

**Former Big Cat Sanctuary
Codicote Road, Welwyn**

Design & Access Statement

July 2026



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The Vision

An exemplar place to live, knitting into its landscape, supporting wildlife and promoting healthy living.

A new community that invests in a sustainable future.

An attractive residential neighbourhood framed by greenspace where people will aspire to live.

A place with a strong identity influenced by the topography and landscape.



**Former Big Cat Sanctuary
Codicote Road, Welwyn**



1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this document

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by OSP Architecture and a wider consultant team on behalf of Howarth Homes to accompany a Full planning application for the redevelopment of the former Big Cat Sanctuary, Codicote Road, Codicote, Welwyn, AL6 9TU

The application is submitted for the following:
"Demolition of all existing buildings and structures on-site and the redevelopment of the site to provide no. 109 residential units with access, parking, hard and soft landscaping, public open space and associated works".

This statement provides a summary of the site analysis incorporating a review of key environmental and technical considerations. Following identification of the key opportunities and constraints for this Site, an overarching vision has been developed alongside an initial concept layout. This advocates a landscape led approach which seeks to provide extensive landscaping enhancements alongside high quality homes and open space.

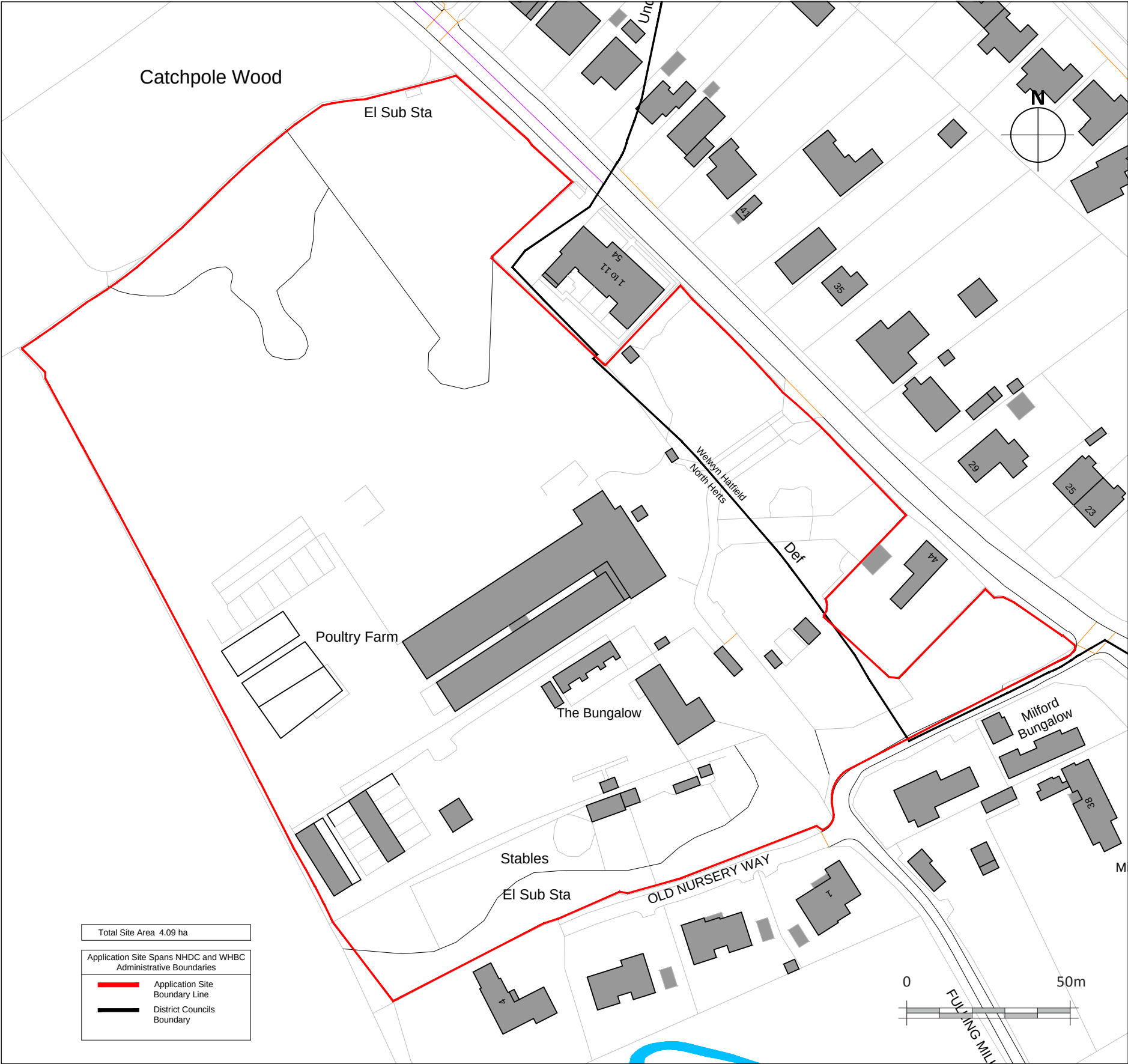
Further details relating to the assessments undertaken as part of the planning application are provided in the accompanying technical reports. This Design and Access Statement should be read alongside these other technical documents.

1.2 Site location

The 4.0 hectare Site sits on the south western side of Codicote Road (B656) to the north of Fulling Mill Lane and Old Nursery Way.

The Site lies across the boundary of the following local planning authorities:

- North Herts District Council (NHDC) (where the majority of the Site lies); and
- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC).



Site location plan (not to scale)

**Former Big Cat Sanctuary
Codicote Road, Welwyn**



2. Existing Site & Context

2.1 Site description

The Site currently consists of a series of horse paddocks, stables, dwelling bungalow and caravans. The Site was formerly a Farm Shop and a big cat sanctuary.

The Site is accessed via an existing track midway along the boundary with Codicote Road. There is also a stepped access to the existing electricity sub-station in the north-eastern corner of the Site. Whilst the southern parts of the Site are fenced, the northern boundary is open to the existing woodland.

Either side of the Codicote Road site entrance, the Site wraps around a Grade II listed building (44 Codicote Road) and a block of apartments (Beeholme).

The Site slopes down over 25 metres from the north to the south, with extended views to the west and south. The Site is well enclosed by existing boundary trees and hedgerows and there are some individual mature trees within the Site.



Birds eye view of the Site looking north (Google)



CATCHPOLE
WOOD

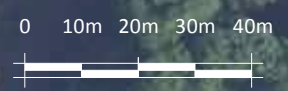
CODICOTE ROAD

SITE ACCESS

44 CODICOTE ROAD
(GRADE II LISTED)

FULLING MILL LANE

OLD NURSERY WAY



Aerial photograph (photograph locations shown in black)

2.2 Site photographs

1. Existing Site access from Codicote Road looking north
2. View along access drive toward Codicote Road
3. Derelict sheds within the Site
4. Existing paddocks adjacent to Codicote Road
5. Former Farm Shop buildings in the centre of the Site
6. Existing paddocks looking towards Beechholme apartments
7. Existing trees on northern part of Site
8. Looking south across former Farm Shop buildings and caravan



2.2 Site photographs

- 9. Looking south-west over former Farm Shop buildings
- 10. Looking west
- 11. Northern part of the Site looking west
- 12. Former pool on northern part of Site
- 13. Looking south over former big cat enclosures
- 14. Looking east from northern part of Site
- 15. Former big cat enclosures along western edge of the Site



9.



10.



12.



14.



11.



13.



15.

2.2 Site photographs

- 16. Former big cat enclosures on southern part of the Site
- 17. Within former big cat enclosures
- 18. Caravan and former Farm Shop
- 19. Existing paddocks along southern edge of the Site
- 20. Existing paddocks adjacent to Codicote Road
- 21. Caravan and abandoned car in middle of the Site
- 22. Rear of Beecholme apartments
- 23. Existing woodland along northern edge of the Site



2.3 Site context

Immediate context

The immediate context surrounding the Site is a varied mix of predominantly detached residential houses either side of Codicote Road or the roads leading from it.

Just to the south of the Site is the River Mimram which runs south towards Old Welwyn and eventually to Hertford ,where it meets the River Lea. Fulling Mill Lane runs parallel with Codicote Road passing over the river and alongside Singlers Marsh.



2.3 Site context

Welwyn

Welwyn (Old Welwyn) is a historic Hertfordshire village with roots dating back to the Roman era. Famous for its Roman Baths (preserved under the A1 motorway) and its medieval High Street, it offers a number of pubs, churches and independent shops, which keeps it distinct from the newer Welwyn Garden City.

Defined by the River Mimram and the scenic Singlers Marsh nature reserve, it is popular with commuters due to its proximity to the A1(M) and Welwyn North railway station.



2.3 Site context

Codicote

Like Welwyn, Codicote is a historic Hertfordshire village and former medieval market village situated on a ridge in the Chiltern Hills. Characterized by its ancient high street and timber-framed architecture, it is home to one of the oldest licensed premises in England. The village is centered around the John Clements Sports & Community Centre and remains popular for its scenic valley walks near the River Mimram and its traditional independent shops. There is also new housing development by Taylor Wimpey called The Heath currently under construction on the south western edge of Codicote.



2.4 Trees

A Tree Survey has been conducted by David Archer Associates to accompany the application. The report evaluates the quality of the existing trees within and adjacent to the Site, and to provide guidance on tree protection and management.

A detailed tree survey was undertaken to identify the species, condition, and value of all relevant trees. The findings have informed the Site layout and design which responds appropriately to the constraints posed by Site's existing trees and hedgerows.

The trees on the Site have been given a quality rating based on Table 1 in BS 5837, summarised below:

- **Category 'U'** – Trees in such a condition that any existing value would be lost within 10 years and which should, in the current context, be removed for reasons of sound arboricultural management.
- **Category 'A'** – Trees of high quality and value; in such a condition as to be able to make a substantial contribution (normally a minimum of 40 years).
- **Category 'B'** – Trees of moderate quality and value; those in such a condition as to make a significant contribution (normally a minimum of 20 years).
- **Category 'C'** – Trees of low quality and value; currently in adequate condition to remain until new planting could be established (normally a minimum of 10 years), or young trees with a stem diameter below 150mm.

The proposed development will result in the removal of Trees 1, 2, 5-7, 18-39, 41-44, 57-60, 65-69, 72-78, 84, 85 and Groups 1-3, 9-12, 14, 18.

The trees and groups proposed to be removed are largely in direct conflict with the proposed access road, parking bays or dwellings. Eight of the trees and two groups have been assigned a 'U' category and would thus require removal to follow accepted arboricultural practices, irrespective of the proposed development. A single tree (Tree 31) of moderate quality and value (category 'B') requires removal. All other trees and groups are of category 'C', due to their small size, low quality or limited value in landscape terms (or a combination of all three). Taken together, the removal of these trees and groups will engender a negligible impact to the long-term character of the area.

All other trees identified within the survey will be retained, as they are either unaffected by the proposal, or can be successfully protected during the construction period.

2.0 Existing Site & Context



Tree constraints plan (David Archer Associates)

2.5 Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Assessment of the Site has been carried out by Greengage to establish the ecological value of the Site and its potential to support protected/priority habitats and species.

The PEA identified the following ecological constraints associated with the Site:

- Presence of three statutory designated sites within 2km of the Site, (Singlers Marsh LNR located 127m south, Danesbury Park LNR located 90m southeast, and Mardley Heath LNR located 1.76km east);
- The Site lies within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for Singlers Marsh SSSI;
- Presence of several non-statutory designated sites within 2km, including LWS, Ancient Woodland Inventory sites and a RIGS, the closest of which is Longston and Catchpole Woods LWS (located 120m northeast);
- High suitability for roosting bats associated with the farm shop (building B1);
- Moderate suitability for bat foraging and commuting associated with grassland, scrub and woodland edge habitats;
- High suitability for nesting birds associated with on-site habitats;
- Moderate suitability for dormice in the northern woodland habitat, and poor suitability for dormice in the southern woodland habitat;
- Moderate suitability for invertebrates associated with grassland, scrub and woodland habitats;
- Moderate suitability for reptiles associated with areas of grassland, scrub and woodland edge;
- Low suitability for protected/notable plant species;
- Low potential for invasive non-native species; and
- Presence of badger activity within the Site, although no setts were identified.

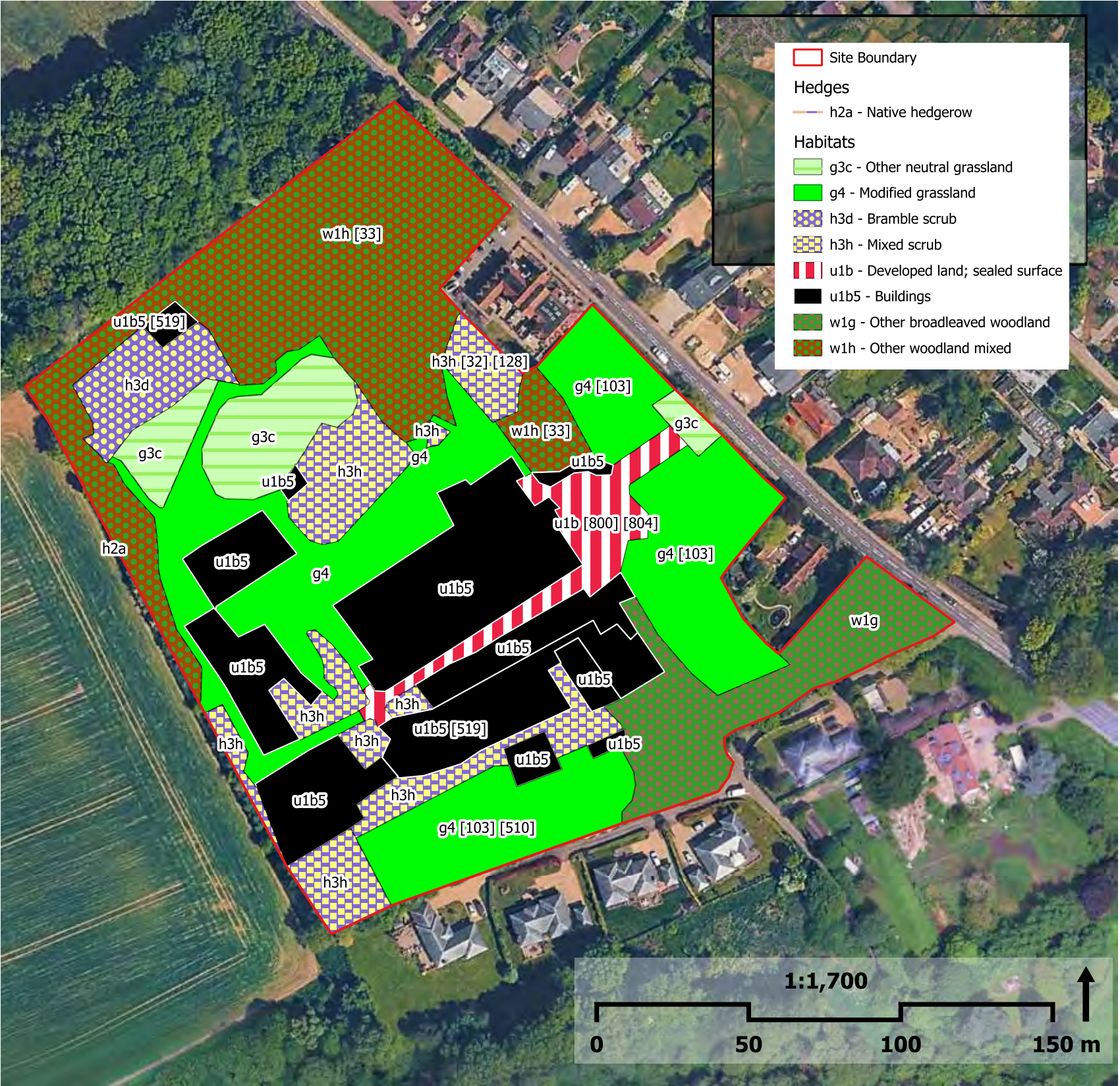
Targeted surveys are required for bats and reptiles. The farm shop (building B1) has been assessed as having high suitability for roosting bats and therefore, in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, three dusk emergence surveys must be undertaken between May and August (inclusive) to determine the presence or likely absence of roosting bats and to inform any mitigation and licensing requirements.

Given the moderate suitability of habitats for reptiles, presence/absence surveys are required in accordance with Froglife guidance to determine the presence of reptiles and to inform appropriate mitigation measures.

No further targeted surveys are required for other ecological receptors. An updated walkover survey, including a botanical survey undertaken during the optimal growing season (May to September inclusive), will be carried out to confirm habitat types and condition, and the presence or absence of protected or notable plant species and invasive non-native species.

Key actions should be secured through the implementation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and, where required, a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), which may be secured by planning condition.

A recommendation has been made for a separate BNGA report, using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (SBM), in accordance with the Environment Act 2021, NPPF 2024, and local policy drivers.



UKhab Site plan (Greengage)

2.6 Topography

The Site slopes down over circa 18 metres from the highest point of circa 85.8 metres AOD in the north-western corner to circa 68 metres AOD on the southern boundary, with extended views to the west and south. The Site is well enclosed by existing boundary trees and hedgerows and there are some individual mature trees within the Site.

2.0 Existing Site & Context



Topographical survey

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been compiled by Hardy Tunstall Engineering Ltd. to inform the application. The principal objectives of the FRA are to:

- Identify potential forms of flooding including rivers, watercourses, surface water flooding, groundwater flooding, flooding from sewer systems and other forms of flooding.
- Establish the risk of flooding.
- Determine the effects of the development on flooding elsewhere either through displacement of floodwaters or increased runoff.
- Suggest appropriate flood mitigation measures, including a strategy for disposal of surface water run-off following the principles of SuDS.

Flood Risk Summary			
Source	Pre-development risk	Post development risk	Comments
Fluvial	Medium to High	Low	Flood model data provided in the Product 4 and 6 data from the EA, confirms no part of the site is at risk of fluvial flooding, with ground levels assessed to be at least 0.79m above the maximum flood level (1% AEP plus climate change).
Tidal	Low	Low	The site is at low risk of tidal fooding, taking into account climate change.
Surface Water (Pluvial)	Medium to Low	Medium to Low	Focussing on the proposed built development area, the site is generally at very low risk of surface water flooding. The proposed dwelling plots to the south east will be raised at least 600mm above the 0.1% AEP plus climate change surface water flood level. An non-significant increase in flood depth across the 0.1% AEP surface water catchment will have no material impact on existing flood extents.
Groundwater	Low	Low	Groundwater flood risk is considered very low across the site. Development proposals do not increase groundwater risk to the site or surrounding areas and ground raising will be undertaken on site, remains Low
Sewer	Low	Low	No change to sewer flood risk, remains Low
Artificial Sources	Low	Low	The Site at not at risk of flooding from artificial sources, remains Low

Flood risk summary

Subject to further detailed analyses and based on existing available data, it is considered the development has appropriately assessed flood risk from fluvial and surface water sources as low, and suitable for planning approval.

Existing site drainage

The existing Site consists of private surface water and foul water drainage.

Surface Water

The topographical survey indicates several manholes on the site; however, most are sealed and it has not been confirmed where they drain to, or whether they serve surface water or foul drainage. Based on the apparent age of the structures on site, together with anecdotal information, it is understood most roof runoff discharges directly to ground. In general, the existing on-site drainage arrangement appears to be informal, with much of the site draining by overland flow and possibly localised infiltration to ground rather than via a clearly defined piped surface water network. This is consistent with the predominantly permeable nature of the site and the apparent lack of formalised collection systems across the majority of the site area.

Foul Water

There appears to be one building that is served by foul drainage via private drains. Possibly to a septic tank. The Adjacent Codicote Road does not appear to have any manholes in the vicinity to indicate a public sewer in the public highway. Proposed development foul drainage will be formalised into a public sewer off-site.

Conclusion

- The risk of flooding from rivers, seas, groundwater, sewers, and reservoirs is considered to remains as existing, with no increase in flood risk to the site or elsewhere.
- However, as the site is still within an area of surface water flood risk, finished floor levels in this area should be set at least 600mm above existing ground level.
- Surface water flood risk to the site and elsewhere will not be increased beyond existing.
- Capacity for Exceedance flows exist within the system, with residual overland flows directed to Codicote Road and south into Old Nursery way, as it drains currently. There is no change to flow paths.
- The Flood Risk Assessment has been successfully prepared in line with the NPPF and the Planning Policy Guidance, and to LLFA and local planning policy and flood risk management strategies.

2.8 Heritage

A Heritage Statement has been prepared by Asset Heritage Consulting to inform the application. The report provides an independent assessment of the impact in built heritage terms of the proposals.

Heritage designations & considerations

The application Site is not the subject of any statutory or non-statutory heritage designations and it contains no statutorily-listed buildings or buildings that could reasonably be considered non-designated heritage asset, nor is it located within a conservation area. However, it is located immediately adjacent to the grounds of 44 Codicote Road, a Grade II-listed building.



44 Codicote Road

Heritage issues

The principal heritage issue in this case is the impact of the proposals on the contribution its setting makes to the significance of 44 Codicote Road as a listed building.

The setting of the listed building has changed remarkably during the course of the 20th century. This is not just changes to its wider setting through the development of the application Site (as a nursery, later a poultry farm, and its later uses) and the residential development along Codicote Road, but also the changes within the immediate setting of the listed building, including the loss of associated buildings to the south and the creation of a domestic curtilage on non-historic boundaries, including the existing garden wall (extending further substantially further west than the apparent historic curtilage) and the parking yard and garage to the north.

The demolition of the existing, modern, poor-quality buildings on the application Site will not in principle result in any harm to the significance of 44 Codicote Road through the effect on its setting; these buildings are not a positive element of its setting.

The pertinent issue, therefore, is how the proposed new development would affect the significance of that listed building. The open, green character of the area fronting Codicote Road to the north-east of the modern garage to 44 Codicote Road does form a positive element of the setting of the listed

building, both by providing 'breathing space' but also by retaining some semblance of the rural setting of the listed building when travelling along the road.

For the most part, the conscious decision to leave this space open and green will maintain much of that effect; however, there will be some diminution to the contribution this area makes to the setting of the listed building, partly through moving the access road closer to the building than the existing access, and developing Plots 1-4 at the north-western end of the existing open space. A substantial area of open, green space, will still be maintained to the north-west of the listed building (and its modern parking area and garage), retaining a sense of space and partial isolation for the listed building, providing a material degree of mitigation for the identified harm.

More generally, the Site will take on a more suburban form than the existing sheds and pens. While the loss of those buildings is not regrettable, this will also have some impact on one's ability to read the listed building within a semi-rural setting. While a modern curtilage (larger than its historic curtilage) has been formed around the listed building and proposed buildings are set away from this enclosure beyond open space and the access road, there is likely to be some sense of the proposed development from within the enclosure. That said, any perception from within the listed building itself is likely to be only from the single, small first-floor window in the western gable of the later western end of the building.

Taking this all into account, it is considered that the proposals will result in a degree of harm to 44 Codicote Lane as a listed building. This derives principally from the diminution of the Site's role in articulating the rural origins of the listed building, which comprises part of its historic interest. This harm is largely a result of the principle of development and has been reduced and mitigated, not least through the omission of development along much of the Site's street frontage.

Taking this into account alongside the argument that 44 Codicote Lane is not a building that derives a great deal of its significance from its setting, such harm would clearly be less than substantial and, in my view, fall towards the lower end of the range of such harm.

Conclusion

While the weighing of harm against public benefits inevitably takes into account non-heritage issues (as public benefits can *'be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework'*, PPG Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20190723) and, as such, lies outside the scope of the Heritage Statement, it is the view of the applicant that the public benefits that flow from the proposals, which include the provision of 109 much-needed housing units, would outweigh the low level of harm identified to 44 Codicote Road and, as such, the test at paragraph 215 of the NPPF would be passed. On that basis, the relevant statutory test at Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 would also be passed. A Cultural Heritage Desk-Based Assessment was instructed by Howarth Contractors Ltd in support of an application for a residential development at the former Big Cat Sanctuary site on Codicote Road, Welwyn, AL6 9TU.

2.9 Archaeology

2.0 Existing Site & Context

A Cultural Heritage Desk-Based Assessment has been produced to describe those heritage assets that may be impacted by the proposed development and the potential effects on these as required in the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG (2024)). The assessment deals only with below ground heritage assets.

Examinations were made of the data held by the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record database and the local Record Office located in Hertford and supplemented with other relevant sources in order to identify designated and non-designated heritage assets and determine the potential for the presence of as yet unknown below ground archaeological remains within the Site which may be impacted upon by the Proposed Development.

A visit to the Site was made on 1st May 2026 where an examination of the Site and local environs was made. An examination of data held by the HHER suggests that there is a medium potential for below ground multi period archaeological deposits of potential regional importance to be present within the Site, particularly those relating to the Romano-British Period. This is evidenced by a number of finds spots in the vicinity.

There are no Registered Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments, or World Heritage Sites, within 1km of the Site. The Codicote Conservation Area lies around 1.075km to the north of the Site boundary. There are numerous heritage assets of archaeological interest within the search area.

Many of the extant buildings on Site date to the mid-20th century, with the land being used for agricultural purposes prior to this. Subsequently, there is the potential for preserved buried archaeological horizons.

Therefore, it is recommended that further investigation of the site, following discussion with the archaeological advisor to the local planning authority, would be necessary in order to determine the potential for archaeological remains within the site, and any mitigation necessary. This intervention could be in the form of a Monitoring and Observation exercise (formally known as a Watching Brief), whilst foundational and services trenches for the new development are excavated. This could be undertaken post-determination and secured via an appropriate Planning Condition.

Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development is appropriate and complies with the relevant national and local policies and in this respect the application should be granted accordingly.