

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Melissa Tyler.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
26/01092/FP	Installation of Air Source Heat Pump units within an external fenced-off area and external soft landscaping works to the fenced area.	North Hertfordshire Leisure Centre Baldock Road Letchworth Garden City Hertfordshire SG6 2ER

Submitted Plan Nos

Location Plan 2157-SBA-LC-00-DR-A-0001 (P03) 2157-SBA-LC-00-A-0101 (P03) 2157-SBA-LC-ZZ-DR-A-1101 (P02) 2157-SBA-LC-ZZ-DR-A-1001 (P02) 2157-SBA-LC-ZZ-DR-A-0202 (P02)

1.0 Policies

Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development

Section 8 - Promoting healthy communities

Section 9 - Promoting sustainable transport

Section 11 – Making effective use of land

Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

Section 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Supplementary Planning Documents and other.

GDPO

Design SPD 2026

Sustainability SPD 2024

Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development SPD

North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 Local Plan and Proposals Map

Policy SP2 Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution

Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability

Policy SP10: Healthy Communities Policy

SP11: Natural resources and sustainability

Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity

Policy T1 Assessment of Transport Matters

Policy T2 Parking

Policy ETC3 New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy D1 Sustainable Design

Policy D3 Protecting living conditions

Policy HC1 Community facilities

Policy NE4 Biodiversity and geological sites

Policy NE12 Renewable and low carbon energy development

2.0 Site History

2.1 Substantial site history – more recent set out below:

- 2.2 25/00719/FP Decarbonisation works, including: the provision of insulated rendering to external walls, air source heat pump and associated enclosure, a substation, and photovoltaic panels on roofs. (Amended plan received 07/05/25). CP
- 2.3 24/02240/PRE Internal and external alterations
- 2.4 22/03019/FP Change of use of existing squash courts 1 and 2 on first floor to a soft play area and existing squash courts 1 and 2 and the studio on ground floor to soft play area, changing entrance to soft play area with associated toilets and refreshment area to replace existing staff room and changing areas, installation of first floor window and canopy to south east elevation and the construction of a new public entrance. CP
- 2.5 15/01594/1 Single storey front extension to existing building to provide a Learner / Training Pool with cafe area, terrace and associated two storey plant room; 15 additional car parking spaces, addition of external lighting to revised car park layout and ancillary works.CP

3.0 **Representations**

Statutory Consultees

3.2 **North Herts Environmental Health :**

The application is supported by a noise assessment which concludes that there will be a low impact from the proposed plant. I agree with this conclusion and raise no objections to the proposals subject to the plant installation being in accordance with the submitted supporting information.

3.9 **Neighbour Representations**

None received

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 The site is North Herts Leisure Centre, which lies just off Baldock Road in Letchworth Garden City. North Herts Leisure Centre is a large multi-use venue, including a gymnasium, swimming facilities, sports courts, soft play area and a café.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 Planning permission is sought for the installation of Air Source Heat Pump units within an external fenced-off area and external soft landscaping works to the fenced area.
- ☐ Replace the existing gas fired boiler plant with air source heat pump technology & modify existing heating systems for the Learner Pool in particular
 - ☐ Providing an enclosure for the ASHP units so as to minimise visual impact and noise for visitors and neighbours of the site

- ② Provide screening planting to minimise the visual impact of the fencing around the ASHP units

4.3 Principle of development and Policy compliance

- 4.3.1 The proposal includes works to the existing leisure centre, located within the settlement boundary of a main town in North Hertfordshire (Policy SP2), which will secure environmental improvements to the building, reducing its carbon impact. This is supported under Policies SP1, SP2, NE12 and D1 of the Local Plan.
- 4.3.2 'Policy SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire' supports development that will 'secure any necessary mitigation measures that reduce the impact of development, including on climate change'.
- 4.3.3 Policy NE12: Renewable and low carbon energy development' and 'Policy SP11: Natural resources and sustainability' broadly support the provision of renewable and low carbon energy development in appropriate locations.
- 4.3.4 Policy D1: Sustainable design' further seeks to ensure that development proposals 'reduce energy consumption and waste'. Specific requirements/provisions are subsequently set out in the Sustainability SPD.
- 4.3.5 The principle of the decarbonisation works are also supported at a National level through legislation, National Policy Statements and the Net Zero Strategy. The NPPF states '*in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic (including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights).*'
- 4.3.6 In assessing renewable and low carbon energy proposals the Council will give significant weight to their local and wider benefits, particularly the potential to reduce greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions, and the social benefits of community owned schemes.
- 4.3.7 On 21 May 2019, the Council passed a Climate Emergency motion which pledged to do everything within the Council's power achieve zero carbon emissions in North Hertfordshire by 2030. As one of the first councils to pass this motion, NHDC is leading the way on climate action. This declaration asserted the Council's commitment toward Climate Action beyond current government targets and international agreements.

Design and layout and landscaping, visual impact on the character of the area

- 4.3.8 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.

- 4.3.9 The application proposes the installation of air source heat pump units and associated fencing within the grounds of the leisure centre. The proposed units would be located in a relatively prominent position within the site and, by virtue of their scale and functional appearance, would introduce additional built infrastructure that would be visible within the wider leisure centre setting. Other locations were explored; however, the proposed site provides the most benefit for the requirements of the ASHPs.

This location provides the ASHP units in close proximity to the equipment they are serving within the building. This minimises on conduit and ductwork connections, ensuring these are as limited in scale as possible. The location is on a level surface and is readily accessible for future maintenance and replacement of equipment in the future – sharing the access arrangements for the building's chemical stores. There is minimal disruption to on site biodiversity as the area of biodiverse land is at a minimum and the nature of that biodiverse land is comparatively poor (monoculture grass lawn). It is on a façade that is readily seen by members of the public though with planting, colour options on the fence panelling and the fact it is an addition on an extension of the original building rather than along the façade of the main entrance or near the more distinctive dark brick and kalwall walls of the main pool hall building, the impact on the façade has been addressed to be as minimal as practicable

- 4.3.10 The proposed fencing and enclosure have the potential to influence the visual appearance of the site, particularly when viewed from surrounding areas and when entering the site from the main entrance and within the context of the existing leisure centre environment. It is therefore important that the detailed appearance, materials, colour finish and landscaping treatment are carefully considered to ensure that the development integrates satisfactorily with its surroundings and does not result in an incongruous or visually intrusive addition.
- 4.3.11 A condition will be imposed requiring details of the final fencing design, materials, finishes and associated landscaping scheme to be submitted and approved prior to installation. This will ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated, including suitable screening and soft landscaping where necessary, to reduce the visual impact of the equipment and maintain the character and appearance of the site.
- 4.3.12 Whilst the proposed air source heat pumps and associated infrastructure would result in some visual impact, this harm is considered limited and must be balanced against the significant environmental benefits arising from the installation of renewable energy technology. The equipment is required to facilitate the operation of the learner pool and contribute towards improved energy efficiency and the decarbonisation of the leisure centre. On balance, the environmental and operational benefits of the proposal are considered to outweigh the limited design and visual impact, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions to secure a high-quality appearance and landscape integration.
- 4.3.13 Overall, it is considered that the design and layout of the proposed scheme are acceptable. As such, the proposal would accord with Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan and Section 12 of the NPPF in terms of the design and layout of the scheme.

Impact on neighbouring properties

- 4.3.15 Local Plan policy D3 Protecting Living Conditions states that: *“Planning permission will be granted for development proposals which do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. Where.....the living conditions of an existing development would be affected by a proposed use, the Council will consider whether there are mitigation measures that can be taken to mitigate the harm to an acceptable level. If the Council is not satisfied that mitigation proposals would address the identified harm, development proposals will not be permitted.”*
- 4.3.16 North Herts Leisure Centre is a large building located on a large plot away from any residential properties. Therefore, the proposal is unlikely to result in any material harm upon the reasonable living conditions and well-being of neighbours. This is in line with Policy D3 of the Local Plan.

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 The proposed development in terms of its design, impact on amenity issues, ecology impacts, landscape impacts is acceptable and considered to comply with the provisions of the Local Plan policies and the National Planning Policy Framework. The general principle of the decarbonisation works is also supported under local policy by virtue of the environmental improvements that will be delivered and the NPPF gives significant weight to these benefits in the planning balance.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. This development is not subject to the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition because it is considered exempt under the statutory exemptions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>) or transitional arrangements in respect of the biodiversity gain condition.
2. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
3. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

4. Prior to the installation of the air source heat pump units hereby approved, details of the proposed fencing/enclosure, including its design, height, materials, colour finish and means of integration with the existing leisure centre environment, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved details shall thereafter be implemented in full and retained for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To ensure that the appearance of the development is appropriately controlled and that the proposed equipment does not result in an unacceptable visual impact, in accordance with Policy D1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. Prior to the installation of the air source heat pump units hereby approved, a scheme of landscaping and planting associated with the enclosure of the equipment shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of the species, size, density and location of any proposed planting and a timetable for implementation. The approved landscaping shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and maintained thereafter for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To ensure that the development is satisfactorily integrated into the site, minimises visual impact and maintains the character and appearance of the surrounding area, in accordance with Policy D1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Proactive Statement:

6. Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Signed	Development Management
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 Anne McDonald	North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer	
Date: 14 July 2026	