

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/00886/FP
CASE OFFICER:	TR
APPLICATION SITE:	Reed House, Jacksons Lane, Reed, Royston Hertfordshire SG8 8AB
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Erection of 14 dwellings and associated infrastructure

RECOMMENDATION:

I raise an **OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal will fail to satisfy the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on character or appearance of the Reed Conservation Area (RCA).

Although outside of the RCA, the works will have a moderately erosive impact upon the significance of the RCA as a result of development within its setting.

Harm, preserve or enhance.

There would be harm occasioned to the setting of the RCA.

SITE CONTEXT:

The proposed development site is on land to the north of Reed House located between The Joint and the rear garden boundaries of dwellings fronting Jackson's Lane, Reed. The southern boundary which adjoins the garden boundaries of 'Thatchers' and 'Bramshott' abuts the Reed conservation area.



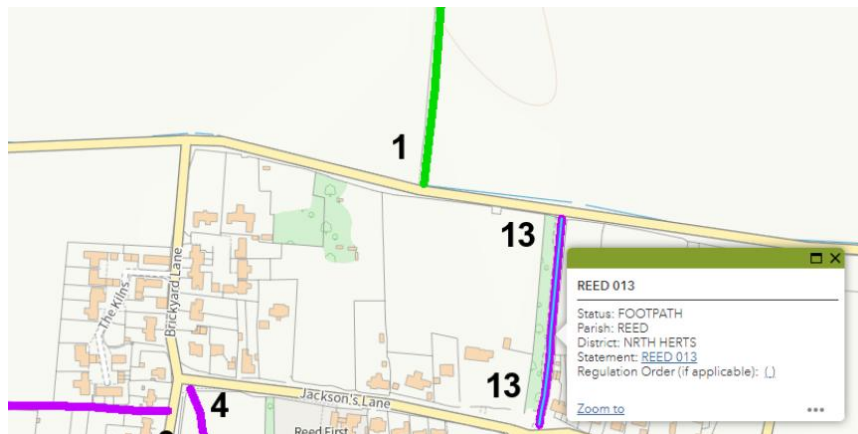
I note that the same case officer provided detailed advice under application ref: 23/00694/PRE on 21 June 2023 for the same number of dwellings on the same site. The officer stated that the scheme would not be supported by planning officers due to the significant conflict with planning policy, the adverse impact on the character and

appearance of the area, the adverse impact on heritage assets and the unsustainable location. That scheme was very similar to a scheme considered previously under ref: 20/1474/PRE and to which a fundamental objection was also raised.

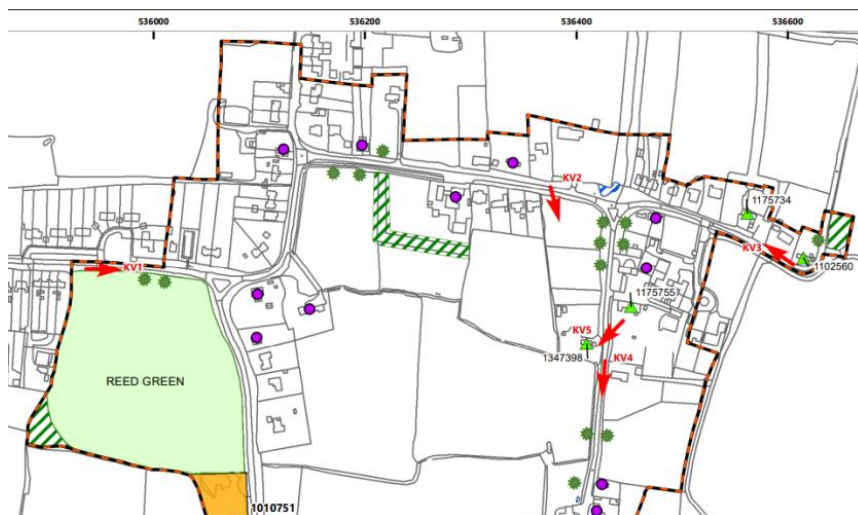
DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Under the subheading 'Heritage Assets' in relation to appn ref: 23/00694/PRE, the case officer stated the following and with which I fully concur:

The Reed Conservation Area lies adjacent to the site and the setting of this heritage asset is the main heritage asset affected. The site makes a positive contribution to the adjacent Conservation Area through its open character and the views that are apparent across the site from The Joint and the public bridleway Reed 001 to the north and from the public footpath Reed 013 immediately the east of the site. See map extract from the definitive map below:



An extract taken from the Reed conservation Character statement map is set out below. It shows most of the Reed House land being adjacent the northern boundary of the CA:



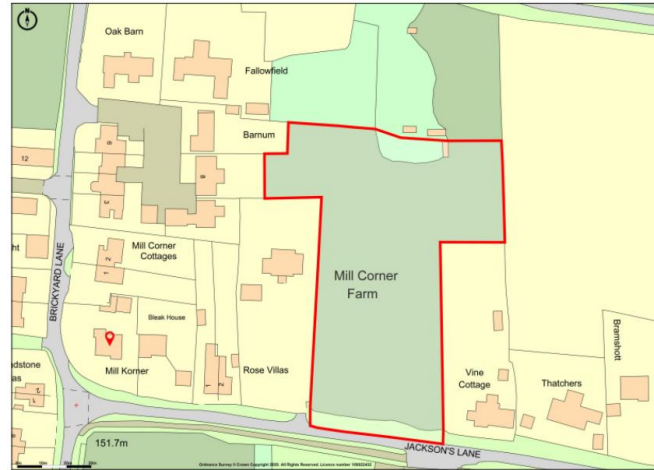
The Reed Conservation Area Character statement sums up the spacious, rural character of Reed village as follows:

'The key character of Reed Conservation Area is its openness. There is no suburban quality to the area, instead houses and farms are mostly scattered along the various country lanes, often with an abundance of space in between properties.'

In my view the proposed 14 unit development would have a suburban character which would be contrary to the prevailing character of the area and that of the adjacent CA.

Appeal decision at Mill Farm House

This pre-application submission does not mention the refused planning application 20/01605/PIP and dismissed appeal decision (APP/X1925/W/20/3260353) at Mill Corner Farm immediately adjoining the Reed House site to the west. The refusal of planning permission on this site is of particular relevance given its location next to the Reed House site, its similar open characteristic, location outside of the defined category A village boundary and the fact that most of the site is outside of but adjacent to the Reed CA. The site boundary is shown below:



In the appeal decision the Inspector stated in response to the impact on the CA:

'The harm arising from the loss of openness and rural character would be experienced primarily in the immediate vicinity of the site and would erode characteristics that contribute to the significance of the CA'

*'... the **scale of benefits** arising from a development of seven houses, even allowing for the clear need for additional housing in the District and the additional weight this attracts, would only be **moderate**. In this instance, the moderate benefits of the development would not outweigh the harm to the significance of the heritage asset.'*

In terms of character and appearance the Inspector said:

'The appeal site is prominent in the surrounding area, including from neighbouring properties and from The Joint.'

*'The development would be relatively low density but contained in the northern part of the site. As a result, **a development of seven houses would appear significantly denser than the neighbouring plots on Jackson's Lane which comprise detached and semi-detached houses on large plots, generally with substantial spacing between the facing detached elevations of houses**. The site could be screened to an extent by reinforcing the landscaping along the site boundaries. However, **the development would still be sited within the countryside and would cause harm through the loss of a greenfield site that contributes to the village's rural setting**'*

*'...the **harm from the loss of the rural character would remain** and would not be offset by the detailed design of the dwellings.'*

'It would also conflict with Policies NE1 and CGB1 of the ELP. The criteria of these policies include requirements that in Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt housing will only be permitted where it meets a proven need for affordable housing in an appropriate location, and that development proposals not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. There is nothing before me to indicate that the proposed houses would meet the criteria of affordable housing'

So, the question raised is has there been any material change in the heritage context since the case officer's detailed response in June 2023?



I turn to the Heritage Statement prepared by GHC Archaeology & Heritage Ltd for David Tait via Strutt and Parker - February 2024

5.24 The character of the Conservation Area is distinctively rural and informed by the village's siting within the Hertfordshire countryside. Farmland bounds the village on all sides forming the setting of the Conservation Area, with several tracts of agricultural fields scattered amongst the country lanes, houses, cottages, and farm buildings that make up the settlement layout.

5.26 In recent years, there have been few developments within and bordering the conservation area but in general, where development has taken place, there appears to have been a preference for incorporating design characteristics more commonly found in agricultural buildings to reflect the rural character of the village. For example, the two residential developments off Brickyard Lane, located c.100m west of the study site and partially within the Conservation Area boundary.

5.31 The rural setting of Reed Conservation Area provides both historical context and a sense of place to the settlement, while the mix of architectural styles provided by the range of 17th to 21st century-built form within the Conservation Area itself and its immediate setting illustrates the story of how the settlement has developed through the centuries. **The rural backdrop emphasises the traditional character of the village and informs its significance and the ability to appreciate said significance to a moderate to high degree.**

5.33 The key elements of the setting of the Conservation Area relate to the agricultural nature of its countryside location. Although the study site is an open space, it is decidedly domestic in character and does not form part of the farmland that is interspersed within and bordering the Conservation Area. There is a complete lack of earthwork features to suggest the previous agricultural use of the study site, which is particularly notable as ridge and furrow earthworks, former field boundaries etc. are relatively widespread in other parts of the Conservation Area. As a consequence of its visual isolation, the study site is not part of any key views, or any third-point views, that help to illustrate the significance of the Conservation Area. At present, the study site forms a neutral element in the setting of the Conservation Area.

6.8 Open space provides a great contribution to the significance of Reed Conservation Area and indeed, the Character Statement aptly summarises this by highlighting that 'The key character of Reed Conservation Area is its openness'. This is also relevant to the setting of the Conservation Area, which is distinctively rural in nature and incorporates vast swathes of open farmland.

6.11 Although the study site can be described as an open space, it is made up of a residential garden and is domestic in character, with a large well-kept lawn occupying the majority of the site. There is no agricultural quality to the space and it does not inform the rural character of the village, nor its Conservation Area. Further, by consequence of it being a domestic garden, it has been designed to be private and visually isolated and as such, is not part of any views that convey the character of the Conservation Area and in turn, its significance. Although the study site does form part of the setting of the Conservation Area and does constitute open space, the potential contribution that it makes to the significance of the asset can only be regarded as neutral to the reasons listed above. Therefore, it is not considered that the study site is an important element of the Conservation Area, nor does it inform the significance of it to any appreciable degree.

6.22 It is recognised that on the basis of cumulative impact, the recent developments off Brickyard Lane are not sufficient to justify further development on the northern side of the Conservation Area, as each proposal must be judged on its own merits based on its individual circumstances. However, it is important to note that the development impacts on the significance of Reed Conservation Area caused by the new dwellings are very minor, and there is an argument to be made that the way in which the buildings have been sited and sensitively designed with a nod to the rural character of the area has had a positive effect on the asset by both improving an underused part of the village and providing a better sense of enclosure at the northern side of the settlement. Through this, it has been demonstrated that new built form to the north of the Conservation Area can be done in a way to have very little impact on its significance, or the ability to appreciate said significance, if the plan form and character of the development is sensitively designed. Further, it has shown that development of similar scale and layout to that proposed on the study site can be completed without introducing suburban form.

6.23 The question then remains whether the layout of the development is incongruous to the existing model set within Reed, and furthermore, whether it is potentially harmful to the significance of the Conservation Area. A plan showing the indicative layout of the proposed development includes 14 dwellings situated on three sides of a central open space, set back from the road within plots of varied sizes with open space between dwellings. It is clear that the design has been mindful of the important heritage context of the study site and has emulated several of the essential characteristics found in the historic core of the village and listed in the Reed Conservation Area Character Statement. These include dwellings generally set back from lane frontages, ample space between buildings and generous areas of open space throughout. The provision of a central amenity space acts as a microcosm of the historic village layout situated around the central green, with the arrangement of dwellings around this mirroring the regular courtyard arrangement of the historic farmsteads that provide a great contribution to the rural architectural character of the Conservation Area, albeit on a larger scale. Variation on this type of plan form (buildings set on three or four sides of a central space) have been utilised in developments elsewhere in the Conservation Area and as such, it is not considered that the proposals constitute a departure from the existing character of the village.

On 14/11/2014 under ref: **14/02573/1** I wrote the following with respect to **The Farmyard, Brickyard Lane, Reed** in relation to a residential development of 13 dwellings.

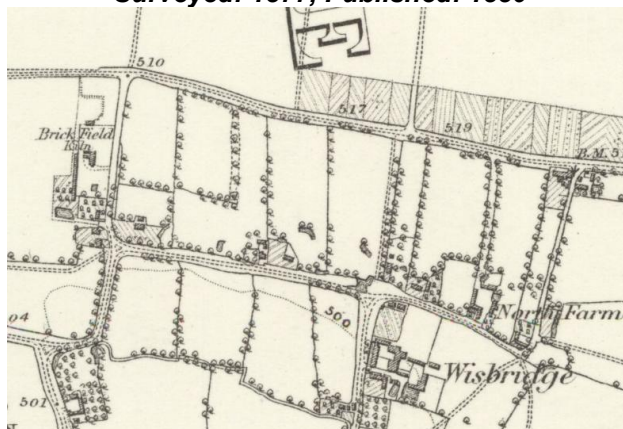
The majority of the site lies within the Reed Conservation Area although part is outside and forms part of its setting. The northern part of the site (beyond the pond) is situated on what is known to have been a former brickyard (hence Brickyard Lane) with the aforementioned pond being the kiln pit and the pit where the clay was extracted from for making the bricks being further to the north (outside of the development site) and adjacent to The Joint. The brickyard site has a social and historical significance to Reed. The 1898 1st edition Ordnance Survey clearly shows the brickyard and by 1921 (2nd edition OS) more buildings in the vicinity of the brickyard had been constructed (Dreadnought Villa 1901 to the east, Gladstone Villas & what appears to be a farm building group relating to Mill Corner Farm and situated behind Gladstone Villas).

In my opinion, Dreadnought Villa makes a positive contribution to the streetscene and therefore to the character and appearance of the conservation area. A mature Horse Chestnut tree on the rear boundary to Dreadnought Villa contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area and would play a significant role at the edge of this proposed development. Furthermore, the side

garden to no.2 Gladstone Villas allows views through to arable farming land beyond and a well-established tree belt to the west, both of which form part of this conservation area's landscape setting.

The following map regression provides an insight into the evolution of the northern part of Reed village from the late C19 through to post-WWII. Whilst generally scattered, built form is consolidated around Mill Corner Farm, Wisbridge Farm and North Farm.

Essex Sheet VII
Surveyed: 1877, Published: 1880



Essex Sheet nXII
Revised: 1919, Published: 1924



Essex Sheet nXII
Revised: 1946 to 1949, Published: 1950

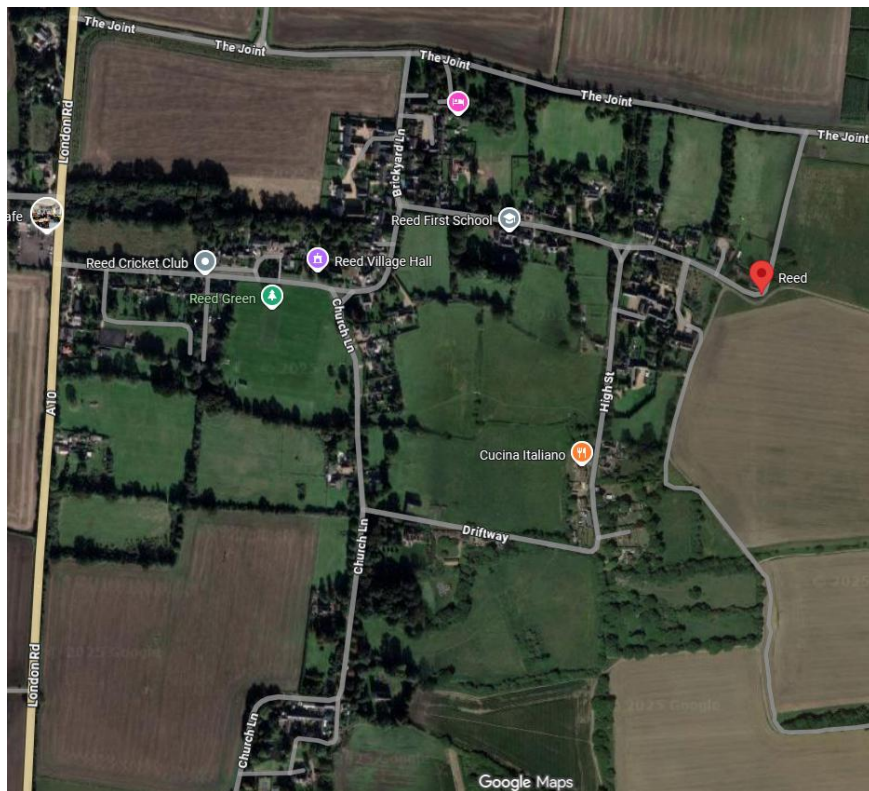


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The applicant's heritage case in support of this proposal appears to be predicated on the following:

- Although the study site does form part of the setting of the Conservation Area and does constitute open space, the potential contribution that it makes to the significance of the asset can only be regarded as **neutral** by consequence of it being a domestic garden.
- The garden land being different from the wider arable farming land setting to the RCA and that this does not contribute to the RCA's significance,
- The recent developments off Brickyard Lane have a minor impact on the significance of Reed Conservation Area and that it has been demonstrated that new built form to the north of the Conservation Area can be done in a way to have very little impact on its significance, or the ability to appreciate said significance, if the plan form and character of the development is sensitively designed.
- The proposal reflects development found in the historic core of the village and listed in the Reed Conservation Area Character Statement. These include dwellings generally set back from lane frontages, ample space between buildings and generous areas of open space throughout. The provision of a central amenity space acts as a microcosm of the historic village layout situated around the central green, with the arrangement of dwellings around this mirroring the regular courtyard arrangement of the historic farmsteads that provide a great contribution to the rural architectural character of the Conservation Area, albeit on a larger scale.

In considering these points, I first drawn upon the latest Google Maps aerial images.



The applicant's Heritage advisor has confirmed that:

- The character of the Conservation Area is distinctively rural,
- The rural setting of Reed Conservation Area provides both historical context and a sense of place to the settlement.
- The rural backdrop emphasises the traditional character of the village and informs its significance and the ability to appreciate said significance to a moderate to high degree.
- The key elements of the setting of the Conservation Area relate to the agricultural nature of its countryside location.
- The study site is an open space and that open space provides a great contribution to the significance of Reed Conservation Area and indeed, the Character Statement aptly summarises this by highlighting that 'The key character of Reed Conservation Area is its openness'.

Even if the view is taken that the land immediately to the rear of Reed House is private garden therefore does not contribute to the significance of the RCA, the garden remains 'private open space' which acts as a buffer between the RCA and the arable farmland to the north of The Joint. The lack of built form on this hinterland behind Reed House reinforces the linear built form along Jackson's Lane and Crow Lane, thus maintaining the character and appearance of the RCA. I dispute the suggestion that the garden land has a neutral impact on the significance of the RCA (in my view a low/moderate positive impact) and the claim made at 6.11 of the HS that the garden to Reed House *"..... does not inform the rural character of the village, nor its Conservation Area. Further, by consequence of it being a domestic garden, it has been designed to be private and visually isolated"*.

Far from being 'isolated', the application site shares similar characteristics to other land parcels south of The Joint with an overwhelming sense of rurality whether that is due to private gardens, paddock/grazing land or areas of countryside that extend up to the road. If successful, there is a clear concern that this development may set an unwelcome precedent for development nearby. In reporting on the Mill Farm House appeal, the Inspector stated that even the development of seven houses *'would appear significantly denser than the neighbouring plots on Jackson's Lane'* and that the development would *'still be sited within the countryside and would cause harm through the loss of a greenfield site that contributes to the village's rural setting'*



Finally, notwithstanding the concept of a 'village green' within the proposed development, I am far from convinced that the 'village green' would *'act as a microcosm of the historic village layout'*. The configuration of built form would result in narrow gaps between buildings, and the north-east corner of the site is tightly configured. The village green is

considered to be a somewhat 'forced' design concept, the purpose of which seems to be to ameliorate the failure of the scheme overall to respond positively to local character.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **207** (*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*)
- **210** (*desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*),
- **212** (*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*),
- **213** (*clear and convincing justification*), and
- **215** (*harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*).

CONCLUSION:

Para 208 of the NPPF states that '*Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset)....*'. Even though outside the RCA, the resulting development in depth will have a moderately erosive impact upon the openness of the settlement harming its significance. The proposal is **OBJECTIONABLE** in heritage terms.

Note: I am happy to be involved further in the drafting of a heritage-based reason for refusal if necessary.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 26/09/2025