



Vistry Group

Land Surrounding Burloes Cottages, Newmarket Road, Royston

**RECREATIONAL MITIGATION STRATEGY –
THERFIELD HEATH SSSI**

April 2026

FPCR Environment and Design Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Site description

- 1.1 A residential development is proposed at Land Surrounding Burloes Cottages, Newmarket Road, Royston (hereafter referred to as the 'Site' (central OS grid reference: TL369406).
- 1.2 The site is located within the jurisdiction of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). The site was dominated by intensively managed arable land. Other habitats present included plantation broadleaved woodland, amenity grassland, neutral semi-improved grassland, hardstanding and tall ruderal vegetation.
- 1.3 Whilst the site is located on the eastern fringes of Royston, it is surrounded by woodland. North of the site is divided from the Newmarket Road by a narrow strip of broadleaved woodland, with open playing fields and residential housing estates to the north of the road. Similarly, a strip of mostly deciduous woodland divides the site from the urban edge of Royston to the west. To the north and east are larger blocks of mature broadleaved woodland with open agricultural downland fields beyond.

Development Proposals

- 1.4 The site is an allocated site for residential development of 300 homes under Policy RY10 of the adopted 2011-2031 North Hertfordshire Local Plan.
- 1.5 Outline planning application for 325 dwellings had previously been approved in 2020, with reserved matters approval for 83 dwellings given in 2022.
- 1.6 This mitigation strategy provides details of the mitigation strategy proposed to support the revised planning application within the same site as the previously consented scheme. The revised application is a hybrid application for residential development of up to 325 dwellings comprising: (a) full planning application for Phase 1 comprising 102 dwellings and associated infrastructure including access from Newmarket Road, emergency and pedestrian/cycle access from Burloes Hall Drive, internal highways, public open space, landscaping and drainage and (b) outline application for up to 223 dwellings and associated infrastructure with all matters reserved apart from primary means of access and emergency and pedestrian/cycle access from Burloes Hall Drive.

Screening for Statutory Designated Sites

Eversden & Wimpole SAC

- 1.7 In the wider environment the Eversden and Wimpole Woods SAC is situated 11.3km north of the proposed development site. The primary reason for the selection of the site is due to the presence of an Annex II species, namely the Barbastelle bat, *Barbastella barbastellus*.
- 1.8 The HRA screening assessment for the North Hertfordshire Local Plan concluded that '*under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, North Hertfordshire District Council believes that either individually or in combination with any other plans or projects, the Local Plan is not likely to have significant effects on any European Sites. As such, the Council believes that no appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive is required.*'

- 1.9 Given that the proposed development is included within the Local Plan, and the distance of the Site from the SAC, the proposed development, in isolation or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have significant effects on this SAC or any other European Site. Therefore, no further detailed assessment is required in relation to this designated site.

Therfield Heath SSSI

- 1.10 The closest statutory designated nature conservation site is Therfield Heath, 1.5km to the west, and on the other side of Royston. This SSSI is notified for its calcareous grassland habitat and associated botanical interest. It is common land with a golf course and is used for general recreation, particularly walking/dog-walking.
- 1.11 The potential effects of increased recreational pressure on the conservation value of habitats within the Therfield Heath SSSI have been identified by Natural England and North Hertfordshire Council. In November 2022, North Hertfordshire Council released a mitigation strategy. The aims of this strategy are to provide mechanisms to reduce the potential effects of all new residential developments with two zones of influence surrounding the SSSI. The inner zone is all land within 1.9km of the SSSI and the outer zone is land up to 5.8km of the SSSI.
- 1.12 The proposed development site is located within the inner zone and mitigation to reduce potential recreational pressure is proposed as an inherent part of the proposals.

2.0 POTENTIAL ADVERSE IMPACTS

- 2.1 Therfield Heath is notified for its calcareous grassland and small area of beech woodland. Despite a limited amount of woodland being present on the proposed development site, none of qualifying species for the SSSI were recorded on the site, and the woodland present is not of the same type as that found on the SSSI. Thus, potential direct effects of the development on qualifying features of the designated sites, or habitats supporting them, have been scoped out.
- 2.2 Contamination impacts from increased sediment load, water flow rates, and water and airborne pollutants, resulting from the construction and operational phases of the development, were scoped but considered unlikely to impact the SSSI for the following reasons:
- No existing roads or junctions need to be modified and local traffic flow, and concomitant air pollution and noise, is not predicted to increase significantly, close to the designated sites;
 - The proposed development will link to existing mains water and sewerage systems; and
 - Run-off from the site will drain into nearby existing watercourses, via standard silt traps and settling ponds forming sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS).
- 2.3 No effects are predicted on Therfield Heath SSSI from the proposed development during the construction phase, there being no evidence that the site supports species for which the statutory sites are designated which may then form a functionally contiguous population with individuals on the SSSI. In addition, the size and extent of the proposed development would not be expected to affect these designated sites during construction due to their physical separation, being located 1.5km away from the construction zone.
- 2.4 As noted within the council mitigation strategy over the operational period increased recreational pressure could affect the conservation value of the SSSI. In terms of other operational effects there will be some increase in light pollution, local traffic flows and atmospheric pollution resulting from the proposed development. These effects will be on land over 200m from the SSSI. The proposals

provide appropriate SUDs and wastewater/sewerage infrastructure and treatment. Consequently, no potential impacts from the proposed development are predicted on the SSSI other than increased recreational pressure during the operational phase.

- 2.5 The Therfield Heath Visitor Access Study concluded that there were approximately 215,000 person visit to the Therfield Heath per year and the main recorded activity was dog walking. Other recorded activity included walking, playing golf, jogging, power walking family outings and meeting with friends. The majority of the people interviewed were from the area within 1.9km from the SSSI.
- 2.6 Positive recommendations to reduce the potential effects of the recreational pressure on habitat listed within the citation included:
- The presence of a warden or ranger;
 - Shifting recreational use to set pathway through the SSSI;
 - The provision of green space in other area of Royston with dedicated dog walking routes;
 - The creation of permissive routes within the ZOI surrounding the designated site to improve recreational resources within the wider ZOI.

Increased population numbers

- 2.7 The proposed development provides for up to 325 new dwellings. Assuming a household occupancy of 2.38 people, based on the 2011 population census (<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-performance-and-data/policy/census-information>), and that all new residents will be from outside the area, the proposed development is predicted to increase the local population by 774 (adults and children).

Recreational Mitigation Proposals

- 2.8 The proposed mitigation strategy to provide adequate mitigation for the site a range of measures have been adopted in the mitigation strategy. These measures include the provision a range of measures provided onsite and off-site.

Onsite Open Space Provision

- 2.9 The development proposals provide in excess of 3ha of open space. This open space will be designed to provide natural habitats includes the retained woodland, meadow grassland and native species scrub planting (Figure 1). This interconnected open space provides routes approximately 0.73km long. The footpaths on the western elevation of the site will link to the existing permissive woodland walk located immediately east of the existing development and to the northeast of the site the recreational route links to the wider public right of way (Figure 2).
- 2.10 Dog waste bins will also be provided in strategic location at the entrance and exits form the development site. These waste bins will be managed through the standard open space management of the site.

Offsite Provisions

- 2.11 Existing footpath and permissive footpaths on land surrounding the site are shown on Figure 2. The permissive footpath situated south of the site is under the ownership of the landowner and as part of this application the landowner confirms that use of this permissive route will be allowed.

This permissive route provides an informal footpath approximately 2.76km in length. This footpath length exceeds the median route length confirmed from the visitor survey in the Therford SSSI and given the direct connectivity to the proposed development and the location on the edge of settlement, this route provides an ideal location to provide an informal dog walking route to reduce increase activity within the SSSI. The location of this resource also provides an alternative informal route within the inner ZOI.

- 2.12 From review, land north of Newmarket Road is well resourced for active play with existing resources including playing fields, a play area and a skatepark (Figure 3). Additional sport and leisure facilities and a recreational ground are also situated on land north of Newmarket Road. As part of planning permission 14/02485/1, a new LEAP and Chalk Grassland and Woodland Community Open Space were approved (also shown on Figure 3) which has now been largely implemented. The development proposals will improve the enhanced link to these resource through the provision of a safe crossing over Newmarket Road.

Overall Local Provision

- 2.13 The total area of greenspace proposed including the retained woodland on site is approximately 3ha. The accessible area of woodland to the west of the site comprising informal greenspace, is c.2ha, the land where the permissive route south of the site is proposed is approximately 34ha and to the north of the Newmarket Road there is a 2.5ha recreation ground. In total, this will give a total of 10ha of accessible green space within 50m of the site.

Additional Provisions

- 2.14 As part of the S106 agreement a financial contribution to mitigate the development upon Therfield Heath has been agreed with North Hertfordshire District Council. This contribution will assist with funding the management and maintenance of Therfield Heath.
- 2.15 In addition to the onsite and offsite enhancements offered by the proposals and the financial contribution, all new residents will be provided with a 'homeowner information package' on first occupation of the houses. This homeowner information package will provide the new residents with information on:
- the sensitive nature of the habitats within the SSSI and suggestions to reduce the potential effect of use of the SSSI,
 - recreational resource provided within the proposed development (including the location of dog waste bins),
 - alternative recreational resources locally including offsite public and permissive walking route.
- 2.16 These existing resources are for existing visitors on the eastern elevation of the site, the footpath link will connect for informal recreation including dog walking provide a significant area of open space, the proposals have been designed to meet the requirements of element which are required by the proposals.

Predicted use of designated sites for recreation

- 2.17 Therfield Heath SSSI has a network of regularly used paths. Using a combination of many visitors surveys undertaken to inform impacts on European designated sites, the generally accepted distance within which increased recreational use of the designated site from visitors arriving by foot

and by vehicle can be expected is 1km and 8km respectively (e.g. The Landscape Partnership, 2011); i.e. designated sites not accessible within a 1km walking route of the site are much less likely to be accessed by residents on foot. Therfield Heath SSSI is 1.5km from the site in a direct line, 2km by road (Figure 3) and over 2.5km away on foot via minor roads and formal and informal footpaths (Figure 3).

- 2.18 Whilst these zones are taken to represent 'radii' around the designations, The Landscape Partnership (2011) acknowledge that these do not necessarily reflect the routes that people use to access the designations, and that this should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is likely the use of the designations will decline with increasing distance, such that residents located within 2km of the nearest car park are more likely to visit the designation than those located 8km away.
- 2.19 Taking this evidence in combination, we conclude that residents of the proposed development are unlikely to visit these designated sites on foot regardless of other alternatives but are likely to visit them via road without suitable alternative natural greenspace being available closer to the site. This could result in a net increase in recreational visits to these designated sites, with a concomitant increase in activities which could have an adverse effect on the SSSI condition, without mitigation. However, as there is almost twice the area of SANGS within 50m of the site as that required for mitigation, it is considered very unlikely that there will be a significant increase in the number of recreational visitors to the SSSI as a result of the proposed development.

3.0 FOOTPATH MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

- 3.1 Management of the footpaths shown within the proposed development site on Figures 1 & 2 will be subject to management. The management requirements for the open space footpaths are covered by the open space requirements for the planning permission and the S106 agreement.
- 3.2 The following management prescriptions only applied to the 'permissive footpath routes' shown in purple / orange on Figure 2. The management prescriptions will be applied prior to occupation of the first dwelling within the development site, and the management period will last for a period of 80 years. Management of the footpaths will either be undertaken by the development sites management company or the landowner of the agricultural land.
- 3.3 Along the permissive route marked 'purple' a 1.5m wide footpath will be provided along the existing route in the plantation woodland.
- 3.4 Along the permissive path marked 'orange' a 1.5m wide footpath will be provided within the field margin surrounding land currently under agricultural production. Usage of the permissive route surrounding the agricultural field will not affect the ongoing agricultural operations within the field.
- 3.5 The existing routes are not surfaced. Given that the proposals are only to formalise and provide an informal recreational resource, it is not intended that the permissive routes will be surfaced.
- 3.6 To facilitate year-round access along the footpaths, the footpaths will be subject to two annual cuts, once in early spring and once in later summer / early autumn. These cuts will reduce the overall sward height along the footpath to around 10cm in height.
- 3.7 In spring and summer, the footpath will be subject to monitoring to ensure the footpaths remains clear from significant obstructions such as fallen branches. Where obstructions from fallen branches or other objects are found, the contractor will remove the obstructions. Where clear evidence of fly tipping is observed along the route this will be reported to the council or other appropriate authority to resolve.

- 3.8 Hedgerow and woodland management adjacent to the routes will be completed on an annual basis outside the bird nesting season in autumn. The purpose of the management will be to ensure that neither the hedgerow nor the woodland obstructs use of the footpath.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The mitigation strategy has been designed to provide recreational resources within the site, enhancement to recreational resources within the inner 1.9km ZOI, enhanced links to existing recreation resources immediately adjacent to the site and educational resources to new homeowner of the development. The strategy also provides a direct contribution of for ongoing management activities within the SSSI. Adopting this range of measures provides an overall package that follows the aspiration of several of the main elements of the overarching strategic mitigation strategy recommended by the council in the Therfield Heath SSSI mitigation strategy (November 2022). Given this, we conclude that there will be no significant adverse effects on the condition of the Therfield Heath SSSI as a result of the proposed development.



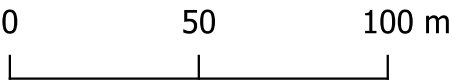
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Key

- Red Line Boundary
- Onsite Footpath Provision [0.73km]

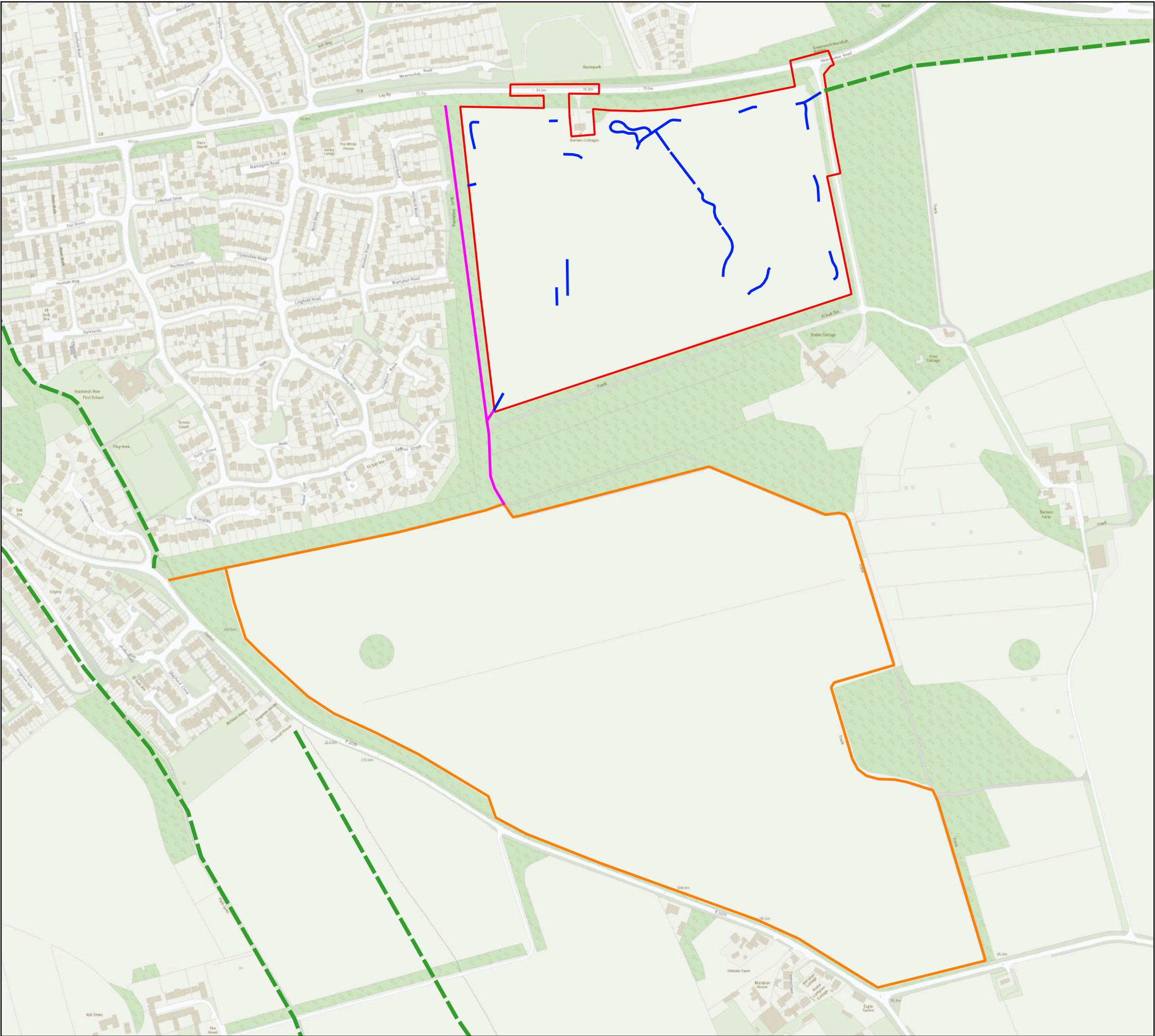


client
Vistry Group
project
Land Surrounding Burloes Cottages,
Newmarket Road, Royston
drawing title
ONSITE FOOTPATH PROVISION

scale @ A3
1:2,000
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24/4/2026



Figure 1



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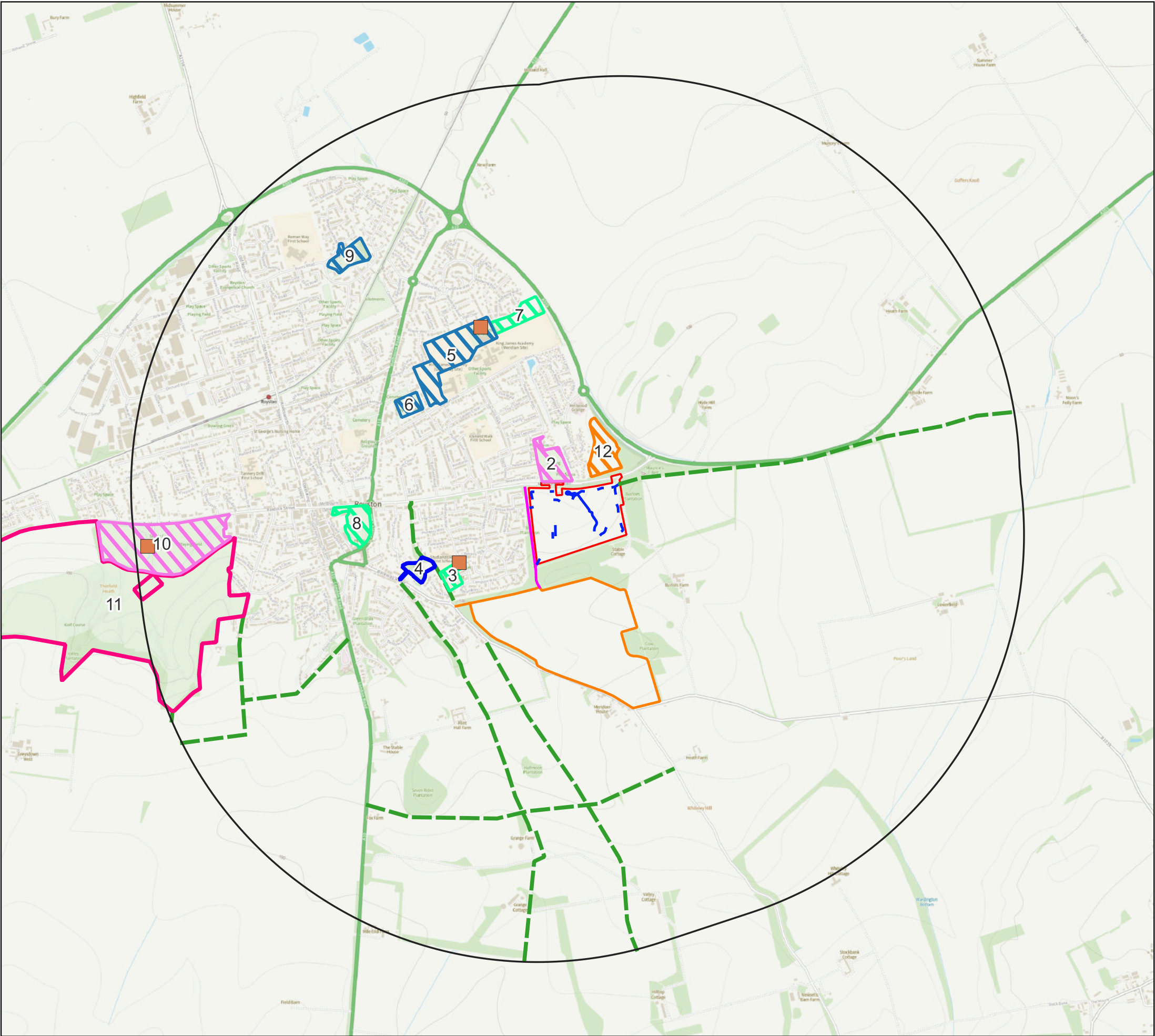
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Key

- Red Line Boundary
- Onsite Footpath Provision [0.73km]
- Permissive Footpath within Field Located to the South [2.76km]
- Informal Pathway Connecting to Permissive Footpath





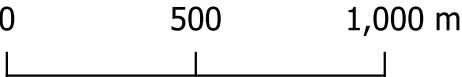
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Key

- Red Line Boundary
- 2km Red Line Buffer
- Car Park
- PRow
- Onsite Footpath Provision
- Informal Pathway Connecting to Permissive Footpath
- Permissive Footpath within Field Located to the South
- Recreational Spaces**
 - Local Play Space
 - LWS
 - Recreation Ground
 - Sports & Leisure
 - SSSI
 - LEAP and Chalk Grassland and Woodland Community Open Space associated with planning application 14/02485/1





client
Vistry Group

project
**Land Surrounding Burloes Cottages,
Newmarket Road, Royston**

drawing title
**WIDER AREA RECREATIONAL
INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**

scale @ A3
1:20,000

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Figure 3