

7 August 2026

Naomi Reynard
Planning Department
North Herts Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
SG6 3JF

Dear Naomi,

24/02889/FP | Residential development of 281 dwellings and associated roads, parking, realignment of Back Lane, drainage, landscaping, open space, servicing facilities and associated works (as amended) | Land At Roundwood Back Lane Graveley Hertfordshire

Great Ashby Community Council (GACC) acknowledges receipt of the consultation letter dated 16 July 2026 regarding the above application. We note that the application is being returned to Planning Control Committee following the submission of the Applicant's viability report and its independent review by Dixon Searle Partnership.

Planning applications to develop the Roundwood site were submitted from 2010 with various resubmissions until the latest Application from Croudace Homes was approved by the NHC Planning Control Committee in July 2025. This decision was made despite many representations of opposition from members of the public and statutory consultees across all planning proposals across the timeframe. Comments stated similar reasons of objection including poor access, existing parking issues, lack of infrastructure and ecology. Great Ashby Community Council (GACC) has strongly objected to the development of the Roundwood site at every stage. These are major constraints which make this site a poor choice for development, and it is our Council's view that the proposals submitted to date have not sufficiently dealt with the issues to the extent that development could proceed without severe negative impact on our local community.

In mitigation of the constraints to development, the developer agreed a s106 agreement with NHC, which the NHC Planning Control Committee reviewed when making the decision to approve. The final legal s106 agreement with NHC remains unsigned and the draft agreement not published on the Planning Portal. We understand that the failure to complete the s106 agreement and the developer's request to change its terms, and that of the planning proposal, is indicative that no planning permission formally exists for this site at present.

GACC has reviewed the developer's viability report and the independent report commissioned by NHC. We note the Applicant's request to reduce the percentage of affordable housing from 40% to 20%, and their further request to reduce the s106 contributions from £12.48 to £5.64m.

We provide our comments below:

Affordable Housing

There is an acute need for affordable housing in this area and NHC approved this planning application in the knowledge that the site contributed significantly to its allocation. GACC maintains that no reduction in affordable housing should be allowed for the following reasons:

- The Local Plan (2011–2031) is clear: **Strategic allocations must deliver full policy-compliant affordable housing and infrastructure.** Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the Local Plan and the Council's policies, otherwise a precedent is set for other developers to seek reductions and the Local Plan strategy would be undermined.
- While GACC is aware of national pressures on Registered Providers (RPs) or social housing contracts, we understand the pressures since 2022-23 relate to construction inflation, interest rates, reduced grant availability and other factors which are general market conditions. These are not exceptional conditions and should be absorbed by the developer. They cannot be used as a justification to dilute obligations or contravene adopted policy.
- The national pressures on delivering affordable housing have been known throughout the application process; this is a national trend and not a site-specific viability issue. The fluctuation in cost cannot be seen as unexpected, exceptional or even a permanent situation; it is a commercial risk which is part of normal business practice.
- In 2022, NHC declared a Cost of Living Emergency in response to rising inflation and household pressures. This declaration emphasised: protecting vulnerable households, supporting access to affordable housing, ensuring new developments contribute to community resilience and maintaining strong S106 and affordable housing obligations.
- Further, NHC has recognised a Housing Emergency and has repeatedly acknowledged a severe housing need and the importance of delivering policy compliant affordable housing.

Section 106 Contributions

The Applicant's proposal to develop the Roundwood site was submitted with full knowledge of the site and surrounding area; the difficulties with access, parking, infrastructure, the proximity to ancient woodland and the protected species on and near the site were known facts.

The Applicant has sought to mitigate these through their s106 obligation. The monies were set out after consultation with the developer and were acceptable to the developer in July 2025 when the planning approval was granted (subject to the signed agreement and planning conditions), and GACC is aware that this was in progress through email correspondence with the Planning Officer. This s106 amount is not a surprise to the developer and this aspect of the project cannot be deemed exceptional.

GACC would be extremely disappointed should NHC decide to allow a reduction in the developer's s106 obligations as these obligations specifically address the effect of the development on our local community and the infrastructure our residents use.

For clarity, we mention some of the major issues with this site, for which full developer contributions are essential:

Poor Access & Parking

It is a known fact that the site has terrible access with the only available access through minor residential streets, a one-track road and a rural lane.

In order to progress with this development, the developer agreed to re-route Back Lane through the development and pedestrianise a section of the original lane. This was a known expense.

It is a known fact that there are significant on-street parking issues on the residential roads leading to the site. As recognised in the NHC Local Plan, the parking issues have arisen, in part, because of the national planning policies in place at the time the original Great Ashby development was built.

While NHC has recognised mistakes from the original development of Great Ashby, and is mindful not to repeat those mistakes, it has chosen to allow the mitigation of the constraints to the development that these congested roads present, through agreement of a s106 contribution to allow development of the site to progress.

Traffic Regulation Orders will be imposed on residential streets leading to the site to prevent residents parking close to their homes. A reactive 'Monitor and Manage' approach will then deal with highway issues which result from displaced parking. This remains a wholly unsatisfactory solution. Residents have been left with the reality that they may not be able to access their homes by car and there is complete uncertainty because no planned solution exists for the displaced parking.

The developer has agreed a contribution of £400,000 (index-linked) to mitigate the work needed for Great Ashby, Weston and Graveley as a result of the development. It remains our view that it is not possible to fully mitigate this parking problem and that displaced parking from these residential roads could lead to unsafe highway conditions in Great Ashby. Further, we maintain our view that this contribution level will be insufficient to adequately cover the work needed to ensure all forms of traffic can move safely in Great Ashby and between the villages of Weston and Graveley.

The contributions associated with highways work and the Monitor and Manage scheme were known and agreed by the developer and any reduction risks the safety of residents, existing and new.

Infrastructure

Great Ashby lacks essential infrastructure to support its current residents, including no GP, no dentist and no secondary school. Our roads are increasingly congested and there is an increase in parking along Great Ashby Way since this application was approved in July 2025.

In the past few years Great Ashby has seen a degradation of its existing SB7 bus service. The service has been unreliable, with Arriva claiming a national shortage of drivers as the cause for the non-arrival of planned buses. A more reliable service was promised by altering the route to include Pin Green and Bedwell and reducing the frequency of buses in early mornings and late evenings. Residents continue to report a poor service. The journey time to Stevenage Town Centre is longer after the route change and the service no longer provides a return journey from Stevenage Railway Station.

From September 2026, GACC is aware that Arriva intend to reduce the service further – buses are set to run every 45 minutes. This is a deterioration of an essential service to the point where it is impractical for residents to make a sustainable travel choice which an efficient and reliable bus service would provide. If a bus is omitted from the published new schedule, passengers can expect to wait at least an hour and a half for the next bus.

The Roundwood development has promised to be a sustainable development with enhancements to the Right of Way network and contributions to a new bus service specifically serving the new development. However, Great Ashby residents are in need of one dedicated and efficient service which routes through Great Ashby to key locations, rather than the creation of two unviable services.

Ecology

We believe the developer is legally bound to make full contributions relating to any ecological and environmental mitigations and BNG. The Local Plan lists binding policies requiring:

- Protection of biodiversity
- Protection of ecological networks
- Mitigation of environmental impacts
- Delivery of green infrastructure
- Compliance with national BNG requirements.

Any reduction would also be a direct infringement of NHC's commitments as pledged through its Climate and Nature / Ecological Emergencies.

Summary

GA1 is a Local Plan allocated site intended to deliver substantial housing, including 112 affordable homes. There is an acute need for affordable homes and to reduce this number would place further strain on housing availability for people in need. This site demands contributions to fund infrastructure and offset constraints at the agreed rate to support the development. Reducing the developer's S106 contributions would leave NHC/HCC/the new unitary authority unable to mitigate the impacts of development, shifting long-term costs onto residents. Any dilution of either the number of affordable homes or the developer's s106 obligations would therefore directly harm local residents, undermine adopted policy, and set a damaging precedent for future Local Plan and strategic sites. From research we have completed, we view the reasons provided for the viability request are more akin to normal business risk, and we feel it is inappropriate for the public to fund a private venture to enable it to make a profitable return. We feel the developer's request should be rejected.

If the developer is unwilling to progress the project on the terms agreed with NHC, we respectfully request the whole planning balance is reassessed based on the new position. That is, the proposal is redetermined detailing a 50% reduction in affordable homes and the significant reduction in s106 contributions. Further, we would request that redetermination takes account of the material changes affecting this development from after the date of approval of the application. For example, Great Ashby is now facing the active planning proposal for the GA2 strategic site with proposed road changes affecting traffic to/from the Roundwood site which were not known at the time of the GA1 application; the GA2 application does not seem to mention the new bus service as a certainty but more a wish, which was key to the sustainability of the Roundwood application. Further, the cumulative effect of both developments will be better able to be assessed now that the GA2 application has been submitted, as this was unable to be considered at the time of the GA1 Roundwood application.

Kind regards,

Great Ashby Community Council