



GA2, Land north of Great Ashby Environmental Statement

Chapter 5: Description of Alternatives

Iceni Projects Limited on
behalf of Picture Estates
Limited

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5. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

- 5.1 This chapter describes the reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Development considered by the Applicant, in accordance with the EIA Regulations.

Description of Alternatives

- 5.2 In line with the EIA Regulations, this chapter describes the 'reasonable alternatives' to the Proposed Development studied by the Applicant, prior to selection of the final design and provides an indication of the main reasons for selecting the final chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.

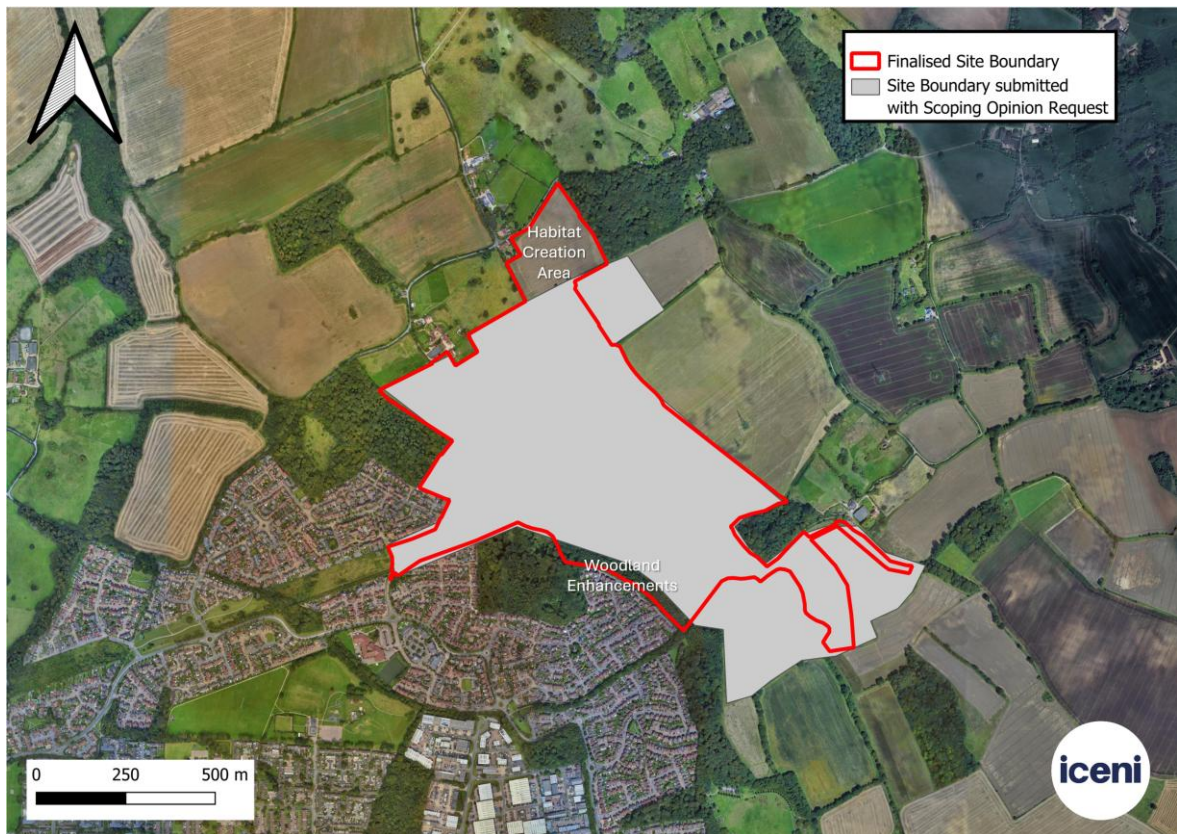
- 5.3 The alternatives that are considered in this chapter include:

- Option 1: Alternative Sites / Site Boundaries;
- Option 2: 'Do Nothing' Alternative;
- Option 3: Alternative Designs (e.g. layout, heights, massing and other aspects).

Option 1: Alternative Sites / Site boundaries

- 5.4 No alternative sites were considered by the Applicant due to their interest in the Site. Minor amendments have been made to the Site boundary since an EIA Scoping Opinion was submitted, as detailed in **Chapter 1**.
- 5.5 The Site was adopted as one of six strategic allocations in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (November 2022), defined as a site providing 500 or more homes and making a substantial contribution towards housing requirements. The Site (GA2) was subject to rigorous assessment as part of its allocation as a Strategic Housing Site in the Local Plan, including a full planning and Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This allocation process was informed by the substantial Local Plan evidence base. Given the Local Plan allocation, the Applicant has not considered any alternative sites.
- 5.6 As shown in **Figure 5.1** below, the Site boundary submitted with the Scoping Opinion Request (shown with grey fill) included an additional parcel to the east of the Site and included a larger area within the southern section of the Site. The finalised Site boundary (shown with red line) includes an additional parcel to the north east of the Site, and an additional parcel to the south west of the Site.

Figure 5.1 Site Boundary Amendments



- 5.7 The finalised Site boundary allows for a Habitat Creation Area in the north east of the Site, and woodland enhancement within the south west of the Site, to be brought forward within the Proposed Development. The alternative to this is for the Site to follow the boundary submitted with the Scoping Opinion Request, with no Habitat Creation Area and limited woodland enhancements. Under the alternative Site boundary, the Proposed Development would not be able to Biodiversity Net Gain, a key benefit.

Option 2: 'Do Nothing' Alternative

- 5.8 In line with best practice, this section broadly outlines the consequences of no development taking place at the Site and it remaining in its current state. Chapters 4-15 set out the baseline conditions of the Site together with the future baseline conditions which are likely to arise in the absence of the Proposed Development. These are not repeated here.
- 5.9 In the absence of the Proposed Development, in the short term, it is reasonable to assume that the Site would largely remain in its present condition i.e. agricultural fields in arable use. In this 'Do Nothing' scenario, the Site would not be developed and thus there would be no loss in agricultural land.
- 5.10 In the absence of the Proposed Development, a number of benefits would not be realised, including:

- The provision of a significant number of new homes (spanning a mix of sizes, types and tenures), within an administrative area where there is an under-delivery of housing and affordable housing;
 - The provision of new community facilities, such as delivering a new community hub that would provide services to residents and communities in the local area;
 - The provision of a significant quantum of accessible public open space and green infrastructure, including formal and informal recreation and play space that would provide services to surrounding residents and communities in the local area;
 - The provision of a site for a primary school to be delivered by NHDC; and
 - The opportunity to expand bus services in the local area.
- 5.11 The 'Do Nothing' Scenario would not achieve the significant beneficial Socio-Economic effects as identified in Chapter 16 of this ES, namely the moderate beneficial effect on the local housing market through the provision of housing.
- 5.12 Given the site allocation in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (November 2022), it is however likely that a development would come forward in the future and realise the benefits set out above. However timescales for this delivery would be uncertain.

Option 3: Alternative Designs

Design Consultation and Considerations

- 5.13 The design of the Proposed Development has been subject to evolution over several iterations in response to technical studies and consultation with various stakeholders, including but not limited to, the Environment Agency, highway authorities and a Design Review Panel (DRP) that took place in early May 2024.
- 5.14 The feedback from the DRP and how it has influenced the design evolution of the illustrative masterplan is set out in the DAS. The extent to which stakeholders have been considered in the design of the Proposed Development is described in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The 'main' alternatives to the Proposed Development that have been considered through the design process are set out later in this chapter.
- 5.15 As part of the design process, consideration has been given to environmental studies and initial modelling undertaken for the Site to inform the design, together with the constraints and opportunities of the Site, as outlined in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1 Summary of Key Design Considerations, Opportunities and Constraints

Issue	Description
Socio-Economics and Health	There is an opportunity to provide community and social infrastructure, including public open and recreational space that is accessible by local communities.
Air Quality/Noise	Although the Site is not located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), active travel and sustainable travel has been at the forefront of the design and thus reducing the reliance on private cars and associated emissions to air/noise.
Transport	There is an opportunity to expand the existing bus service and enhance PRoW connections. Other than the existing PRoW, the Site is currently largely inaccessible to the public. There are opportunities to enhance the PRoW, including widening PRoW to allow for cycle access to provide active travel routes.
Ecology	The Site is largely in agricultural use with arable fields. There is therefore an opportunity to improve biodiversity on the Site and create more diversity rich habitats, together with long term management of habitats. The Site provides the opportunity to deliver a buffer around the pockets of ancient woodland as well as providing woodland enhancements and new planting in some areas.
Water Environment and Flood Risk	Flood risk from all sources of flooding has been a key design consideration in sustainable drainage design. There are opportunities to work with natural topographies of the Site and work with natural mechanisms of flood and rainwater management, whilst providing space for wildlife and recreation.
Landscape and Visual Amenity	It is inevitable that development would change the landscape character and visual amenity of the Site and surrounding area. Key design considerations have included balancing the constraints and opportunities with woodland screening, biodiversity enhancements and recreational pressures.
Archaeology and Built Heritage	The Site is not in a Conservation Area and contains no designated nor non-designated heritage assets. However, there are several listed buildings surrounding the Site that have been considered.
Climate Change	Opportunities to achieve zero carbon emissions (in operation) by 2035 (subject to projected decarbonisation of the national grid) and create a comprehensively designed sustainable development.
Agricultural Land	The Site comprises agricultural land that would be lost, including Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.
Utilities	A green infrastructure corridor currently runs through Great Ashby following the alignment of the overhead power lines. The Proposed Development provides an opportunity to extend the green infrastructure through the Site to follow the alignment of the overhead power lines.

- 5.16 The final masterplan incorporates much of the comments and suggestions made by the DRP, and the resultant masterplan now better reflects the landscape within which the Site it is located, whilst also ensuring active travel routes are more direct, convenient and attractive. The Planning

Statement, which accompanies the planning application, sets out a timeline of events and further details of design responses. Specific design responses include:

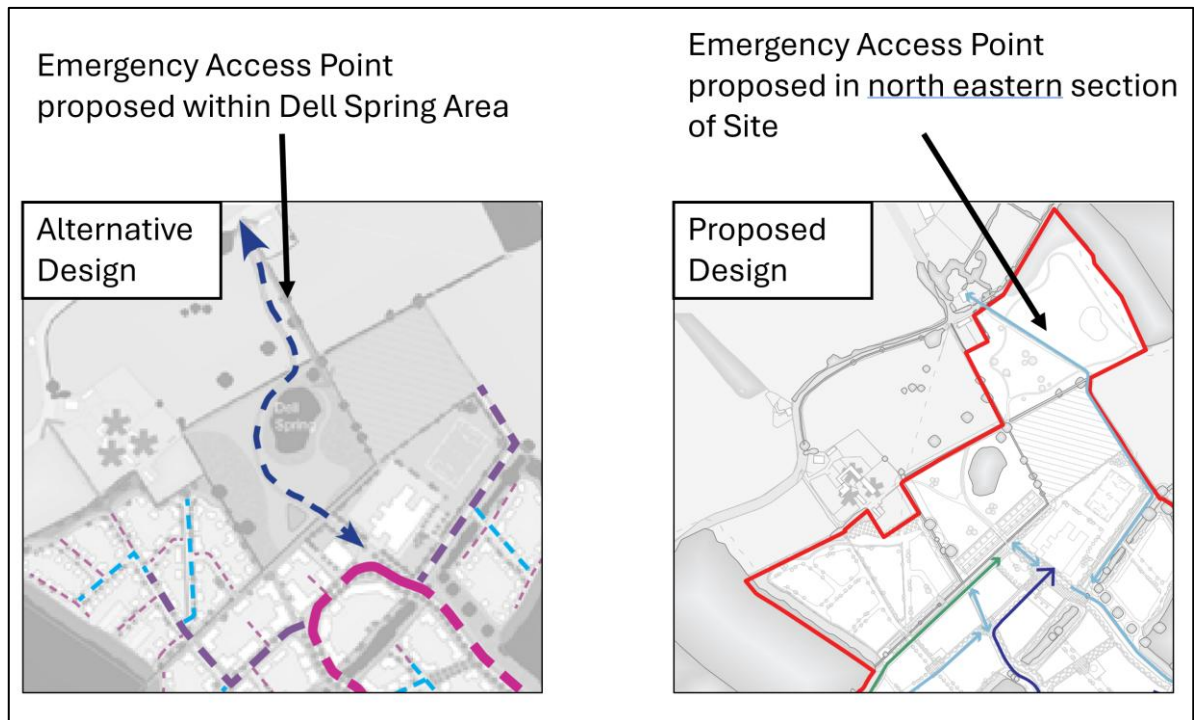
- Separating the cycle and footways from the main carriageway along the access corridor, to make active travel routes more direct, and to locate them within a parkland area.
- Green corridors strengthened to form the primary structure of the development.
- The spine road corridor has been redesigned, creating more variety in the location of the cycle paths and cycleways, and verges and tree planting, in order to create areas of differing character, while reducing the dominant appearance of the spine street on the plan.
- The northern part of the Site is proposed to be more dense to help create a central area of focus at Dell Spring, the Community Hall, and Primary School.
- The allotments have been moved to the Community Hub, to create a greener heart to the development and to be more accessible.
- The western SuDS basin has been redesigned to serve as an area of usable public open space, with amenity grass in the bottom of the basin.
- The emergency access has been moved away from Dell Spring to protect the landscape character and setting of Tile Kiln Farm.
- The proposed landscape treatment of the spaces has been reconsidered, to create more usable amenity areas where one could kick a ball.

Main Alternative Designs

Emergency Access

- 5.17 The Proposed Development provides an emergency access point which is located off Warrengreen Lane. The emergency access point will link to the north of the Site, near the primary school. It will also be usable by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. The alternative design to this, which was presented at the DRP in May 2024, was the location of the emergency access point in the Dell Spring Area, as shown in **Figure 5.2**. This design was not taken forward to protect the landscape character and setting of the Tile Kiln Farm complex and the Grade II listed buildings located there.

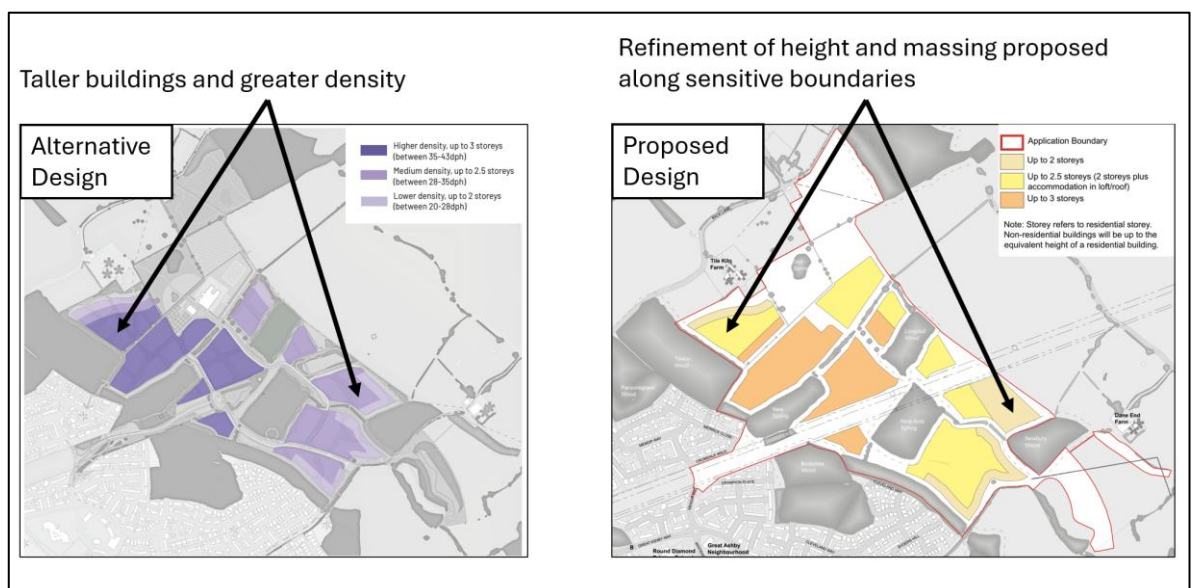
Figure 5.2 Emergency Access Alternative Design



Building Heights

- 5.18 The Proposed Development provides sensitive boundary treatment to respect the more open landscape character to the north and east of the Site. The alternative design to this, which was presented for feedback to NHDC as part of the Strategic Masterplan consultation process, was to have taller buildings located closer to sensitive boundaries, as shown in **Figure 5.3**. This alternative design was not taken forward so that the Proposed Development could create sensitive edges to respond to the landscape character and retain attractive views where appropriate.

Figure 5.3 Emergency Access Alternative Design



Gateway Park Access

- 5.19 The Proposed Development was originally going to be submitted in outline, with all matters reserved (layout, scale, appearance and landscaping) except for the highway design of the main point of access into the Site.
- 5.20 A hybrid application has instead been taken forward so that there is a sufficient level of detail for NHDC to assess the application. The detailed component for the Proposed Development now includes landscaping for all of the gateway park, including attenuation ponds, swales and planting.
- 5.21 The Proposed Development locates the active travel route along the Gateway Park access corridor to the north of the access road. The alternative design to this, which was presented to NHDC as part of the Strategic Masterplan process, was the location of the active travel route to the south of the access road, as shown in **Figure 5.4**. This design was not taken forward so that the Proposed Development can deliver active travel routes which are more direct and are located within a parkland area, which ensures that active travel routes are convenient and attractive. Compared to the alternative design, the Proposed Development minimises the amount of road crossings between the existing Neighbourhood Centre and the new Community Hub and provides direct access to the park, which has transport and accessibility and socio-economic benefits.

Figure 5.4 Gateway Park Access Alternative Design

