



Planning Statement

In respect of

Residential Development

at

LAND AT FORMER MERCHANT
TAYLORS SCHOOL
ROLLYS LANE
ASHWELL
SG7 5LY

On behalf of

The Henry Colborn Trust

USP1237

March 2026

COPYRIGHT ©

The material presented in this report is confidential. This report has been prepared for the exclusive use of The Henry Colborn Trust and shall not be distributed or made available to any other company or person without the knowledge and written consent.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA	3
3	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	4
4	PRE-APPLICATION ENGAGEMENT.....	5
5	DEVELOPMENT PLAN	7
6	PLANNING APPRAISAL	10
7	CONCLUSION	22

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application has been prepared on behalf of our client, The Henry Colborn Trust, in respect of a planning application for residential development at land at former Merchant Taylors School, Mill Street, Ashwell, SG7 5LY.
- 1.2 The existing site comprises an area of vacant and disused “brown field” land to the north of Ashwell, with vehicular access point on Rollys Lane and further pedestrian access route from Gardiners Lane. The site is located within the Settlement Boundary of Ashwell and is located within a Conservation Area.
- 1.3 The site originally formed part of the Merchant Taylors’ School in Ashwell, until the school closed in 1947. The Headmaster’s House and old school buildings were subsequently used up until 2000 for a range of services including field studies centre, infant welfare clinic and business centre run by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). In 2000 HCC however ceased their lease and transferred their operations to other premises and the old school buildings became vacant.
- 1.4 A planning application was subsequently approved in 2004 for the erection of four dwellings, conversion of the existing school building, and refurbishment of the Headmaster’s House for residential use. The planning permission included the provision of two netball courts with gated vehicular access from Rollys Lane on this site for use by Ashwell Primary School. The aerial image below shows the site and hardsurfaced court area.



Image 1 – Aerial Image of the Site

- 1.5 The land however has not been used by the school for over ten years and the school has now written to the Trust to confirm that they have no need for the site, have no intention of making use of the site either now or in the future, and that it does not fulfil any needs of the school. The site consists of a large open central area of a regular square shape. Due to its lack of use for the past 10 years it is however now in poor condition, with areas of patchy moss on the tarmac and is not suitable for use. The letter from the Headteacher of Ashwell Primary School included in **Appendix 1** provides further details of the historic and current position.
- 1.6 To bring the site into beneficial use the Henry Colburn Trust propose a residential development to make use of the vacant land. The development would deliver additional residential dwellings to add to the housing provision within the area on previously developed land within the settlement boundary, which responds to the character and form of residential development adjacent. The proposal is to provide two three bedroom houses on the site, reflecting the existing character and context of the local area, maintaining the dedicated access from Rollys Lane and providing off-street parking, communal landscaping and private amenity spaces. The proposals have been located and designed to enable retention of the trees located within the site, and boundary landscaping existing and enable beneficial reuse of a vacant previously developed site.
- 1.7 The proposals will contribute to the provision of housing, assisting to meet the Council's housing land supply requirements and address the current significant shortfall in delivery. The current five year housing position in North Herts is set out within the **North Herts Council Five-Year Housing Land Supply Update (November 2025)** and demonstrates that the Council is only able to demonstrate a 2.6 year supply of housing, falling significantly below the obligation to demonstrate a five-year housing supply figure and engaging the tilted balance in favour of housing development applications under Paragraph 11d of the NPPF.

2 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 The Site is located on the northern side of Ashwell, a Category A village to the north of Hertfordshire. The site has a gated vehicular access from Rollys Lane to the North and provides a regular, roughly square shaped hardsurfaced open site with a high chain link boundary fence and gates. To the north the site includes a band of trees along Rolly's Road. The south and east edges of the site are bounded by hedge planting outside of the site on the other side of the boundary fence, with a boundary hedge to the west boundary within the site area.

- 2.2 The site contains a tarmacadam surface to the vast majority of the site area, as shown in Image 1 above, which was used as netball courts by Ashwell Primary School from 2004 until circa. 2013/14. However, the school has not utilised the site for ten years and no longer have any need or requirement for them. The courts are not physically connected to or directly accessible from the school site, which is located 0.3 miles to the south.

- 2.3 Gardiners Lane provides a bus stop with access to the 91 bus which runs from Royston-Letchworth through the day. Ashwell and Morden train station is a 15 minute cycle or 6 minute drive from the site, this provides trains to London Blackfriars, Brighton, Royston and Cambridge.

- 2.4 The properties to the south and west of the site are residential dwellings, including houses constructed in 2004 and converted from the former Merchant Taylors' school buildings immediately to the south and east, and residential houses to the west on Gardiners Lane.

- 2.5 The site is located within the Ashwell Conservation Area. To the west of the application site lies Chain Cottage (grade II), which is located on the corner of Gardiners Lane and Rolly Lane. Directly east is nos. 29 and 31 Mill Street (grade II) and to the south-east is nos.23 The Old School House (grade II) forming part of the former Merchant Taylors School. On the north side of Rolly's Lane lies the Historic Park and Garden to Ashwell Bury. St Mary's Church (Grade I) is located further to the south east.

- 2.6 The site is located within the Settlement Boundary of Ashwell, with the wider area predominantly residential, with the centre of the village located to the south. The site is within Flood Zone 1, demonstrating low risk from fluvial flooding and is within the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan Area.

3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The proposal seeks to bring this underutilised site back into beneficial use to provide new homes providing family accommodation in line with the character, form and context of the local area. The scheme aims to improve its use and contribution to the character and appearance of the area, by improving its condition and appearance, and optimising its function and scale in context with the surrounding residential character. It proposes the delivery of two, three bed homes in high quality residential buildings reflecting the existing form and scale of housing within the area, situated in an accessible location utilising and altering an existing access, and making provision for off-street parking, cycle and refuse stores, communal landscaping and private amenity spaces.
- 3.2 The design has been developed through a collaborative design approach including architect, heritage consultants, and technical and environmental consultants, to provide a scheme that responds to the character and heritage context of the site, the neighbours to the site and the established village character in this part of the settlement, and to read as a natural evolution of its surroundings. The application follows the submission of a pre-application enquiry in January 2025 and response received in May 2025 related to a scheme for three detached dwellings, garages, parking and landscaping. The proposals have been the subject of further review and development following the receipt of the advice, with the input provided by heritage, transport, ecology and drainage consultants incorporated into the detail of the submitted scheme to address the matters and comments raised and provide a scheme that delivers high quality sustainable development.
- 3.3 The scheme provides vehicular parking for each of the properties through the provision of an accessible and usable garage, and surface parking, together with enclosed and secure cycle parking provision and waste storage.
- 3.4 Each of the properties is provided with a generous regular shaped garden to the south of the site, which will be well lit and provide usable amenity space, together with a more open front garden that will open onto shared communal landscaped space that will provide a vegetated buffer to Rollys Lane and follow the landscaped character of the lane, as well as biodiversity improvements. All existing trees on site are proposed to be retained, with further tree planting proposed to reinforce the tree'd frontage on Rollys Lane and improve the planting across the site. Overall a significant element of the existing hardstanding will be removed and significant greening provided as part of the proposals.
- 3.5 Further details of the proposals and the design evolution of the scheme is set out in the submitted Design and Access Statement.

4 PRE-APPLICATION ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Discussions have been undertaken with the Local Planning Authority through the pre-application process to confirm the principle of the proposed residential use and explore the detail of the residential scheme on the site, its scale and form, and confirm the relevant application submission requirements. The Council's response was positive, with support for the proposals in principle, subject to further detailed considerations in respect of the scale of development, heritage context and setting, and environmental and technical considerations related to transport, energy and sustainability, ecology and biodiversity, and drainage.

4.2 The key summarised below:

- Ashwell is defined in Policy SP2 as a Category A village where general development will be permitted within the recently defined settlement boundary.
- The proposed dwellinghouses would be considered as windfall as the site is not allocated and development of the site for housing would be supported in principle.
- The scheme would add additional dwellings to the Districts housing figures which could be delivered in a relatively short space of time.
- The proposed development would see the delivery of jobs during the build/construction phase which is a benefit.
- Given the site is within a Cat A village, it is considered that the proposed development meets the three objectives of sustainability.
- The previous proposal submitted at pre-application stage was considered to have an unwelcome and assertive presence, within the area and further consideration was suggested to review the design.
- This area of Ashwell is seen as a transition area, residential in nature in the village boundary that is transitioning towards the rural area to the north outside of the settlement boundary.
- The pre-application response recommended reviewing the scheme to reduce the overall scale and quantum of development to reduce its presence in the site. Larger plots and bigger gardens were sought to set the units in more space and position the premises further from the trees.
- It was suggested the design of the three dwellings lacked an appreciation of more traditional built forms conveyed in the relatively new-build on Gardiners Lane adjacent to the Bushell and Strike PH car park where the gable pitch is steeper, the dormer window is well-proportioned and with no integral garage.
- The orientation of the dwellings would see them all benefit from acceptable levels of daylight/sunlight.

- A tree report was requested as part of any application to consider any requirements for potential tree felling along Rollys Lane and any works to the access.
- The Council ecologist confirmed no ecological objection to the principle of development on this site given its previously developed nature, with a recommendation to submit an ecological appraisal as part of any further application.
- Environmental Health noted no objections in relation to noise and other nuisances nor contaminated land or air quality, and suggested each proposed dwelling should incorporate an electric vehicle charging point.
- An Energy Assessment was noted to be required in any subsequent planning application, identifying which sustainable measures will be incorporated into the scheme.
- A sustainable drainage solution should be included as part of the development.

4.3

The application preparation has responded to these comments and suggestions and been developed to satisfy these elements of the advice through detailed input from the consultant team. Further details of the design responses to the pre-application advice is contained in the Design and Access Statement, whilst the accompanying submission reports address the technical and environmental matters which were raised.

5 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires development proposals to be considered in accordance with the statutory Development Plan and other material considerations.
- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) forms the national planning policy guidance document, and is supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance, which is an online resource and are also material considerations.
- 5.3 The Development Plan for this site consists of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.
- 5.4 North Hertfordshire has adopted a number of Supplementary Planning Guidance and Documents, including:
- Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD
 - November 2011 Design SPD
 - July 2011 Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan
 - Sustainability SPD 2024

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.5 The NPPF includes a requirement on local planning authorities to plan positively for growth and identifies the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development of which there are three inter-related dimensions of which are identified as economic, social and environmental (Paragraph 8).
- 5.6 These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles: an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy; a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities; and an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.
- 5.7 Paragraph 10 notes that “at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development” which is expanded upon in Paragraph 11 and confirms that for decision-taking this means;

"Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies are which are most important for determining the application are out of date, granting permission unless:

- i. The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas of assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*

ii. Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

- 5.8 Under Paragraph 11d, as the Council are unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing supply, planning permission should be granted unless "any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits".
- 5.9 The NPPF seeks to promote and deliver a wide choice of high quality homes. Paragraph 60 requires local planning authorities to significantly boost the supply of housing through delivering a sufficient amount and variety of land, addressing specific housing requirements, and ensuring land with permission is developed without delay.
- 5.10 Paragraph 70 notes that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area and are often built-out relatively quickly. It supports the development of windfall sites, giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes and encourages working with developers to sub-divide large sites to speed up the delivery of homes.
- 5.11 Paragraph 123 states that planning policies and decision making should promote an effective use of land.
- 5.12 The NPPF promotes the delivery of a wide choice of high quality homes and requires local planning authorities to plan for a mix of housing based on current and future needs and to identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand.
- 5.13 The NPPF places great emphasis upon the creation of high quality buildings and places within Chapter 12. Paragraph 131 sets out that 'Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities'.
- 5.14 Paragraph 116 provides that development proposals should only be refused on highways grounds if it would give rise to an unacceptable impact on highways safety, or the residual cumulative impacts upon the highway would be severe.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Adopted)

- 5.15 The relevant policies of the Local Plan are considered to be as follows:
- Policy SP1 Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP2 Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
- Policy SP6 Sustainable Transport
- Policy SP7 Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions
- Policy SP8 Housing Policy

Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability

Policy SP12 Green Infrastructure, landscape and Biodiversity

Policy T1 Assessment of Transport Matters

Policy T2 Parking

Policy D1 Sustainable Design

Policy D3 Protecting Living Conditions Policy

Policy NE8 Sustainable Drainage Systems

Policy NE4 Biodiversity and Geological Sites

Policy HE1 Designated Heritage Assets

6 PLANNING APPRAISAL

6.1 In this section, consideration is given to the key planning considerations associated with the proposed residential development.

6.2 The main planning considerations related to the proposal concern:

- Former Use
- Proposed Residential Use and Principle of Development
- Scale & Design of Development
- Heritage
- Residential Amenity
- Access, Parking and Highways
- Flood Risk and Drainage
- Trees, Biodiversity and Ecology

Former Use

6.3 The former sports courts have been vacant and unused for a significant period of time in excess of ten years. The site provides no beneficial use or operation and is continuing to decline in terms of its condition.

6.4 Ashwell Primary School has confirmed in writing within their letter included in Appendix 1 that:

- The courts have not been used for ten years;
- There is no intention of the school to make use of the site now or in the future;
- The courts do not meet the needs of the school and are not required in any way for use by the school;
- There is sufficient on-site recreational facilities at the school which means that this space is no longer required.

6.5 The letter identifies a number of reasons why use of the courts ceased and are no longer required for recreational use. These include:

- The physical separation of the site from the school and the distance to the courts which does not provide a feasible or accessible location for its regular use;
- The separation and location of the site does not provide adequate supervision and the level of staff required to support an off-site facilities is not sustainable;
- There are no welfare facilities available;
- The site has restricted accessibility on foot from the school unsuited to moving classes or large groups of children safely and effectively between the school and site;
- There are no facilities for separate parking on-site whilst enabling the use to take place, which prevents sufficient vehicular use of site;

- New sports courts have been installed within the existing school grounds which meet the requirements for PE and the school has sufficient on-site recreation provision and does not require this site.

- 6.6 Whilst the site has not provided any use at all for ten years for any function, consideration has been given the **Policy HC1** in respect of community facilities. **Policy HC1** allows the loss of facilities where either (i) there is provision of replacement facilities either on site or as part or in an alternative appropriate location, or (ii) it is demonstrated that there is no local need for the facility or alternative community facility to meet local needs.
- 6.7 Having been vacant for ten years the site does not fulfil an existing function, whilst alternative sports courts have been delivered by the school within their existing school grounds. The proposed redevelopment of the site can clearly meet the criteria in respect of either (i) or (ii) of **Policy HC1**.
- 6.8 As confirmed in the letter from Ashwell Primary School (Appendix 1) a new sports court area has been installed within the school grounds itself which meets the purposes of the school and is in a more suitable, accessible and appropriate location, and provides appropriate replacement facilities to the former use of the site as netball courts. The school has confirmed that the school has sufficient on-site recreation provision following these on-site works. Reprovision of these sports courts has already therefore been delivered within the school grounds, meeting the requirements of criteria (i).
- 6.9 The site has not been in use for ten years and has been vacant for this period. The letter from Ashwell Primary School confirms that there is no intention to reuse this site and is no longer required. The site is not fit for purpose for a number of reasons, including the lack of facilities/welfare and services on site, the location and lack of accessibility for groups. Criteria (ii) is therefore also met in respect of **Policy HC1**. The pre-application response raised no issues in terms of the loss of the former use and compliance with the Local Plan in this respect.
- 6.10 On this basis consideration has been given to potential alternative uses for the site to bring it back into beneficial use and deliver community benefits. Consideration has been given to the local area, neighbouring uses and planning policies in determining the most appropriate use and form of development for the site.

Proposed Residential Use

- 6.11 The site is located within the settlement boundary of this Category "A" Village. The surrounding properties are all residential in use, with the character of the area principally residential. The site comprises previously developed land which has been vacant for over ten years and currently providing no benefit in its current condition.
- 6.12 **Policy SP1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan** identifies that key settlements are to be the main focus for housing and new development, making use of previously developed land where possible. The policy seeks to ensure the long term vitality of the District's villages by supporting growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities.

- 6.13 **Policy SP2** identifies Ashwell as a location for “windfall” housing development to assist in meeting the Council’s housing need. **Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (ANP)** alongside the **North Herts Local Plan (NHLP)** states that Ashwell, together with other villages, will make provision for 9% of the housing need across the district. This equates to a requirement to deliver circa. 1,170 new homes within these villages over the plan period. **Policy ASH1** of the **ANP** states development will be focused within the settlement boundary and proposals for brownfield land will be particularly supported.
- 6.14 The focus on delivering new housing and optimising brownfield land is further emphasised in the Governments recent publications.
- 6.15 On 30 July 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister issued a Written Ministerial Statement entitled “Building the homes we need” (“WMS”). On the same day, the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a consultation on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) together with draft amendments to the NPPF. The WMS is a statement of policy which carries full weight as a recent expression of Government policy. The consultation material is an expression of intent from the Government which is a material consideration in the determination of planning proposals.
- 6.16 The WMS emphasises the urgent need for housing. In particular, it provides that:
- “We are in the middle of the most acute housing crisis in living memory. Home ownership is out of reach for too many; the shortage of houses drives high rents; and too many are left without access to a safe and secure home.”*
- 6.17 The need to prioritise brownfield land for development is further emphasised in the WMS, which provides that:
- “The first port of call for development should be brownfield land, and we are proposing some changes today to support more brownfield development: being explicit in policy that the default answer to brownfield development should be yes”.*
- 6.18 The consultation material published by the Government further supports the objective of optimising housing density, explaining that:
- “We are clear that local planning authorities should identify opportunities for maximising the efficient use of land, especially in areas well served by transport and other infrastructure. By restricting density, the existing policy is likely to have longer term negative impacts on achieving sustainable patterns of development and on meeting expectations on future housing supply....we propose strengthening expectations that plans should promote an uplift in density in urban areas.”*
- 6.19 The consultation material confirms the Government’s ambition to deliver 1.5 million homes over the next five years and identifies a number of mechanisms through which this is proposed to be achieved, including a new formula for calculating housing need which “*increases targets across all...regions relative to the existing standard method*”. The Government recognises the need to “*act decisively if we are to ramp up new supply*”.

- 6.20 The current five year housing position in North Herts is set out within the **North Herts Council Five-Year Housing Land Supply Update (November 2025)**. This demonstrates that the Council is only able to demonstrate a 2.6 year supply of housing, falling significantly below the obligation to demonstrate a five-year housing supply figure. As a result, there is a need to substantially further increase the supply and delivery of housing within the district and establishing a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Under **Paragraph 11d of the NPPF** as the Council are unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing supply, planning permission should be granted unless "any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits".
- 6.21 The proposed redevelopment of this vacant and unused brownfield site to deliver additional housing is fully in line with the Government's targets for housing delivery across the UK, whilst responding to and reflecting the character and context of development surrounding the site. The proposal will deliver sustainable development through delivery of new housing on this previously developed site within the settlement boundary of this Category A village. The proposed scheme will make a material contribution to housing supply within the district, assisting to meet housing needs within an existing settlement and responding to the residential character and context of the location.
- 6.22 Overall, the reuse of this unused brownfield site within the settlement boundary to provide new homes will provide a beneficial use of this vacant land, follow the character and form of uses within the surrounding location and support the overall facilities within the village. The proposal will assist with meeting housing need, assisting to avoid the need for urban sprawl and development within the countryside and greenbelt. The proposals are in principal compliant with the requirements of **SP1** in respect of Sustainable Development, **SP2** Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution, **ANP** Spatial Strategy, and are supported by the **NPPF**, **WMS** and presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Scale & Design of Development

- 6.23 The form, scale and massing of the proposals result from a detailed assessment of the sites context, topography and surroundings; the grain, form and scale of existing development within the area; and analysis of the neighbouring relationships.
- 6.24 **Paragraph 131** of the **NPPF** advocates good design and high quality development. Section 12 reinforces the importance of good design in achieving sustainable development, by ensuring the creation of inclusive and high quality places. It goes on in **paragraph 135** to highlight the need for new design to function well and add to the quality of the area in which it is built, establish a strong sense of place and respond to local character and history, reflecting the built identity of the surrounding area.
- 6.25 This is supported by **Paragraph 6.1** of the **ANP** which requires high quality design standards that integrate with the area and reflect and reinforce, without overwhelming, the rural character of the parish. This is added to in **Paragraph 6.6** stating all development should be designed to a high quality and reinforce and enhance local character that is appropriate to the site's context, including the landscape in which it is set, whilst making best use of land available.

- 6.26 **Paragraph 130** of the **NPPF** states that plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area, and should seek an uplift in density of development. **Paragraph 130(c)** states that local planning authorities should refuse applications which do not make efficient use of land. **Paragraph 117** requires proposals to respond to local context, with Section 12 requiring proposals to take a design led approach to sites.
- 6.27 North Herts Local Plan **Policy D1** requires proposals to respond positively to the site's local context, meeting or exceeding national described site standards, having regard for the Design SPD as ensuring the site is as sustainable as possible. **Policy SP1** states proposals will be granted if they create high quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings.
- 6.28 Local Plan **Policy SP9** relates to Design and Sustainability, it states the Council considers good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development and will support new development that is well designed and responds well to its local context.
- 6.29 Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan **Policy ASH3** relates to Character of Development. It requires\;
- Development proposals should conserve and enhance the Conservation Area,
 - The design of new development should demonstrate how it has taken account of the local context and reflected the character and vernacular of the area, using architectural variety in form and materials, in order to avoid building design that is inappropriate to the ANP area.
- However, innovation in design will be supported where this demonstrably enhances the quality of the built form in a character area.
- As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should make a positive contribution to the visual impact of the village and not have a significantly detrimental impact on local views.
- 6.30 The Design Supplementary Planning Document encourages proposals to think about the context of the site and how their development might contribute to and enhance the local area. The Design (SPD) has been taken into account when developing the proposals. The Ashwell Village Design Statement August 2018 has also been reviewed in preparing the proposals for the site.
- 6.31 The site is located to the north of the settlement of Ashwell, with a variety of forms of dwelling surrounding the site. This includes:
- The individual detached residential houses located to the west on Gardiners Lane which are more historic in nature, including the Grade II listed Chain House;
 - The tighter knit detached residential properties of Merchant Taylors Close to the south and east, delivered in the early 2000s through the redevelopment and reuse of the former school site and its buildings/Head Teacher's House;
 - The open grounds and manor house of Ashwell Bury located to the north of Rollys Lane.
- 6.32 The Design and Access Statement and Heritage Assessment include appraisals of the existing character and local context of the site to inform the design response and design approach to this

site to respond to the existing form, character and nature of the development within the existing setting of the locality. It is evident that the character of dwellings in this part of the conservation area all have in common that they are predominately detached family houses, set within private gardens with landscaped boundaries, of one and a half to two stories, predominantly brick or rendered, with off-street parking on driveways and/or separate garage and car port structures.

- 6.33 In line with the policies of the Development Plan the proposals respond to this existing context, reflect the current character and respond to the built form within the area. The proposals maintain the landscaped boundaries to the site, retaining the majority of the trees to the boundaries and retaining the existing character of Rollys Lane by setting the properties back from the road within the site, and responding to the form and character created by Merchant Taylors Close to the South, which the land was originally associated with.
- 6.34 The scheme proposes two new detached dwellings located within the centre of the site, with a central access utilising the existing vehicular access point from Rollys Lane to the North. The properties are set within private gardens with off-street parking provided in a combination of garages and driveways. The properties follow the scale and form of dwellings surrounding the site, with the initial design ethos in line with the Merchant Taylors Close properties, given the association of these sites. The site provides dwellings which respond to the character of the locality and follow a design led approach, whilst enabling residents in the locality to move up from smaller sized accommodation, freeing up existing smaller dwellings to smaller households or individuals, including younger people or the elderly. On the basis that the scheme only accommodates two dwellings there are limited opportunities to provide a range of dwellings types and sizes, however the proposed design and heritage approach ensures the homes respond appropriately to the local character and setting, with the form, type and nature of the dwellings reflecting the character of this part of the conservation area and providing accommodation to meet family needs and providing opportunities to free up smaller sized accommodation as households move up the housing chain.
- 6.35 The layout, distribution, form and design follows detailed assessment of the principal heritage considerations, as set out in the proceeding section, to establish a built form and design that responds appropriately and positively to its setting and heritage context.
- 6.36 The scale, massing and bulk has been carefully considered and reduced, with the layout of the proposed dwellings set back within the site further and rigorously reviewed and actively modelled to ensure significant key views across the site to the west tower of Ashwell Church are maintained and can continue to be appreciated. The garages are provided as a lower scale separate elements which provide a suitable enclosure to the public and private areas of the site, enable the appreciation of views to the church tower to be maintained, and follow the form of the existing residential homes in the local area.
- 6.37 The homes are positioned with east/west orientations, maximising daylight and sunlight whilst avoiding both north facing aspects and south facing elevations, to avoid the potential for overheating. The orientation of the dwellings also takes account of the layout of the surrounding dwellings, avoiding principal elevations and windows to the South facing towards the properties within Merchant Taylors Close. The properties are set back from the boundaries of the site, to

enable the trees and landscaped boundaries to be retained, maintaining appropriate buffers and privacy to the gardens of the properties to the east and west. The dwellings are positioned away from Chain Cottage to the west, which is a Grade II listed building, providing appropriate separation and maintaining the setting of the listed building.

- 6.38 The layout provides suitable accessibility on foot and vehicle, with parking for cycles and cars in line with adopted standards, as well as capacity for onsite servicing and deliveries, and arrangements to address waste collection from the site.
- 6.39 The proposed layout, form and configuration of the properties follow the characteristics of existing dwellings within the conservation area and will maintain and improve the character through reflecting these established principles. The scheme therefore addresses the policies of the Local Plan and ANP in respect of scale, layout and form of development, as well as respecting the amenity of existing residents and providing appropriate amenity for future occupiers.

Heritage

- 6.40 Local Plan **Policy HE1** relates to Designated Heritage Assets and states proposals affecting the setting of Designated Heritage Assets will be granted where they use a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character and lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset.
- 6.41 The detailed Heritage Assessment submitted with the application follows collaborative working between the Heritage consultant, architect and consultant team. The design, form and approach of the submitted scheme follow a detailed appraisal of the site, conservation area, designated heritage assets and key views.
- 6.42 The Heritage Assessment concludes that scale, form and massing have been carefully considered and reduced in light of the pre-application response, with an amended silhouette to the rooflines, revised layout, reducing the footprint and setting back built form further into the site and maintaining key views to the listed Church tower beyond. The view of the church will be further enhanced by removing the existing high chain link fencing which runs along the frontage of the site and providing for improved maintenance of the Rollys Lane boundary.
- 6.43 The revised form and house design sympathises comfortably with the nearby houses and reflects traditional materials and finishes in the area. It is considered that the approach thoughtfully weaves the scheme into the built form of the village and fabric in this part of the conservation area, whilst providing an appropriate landscaped transition to the parkland and rural area that opens up to the north of the site, improving the extensive hard surfaced nature and appearance of the site at present.
- 6.44 The proposals retain all trees along Rollys Lane, preserving the existing character and setting of the site along this approach, whilst the landscape treatment provides an informal boundary to the frontage to provide appropriate and improved integration into its setting.
- 6.45 No harm is identified in respect of the listed buildings of Chain Cottage or the old School House due to the layout and form of development, and relative separation and lack of intervisibility between with these heritage assets. The Heritage Assessment concludes that the proposal will

have impact or potential harm to the group of heritage assets within this part of the conservation area, whilst it will deliver beneficial reuse of this vacant site in poor condition which will maintain and benefit the character of the conservation area.

6.46 The assessment confirms that the proposal will not result in heritage harm. Even if less than substantial harm was to be considered to result the proposal would deliver public benefits which would far outweigh it. This includes the beneficial re-use of the site for much needed housing meeting unmet housing demand, and enhancement of the land by a viable re-use of this redundant, disused land which is in poor condition and currently negatively contributing to the areas character.

6.47 The proposal is in accordance with the NPPF and Local Plan Policy HE1.

Sustainability and Energy

6.48 Local Plan **Policy D1** relates to Sustainable Design and states in b) iii) planning permission will be granted if proposals reduce energy consumption and waste.

6.49 The application is submitted with a Sustainability Statement which incorporates assessment of the energy performance of the new homes. The statement demonstrates that the proposals will exceed the North Herts District Council Bronze requirements for minor development and supports many of the SPDs Silver aspirations under Checklist 1.

6.50 The homes have been designed around a fabric first approach. Both dwellings are all electric, with low carbon heating. The SAP calculations in respect of energy assessment demonstrate an EPC B rating, confirming excellent energy performance and incorporating strong airtightness, use of heat recovery and a substantial improvement over Part L requirements in the Building Regulations.

6.51 The proposals complies with the requirements of the SPD in respect of minor development and is in accordance with Policy D1 as achieved high standards of sustainable design and energy efficiency.

Residential Amenity

6.52 Local Plan **Policy D3** Protecting Living Conditions states that "Planning permission will be granted for development proposals which do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. Where the living conditions of an existing development would be affected by a proposed use, the Council will consider whether there are mitigation measures that can be taken to mitigate the harm to an acceptable level. If the Council is not satisfied that mitigation proposals would address the identified harm, development proposals will not be permitted."

6.53 The dwellings have been positioned and orientated to ensure the amenity of neighbouring properties are maintained, whilst achieving high standards of amenity for future residents. The homes are positioned with substantial separation from the residential properties located to the south, with windows looking onto the generous private gardens of the associated property. The properties to the south are orientated such that they do not look directly towards the site, with angled views to the north east and north west. Chain Cottage is positioned over 30 metres from

the nearest proposed dwelling, whilst the closest first floor windows of 40 Gardiners Lane and Gild Cottage are 27 and 18 metres respectively from the nearest home, and 30 metres from the nearest first floor window of the Old School House. The separation distances of the proposed dwellings to the existing houses, together with the relationship and orientation of the existing and proposed dwellings, ensure there will be no unacceptable overlooking.

- 6.54 To the east and west of the site, the properties have been located within the site such they are not positioned adjacent to existing dwellings. The houses are designed with no habitable rooms having windows facing towards these boundaries, and non-habitable windows to first floor bathrooms are to be obscured and fixed shut below 1700mm to ensure no overlooking to neighbouring properties.
- 6.55 The location of the proposed dwellings positioned away from the existing houses and the orientation of the site, predominantly to the north of the existing residential properties, ensures that there will be no loss of light to neighbouring dwellings, whilst the proposed homes are positioned and spaced within the site to ensure good levels of internal daylight throughout the accommodation.
- 6.56 Garden sizes have been significantly increased as part of the preparation of the application scheme, with large private amenity areas providing regular shaped highly usable areas with a southern orientation. Landscaped front gardens, and a communal landscaped frontage to the site, add to the character of the site within public views and provide visual amenity for residents.
- 6.57 The proposal does not result in any unacceptable impact on the amenity of existing residents, and will deliver excellent amenity for future residents. The scheme complies with the requirements of the Development Plan.

Access, Parking and Highways

- 6.58 Local Plan Policy T1 Assessment of transport matters states that planning permission will be granted provided that:

"a) Development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network."
- 6.59 Policy T2 states that planning permission will be granted provided that: *"a) Parking for residential development is provided in accordance with the minimum standards set out in Appendix 4 of this Plan"*. Paragraph 116 of the NPPF provides that development proposals should only be refused on highways grounds if it would give rise to an unacceptable impact on highways safety, or the residual cumulative impacts upon the highway would be severe.
- 6.60 The proposals have been the subject of pre-application review and advice with Hertfordshire Highways. The submitted Transport Statement addresses in full the relevant highways and transport policies, and the comments and requirements raised by HCC in the pre-application process.
- 6.61 The access to the site is proposed to be upgraded to meet modern highways standards, whilst retaining the character of Rollys Lane and working within the existing 20mph speed limit in place.

The works to the access do not require any removal of existing trees as a result and ensure an improved vehicular access to the site which will appropriately accommodate the associated vehicles for these two dwellings.

- 6.62 Car Parking is provided on site in line with North Hertfordshire's Parking Standards, with provision on site for a further visitors space to ensure car parking can be appropriately contained off of the highway. Each unit will have access to well proportioned garages that facilitate the parking of a car, which will have provision for EV charging.
- 6.63 Cycle Parking is also accommodated within each plot, with a secure and covered cycle store provision storage provision for each of the units in line with standards. Residents will be able to access the site on foot also by the existing footpath which connects through their plots to Gardiners Lane and provides an appropriate private route for occupiers of the dwellings.
- 6.64 Servicing is accommodated within the proposals with refuse vehicle arrangements in line with Manual for Streets standards and a dedicate bin collection area provided within the site for use on collection days. Fire Tenders will be able to service the site within the required 45m distance of each dwelling as per Manual for Streets requirements. The site can accommodate delivery vehicles, including courier and grocery deliveries, with swept path analysis included demonstrating that vehicles can access the site and egress in forward gear.
- 6.65 The Transport Statement includes an assessment of impact on the highway and confirms that the proposal will result in an imperceptible impact on the operation of the local highway network. It concludes that the proposal complies with relevant transport and Local Plan policy.

Trees, Biodiversity and Ecology

- 6.66 Local Plan **Policy NE4** relates to Biodiversity and states permission will only be granted for proposals that appropriately protect, enhance and manage biodiversity in accordance Local Plan **Policy SP12**. The policy goes onto state development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity and proposals should include an ecological survey that is commensurate to the scale and location of the development and impact on biodiversity.
- 6.67 The PEA submitted as part of the application pack follows an ecological walkover of the site and review of the available ecological records for the site and area. It notes that the significant majority of the site is hardsurfaced, however patches of vegetation have encroached, with weeds and grasses emerging, whilst the frontage of the site contains scattered ash, chestnut and thorn. The nature of the hardstanding across the majority of the site was found to limit opportunities for small mammals and other species, and no evidence of any protected species on site or within the surrounding trees were identified. Whilst potential for bats to forage along the tree boundary, there was no potential for bat roosts identified. To protect potential for birds within the trees any work near to trees will not be undertaken between March and August, unless trees are inspected in advance.
- 6.68 The proposal includes for the retention of all trees within the site and the proposed dwellings avoid the root protection areas. The Tree Survey and AIA submitted with the application confirms that the proposal will have minimal impact on the existing trees and is acceptable from an

arboricultural perspective. Proposed methods of working within the proximity of existing trees and tree protection measures are included as part of the submitted report to ensure that there is no unacceptable disturbance or impact. The proposal also retains the existing landscaped boundaries to the site, setting built form back from the boundaries and incorporating these into the scheme design to maintain the landscaped character of these edges.

- 6.69 In addition, the site includes enhanced planting to the frontage of the site and the proposal enhances the landscape setting of the site, removing the high metal fence and gate, providing a more open character and appearance to the site, better relating to the landscape character of the site and relationship with its surroundings.
- 6.70 The proposal will deliver a substantial improvement to the greening of the site compared with the existing extensive hardstanding, whilst the additional planting will reinforce the frontage and boundary of the site, with existing trees retained and protected. The BNG report confirms the site will deliver a 11.47% gain in habitat in for the communal areas of the scheme, as well as a 34.19% hedgerow gain, exceeding national and local plan requirements and demonstrating the biodiversity benefit which will be delivered on site.

Drainage

- 6.71 Local Plan **Policy D1**, relates to Sustainable Design and states permission will be granted if the design takes all reasonable opportunities, consistent with the nature and scale of the scheme to optimise the potential of the site by incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systeme (SuDS).
- 6.72 Local Plan **Policy NE8** relates to Sustainable Drainage Systems and states permission for development will be granted provided that:
- " a) The most appropriate sustainable drainage solution is used taking into account technical, viability and design issues to reduce the risk of surface water flooding, enhance biodiversity, water quality and provide amenity benefits;*
- b) It aims to mimic the natural drainage patterns and processes as far as possible; and*
- c) Drainage solutions follow the SuDS hierarchy."*
- 6.73 The Flood Risk Assessment confirms that the site is located in Flood Zone 1 with the lowest level of flood risk from fluvial flooding, and the site is not identified to be at risk of surface water flooding, with an overall low risk from all sources.
- 6.74 The scheme has adopted the SUDS hierarchy as part of the preparation of the sustainable drainage for the site. The proposed SUDS strategy includes raingardens, permeable paving and soakaways to deliver an appropriate drainage strategy which will deliver significantly improved infiltration compared with the existing extent of hardstanding on site and appropriately manage surface water inline with the SUDS hierarchy.
- 6.75 The proposals therefore comply with D1 and NE8 of the Local Plan and provide a sustainable form and design of development, improving the existing on-site situation.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This application has been prepared on behalf of our client, The Henry Colburn Trust, in respect of a planning application for residential development at land at former Merchant Taylors School, Mill Street, Ashwell, SG7 5LY. The existing site comprises an area of vacant and disused "brown field" land to the north of Ashwell which was last used over ten years ago as sports courts by the Ashwell Primary School, with vehicular access point on Rollys Lane and further pedestrian access route from Gardiners Lane.
- 7.2 The land has however not been used by the school for over ten years and the school has confirmed that they have no need for the site. To bring the site back into beneficial use, and optimise its use in line with the NPPF, the Henry Colburn Trust propose a residential development to make use of the vacant land. The development would deliver additional residential dwellings to add to the housing provision within the area on previously developed land within the settlement boundary, which responds to the character and form of residential development adjacent.
- 7.3 The proposal has been developed through a collaborative design approach including architect, heritage consultants, landscape, technical and environmental consultants, to provide a scheme that responds to the character and heritage context of the site, the neighbours to the site and the established village character in this part of the settlement, and to read as a natural evolution of its surroundings. The application follows the submission of a pre-application enquiry in January 2025 and response received in May 2025 related to a scheme for three detached dwellings, garages, parking and landscaping. The proposals have been the subject of further review and development following the receipt of the advice, with the input provided by heritage, transport, ecology, landscape and drainage consultants incorporated into the detail of the submitted scheme to address the matters and comments raised and provide a scheme that delivers high quality sustainable development.
- 7.4 The proposed use of the site for residential within the settlement boundary was confirmed as acceptable by the Council as part of the pre-application proposal in 2025. The site has been vacant for ten years and does not provide any existing community facility, with criteria (i) or (ii) of **Policy HC1** both met. The proposed redevelopment of this vacant and unused brownfield site to deliver additional housing is fully in line with the Government's targets for housing delivery across the UK, whilst responding to and reflecting the character and context of development surrounding the site. The proposal will deliver sustainable development through delivery of new housing on this previously developed site within the settlement boundary of this Category A village. The proposed scheme will make a material contribution to housing supply within the district, assisting to meet housing needs within an existing settlement, and responding to the residential character and context of the location. Under Paragraph 11d of the NPPF as the Council are unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing supply, planning permission should be granted for the development unless "any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits".

- 7.5 The proposed layout, form and configuration of the properties follow the characteristics of existing dwellings within the conservation area and will maintain and improve the character through reflecting these established principles. The scheme therefore addresses the policies of the Local Plan and ANP in respect of scale, layout and form of development, as well as respecting the amenity of existing residents and providing appropriate amenity for future occupiers.

- 7.6 The Heritage Assessment confirms that the proposal will not result in heritage harm, and will deliver a beneficial reuse of the site delivering a sympathetic design, positively responding to the conservation area context and maintaining the setting of the listed buildings.

- 7.7 The proposals deliver energy efficient and sustainable homes that will exceed the North Herts District Council Bronze requirements for minor development and goes beyond this requirement to support many of the SPDs Silver aspirations under Checklist 1. The overall risk of flooding from all sources is low, whilst the proposals incorporate sustainable urban design measures which will greatly increase infiltration compared to the existing situation and manage surface water appropriately.

- 7.8 The Transport Statement confirms that the proposal will result in an imperceptible impact on the operation of the local highway network and complies with relevant transport and Local Plan policy, with appropriate access provided and facilities to encourage walking and cycling.

- 7.9 The proposal has been designed to include for the retention of all trees within the site and the proposed dwellings avoid the root protection areas, with no impact on protected species and will deliver an improvement in biodiversity in excess of the 10% BNG requirement. The proposal will achieve a significant greening of the site, removing the vast extent of hardstanding existing and providing for a substantial increase in planting across the site.

- 7.10 The proposal represents sustainable development, which follows the objectives of the NPPF and Local Plan, delivers much needed housing in high quality homes that reflect the existing residential, historic and landscape character of the area. The proposal does not result in any significant impacts which significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits in respect of this vacant and unutilised site, and the application is therefore required to be approved in line with Paragraph 11d of the NPPF.

APPENDIX 1



*Shaping Futures: Together
we learn, care and grow*

Ashwell Primary School

Silver Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts, SG7 5QL

Headteacher: Mr S England

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Website: www.ashwell.herts.sch.uk

The Trustees of Henry Colborn (or Colbron), registered charity number 310961
Merchant Taylors' of the Fraternity of St John Baptist in the City of London,
30 Threadneedle Street,
EC2R 8JB

Thursday 19th March 2026

RE: Rollys Lane – Merchant Taylor Netball Court Site (Ashwell)

Dear Trustees of Henry Colborn,

I am writing to provide some information regarding the disused site on Rollys Lane that was provided to the school. Originally this site was largely for the use of delivering the Physical Education National Curriculum (PE lessons).

When I took up post of Headteacher in January 2017, the school had already discontinued use of this site. There has been absolutely no use of this plot of land by the school during my tenure as Headteacher. My understanding is that it was no longer deemed a viable space for the following reasons:

1. The logistics involved in getting the children changed and walking to and from the site took up too much curriculum time and hindered the ability to provide the required allocation of physical activity to children.
2. The site became unsafe to use as a result of the degrading playing surface.
3. Access to the site was always difficult and increasingly unsafe (it included walking classes of children down narrow lanes without pedestrian paths.)

The courts have not been used for around ten years and there remains absolutely no intention of the school reusing this space again in the future.

The reasons the school ceased use and are no longer required include:

- The distance of the courts from the school does not provide a facility in a feasible or accessible location for use by the school on a regular basis (especially within timetabled PE lessons given the requirement PE national curriculum).
- The way in which the school now organise PE lessons with an external sports provider does not leave the location suitable for adequate supervision away from staff at the main school site.
- There are no welfare facilities at the site.
- The context of the cohorts in the younger years has changed dramatically meaning a much higher level of SEND need. Staff support has had to be redistributed to meet this need and therefore we would no longer be able to provide a safe adult to child ratio for activities off site in the current climate.
- The accessibility of the site is limited due to the lack of footpaths and does not have effective or safe movement of classes or large groups of children from the school to the courts.
- There are no facilities for parking to enable appropriate vehicular access



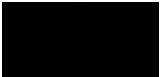
- The courts do not meet an additional need or requirement of the school since the installation of a new flat netball court area within the existing school grounds.
- The school has sufficient on-site recreation provision following extensive on site development and does not require this additional space any longer.

In addition to the points outlined above, the school's budget does not allow for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of a facility which is no longer fit for purpose and no longer meets our needs.

In conclusion, there are a significant number of reasons, as outlined above that have resulted in the site on Rollys Lane being deemed no longer fit for purpose. As a result, this site has been left derelict for over ten years and is no longer required in any way for use by the school.

Should you have any further questions, I would be more than happy to provide any additional information required.

Yours Sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Mr S England.

Mr S England

Headteacher