a farm, is likely to result in an unacceptable impact upon the amenities of future occupiers from noise and odour generation. This would potentially put the farm under unacceptable pressure to curtail its operations or to close. This would therefore be contrary to the provisions of Local Plan Policy D3 and the advice contained in para. 200 of the NPPF and location of the development is unacceptable.
3. The proposed development, by reason of its location and lack of nearby footpaths onto Arch Road, would potentially result in unacceptable risks to pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users and other non-vehicular trips to and from the site. This would potentially result in unacceptable conflicts with vehicles, posing a risk to safety that cannot be resolved at the design stage. This would be contrary to the provisions of Policy T1 of the North Herts Local plan and Local Transport Plan 4.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been refused for this proposal for the clear reasons set out in this decision notice. The Council has not acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant as in the Council's view the proposal is unacceptable in principle and the fundamental objections cannot be overcome through dialogue. Since no solutions can be found the Council has complied with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Signed  Anne McDonald	Development Management North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer Date: 8 May 2026	