

Comprehensive Objection to Planning Application 25/01696/OP – Land Adjacent to Elm Tree Farm, Hambridge Way, Pirton

Applicant: Gladman Developments Ltd

Proposal: Outline planning application for up to 130 dwellings with associated access, infrastructure, and landscaping.

Site: Land to the rear of Elm Tree Farm and Coopers Elms, Pirton, Hertfordshire

Application Ref: 25/01696/OP

1. Executive Summary

This document sets out a detailed objection to the above application submitted by Gladman Developments Ltd. The objection draws upon:

- Relevant planning history (including two previously refused applications and one dismissed appeal)
- National and local planning policy
- Technical evidence from application documents
- Previously submitted technical evidence, including highway safety and environmental assessments
- Key changes (or lack thereof) in relation to the previous proposals

This proposal remains fundamentally flawed, both in principle and in detail. It conflicts with the Local Plan, undermines commitments made under previous permissions (notably the Cala Homes development), and fails to overcome the prior reasons for refusal. The proposed development is not sustainable and should be refused.

2. Planning History and Context

Previous Applications on the Site:

- **17/01543/1:** Outline application for 99 dwellings – Refused
- **17/02563/1:** Outline application for 85 dwellings – Refused, with appeal dismissed (APP/X1925/W/18/3198996)
- **Current Application:** 130 dwellings – Significantly larger in scale, with minimal changes to site constraints or context

The appeal Inspector in APP/X1925/W/18/3198996 noted key concerns:

- Significant harm to landscape and rural character
- Inappropriate form and scale relative to Pirton's settlement pattern
- Weak sustainability credentials due to location and access constraints

These concerns remain entirely valid.

3. Planning Policy Conflict

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024)

- **Para 11:** Presumption in favour of sustainable development – not applicable where specific policies or impacts provide a clear reason for refusal
- **Para 115(b):** Development must provide safe and suitable access for all users
- **Para 180:** Avoid significant harm to biodiversity; protect existing hedgerows and habitats
- **Para 174:** Recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

- **Policy SP1:** Sustainable development in line with settlement hierarchy
- **Policy SP2:** Development focused on sustainable locations – Pirton is a Category A village with limited growth allocation
- **Policy SP5/SP6:** Countryside protection and strategic housing allocations – this site is not allocated
- **Policy CGB1:** Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt – development should be strictly controlled
- **Policy T1:** Sustainable Transport
- **Policy NE1:** Landscape protection
- **Policy NE6:** Protecting and enhancing biodiversity
- **Policy D1-D3:** Design, layout, and character

Hertfordshire County Guidance

- **Place & Movement Design Guide (2021)** – Paragraph 10.8 requires developments over 50 homes to include an emergency access
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4. Landscape and Character Harm

The site lies outside the village boundary and forms part of the rural landscape. The appeal Inspector found the site to be:

- Exposed to views from the Chilterns AONB (to the north)
- Physically and visually detached from the main village form

The current application increases the extent of harm:

- From 85 to 130 dwellings
 - With no new structural landscaping or mitigation
 - Proposing a more intensive development pattern beyond the established village edge
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5. Access and Highways Concerns

Primary Access:

- Single access point via **Coopers Elms**, a quiet residential cul-de-sac
- No direct connection to any adopted public highway
- Requires **breach of Hedgerow H3**, which Cala Homes previously committed to protecting

Emergency Access:

- No dedicated emergency access proposed
- Relies on legacy emergency route from Cala Homes, which is neither secured nor appropriate
- Breaches HCC Place & Movement Design Guide Paragraph 10.8

Highway Safety:

- Increased pressure on Drovers Way/High Street junction
- No capacity improvements or mitigation measures

These matters alone are sufficient to justify refusal under **NPPF para 115(b)** and **Local Plan Policy T1**.

6. Hedgerow H3 – Undermining Prior Permissions

In the adjacent Cala Homes development, **Hedgerow H3 was identified as a key landscape and ecological feature**, and its retention was embedded in the approved planning strategy:

- Clearly shown as **retained and protected** in the approved **Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)**.
- Incorporated as part of the **biodiversity mitigation strategy** and visual buffer, contributing to the scheme's acceptability.
- Formed part of the **public realm design**, ensuring connectivity, visual containment, and habitat continuity.

The current proposal by Gladman would involve breaching Hedgerow H3 to create a new access point:

- Directly **contradicting the design rationale and mitigation hierarchy** that underpinned the Cala Homes permission.
- **Undermining the visual, ecological, and amenity value** the hedgerow provides to both the adjacent development and wider setting.
- **Eroding the planned transition between village edge and open countryside**, in conflict with the strategic edge-of-settlement design intentions.

This is contrary to:

- **Policy NE6** – which requires protection and enhancement of ecological features, and discourages harm to priority habitats and green infrastructure.
- **Policy D1** – which requires developments to integrate into their context, protect landscape features, and reinforce local character.
- The **approved Cala Homes permission**, which provides the **only lawful point of access** and formed part of a carefully balanced planning decision.

Development proposals that would undermine implemented mitigation measures or previously agreed landscape/ecological strategies have been refused at appeal. For example:

- **APP/P1940/W/19/3230483 (Three Rivers, 2019)** – appeal dismissed where removal of a previously retained hedgerow would harm an established buffer and wildlife corridor.
- **APP/L3815/W/21/3274820 (Chichester, 2022)** – appeal dismissed as proposed changes conflicted with previously agreed ecological mitigation required under a consented adjacent scheme.

These decisions establish that **the integrity of approved ecological and landscape frameworks must be respected**, particularly where they were critical to a prior grant of permission. To do otherwise risks **piecemeal erosion of approved development logic and public trust in the planning process**.

7. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)

Both past and current applications confirm the site comprises **Grade 2 agricultural land**, classified as **Best and Most Versatile (BMV)**. This is a nationally important soil classification.

- The presence of BMV land was previously identified as a material constraint.
- The current application seeks to **downplay its significance** without providing any new agricultural land classification or soil quality evidence.
- **Grade 2 land is a finite and irreplaceable resource** critical to food security and the rural economy.

The loss of such land for **unallocated, speculative development** is in direct conflict with:

- **Paragraph 174(b) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which requires planning decisions to protect and enhance soils, and specifically to recognise the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land.
- **Local Plan Policies SP5 and SP6**, which promote a plan-led approach and direct development toward allocated or previously developed land.

This principle has been upheld in numerous planning appeal decisions, including:

- **APP/F0114/W/22/3308233 (Bath and North East Somerset, 2023)** – where the loss of Grade 2 land was a key reason for dismissal, with the Inspector concluding that alternative sites of lesser agricultural value should be explored first.
- **APP/B3030/W/22/3311299 (Newark and Sherwood, 2023)** – where development on Grade 2 and 3a land was found to conflict with national and local policy, and no overriding need was demonstrated.
- **APP/K2610/W/21/3278065 (North Norfolk, 2023)** – where the Inspector gave significant weight to the unjustified loss of high-grade land, ultimately dismissing the appeal on this basis.

In each of these cases, the **loss of BMV land in the absence of compelling justification** or overriding public benefit weighed heavily against the development.

This proposal fails to demonstrate that the development of high-quality agricultural land is either necessary or unavoidable.

8. Unsustainable Location & Overdevelopment

The application site lies:

- Beyond the defined edge of the village, forming an unplanned and visually disconnected extension into open countryside.
- At the eastern extremity of Pirton, **further from core village services than existing development**, and thus **poorly located in terms of accessibility**.
- Outside the development boundaries of the adopted or emerging **Local Plan** and is not allocated within the **Pirton Neighbourhood Plan**.
- Along a road—**Coopers Elms**—which lacks continuous footway provision, thereby failing to provide safe and inclusive pedestrian access.

These deficiencies were **central to the Planning Inspector’s decision** in dismissing the previous appeal on this site (APP/X1925/W/18/3206346), which concluded:

“The site is not located in an area well served by public transport or within easy walking distance of a range of everyday services.”

The Inspector further noted that the development would:

“Promote unsustainable travel behaviour by increasing car dependency, and relying heavily on unguaranteed travel plan measures and future service improvements which had not been secured.”

This current proposal for **130 dwellings** is **53% larger** than the previously refused scheme, yet provides **no updated or secured infrastructure enhancements**, no dedicated public transport interventions, and **no new justification to demonstrate that such a scale is sustainable**.

The development would therefore fail to meet the tests of sustainable development outlined in the **National Planning Policy Framework (2024)**, specifically:

- **Paragraph 15** – Plan-led development should guide growth in a sustainable way.
- **Paragraph 85** – New housing should be directed toward **locations with appropriate infrastructure and accessibility to services**.
- **Paragraph 115(b)** – Development must ensure **safe and suitable access for all users**, including pedestrians and cyclists.

Moreover, this proposal comes **on top of recent growth** in Pirton (e.g. Cala Homes, Spitfire Homes, Blakeney Homes etc), **exacerbating cumulative impacts** on local services and infrastructure.

9. Green Infrastructure and Bridleway Disruption

- The application breaches the **bridleway** running adjacent to the eastern boundary
- This bridleway was designed as a **green infrastructure corridor** in the Cala scheme
- Breaching it for access reduces connectivity, public safety, and habitat integrity

10. Grey Belt Consideration – Ineligible

Under the **2025 PPG Grey Belt Guidance**, land must:

- Be **sustainable**
- Have **clear edge** conditions
- Not undermine existing protections

Given this land has been **assessed and dismissed as unsustainable** at appeal, it does **not meet Grey Belt eligibility** and must be protected under current policy.

11. Summary of Reasons for Objection

1. **Conflict with Local Plan Policy** – particularly SP1, SP2, SP5, SP6, CGB1, T1, NE1, NE6, D1-D3
 2. **Failure to address previous appeal refusal** – harm to landscape, character, access, and sustainability
 3. **Inadequate highways access and no emergency access** – in breach of HCC Design Guidance and NPPF 115(b)
 4. **Destruction of Hedgerow H3**, previously protected
 5. **Unjustified loss of Grade 2 agricultural land**
 6. **Unsustainable location** – no allocation, no supporting infrastructure, poor connections
 7. **Disruption to green infrastructure and bridleway network**
 8. **Scale and form inappropriate for village context** – represents urban intrusion into the countryside
 9. **Fails Grey Belt eligibility under new 2025 PPG Guidance**
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12. Conclusion

This is not a sustainable proposal. It contradicts local and national planning policy, increases the scale of previous unacceptable schemes, and fails to mitigate long-standing access and landscape issues. We urge North Hertfordshire District Council to robustly reject this application and uphold the integrity of the adopted Local Plan and the character of Pirton.

Prepared by: Michael Campbell

On behalf of: Local residents concerned about inappropriate development in Pirton

Dated: 06 August 2025