



Rightpharm Limited, trading as CareRx Pharmacy
Providing NHS Services
Unit 1, rear of 93-95 Bancroft
Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1NQ

1st September 2026

By email and via the Planning Portal
planning.control@north-herts.gov.uk
Development Management
North Hertfordshire District Council
PO Box 7075, Manchester, M28 8JX
For the attention of: William Thompson, Planning Officer

Dear Mr Thompson,

**FORMAL OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION 26/01793/FP (PP-15066993)
— UNITS 1-5, REAR OF 93-95 BANCROFT, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE SG5
1NQ**

***PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL — CONTAINS COMMERCIALY SENSITIVE
OPERATIONAL INFORMATION***

The precise patient-database and NHS-nomination figures underlying this objection are commercially sensitive. Rather than include them in the main body of this letter — which we understand will ordinarily be published on the Council's planning portal — those exact figures are set out separately in the enclosed Annex A, marked confidential.

Rightpharm requests that Annex A is treated in confidence and is not published on the planning portal or otherwise disclosed to the applicant, its agents or the public; the main letter itself uses only high-level figures and can be published in full. If the Council is unable to accommodate this request, please contact us beforehand so that we may consider our position.

1. Executive Summary — Why Permission Should Be Refused

Rightpharm Limited, trading as CareRx Pharmacy ("Rightpharm"), is the current lawful occupier of the application premises and operates an active NHS community pharmacy from the site.

The proposal would materially reconfigure and subdivide the premises from which that existing NHS service is delivered. The application as submitted has not demonstrated that the development is acceptable having regard to its effect on that service, its patients, and the continuity, accessibility and provision of pharmaceutical services in the area.

Central to this objection: the application has been assessed against a materially false baseline. It treats the premises as vacant, when they are in fact occupied by an established, heavily

used NHS pharmacy. The applicant's impact analysis has therefore proceeded from the wrong starting point, and the true consequences of the development — for an existing healthcare service, not an empty shop unit — have never been assessed.

Rightpharm therefore respectfully requests that the Local Planning Authority determine the application as submitted and refuse planning permission.

2. Existing NHS Healthcare Use and Scale of Community Reliance

CareRx pharmacy records contain a database of over 18,000 patients, of whom over 7,000 have formally nominated CareRx as their pharmacy of choice for NHS prescriptions (precise figures are provided, on a confidential basis, in Annex A). The pharmacy receives on average more than 100 walk-in visits each day for prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, healthcare advice and other pharmacy services — tens of thousands of patient and customer visits annually. This is independently corroborated by the pharmacy's own NHS.uk pharmacy profile.

The pharmacy also functions as an accessible first point of healthcare contact, providing advice, signposting and referral across a range of health concerns, including healthy living, weight management, mental health, and smoking- and alcohol-related harm.

A substantial proportion of CareRx's regular users are older people, many of whom attend frequently for repeat prescriptions and medicines advice; the pharmacy also serves disabled and mobility-impaired patients, for whom proximity, familiarity and ease of access can be particularly important. This is not simply a matter of convenience: the Hertfordshire PNA assesses pharmaceutical provision partly by accessibility and travel time, and separately records, citing the JSNA, that North Hertfordshire was one of the top three Hertfordshire districts with the highest proportion of disabled residents.

No evidence has been submitted identifying where displaced patients would obtain equivalent services, the walking or public-transport relationship of those alternatives, their capacity to absorb displaced demand, or the impact upon elderly and disabled patients.

The scale of use is important. The potential consequences of disruption or displacement are not hypothetical or confined to the commercial interests of the existing tenant. They concern an established healthcare facility used extensively by the local community.

3. The Application Is Assessed Against a Materially False Existing-Use Baseline

The Council must assess the proposed development against the site's actual existing use — its baseline. The applicant's Design, Access, Planning & Heritage Statement repeatedly describes the premises as vacant, and proceeds throughout on the basis that the previous pharmacy operator has departed. That is incorrect: CareRx remains in active occupation, and the applicant's own application form confirms the site is not vacant.

This is not a minor drafting slip. It means the applicant has assessed the wrong development altogether — a scheme bringing empty floorspace into beneficial use, rather than one that would displace or materially compromise an operating NHS pharmacy. The claimed planning benefits, and the true planning harms, have both been assessed against the wrong factual counterfactual. Correcting the words “vacant premises” would not, by itself, cure this: the applicant would still need to assess the actual consequences of the development for the actual existing use, which the application as submitted has not done.

4. The Development Would Materially Interfere With and Displace the Existing Healthcare Service

The proposal is not a straightforward extension leaving the existing occupier undisturbed. The submitted plans would subdivide and materially reconfigure the existing pharmacy floorplate into several commercial units. On Rightpharm's information, the resulting configuration would not permit the pharmacy to continue operating in its present form, and the application does not adequately address how NHS pharmaceutical services would continue during construction, how the dispensary, consultation facilities, secure medicine storage, refrigeration and other specialist infrastructure would be maintained, or the consequences for patients accustomed to obtaining pharmaceutical services from this location.

Nor can relocation simply be assumed. The availability of other Class E floorspace does not establish that a displaced NHS pharmacy can readily relocate. Suitable premises may not be available for pharmacy use: for example, Rightpharm is aware that 13 Hermitage Road is subject to a lease restriction expressly prohibiting pharmacy/chemist use. Relocation of an NHS pharmacy also engages a separate regulatory process under the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013 (as amended), under which the ICB must be satisfied that new premises would not be significantly less accessible to existing patient groups, and that relocation would not cause significant detriment to the proper planning of pharmaceutical services. We raise this not because the Council administers that regime, but because it demonstrates why the applicant cannot simply assume that displacement is harmless on the basis that another Class E unit exists elsewhere: finding a shop, obtaining the landlord's agreement to pharmacy use, and securing NHS approval are three separate hurdles, none of which the application addresses.

The application also provides no explanation of how the development could be phased or implemented while the existing NHS pharmacy remains in lawful occupation.

5. Policy Context: Why These Consequences Matter

The Hertfordshire Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2025 ("PNA") expressly lists CareRx (ODS code FEX99) as one of the 24 community pharmacies forming the existing North Hertfordshire pharmaceutical-services network — a rate of 17.8 per 100,000 population, below both the England (18.1) and Hertfordshire (18.4) averages. Its conclusion that no current gap in Necessary Services has been identified is expressly based on that existing network, including CareRx, remaining intact. Rightpharm does not contend that displacement would automatically create a formal PNA gap; the material point is that the PNA's adequacy assessment depends on the network it describes, and an application capable of displacing a pharmacy within that network should be accompanied by evidence addressing the consequences for capacity, accessibility, continuity and geographical coverage — evidence this application does not provide.

Paragraphs 98(c) and 98(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework require planning decisions to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, and to enable established shops, facilities and services to be retained for community benefit. North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy SP10 (Healthy Communities) commits the Council to work with NHS bodies to ensure appropriate healthcare coverage; Policy HC1 provides further protection for community facilities, though pharmacies are not expressly named among its examples. These policies therefore reinforce the need for the Council to assess the practical consequences of the proposal for the retention, continuity and accessibility of this established

healthcare service, rather than treating the premises simply as interchangeable Class E floorspace.

The applicant may argue that no loss of pharmacy use arises in planning terms because both the existing and proposed uses fall within Class E. The absence of a formal change of use does not, in Rightpharm's submission, necessarily answer the separate question whether the development would cause the practical loss or displacement of an established and valued service; paragraph 98 is concerned with the loss of valued facilities and services, not merely with the Use Classes Order. We ask the Council to determine, as part of its assessment, whether this proposal results in the loss or effective displacement of an existing community facility or service for the purposes of paragraph 98 — a question the application does not confront.

6. Supporting Matters

The applicant's own material confirms the site has no dedicated parking and relies on the adjoining Sainsbury's car park; subdivision into several commercial units has the potential to alter customer movements, deliveries and servicing, and this should be assessed rather than assumed to be neutral. The site also lies within the Hitchin Conservation Area, which reinforces — without itself determining — the need for the proposal to be assessed against its actual existing circumstances.

Rightpharm notes the Certificate B submitted with the application and asks the Council to satisfy itself that all applicable ownership-notification requirements have been complied with.

7. Consultation, Determination and Requested Decision

North Herts Council's published position is that applications should be supported by relevant information and determined as submitted, and that amendments are not normally accepted after validation. If, notwithstanding that position, the applicant submits new healthcare, relocation, phasing or accessibility evidence in response to this objection, Rightpharm requests that the Council reconsult on that evidence before any favourable determination is made, rather than accept it without further scrutiny.

Rightpharm respectfully asks the Local Planning Authority to determine the application as submitted, having regard to the true existing use and circumstances of the site, the Hertfordshire PNA, national and local planning policy, this objection, and all other material planning considerations — and, in particular, to determine whether the proposal results in the loss or effective displacement of an existing community facility or service for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 98.

If the Planning Officer considers that a site inspection would assist that assessment, Rightpharm would be pleased to facilitate one.

For the reasons set out above, Rightpharm respectfully submits that the application has failed to demonstrate that the proposed development would avoid unacceptable consequences for the continuity and accessibility of the existing NHS community pharmacy service, and has therefore not demonstrated that the development is acceptable. Rightpharm accordingly requests that planning permission be REFUSED.

Please confirm receipt of this objection.

Yours faithfully,

Mahesh Shah
Director
Rightpharm Limited, trading as CareRx Pharmacy
Providing NHS Services

cc: Community Pharmacy Hertfordshire (Local Pharmaceutical Committee)
Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board
Hitchin Bearton Ward Councillors