



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
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Our ref: 14164
Date: 11 February 2026

For the attention of: Sam Dicocco

Application ref: 26/00006/FP
Location: Land To North Of Stevenage Road Hitchin Hertfordshire
Proposal/Description: Erection of 50no. residential dwellings (including affordable) with public open space, associated parking, landscaping and access.

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Full planning application This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

This letter sets out our landscape comments and observations based on the submitted amended documents and plans, whilst also looking to provide recommendations for how to proceed.

1.0. Site Context

- 1.1. The application site is located to the south-east of Hitchin, within St Ippolyts parish. The site sits adjacent to the A602 Stevenage Road, and Kingshott School which sits on the north-west edge. The surrounding area largely comprises open arable farmland with the exception of Kingshott School to the north-west and a small area of industrial and houses to the east. The site itself comprises an arable field.

2.0. Planning Policy Context

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

- 2.1. Policies to be considered that are relevant to landscape include Policy ENV3, ENV5, NE1, NE2, NE6, NE7, NE8, SP9 and SP12.

North Herts and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.2. The application site is located within Landscape Character Area 216 Arlesey – Great Wymondley. Key characteristics of this LCA that are relevant to the site include the rolling arable landscape of large-scale fields and few trees.
- 2.3. The strategy for this LCA is to ‘improve and conserve’. The following guidelines are therefore advised:
- *“Promote management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora*
 - *Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas*
 - *Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas*
 - *Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to grazing areas*
 - *Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees*
 - *Maintain and extend the rights of way network*
 - *In the south encourage the development of species-rich calcareous grassland habitats*
 - *Encourage woodland planting, in small copses, around the fringes of sub-urban settlements.”*

3.0. Review of LVA:

- 3.1. A Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) undertaken by Enplan in December 2025 has been submitted for review.

Landscape Character

- 3.2. We judge that the LVIA Methodology (Appendix A) relies heavily on designations to determine the landscape value, as has been outlined within Table 7.5. Using this methodology, landscapes which are undesignated appear at the low end of the scale of value which will therefore skew the assessment towards landscapes being less sensitive.
- 3.3. TGN 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations (Para A5.1.10) states that *“the lack of a local landscape designation should not preclude the presence of a valued landscape”*. The methodology for assessing landscape value should utilise Table 1 in TGN 02/21 to provide a more thorough assessment of the valued characteristics within this particular landscape, as opposed to relying on wider designations.
- 3.4. The character of the site has been assessed with reference to Landscape Character Area 216 Arlesey – Great Wymondley of the North Herts and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment. Key characteristics of this LCA which are relevant to the site include the expansive arable landscape, relatively few surrounding trees and a rolling landform.

- 3.5. Notwithstanding our above concerns, we do not disagree that LCA 216 has a **moderate sensitivity**.
- 3.6. Whilst a moderate magnitude of landscape effects is judged (Para 4.29), no overall landscape effects judgement is provided, despite providing Table 7.9 'Overall Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects Criteria (Significance)' within the Methodology. The assessment concludes the effects are not significant, however according to the LVIA methodology, the landscape effects are considered "*Potentially significant effect considered with other viewpoint effect evaluations*" (Table 7.9).
- 3.7. We would have expected an individual assessment of each of the relevant landscape receptors to be provided. In addition to LCA 216 (stated above), the landscape character for the Site, for the Surrounding Context, and also for individual landscape features should be assessed.
- 3.8. We would anticipate that the overall landscape effects for the Site itself would be significant, however this is not represented within the current LVIA owed to the lack of other landscape receptors. The surrounding character has no large-scale urban development, with only some small-scale residential and commercial buildings. We judge that an assessment of landscape character for the site and surrounding context would have highlighted that this type of development would result in a **large magnitude of change**.
- 3.9. We therefore judge that the methodological approach may have underassessed the potential impacts by omitting some receptors and judgements from the landscape effects. The proposed scheme has potential to locally conflict with the requirements of Policy NE2 Landscape and SP12 GI, Landscape & Biodiversity.

Visual Effects

- 3.10. The locations of viewpoint receptors have been included in Figure 1: Location of Wider Viewpoints and Figure 7: Location of Viewpoints and Site Appraisal Views, following a ZTV (Figure 4). It would have been useful for the selected viewpoint receptors to be overlaid on the ZTV figure to show how selected locations respond. We do however judge that an appropriate selection of viewpoints has been included within the LVIA.
- 3.11. Appendix D 'Visual Impact Assessment Summary Table' identifies Views 8 (**major/moderate adverse**) and 10 (**major adverse**) from the unnamed southern PRoW as experiencing significant effects at Year 1, falling to moderate adverse effects at Year 15 which is assessed as not significant.

- 3.12. Whilst we do not disagree with these judgements, additional hedgerow and tree planting should be proposed on the southern boundary, particularly around the entrance to the scheme. The substation is also one of the first buildings in view from this location, which should be relocated.

4.0. Review of Proposals:

- 4.1. The Site is located between Hitchin and Little Wymondley, adjacent to small hamlet Ashbrook and Kingshott School. The proposed development of 50no. dwellings is disproportionate to the scale of the surrounding existing residential development, comprising only around 10 dwellings.
- 4.2. The site location is also disconnected from any other large settlement edge. This reduces the separation between two distinctly separate settlements; Hitchin and Little Wymondley.
- 4.3. Page 38 of the Designers Guide to Designing Out Crime states: “*The design of a space or environment can help to ensure that the presence of offenders is visible to others*”. Passive surveillance of the public open space (POS) is poor, with a large proportion of the western edge of the space being defined by the rear gardens of Plots 42-47. Houses should front on to the POS to allow for passive surveillance for this public space.
- 4.4. Fronting houses on to the POS will also enhance the visual amenity of the POS. At present, close-board fencing is proposed along the rear gardens abutting the POS, which is not considered appropriate design treatment for the edge of public realm.
- 4.5. As per Page 37 of National Grid design guidance (ASoP A4 AW(27.05.03)), it is not preferable to orientate all dwellings parallel to the power line route. We therefore advise that if dwellings are proposed to front on to the POS, that they are not in an arrangement which creates additional focus on the pylons. We recommend seeking Urban Design advice regarding orientation and aspects to improve this edge.
- 4.6. Whilst the arrangement of housing frontage on to the POS should be rearranged (See comments (4.3 to 4.5), there is also insufficient buffer planting alongside the rear gardens of Plots 42-47 to soften these close-board fences and provide a buffer to the POS. Notwithstanding this comment, we would prefer that the frontage faces east and the layout is amended.
- 4.7. The parking court serving Plots 48 and 49 is excessive in its quantum of hard surfacing. We advise that the area of hard surfacing is significantly reduced to provide more soft landscaping. The North Herts ‘Vehicle Parking at New Development’ SPD (2011) should be considered.

- 4.8. Plots 13 and 14 can be accessed from all four sides, and appear situated within the public realm, facing away from the POS. The arrangement of this space needs reconsideration, to reduce the exposure of these plots and the dominance of hard boundary treatments and car parks fronting the POS.
- 4.9. The substation and other hard surfacing are located adjacent to the site entrance, towards the south-east corner of the scheme. These features are located in a highly visible location on the entrance to the scheme and at the end of the public open space (POS). To enhance the quality of the design, these features would be better sited in a more discrete location and would also benefit from being screened with vegetation and planting.
- 4.10. Additional hedgerow and tree planting should be proposed around the entrance, on the grass strip of land between the southern PRoW and the internal access road, at the entrance to the scheme.
- 4.11. We also advise that the scheme is generous with street trees as these will break up the view of built form from the north and will filter views of the development over time, as per para 136 of the NPPF.
- 4.12. Parking should be located next to dwellings to reduce the car dominance on the street scene. The North Herts 'Vehicle Parking at New Development' SPD (2011) should be considered.
- 4.13. Low level planting could be proposed beneath the power lines without risk of interference with this infrastructure. Planting should be integrated into the SuDS feature, which is dominant within the POS.
- 4.14. We advise that the swathes of hard surfacing are broken up with soft landscaping and tree planting in the interest of surface water runoff, visual amenity, shading and biodiversity.
- 4.15. There are some legibility concerns within the centre of the scheme related to road hierarchy. No hard surface treatment plans have been submitted; however, the Coloured Site Layout (Dwg. 22.102-10-D) suggests that the two secondary streets are tarmac. These two streets have no pavements alongside so would be a shared surface and therefore we advise that an alternative surface treatment is proposed, such as block paving.
- 4.16. Where rear gardens of plots meet the outer boundaries of the site, 1.8 metre close board fence is proposed. This should be replaced with a softer treatment that encourages wildlife permeability of the site and utilised the natural vegetated edges.

- 4.17. Where the sides of rear gardens are exposed to the public realm, these should either be brick walls or have planting alongside which can provide a buffer and soften these hard features.
- 4.18. Galvanised railings and precast concrete headwalls should be actively avoided in the interest of visual amenity and designing a scheme for a rural setting.

5.0. Summary

- 5.1. We have some minor differences in judgement regarding the LVIA effects, however, these differences are not deemed substantial.
- 5.2. We have concerns regarding the location of the development which will contribute to the coalescence of Hitchin and Little Wymondley, owed to its location within the countryside and not connected to any urban settlement edge. This is also owed to the quantum of development within the site which is disproportionate to the surrounding developed area.
- 5.3. In addition to the principle of developing a disconnected site, significant design amends are required based on the submitted layout.
- 5.4. Our primary design concern relates to the passive surveillance over the POS and the extent of rear garden boundaries backing on to the main POS. There are also a number of other issues with the current layout arrangement which we advise is amended to improve the scheme.

Please contact us if you have any queries in relation to this advice.

Place Services – Landscape Team

Email: landscape@essex.gov.uk



Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of North Herts Council

Please note:

This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.

We are unable to respond directly to applicants/agents or other interested parties. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant/agent or other interested parties may



have, must be directed to the Planning Officer at the relevant LPA, who will seek further advice from us where appropriate.