

Officer Liz Anderson – Ecologist
Date 02/03/2026

Ref: 26/00006/FP
Att: Sam Dicocco

**Land To North Of, Stevenage Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire,
Erection of 50no. residential dwellings (including affordable) with public open space,
associated parking, landscaping and access.**

Consultee comments

I have no objection to the principle of development on this site but do have concerns regarding the layout as submitted. I flagged these concerns in relation to North Herts Local Plan policy NE4 at pre-app stage and advised the applicant reconsider the location of properties bordering the hedgerows. Whilst the intention to retain boundary hedgerows is welcomed, NE4 requires a 12m buffer to such features. H1, in the north, is recorded as a native hedgerow with trees. It is in good ecological condition and an ecological corridor, having this form a residential boundary would not be considered appropriate buffering.

The December 2025 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEAR) advises HERC returned 142 records of at least eight species of bat from within 2km of the survey area. A daytime bat walkover was undertaken to assess potential roost sites for bats and likelihood of bats roosting was not considered to represent constraint to development.

Nevertheless, the hedgerows were acknowledged as *'likely to provide better opportunities for foraging and commuting bats'* as they represented *'moderate suitability habitat.'* And as such the PEAR warns that they are likely to be subject to increases in artificial light. It is unfortunate that no assessment of bat activity was undertaken to determine the level of use of these hedgerows by bats as the recommendation for external lighting to be *'low-level, directional lighting with minimal spill and glare'* cannot be achieved where the hedgerow will form part of the private curtilage boundary of the new dwellings. Householders will potentially install external security lighting which will have a detrimental impact to nocturnal species. We cannot know how damaging this impact will be as we have no survey data. Therefore, I am concerned over the lack of information to determine true impact and allow for informed mitigation.

The tree constraints plan shows an oak tree, T3, as a category A tree which appears to the rear of plot 36. The tree survey says *'The tree had significant potential for future growth'*. Given the small rear garden this will likely cause nuisance in the future with the householder seeking reduction adding further detriment to the ecological corridor.

Looking at the drainage proposals, the use of SUDS to the east provides added ecological benefit and compliments the Ash Brook corridor, however, it is disappointing to see a piped solution rather than swales or rain gardens within the built elements of the scheme.

A statutory Biodiversity Metric has been supplied with the application, this identifies the scheme as able to deliver a net gain of 83% of biodiversity units and hence is compliant with mandatory requirements. As proposed habitats on site are classified as medium distinctiveness they are considered to be significant so a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) will be required to be submitted alongside a Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP).

As North Herts Council will be required to review the monitoring reports and make site visits to assess the effectiveness of, and adherence to, the HMMP, costs would need to be secured via a s106 as detailed in Biodiversity planning advice at complexity price band 1.

Lastly, a point of clarity, the PEAR states in table 4.2 Hedgerow assessment, H2 is important. However, on inspection of appendix 3 it is clear this should be H3.

Should the case officer be minded to approve the application the following conditions are advised;

Construction Environmental Management Plan

No development shall take place (including ground works or vegetation clearance) until a construction environmental management plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) should include the following;

- a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.*
- b) Identification of “biodiversity protection zones” to be informed by a recent badger survey undertaken prior to commencement*
- c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid impacts to protected species during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).*
- d) The location and timing of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.*
- e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.*
- f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.*
- g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.*
- h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs.*

The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan

The development shall not commence until a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (the HMMP), prepared in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Gain Plan and including:

- (a) a non-technical summary;*
- (b) the roles and responsibilities of the people or organisation(s) delivering the HMMP;*

- (c) the planned habitat creation and enhancement works to create or improve habitat to achieve the biodiversity net gain in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Gain Plan;*
- (d) the management measures to maintain habitat in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Gain Plan for a period of 30 years from the completion of development; and*
- (e) the monitoring methodology and frequency in respect of the created or enhanced habitat to be submitted to the local planning authority, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority.*

Notice in writing shall be given to the Council when the:

- (a) HMMP has been implemented; and*
- (b) habitat creation and enhancement works as set out in the HMMP have been completed.*

The created habitat specified in the approved HMMP shall be managed and maintained in accordance with the approved HMMP.

Recommendations are made for ecological enhancements and, in conjunction with North Herts Local Plan policy NE4, the following condition is advised;

No development shall take place until an Ecological Enhancement Plan (EEP) for the creation of new wildlife features such as the inclusion of integrated bird/bat and bee bricks in buildings/structures (swift bricks should be used where building heights allow), hedgehog holes in fences and hibernacula has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure development is ecologically sensitive and secures biodiversity enhancements in accordance with the North Herts Local Plan policy NE4.

The potential for disturbance to nocturnal species from lighting on site is raised and a sensitive lighting strategy is advised;

A lighting strategy for biodiversity on the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The strategy shall;

a) identify those areas/features on site to which bats and other nocturnal species are particularly sensitive and that are likely to cause disturbance in or around their breeding sites and resting places, or along important routes used to reach key areas of their territory, for example, for foraging;

and b) show how and where external lighting will be installed (through the provision of appropriate lighting contour plans and technical specifications) so that it can be clearly demonstrated that areas to be lit will not disturb or prevent the above species using their territory or having access to their breeding sites and resting places.

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specifications and locations set out in the strategy, and these shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the strategy. Under no circumstances should any other external lighting be installed without prior consent from the local planning authority.

The case officer should note Biodiversity Gain condition wording should be added to the decision notice, the biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition having its own separate statutory basis and is deemed to apply to every planning permission granted for the development of land in England. To ensure the applicant is clear about this distinction the biodiversity gain condition should not be included in the list of conditions imposed in the written notice when granting planning permission but should remain separate.

Biodiversity Net Gain

*The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition “(the biodiversity gain condition)” that **development may not begin** unless:*

- (a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and*
- (b) the planning authority has approved the plan.*

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be North Herts Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.