



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
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Date: 16 December 2025
Our ref: 12412

For the attention of: Paul Chaston

Application ref: 25/02555/SO
Location: Pound Farm, Bedford Road, Ickleford, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 3RS
Proposal/Description: Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Screening Opinion. 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.

Site Context:

The site is located to the north of Ickleford village on the northern outskirts of Hitchin. The site comprises parts of the three arable fields to the west of the A600 Bedford Road, and to the south of Pound Farm. Residential dwellings on Ryder Way and Ryder Avenue form the southern boundary of the site. The three arable fields are separated by a ditch and the Hertfordshire Way.

Planning Policy Context:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

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

Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan (Made 2024)

As per Policy E2: Protecting the Landscape, we advise that the proposals protect and enhance the “*natural landscape and local character of the Parish*”, mature trees, and hedgerows. “*Such features should be protected and, where appropriate, incorporated into landscape design schemes*”.

Policy E3: Rural Character states that development proposals should respect the rural character of the village and its surroundings by ensuring that:

- “*they respond positively to the local topography, landscape and water features, trees and plants in the vicinity and on the site.*”
- “*the scale and character of new buildings are in keeping with the rural setting,*”

- *the variable sense of space between and around existing buildings is retained where appropriate, particularly in the green heart of the village and where views of the countryside beyond the village are available. The design of new buildings should ensure that adequate space is provided around them to compliment the rural character of the village,*
- *boundary treatment and landscaping schemes are carefully designed so as to maintain the rural character of the area,*
- *Views of particular importance as defined on the Policies Map should be protected and not be obstructed by new development.”*

Policy MTT1: Provision for Pedestrians, Cyclists and Horse-riders should also be considered.

Ickleford Design Code

- Views 6 and 17 (Figure 16) provide potential views of the site.
- The site is located within Area Type C: Rural countryside and Area Type D: Green Belt which are the more sensitive area types.
- The Design Code Guidance should be applied to the design and layout of the proposals.

Landscape Character

North Herts and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment

The site is located within Landscape Character Area 218 Pirton Lowlands. Key characteristics of this LCA that are relevant to the site include large scale open flat farming landscape, predominantly arable land, remnant hedges, gappy and predominantly hawthorn but occasional mature trees, minimal woodland, A600 prominent. The landscape is assessed as having poor condition and weak robustness.

The strategy for this LCA is to ‘reconstruct’. The following guidelines are therefore advised:

- *“Promote planting of new woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora especially in relation to sub-urban fringe areas*
- *For existing woodlands, encourage diverse woodland management practice and replanting of conifer plantations with new deciduous woodlands*
- *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 new grazing areas*
- *Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges*
- *Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees*
- *Maintain and extend the rights of way network*
- *Encourage the development of unimproved species-rich grassland habitats*
- *Promote the creation of new ponds and the retention of existing ponds for wildlife*
- *Encourage the planting of shelter belts*

- *Encourage the planting of trees and other appropriate vegetation along watercourses”*

Visual Effects

The Icknield Way Public Right of Way (PRoW) is an ancient trackway that runs from Norfolk to Wiltshire following the chalk escarpment and runs directly through the centre of the site. The Hambridge Way also runs along the immediate western site boundary. Another PRoW also extends close to the northern site boundary, within the site.

The Icknield Way is a locally well-used route which is also a promoted PRoW owed to being a long-distance route. This increases the value of this particular PRoW, although there are other well-used PRoWs, including the Hambridge Way, that are interconnected. These are highly susceptible receptors owed to the type of activity being undertaken by these users.

Owed to the landform, views from the Chilterns National Landscape (AONB) are also anticipated, which is a highly valued and susceptible visual receptor.

Views 6 and 17 (Figure 16) within the Ickleford Design Code provide potential views and should be considered.

The site is surrounded by a strong network of PRoWs, which are susceptible features to development.

The Chilterns National Landscape

The site is located approximately 3km from the boundary of the Chilterns National Landscape (AONB). Views can be obtained of the site from the Chilterns on Hitchin Road, south of Pirton village.

As per Policy DP4 of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan; *“In the setting of the AONB, take full account of whether proposals harm the AONB. For example, development of land visible in panoramic views from the Chilterns escarpment, or which generates traffic in or travelling across the AONB...”*.

The ‘Development affecting the setting of the Chilterns AONB’ Position Statement includes examples of adverse impacts in Para 15, including [inter alia], breaking the skyline, inference of views out of the AONB or views towards the AONB.

Policy DP5 of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan states that an LVIA that meets the requirements of GLVIA3 must be submitted for developments affecting the setting of an AONB.

EIA Screening Considerations

A red line boundary (RLB) has been submitted alongside this application. No information on the proposed development has been included within this submission.

The proposed development may not give rise to significant effects on the fabric of the landscape owed to no direct impacts on the hedgerows, trees or landform, however significant effects may occur in relation to the Site, or to the Local Character. The site is very

open and representative of the open arable farmland character within the LCAs, and has very limited screening.

Panoramic views and 180-degree views are available from publicly accessible receptors within the site. Significant effects may arise on these visual receptors.

Screening may be used to reduce some of the visual effects associated with the development of the site. Considering the very open character, screening would have to be balanced with retaining this open character.

We do however judge that development should be located closer to the southern edge of the site where it joins the Ickleford. This provides an opportunity to form a stronger countryside edge.

The relevant LCAs should be considered within any forthcoming proposals.

Summary:

From a landscape perspective, there will be likely adverse negative effects on landscape character and visual receptors arising from development of the site. However, we do not consider these effects significant enough to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) from a landscape perspective.

We do, however, require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) be undertaken and submitted. This assessment should provide judgements on the potential landscape and visual impacts, which will inform mitigation and landscape strategies for the development. The LVIA should be conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), 3rd edition, and all other relevant Technical Guidance Notes (TGN).

Please do not hesitate to 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.