

WYMONDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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North Herts District Council
Planning Department

2 March 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

Planning application: 26/00006/FP

Proposal: Erection of 50 residential dwellings (including affordable) with public open space, associated parking, landscaping and access

Site: Land to the north of Stevenage Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

I write on behalf of Wymondley Parish Council as the neighbouring Parish Council to object strongly to the above application.

Our objection is based on predominantly green belt/grey belt definition and Highways issues but it should also be noted that this land is open agricultural land adjoining a small hamlet of Ashbrook and would be very close to Kingshott school and particularly their playing field. The proposed density of the development is completely out of character with the rural area and the layout is very urban in nature to be built in the countryside

We focus below on:

Green Belt

The site lies within the designated Green Belt as defined in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031. The applicant seeks to characterise the land as “grey belt”. However, under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance, “grey belt” refers to Green Belt land that is previously developed and/or does not strongly contribute to key Green Belt purposes. This site is open, undeveloped countryside which clearly contributes to several Green Belt purposes, including:

- checking the unrestricted sprawl of Hitchin;
- preventing neighbouring towns and villages from merging, particularly the coalescence of Hitchin and Little Wymondley;
- safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and
- preserving the setting and special character of historic settlements.

On this basis, the land does not meet the NPPF definition of “grey belt” and should continue to be treated as Green Belt. The proposal therefore conflicts with the Green Belt policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (including policies relating to the protection of the Green Belt and countryside) and with the NPPF tests for inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No very special circumstances have been demonstrated that would clearly outweigh

the substantial harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and loss of openness, together with the other harms identified below.

This is a key section of open green belt land in the Chiltern Gap a geographically sensitive area of countryside.

It also serves an important purpose of stopping the merging of Stevenage and Hitchin. We would therefore argue that Green Belt reason B to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another applies in this case. The Green belt legislation was never to be interpreted as to mean only the last blade of grass or strip of land between two towns would be green belt. A clear demarcation should be retained between towns. The more planning consents that are granted the more important understanding where that line is drawn is critical.

North Herts is described in the Local Plan as *“North Hertfordshire is characterised by a number of small to medium sized towns with a range of facilities and smaller settlements located within open countryside.”* We are at risk of having to rewrite that introduction.

The reality is consents over the past couple of years are driving us towards a single urban sprawl.

Highways

Highway safety and traffic impacts are a major concern for our Parish. Access to and from the A602 in this locality is already difficult and hazardous. We understand from a freedom of information Act request that there have been some 33 recorded serious accidents from the Ashbrook junction to the Whitehill junction over the past 10 years. Adding traffic from 50 additional dwellings will inevitably increase turning movements and congestion at an already stressed junction, contrary to the NPPF requirement that developments should provide safe and suitable access for all users and should not result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety. This traffic increase is going to be even greater as the pupil numbers at Kingshott rise from 380 to 520 over the next two years.

In practice, when the A602 is congested or perceived as unsafe (which is most of the time), traffic diverts through Great Wymondley as a rat run route to Hitchin. This already causes significant problems for our village in terms of safety, noise, and general amenity. The proposed development would exacerbate this rat-running, increasing traffic through narrow village roads that are wholly unsuitable for additional through traffic. The applicant's transport assessment appears to underplay these impacts and does not provide robust mitigation.

There are also the impacts upon Kingshott school. We understand that the school is not able due to legal constraints with the developer to express its concerns on the safety of its children as strongly as it would wish. The fact is that the developer had said in consultation meetings they would gate or barrier the access to the school to the right of the estate access but that does not seem to be the case in the proposals. That means that to avoid the A602 Ashbrook junction and congestion residents could exit right through the school children drop off zone. This would be extremely dangerous and create a real safety issue for the school. This should by conditions be avoided.

Sustainable Location

There is also a fundamental question of whether this is a sustainable location for development in the terms set out in the NPPF and the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The site is separated from existing services and facilities, and future residents are likely to be heavily dependent on the private car for everyday needs. This conflicts with the NPPF's emphasis on promoting sustainable transport, reducing the need to travel, and locating development where it can be served by safe and convenient walking, cycling and public transport. The claimed "grey belt" status does not in itself make the site sustainable; sustainability must be assessed in terms of access to services, transport, and the overall pattern of development, and on these measures the proposal performs poorly.

In addition, the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the countryside and to the openness of the Green Belt, eroding the gap between Hitchin and Great Wymondley and undermining the spatial strategy of the Local Plan, which seeks to direct growth to appropriate, planned locations rather than through speculative incursions into the Green Belt.

Having reviewed the applicant's submissions, particularly in relation to access and transport, we do not consider that the evidence provided adequately addresses the real-world safety issues on the A602 or the knock-on impacts on neighbouring villages such as Great Wymondley. Nor does it justify the loss of Green Belt in a manner consistent with the Local Plan and the NPPF.

For these reasons, Wymondley Parish Council objects to application 26/00006/FP and respectfully requests that North Herts Council refuses planning permission.

Conditions

Should you unwisely decide to grant permission in so doing accept that you are satisfied that the A602 Ashbrook junction is safe we would request the following conditions are adopted:

To protect residents of Great Wymondley a no left turn is implemented as you exit the development onto Stevenage Road.

If this is not acceptable, we would require speed restrictions to 20MPH and traffic calming measure to include pedestrian safety along Arch Road and at the railway bridge to protect pedestrians especially children going to the village school.

Yours Faithfully

Sandra Weir

Sandra Weir
Clerk to Wymondley Parish Council