

PLANNING STATEMENT

Hitchin Yeshiva, Wellbury House, Little Offley, SG5 3BP

Job Ref: 24/112

Date: September 2025



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PETER GEORGE TOWN PLANNING



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Section 1: Introduction & Background

Introduction

- 1.1 Peter George Town Planning has been instructed by Y Stern to prepare and make an application for full planning permission at Hitchin Yeshiva, Little Offley, SG5 3BP for **the erection of a detached building to provide dining, kitchen and changing facilities in association with the school.**
- 1.2 The purpose of this statement is to set out the proposals, provide an analysis against relevant national and local planning policy and ultimately make the case as to why planning permission should be granted.

Planning History

Ref.	Proposal	Decision (Decision Date)
99/01411/1	Three storey side extension to provide additional bedrooms (as amplified by written statement received 1.12.99)	Granted 07/12/1999
95/00143/1	Three detached dwellings with associated parking and garaging following demolition of 3 existing bungalows and school buildings.	Granted 01/06/1995
94/01176/1	Outline - 8 detached dwellings with associated parking and garaging following demolition of 3 existing bungalows and	Withdrawn 09/02/1995



	school buildings (Design, external appearance and landscaping reserved).	
94/00276/1	Two storey detached building to provide dormitory accommodation (24 bedrooms) in association with religious school (outline - design, external appearance and landscaping reserved).	Withdrawn 13/09/1994
92/00494/1	Continued use of land for temporary siting of portable buildings for residential purposes.	Refused 25/06/1992
89/01307/1	Single storey extension, roof alteration and external alterations to main building. External alterations to existing chapel and gymnasium (as revised by amended plans dated 27th November 1989)	Granted 30/11/1989
85/01417/1	Erection of single storey side and rear extensions at bungalows 2 and 3.	Granted 10/10/1985
84/01287/1	Approval of details of erection of detached house with double garage	Granted 31/01/1985
84/01297/1	Outline application (all matters reserved) for erection of 1 dwelling with double garage	Granted 10/11/1984
84/01207/1	Outline application (all matters reserved) for erection of 1 dwelling with double garage	Granted 18/10/1984
81/01609/1	Retention of prefabricated temporary classroom unit.	Granted 10/12/1981



Section 2: Analysis of the Site and Surroundings

The Application Site & Immediate Context

- 2.1 The application site comprises Hitchin Yeshiva an existing rabbinical school situated approximately a mile north of the small hamlet of Little Offley. The site lies between the B655 (Hexton Road) and the A505 with access provided by a series of bridleways which connect Hexton Road with Great Offley which is approximately 1.3 miles to the south. The site lies approximately 2.5 miles to the west of Hitchin.

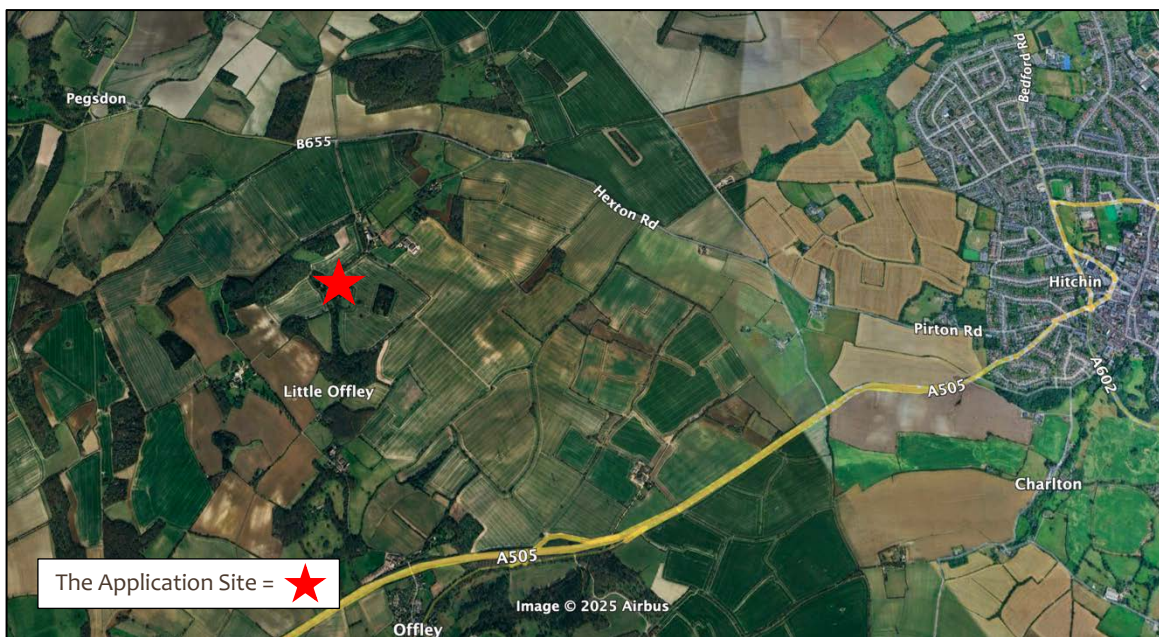


Figure 1 - Google Earth Snapshot

- 2.2 The school occupies various buildings on the site including Wellbury House, much of which has largely fallen into disrepair and has been made unsafe for use, and a number of associated residential and school building located



within the grounds. A large extension was added to Wellbury House in the late 1990's.

- 2.3 Wellbury House was a large residential mansion once forming part of Wellbury Estate along with its associated park and farm. The house is understood to date from the 19th century, although it is not listed. The Estate was subsequently broken up and the house and park sold separately to the remainder of the estate in the mid 1920's.



Figure 2 - Wellbury House

- 2.4 Bernard Kenworthy-Browne bought Wellbury House in the late 1920's or early 1930's, where he set up a preparatory school for catholic boys. The school closed in the 1970's and became a residential care home for boys. It has been used as a rabbinical school since 1989. The site currently accommodates approximately 50 pupils, with 10 staff members employed at the site.



2.5 None of the existing building on the site are listed. The nearest listed buildings are the grade II listed East Barn at New Wellbury Farm and the grade II listed Dovecote at New Wellbury Farm. These are located approximately 0.5km to the north-east.



Section 3: The Development Proposal

3.1 The proposed development can be described as follows:

“Erection of a detached building to provide dining, kitchen, shower and other ancillary facilities in association with the existing rabbinical school following the demolition of the existing swimming pool.”

3.2 Wellbury House has fallen into a significant degree of disrepair over the past 40 years, and the original part of the building is thus almost completely uninhabitable. A very small part of the existing building remains in use as the mikvah and shower/bathing/changing facilities, but the continued use of this part of the building is untenable. The three-storey extension built in the late 1990’s is still in use, as are other existing buildings situated within the grounds.

3.3 The existing swimming pool structure is situated immediately to the south of the main house. It is no longer in use and is thus proposed to be demolished and replaced with the proposed detached building.



- 3.4 The proposed building would be a brick-built structure with a concrete tiled roof. It would measure approximately 20m in depth, 37, in length, 4.7m to eaves height and 7.3m to ridge height. It has been designed to meet the very specific requirements of the yeshiva and thus provides dining facilities for approximately 120 students, a separate kitchen and milk kitchen, mikvah, changing and shower facilities and plant room.
- 3.5 The need for the proposed building is further set out within the Statement of Need that accompanies the planning application.



Section 4: Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The Government policies on different aspects of planning are set out in the **National Planning Policy Framework 2024** (the Framework).

4.2 The relevant sections of the Framework are as follows:

- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Section 5: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Section 9: Promoting sustainable development
- Section 11: Making effective use of land
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Development Plan

4.3 Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that:

“If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.”



- 4.4 The development plan context for the planning application is provided by:
- **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022)**

- 4.5 The following policies are considered relevant to the consideration of this application:

Strategic Policies

- Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
- Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport
- Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability
- Policy SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability
- Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity

Development Management Policies

- Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- Policy T2: Parking
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy D3: Protecting Living Conditions
- Policy D4: Air Quality
- Policy CGB1: Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt
- Policy NE1: Strategic Green Infrastructure
- Policy NE3: The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Policy NE4: Biodiversity and Geological Sites
- Policy NE7: Reducing Flood Risk
- Policy NE8: Sustainable Drainage Systems



- Policy NE9: Water Quality and Environment

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD (September 2011)



Section 5: Planning Analysis

Principle & Visual Impact

Policy Background

- 5.1 The application site is located outside of a defined settlement boundary lying within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. Accordingly, relevant NHLP Policies are Policies SP5, CGB1 and CGB4. These Policies are part of the recently adopted Local Plan albeit they are considered to be only partially consistent with the Framework insofar that, whilst they seek to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, they take a slightly more restrictive and protectionist approach.
- 5.2 LP Policy SP5 indicates that the Council will operate a general policy of restraint in Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt through the application of detailed policies. This includes LP Policy CGB1 which indicates that planning permission will only be granted for new development in certain circumstances, whilst LP Policy CGB4 indicates that the re-use, replacement or extension of buildings in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt will be granted in certain circumstances.



- 5.3 Limb (c) of LP Policy CGB4 sets out that planning permission for the re-use, replacement or extension of buildings in the rural area beyond the green belt will be granted provided that the resultant buildings should not have a materially greater impact on the openness, purposes or general policy aims of the rural area beyond the green belt. Limb (d) of LP Policy CGB4 indicates that permission will be granted for new outbuildings subject to such being positioned as close as possible to the main building and being visually subordinate to them.
- 5.4 The site lies within The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Accordingly, LP Policy NE3 is relevant. This states that planning permission will be granted for development within the AONB subject to compliance with certain criteria.

Discussion

- 5.5 Wellbury House is a former stately home which, since the mid 1930's has been a catholic boy's school, a residential children's home for boys and a rabbinical school. The original building has unfortunately fallen into a state of disrepair over the course of the last several decades and is largely unfit for use. Notwithstanding, it remains a very large and imposing building with



the other buildings situated in the grounds very clearly subordinate to the main building.

- 5.6 The vast majority of the existing outbuildings and other buildings situated on the site appear to be modern, many of which appear to have been approved and built in accordance with a number of planning permissions from the 1980's and 1990's. That being said, it is worth noting that, based on historic mapping from 1880, the site previously contained a much more significant range of outbuildings, most of which were located to its western end.

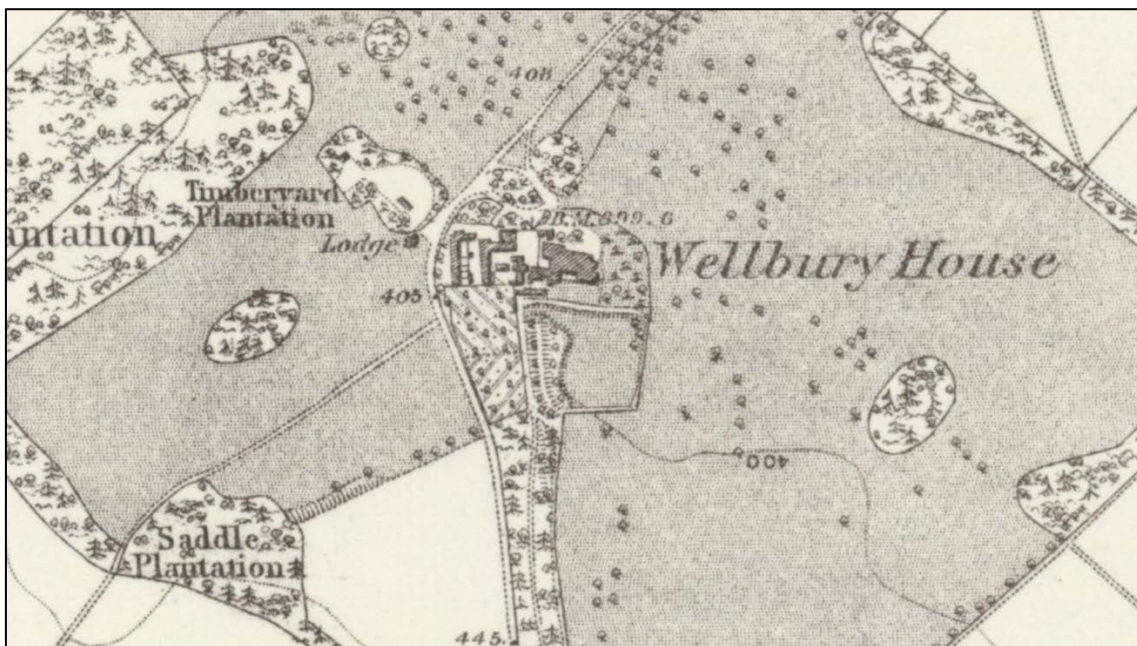


Figure 3 - Historic Mapping c1880 (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland)

- 5.7 The proposed outbuilding is proposed to be located immediately at the south-western end of the main house as a replacement for the existing concrete swimming pool structure (including the walls which surround it)



which is no longer used. It would have a single-storey and, whilst it would have a larger footprint and height than the structure that it is replacing, given its relationship with the main building and the degree to which it is largely surrounded by existing development, it would be read as a further subordinate building in the grounds of Wellbury House.

5.8 Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development would be compliant with limb (d) of LP Policy CGB4 insofar that the proposed outbuilding would a) be positioned as close to the main building as possible, and b) be visually subordinate.

5.9 In a wider sense, proposing to position the building to the south-western end of the existing building, it is adjacent not only to the main building but also to the cluster of existing outbuildings and other buildings situated to this side of Wellbury House. This significantly limits the wider visual impacts of the proposed outbuilding ultimately ensuring that it would have little tangible impact on the wider countryside or from public viewpoints more generally.

5.10 Turning to the effect of the proposed development on the AONB, it is noted that the site falls within the part of the district that is located within



the Chilterns AONB. Accordingly, development proposals should only be granted for development proposals that are, inter-alia, appropriate in scale, and that conserve or enhance the special qualities, distinctive character and biodiversity, tranquillity and remoteness of the AONB.

- 5.11 As discussed above, the proposed outbuilding would be positioned to the south-west side of Wellbury House, set amongst other existing outbuildings and other buildings to the west and south-west side of the main building. As such, the proposed development would be set against the backdrop of existing development which would significantly limit clear views to the proposed outbuilding from within the surrounding landscape. It would moreover have little public visibility from the public right of way.
- 5.12 In design terms, the building would have a simple functional design in keeping with other existing, modern development within the grounds of the yeshiva. Its size is largely dictated by the nature of the facilities required by the yeshiva.
- 5.13 Moreover, the proposed building would be relatively modest when compared to the footprint and scale of the main building and would very much sit in its shadow. Accordingly, for the reasons discussed, it is



considered that the proposed development would have a limited impact on the Chilterns AONB and not otherwise conflict with its special characteristics or qualities.

Summary

- 5.14 The proposed development involves the erection of a detached outbuilding to provide essential facilities in association with the continued use of the existing yeshiva. The proposed building has been designed to meet specific requirements and is proposed to be sited in a convenient location immediately to the south-west of the main building.
- 5.15 The site lies within the rural area beyond the green belt, but the proposed outbuilding is considered to be acceptable in principle given its clear and functional relationship with the main building as well as its very obvious degree of subservience.
- 5.16 Moreover, given its siting immediately to the south-west of the main building and the presence of other existing buildings to the west and south-west, the proposed outbuilding would be set against the backdrop of existing built form, and it would have a limited impact on the surrounding countryside or indeed on the Chilterns AONB.



- 5.17 Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development would be in accordance with LP Policies SP5, SP9, CGB1, CGB4, D1 and NE3.

Impact on Neighbouring Properties

- 5.18 The entire site and the buildings contained within are used in conjunction with the yeshiva. Accordingly, given the isolation of the site in the wider context, the proposed development would not give rise to any harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residential properties.

Highways Implications

- 5.19 The proposals are not intended to increase the capacity of the yeshiva, but rather to replace and rationalise existing facilities currently provided in a piecemeal fashion across the site, including within the main building (much of which has been made unfit for use by the Fire Service). Accordingly, the proposals would not result in the intensification of the use of the site and would thus not have any tangible impacts in terms of highways capacity or safety.

- 5.20 In terms of parking, the yeshiva already contains parking for approximately 25 cars. This is more than sufficient in the circumstances; not least because



the proposals do not seek to increase the capacity of the existing yeshiva or otherwise intensify the use of the site.

Ecology

Protected Species

- 5.21 The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) which concluded that the development of the site would not have any impact on UK or European protected species.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.22 The proposed development would deliver a 15.49% biodiversity net gain as per the submitted Biodiversity Net Gain Statement and Metric.



Section 6: Summary & Conclusions

- 6.1 This statement supports an application for planning permission for the erection of a detached outbuilding to provide a detached building to provide dining, kitchen and changing facilities in association with Hitchin Yeshiva.
- 6.2 As discussed in the foregoing, it is not considered that the proposals would have any adverse impact on the overall strategic aims of the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt insofar that the proposed would not cause any harm to the intrinsic beauty of the countryside, nor would it have a negative impact on the special qualities or characteristics of the AONB.
- 6.3 Other matters material to the consideration of this application have been considered and discussed in the foregoing and it is considered that the proposals would be fully compliant with relevant national and local planning policy.
- 6.4 In light of the above, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted for the proposed development.

