

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02889/FP

Date: 10/06/2025

Planning Officer: NR

Address: Land at Roundwood, Back Lane, Graveley Hertfordshire

Subject: Residential development of 281 dwellings and associated roads, parking, realignment of Back Lane, drainage, landscaping, open space, servicing facilities and associated works (as amended).

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 The proposed residential development will have some impact upon the wider setting of individual heritage assets (the Grade II listed Manor Farmhouse and boundary walls, and the Grade II listed Church of Etheldrada and Scheduled Monument; and the non-designated heritage asset of Chesfield Park). However, the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area has not been confirmed and so the impact I suggest, is more to do with the wider agrarian landscape to the north of Stevenage. It is considered that the development will not occasion harm to the significance of identified heritage assets (designated or non-designated) or to quote the words of Stantec *'their significance would be sustained'*. The proposed development would therefore satisfy the provisions of Section 66(1) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and will accord with Section 16 of the Framework or Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. Consequently, I find the proposal **UNOBJECTIONABLE** in heritage terms.



2.0 The Local Plan and NPPF

2.1 Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF:

- **135 c)** (sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment),
- **207** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- **210** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **212** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **213** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **215** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

3.0 Context

3.1 The Conservation Team was reconsulted on this application on 15 April 2025 and given until 8 May 2025 to respond. Although beyond this deadline, the case officer has requested feedback from the Conservation Team.

3.2 The Chesfield Conservation Area Designation Assessment initially prepared by Place Services and dated September 2021 was commissioned by North Hertfordshire District Council to assess the suitability of Chesfield Park for conservation area designation. As stated in that document, as a well-preserved landscaped estate, with archaeological potential, the study area has a distinct character and appearance, which contributes to the understanding of the historic use and development of the landscape over time. The following plan formed part of the proposed 'Character Appraisal and Management Plan' (November 2024).

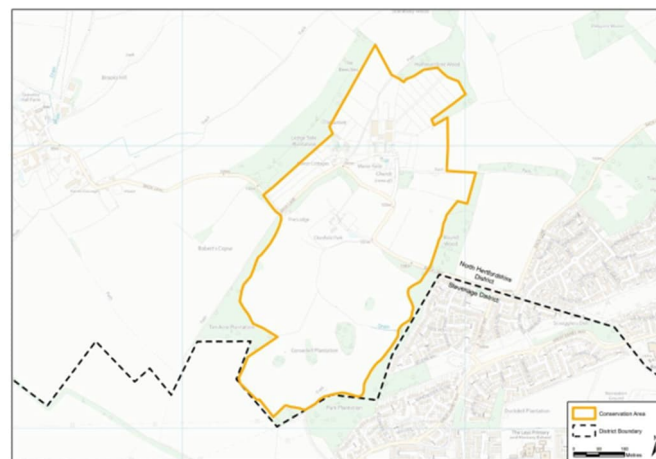


Figure 1: Location Plan showing proposed Chesfield Conservation Area boundary and district boundary.

3.3 It should be noted that on 26 November 2024, Cabinet agreed that no further work on the proposed conservation area at Chesfield should be undertaken, effectively shelving the proposed designation even though NHC's consultants remained of the view that the area has sufficient historic interest to merit the designation of a conservation area. It was previously reported that the area is arguably in Forster Country, if not, then adjacent to it.

3.4 The inference here is that not only was there not the appetite to pursue this designation, but the case had not been robustly made that the area immediately west of the current application site possesses sufficient special character to justify designation. Furthermore, as debated at Cabinet, there are other designations already in place, such as Greenbelt and statutory listings of buildings of special architectural or historic interest to afford a degree of protection to the area and buildings within that area and that this negates imposing another layer of control via the proposed designation.

3.5 I turn initially to the submitted Heritage Statement prepared by Stantec on behalf of Croudace Homes and dated September 2023, noting in particular, sections 2.3 and 4.3 entitled 'Heritage Designations' and 'Impact Assessment' respectively. At 2.3.4 it states that:

The designated heritage assets listed below have therefore been identified as having the potential to be affected by the proposed development. This has been confirmed through the site visit. Details of the designation entries are provided in full at Appendix 3.

- Manor Farmhouse - Grade II listed building
- Boundary wall and gate piers to garden on southwest and west of manor farmhouse - Grade II listed building
- Church of St Etheldrada - Grade II listed building
- Chesfield Church — Scheduled Monument

Note: The Church of St Etheldreda and Chesfield Church are one of the same.

3.6 At 2.3.5 it states that (please note 3.4 above):

North Hertfordshire Council are currently consulting on the Chesfield Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) which proposed to designate Chesfield a conservation area. For the purposes of this assessment, the conservation area has been assessed for completeness. The above heritage assets all fall within the boundary of the conservation area, therefore they will be grouped and assessed as one.

3.7 At 2.3.6 under the sub-heading 'Non-designated Heritage Assets' it states:

North Hertfordshire does not have a register of Locally Important Heritage Assets. However, they have been in the process of reviewing conservation areas and creating registers for specific areas. None of these areas are in close proximity to the Site.

Whilst at 2.3.7 it states:

An online search of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and St Albans UAD identified several entries within 500m of the centre point of the Site. These include the above designated heritage assets and Chesfield Park (HHER 9567). The draft CAAMP also identifies the garden boundary wall surrounding Chesfield Park House as a non-designated heritage asset due to its historic and architectural interest as a remaining structure associated with the original house which was demolished in the 1950s.

3.8 I consider that what is written under the subheading 'Impact Assessment' at 4.3 of the HS is fair:

4.3.1 As noted in Section 3, the setting of the individual heritage assets (the Grade II listed Manor Farmhouse and boundary walls, and the Grade II listed Church of

Etheldrada and Scheduled Monument; and the non-designated heritage asset of Chesfield Park), is largely derived from the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area with their wider setting comprising the agrarian landscape the north of Stevenage. Whilst the town of Stevenage lies in close proximity to the southeast of the asset group, they retain a sense of their rural setting with the rolling topography and agricultural landscape.

4.3.2 The boundary of the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area runs concurrently with the western edge of the Site from Back Lane to the top of the Site. Whilst the general surroundings of the conservation area are rural to the north, west and south, its surroundings to the east and southeast comprises the suburban expansion of Stevenage and the Site.

4.3.3 The Site and the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area are both physically and visually separated by the mature tree plantation known as 'Roundwood'. This mature tree belt extends around to the north of the Site, providing further visual and physical screening of the Site from the proposed conservation area. These tree belts establish a clear edge to the conservation area and assist in separating the Site from the wider rural agricultural landscape. As such, the Site is considered to make a limited contribution to how the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area is experienced and no contribution to how the listed buildings and Scheduled Monument contained within are experienced.

*4.3.4 However, **the proposed development has the potential to affect the wider experience of the proposed Chesfield Conservation Area by virtue of a change within its wider setting, particularly when viewed from the approach to the conservation area along Back Lane.** However, this has been considered during design development and as such is considered to be mitigated through the following design proposals.*

*4.3.5 The proposed layout seeks to respond to the character of the Site and adjacent heritage assets through setting back built form on the Site from its edges, creating a green edge. Around the edges of the Site are habitat areas, public open space and recreational routes which connect to the existing Public Right of Way (PRoW) which assist in providing a buffer between built form and the proposed conservation area boundary. **This will be further reinforced through the retention and supplementation of the existing planting around the edge of the Site.***

*4.3.6 **The proposed built form around the edges of the Site will be of a lower density, with a more informal character and limited to 2 storeys in height.** This will assist in creating an edge of settlement character, whilst development of up to 2.5 and 3 storeys is concentrated within the central parts of the Site. This will reflect the wider surroundings of the Site, including the proposed conservation area, to the southeast which comprises the suburban expansion of Stevenage.*

4.3.7 It is therefore considered that the development would not harm to the identified heritage assets as their significance would be sustained.

- 3.9 On 11 February 2025 the case officer emailed me drawing attention to the fact that there wasn't a need for my involvement in a series of pre-application workshops in 2024 as part of a PPA 'because there wouldn't be any impacts on Heritage Assets'. The case officer stated that Policy GA1 sets out the site-specific policy criteria for the site which includes:

"Sensitive design and landscaping around northern and western peripheries to minimise impacts upon wider landscape and heritage assets, including the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Chesfield Church."

- 3.10 When asked at last November's Cabinet meeting whether the Council's Conservation Officer had expressed any views about the setting to St Etheldreda's Church, the Principal Strategic Planning Officer informed members that she was not aware of any Conservation Officer response on this matter. In fact, it would be fair to say that my involvement has been minimal but included a short email to the Strategic Planning and Projects Manager on 6 October 2021 outlining several minor points.
- 3.11 I previously advised the case officer that there is a listed farmhouse to the west of the site and Chesfield Church is listed as well as an ancient monument and that there is a further group of listed buildings nearby at Tilekiln Farm: Tilekiln Farmhouse, Barn group around courtyard at Tilekiln Farm and Barn to east of Farmhouse (all grade II). I said that there was no visual connectivity between the site and these heritage assets (given woodland in between) and that I was not aware that the land had any historical association with these heritage assets.
- 3.12 I conclude that the submitted HS does demonstrate that the development proposals for the site are not considered to result in any harm to the significance of the identified designated or non-designated heritage assets at Chesfield, or their setting (see 5.1.2 of the HS).

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer