



Martin Grant Homes

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FOREWORD.

Martin Grant Homes Limited's (MGH) proposals for Land at Mill Lane and London Road, Hitchin (the Site) will provide up to 41 new homes, set within an attractive network green spaces, containing new and retained habitats for wildlife, recreational routes, natural play features and areas of new landscaping to assimilate the proposals into the existing landscape fabric. Although the Site is currently located within the Green Belt, it is considered to meet the National Planning Policy Framework NPPF's definition of 'Grey Belt' due to its weak contribution to purposes (a), (b) and (d) of paragraph 143. The proposals also comply with the 'Golden Rules' set out in the NPPF in respect of affordable housing provision on site and new on site public open space.

The scheme includes 50% affordable housing, demonstrating a strong commitment to meeting local housing needs. In addition, the development will deliver accessible, high-quality public open spaces that exceed local plan standards, providing a valuable new green infrastructure for both existing and future residents.

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) provides a review of the Site and its context to ensure an appropriate design response and provides a Development Framework Plan and supporting diagrams as guidance to inform a future Reserved Matters application.

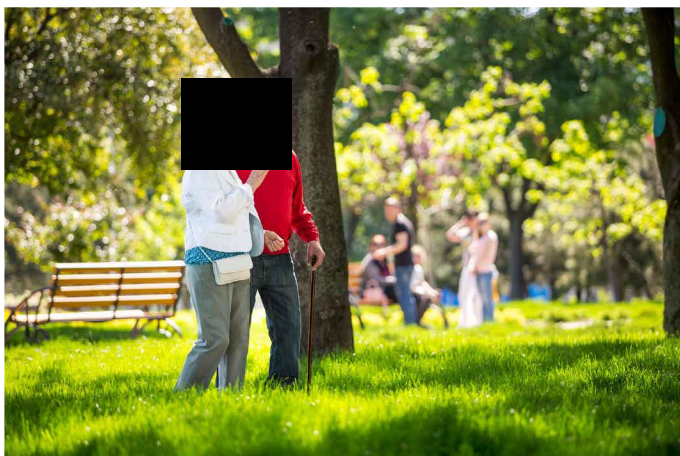
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

An introduction to the Design and Access Statement and the Vision for the new neighbourhood.

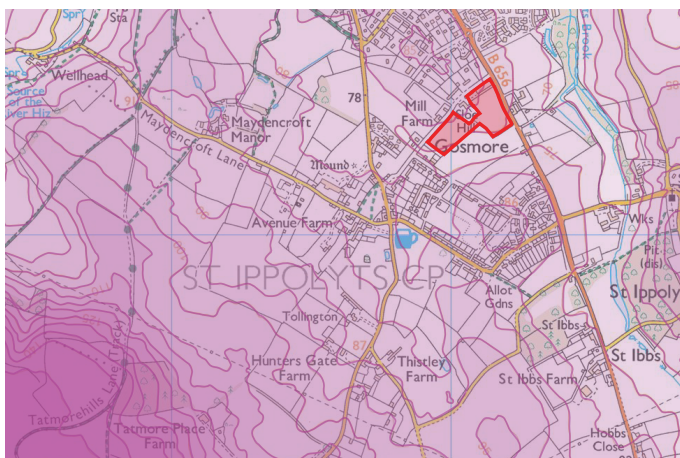
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An overview of the proposals for the Site, including benefits and proposed land uses.

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CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

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A detailed description of the Development Framework Plan, Illustrative Masterplan and Character Areas.



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CHAPTER SIX: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE & BIODIVERSITY

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W N O INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the proposals for Land at Mill Lane and London Road, Hitchin, before discussing the relevant local planning policy. Finally, it sets out the Vision for the Site as an integrated and sustainable new place.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSAL

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared by CSA Environmental on behalf of Martin Grant Homes Limited (MGH) to accompany an Outline Planning Application at Land at Mill Lane and London Road, Hitchin (the Site) for up to 41 dwellings (Use Class C3) (including affordable housing), informal open space, landscaping, parking, associated infrastructure and works, with vehicle and pedestrian accesses from London Road and Mill Lane.

This document describes how the proposed vision and masterplan represent a well-designed response to the Site's context in planning for a sustainable new neighbourhood.

The DAS should be read alongside the following suite of key documents and plans which comprise the Outline Planning Application:

1. Application Site Location Plan
2. Development Framework Plan and Illustrative Masterplan
3. Planning Statement
4. Statement of Community Involvement

A detailed assessment of the planning policy framework is set out in the Planning Statement. This section focuses on the national and local planning policies most relevant to the design and access proposals for the development.

1.2 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

At the national level the relevant policy guidance is set out in the NPPF (December 2024). The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and is a material consideration in the making of planning decisions, setting out the parameters by which planning applications are to be assessed in relation to:

- The presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Decision making
- Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Promoting sustainable transport
- Making effective use of land
- Achieving well-designed places
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

The NPPF recognises the important contribution small and medium sized sites can make to the supply of new housing in an area (Paragraph 73), particularly as they can be built out relatively quickly.

The NPPF sets out a strong emphasis on delivering a sufficient supply of homes, including affordable (Paragraph 61). Local Planning Authorities should meet as much of an area's identified housing need as possible, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF states 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".

Paragraph 135 provides a set of design criteria which new development should seek to achieve:

- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.
- Be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.
- Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).
- Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.
- Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks.
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Building For A Healthy Life (BHL)

'A Design Toolkit for neighbourhoods, streets, homes and public spaces'

BHL is one of the most widely used design tools in England for creating places that are better for people and nature. It was written in partnership with Homes England, NHS England and NHS Improvement and is structured to set clear expectations for new developments.

By following BHL, a critical aspect of the proposals for the Site is to design for active travel and access to green space. The ability to be able to walk and cycle within the new neighbourhood and further afield to essential services and work is key to minimise traffic and mitigating climate change. Equally, and as BHL sets out, the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of designing for active travel. This is in recognition that design choices that help people feel disposed to walk or ride a bicycle in their neighbourhood are critical to supporting a sense of well-being from outdoor exercise.

The development of the Site will also respond positively to climate change. The principles embedded in BHL as a whole creates the basis for a sustainable development, including in relation to designing for active travel, maximising access to green space, working with the existing landscape and securing biodiversity enhancements.

National Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains how the NPPF policy should be implemented. Paragraph 006 (ID: 26-001-20191001) of the PPG provides further information on design in the planning process. It states:

"...development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to: a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings."

National Design Guide

In October 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the National Design Guide (NDG). The NDG has been put in place to advise local authorities and their officers when assessing planning applications, councillors when making planning decisions, applicants and their design teams when preparing a planning application and local communities and their representatives.

Whilst it seeks to inform development proposals and guide the assessment of them, it also supports paragraph 139 of the NPPF which states "development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design."

Part 2 of the NDG sets out the ten characteristics which help to nurture and sustain a sense of community. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting climate. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the NPPF.

National Design Guide's Ten characteristics of a well-designed place



1.3 LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The Site lies within the administrative boundary of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). At the time of preparing this Design and Access Statement, the following adopted policy documents and guidance apply:

Adopted Policy Framework

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (Adopted 2022)
- North Hertfordshire Vehicle Parking Standards SPD (2011)
- North Hertfordshire Design SPD (in preparation; referenced in Policy D1)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

Spatial Development Context

Although the Site is not currently allocated within the Local Plan, it is well related to Hitchin and demonstrates the characteristics of a logical, sustainable expansion opportunity. Its location adjacent to the urban edge, supported by existing infrastructure and transport connectivity, enables the delivery of a high-quality, master planned residential development.

The Site lies within the Green Belt. However, its form, containment, and defensible boundaries provide an opportunity to contribute to housing delivery in a way that aligns with the objectives of sustainable development and Green Belt review principles.

Policy HT2 of the adopted Local Plan — concerning land on the edge of St Ippolyts — serves as a precedent for the type of landscape-led, design-informed growth that can be sensitively integrated into the Green Belt edge while respecting environmental and character constraints.

Relevant Local Plan Policies

STRATEGIC POLICIES:

- SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire
- SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
- SP5: Countryside and Green Belt
- SP6: Sustainable Transport
- SP9: Design and Sustainability
- SP12: Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Landscape
- SP13: Historic Environment

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES:

- T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- T2: Parking
- D1: Sustainable Design
- D3: Protecting Living Conditions
- D4: Air Quality
- NE1: Landscape
- NE4: Protecting Open Space
- NE6: Biodiversity and Geological Sites
- NE8: Sustainable Drainage Systems
- HE1: Designated Heritage Assets
- HS2: Affordable Housing
- HS3: Housing Mix
- HW1: Community Facilities
- HW7: Open Space Standards

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

VEHICLE PARKING STANDARDS SPD (2011)

This SPD sets out standards for residential and visitor parking, including provision for bicycles and electric vehicle infrastructure. The proposal meets these requirements while balancing functionality and visual impact.

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Local Plan refers to achieving biodiversity net gain, strategic green infrastructure connectivity, and robust master planning on strategic sites — all principles embedded in the proposal. The masterplan also reflects guidance in the National Design Guide (MHCLG, 2021).

POLICY HT2 – A DESIGN BENCHMARK

Policy HT2, which allocates land north of Pound Farm (St Ippolyts parish), is an example of best-practice settlement edge design within the adopted Local Plan. That policy outlines:

- The importance of landscape-led planning and Green Belt boundary reinforcement;
- The need to protect biodiversity, views, and settlement character;
- The role of strategic green buffers in maintaining a transition between built form and countryside;
- Infrastructure-led master planning with a strong focus on connectivity, amenity, and placemaking.

These same principles have informed the approach to this Site. A robust design framework has been adopted, shaped by topography, landscape setting, access potential, and ecological sensitivity — ensuring the proposal delivers high-quality, locally responsive development.

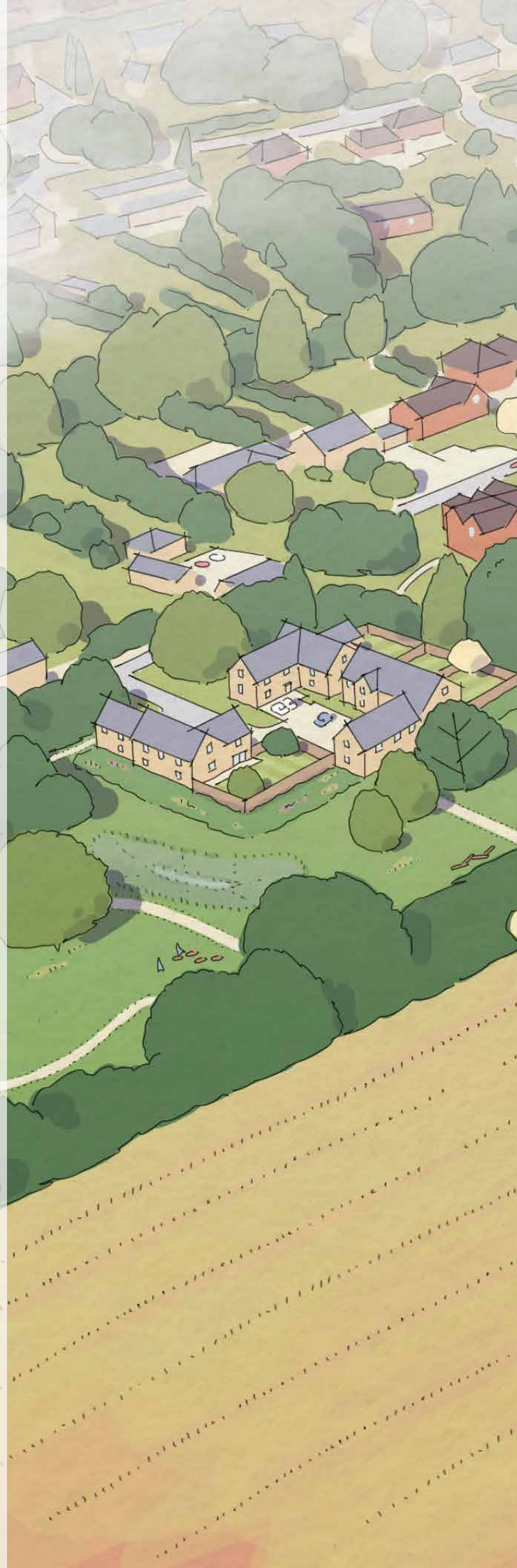
SUMMARY

Whilst not an allocated site, the proposals reflect spatial, environmental, and placemaking best practice — consistent with Policy HT2 and the broader policy framework — and present a compelling opportunity to deliver sustainable, design-led growth.

1.4 THE VISION

The vision for this Site is expected to provide:

- A sensitively designed residential community that integrates with the existing character and community.
- A suitable mix of high-quality new homes that fit seamlessly into the surroundings.
- A new access into the Site from London Road via improvements to the new roundabout to serve the Pound Farm development.
- Improvements to the existing junction at Mill Lane/ London Road, through diverting traffic through the Site, and stopping-up of the existing junction.
- A new defensible, robust boundary to the Green Belt.
- Existing vegetation and mature trees will be retained and carefully integrated into the layout of the Site, helping to maintain the Site's natural character.
- The western part of the Site will remain largely free from development, with a focus on ecological enhancement. This area will support biodiversity through new planting and wildlife habitats, while also providing informal public access and natural walking trails.
- The southern edge of the Site will also remain undeveloped, protecting the edge of settlement character and proximity to a nearby listed building, enhancing the visual amenity of the area.
- Movement through the Site will be structured via a primary street and a network of shared or secondary streets, lanes, and recreational routes. Walking and cycling will be prioritised with safe, attractive access points and internal links.
- A variety of open spaces will be provided, including wildflower meadows, tree and woodland planting, and sustainable drainage (SuDS) features designed to manage water run off and provide enhanced natural character to the Site.







TWO

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS.

This section summarises
the proposals for the Site,
including benefits and
proposed land uses.

This section summarises the proposals for the Site. The planning submission takes the form of an Outline Planning Application with all matters reserved except for means of access. In line with the relevant provisions of the General Development Procedure Order (as amended), the application includes key details such as the proposed land uses, development scale, and indicative layout. These aspects are defined within a set of Parameters Plans.

To support the submission, an Illustrative Masterplan has also been prepared. This builds upon the design and access principles set out on the Development Framework Plan and provides a visual interpretation of how the Site could be developed in line with the proposed spatial framework.

2.1 LOCATION

The Site is located on the Southern settlement edge of Hitchin, in proximity to St Ippolyts and Gosmore. It is bound by London Road along its eastern boundary and to its north by Mill Lane, although this boundary is indented by Sloe Hill Residential Home. Approximately, 1.7 miles north of the Site is Hitchin railway station, providing access to national rail services and sustainable travel.

-  SITE BOUNDARY: 3.37HA
-  INDUSTRIAL AREA
-  TOWN CENTRE
-  PUBLIC OPEN SPACE
-  HITCHIN RAILWAY STATION
-  EXISTING BUS ROUTES
-  PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY
-  SLOE HILL RESIDENTIAL HOME
-  PINEHILL PRIVATE HOSPITAL

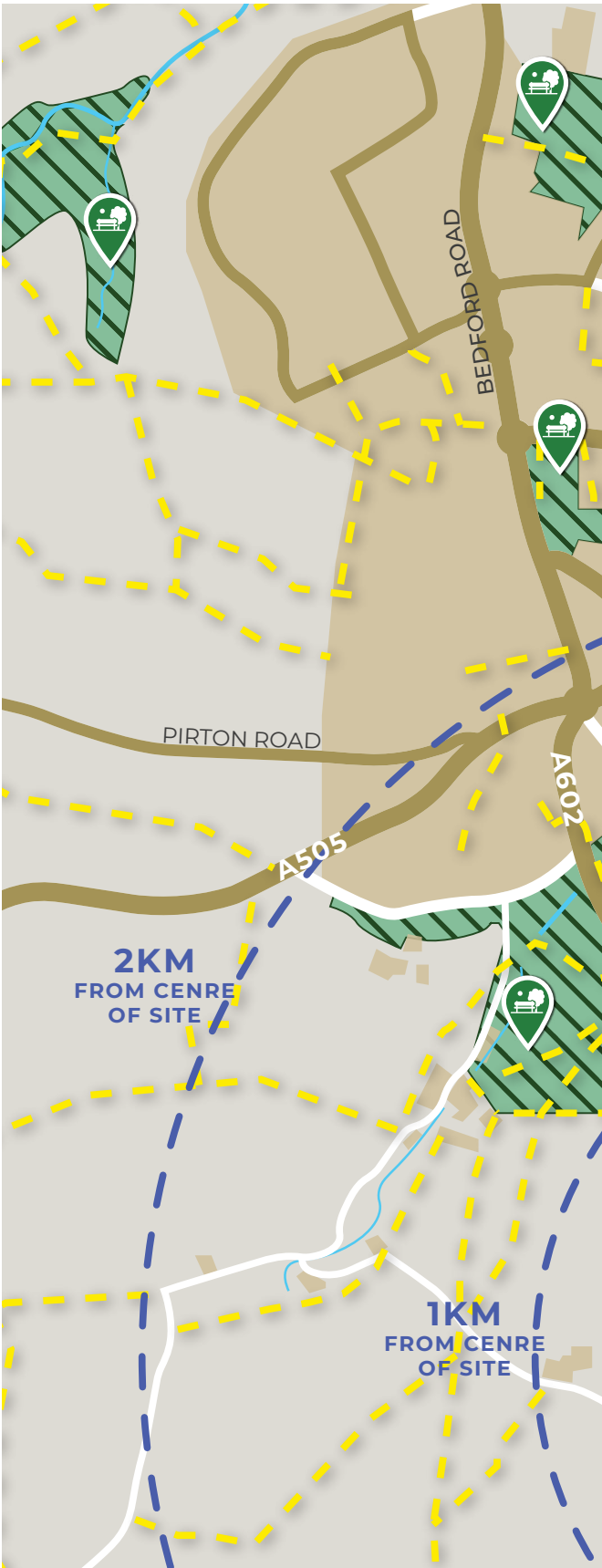
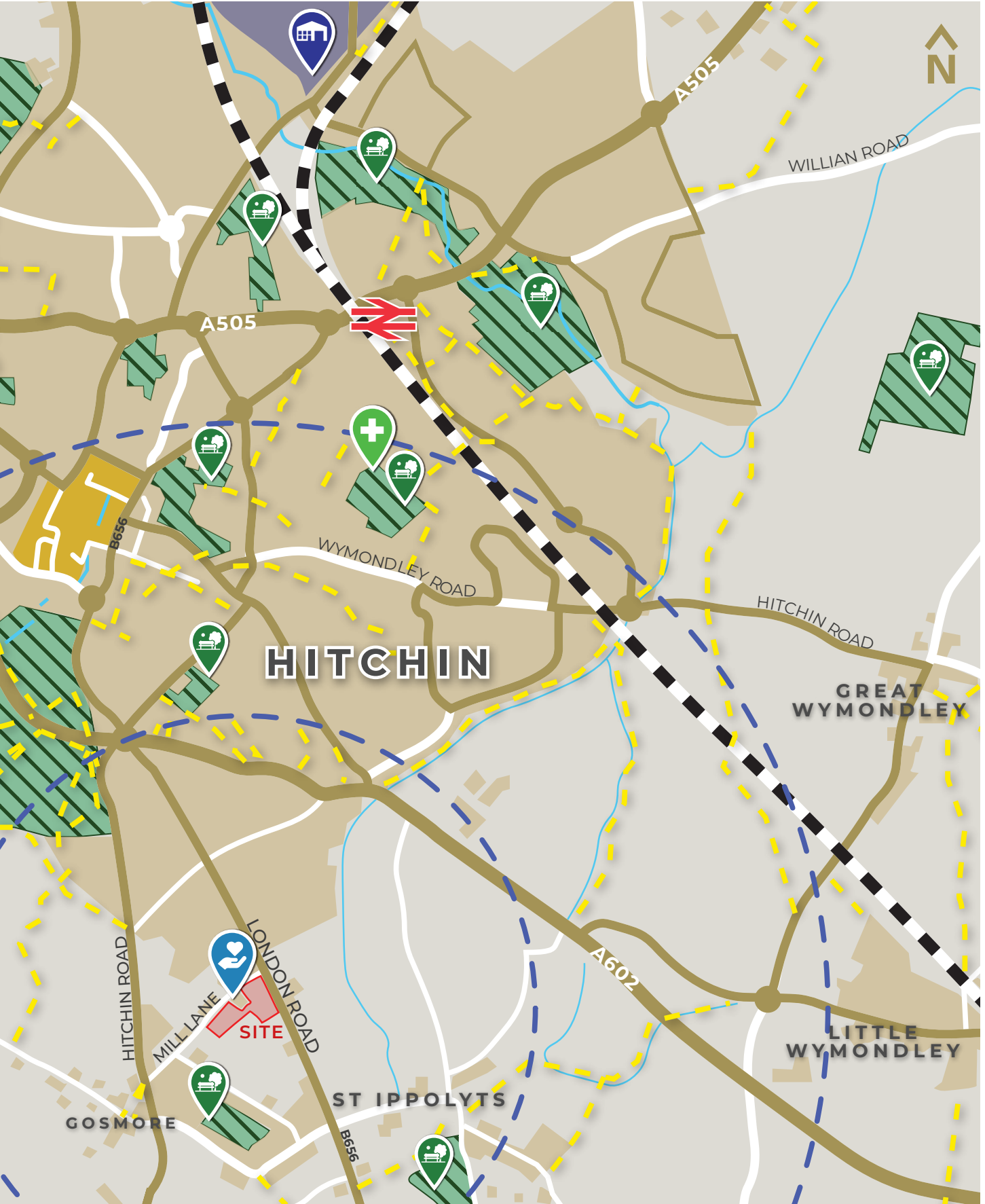


Figure 2.1: Site Context Plan



2.2 PROPOSED LAND USES

The planning application seeks permission to develop the Site to create a new sustainable, mixed-use community. The proposals are accompanied by a land use budget, which sets out the amount of development for which permission is sought, as follows:

LAND USE	HECTARES	NOTES
Housing	1.03	Up to 41 homes at an assumed average net density of 40 dwellings per hectare (dph). Gross density of 12dph.
Public Open Space	2.23	Natural and semi-natural greenspace: 2.10ha
		Amenity greenspace: 0.10ha
		Children’s Play: 300m²
Remaining Infrastructure	0.11	Includes land used for access roundabout, junction realignment onto Mill Lane and internal roads which do not serve direct access to new homes.
SITE TOTAL	3.37	



RESIDENTIAL

Up to 41 new homes are proposed. Provision will be made for 50% affordable housing as part of the proposals. A broad range of house types, sizes and tenures will be provided to create a balanced community that suits the needs of the local community. This may include first time buyer homes, family homes, and homes for those downsizing. The exact mix will be determined by future reserved matters applications.

GREEN SPACES

The proposals for the Site ensure that generous areas of open space and landscaping will be provided. The open space works with the Site’s existing landscape features. Where possible, the existing tree belts and hedgerows around the periphery of the Site are retained, and will contribute to the creation of a defensible and robust boundary to the Green Belt. Most of the Site’s individual trees are retained either as key components of the larger areas of open space or as the focal point of several pocket parks located within the residential development area. Some tree removal to facilitate access into the Site will be necessary.

The development provides 2.23 hectares (66% of the Site) of green space, natural and semi-natural greenspace, amenity greenspace and natural play features. These spaces will provide a range of formal and informal recreation and play opportunities, space for sustainable drainage solutions, and important opportunities for biodiversity enhancements.



Figure 2.2: Development Framework Plan.

