



Bygrave Parish Council

Representation on the Growing Baldock Application 25/02571/OP

Submitted to North Hertfordshire Council

28th June 2026

Introduction

Bygrave Parish Council has carefully reviewed the amended proposals for the Growing Baldock development and the accompanying technical documents. Whilst we acknowledge that a number of revisions have been made since the previous consultation, the amended application does not, in the Parish Council's opinion, adequately address several issues of fundamental importance to Bygrave and the surrounding rural area.

This representation therefore concentrates on those matters that remain unresolved. In particular, our comments focus on two issues that continue to have significant implications for existing residents:

- the transport strategy and the adequacy of the supporting Transport Assessment; and
- the scale, location and function of Eastern Park.

The Parish Council remains unconvinced that the submitted evidence demonstrates these impacts can be accommodated without unacceptable consequences for Bygrave. In particular, important questions remain regarding the effect of the proposals on existing communities, the rural road network and the role of Eastern Park. Until these matters have been satisfactorily addressed, the Parish Council considers that outline planning permission should not be granted.

1. Transport Strategy

The Parish Council recognises the considerable work undertaken to prepare the Transport Assessment and supporting modelling for the amended proposals. We acknowledge that the assessment has been prepared using recognised methodologies in consultation with Hertfordshire County Council.

However, the issue for the Local Planning Authority is not simply whether accepted modelling techniques have been applied, but whether the submitted evidence demonstrates that the proposed development can be accommodated without unacceptable impacts on existing and future communities.

Whilst the transport strategy delivers significant benefits for the new development, it leaves a number of important matters insufficiently addressed regarding its implications for Bygrave and the surrounding rural highway network.

Existing Communities

The amended transport strategy offers relatively little practical improvement for existing residents of Bygrave.

The proposed shuttle bus provides an attractive public transport option for the new development but does not serve Bygrave. Residents will therefore remain almost entirely dependent upon private vehicles for access to Baldock railway station, employment, healthcare, education and shopping.

Similarly, whilst the proposed Greenway is welcomed as an attractive walking and cycling route, it cannot realistically replace many day-to-day journeys made by existing residents. The Parish Council is therefore concerned that **increased congestion on routes into Baldock may adversely affect access to employment, healthcare, shopping and the railway station**, without any corresponding improvement in transport options for Bygrave.

The Transport Assessment does not appear to quantify how journey times for existing residents travelling to Baldock railway station and the A507 would change following completion of the development, particularly during weekday peak periods. Given that Bygrave residents have few realistic alternative routes or modes of transport for many of these journeys, the Parish Council considers this to be an important omission. **The applicant should demonstrate the anticipated changes in journey times and show how these impacts on existing communities have been assessed.**

The application also gives limited consideration to the cumulative impact upon parking demand at Baldock railway station, which already experiences significant pressure.

Consequently, whilst the transport strategy provides substantial benefits for the proposed development, it offers comparatively little improvement for existing residents of Bygrave, who would nevertheless experience many of the additional traffic and accessibility impacts arising from the scheme.

Infrastructure Delivery

The proposed railway bridge is welcomed as an important element of the overall transport strategy. However, it will not be delivered until a substantial proportion of the development has already been occupied.

The Transport Assessment should therefore demonstrate not only the operation of the completed transport network but also its ability to accommodate traffic safely and efficiently throughout the phased occupation of the development, including the period before the railway bridge becomes operational.

The modelling also assesses only a limited number of future assessment years. The Parish Council therefore remains unclear whether traffic conditions arising during intermediate phases of the development have been adequately assessed, particularly during periods when substantial numbers of dwellings may be occupied before key transport infrastructure has been completed.

It is therefore important that the Transport Assessment demonstrates the resilience of the transport network throughout all phases of the development, and not solely once the full transport infrastructure has been completed.

Assessment of Bygrave

The Transport Assessment concludes that the development will result in "*no severe impacts on neighbouring villages.*" This is a significant conclusion and one which, in the Parish Council's view, requires clear supporting evidence.

The Parish Council has been unable to identify how Bygrave has been specifically assessed, what traffic changes are predicted on Bygrave Road, Church Lane, Ashwell Road, Newnham Road and other surrounding rural roads, or why those impacts are considered acceptable.

The supporting documentation also states that the COMET model has been used to assess dynamic rerouting, trip assignment and cumulative network effects. These are precisely the issues of concern to Bygrave residents. If the modelling demonstrates that traffic will not be materially displaced onto surrounding rural roads, the evidence supporting that conclusion should be clearly presented, including the relevant outputs for Bygrave.

Weekend Traffic and Eastern Park

One of the principal concerns relates to the apparent emphasis on weekday commuter traffic.

The assessment models weekday AM and PM peak periods. Whilst this is appropriate for residential commuting patterns, Eastern Park is fundamentally different. The proposed destination sports and recreation facility, incorporating multiple football pitches, play areas, a pavilion and associated facilities, is likely to generate its greatest traffic demand during weekends, particularly on Saturday and Sunday mornings. At peak times, the pitches have the capacity to accommodate around 250 players. Once coaches, officials, parents and

spectators are taken into account, several hundred people could be arriving and departing within relatively short periods, generating concentrated peaks in vehicle movements that differ fundamentally from normal residential traffic patterns.

The Parish Council has been unable to identify evidence that these weekend traffic movements have been specifically modelled. If weekend visitor traffic associated with Eastern Park has not been assessed, it is difficult to see how the Transport Assessment can demonstrate the full impact of one of the principal traffic-generating elements of the development.

The Parish Council also notes that reliance upon average traffic conditions may mask periods of significantly higher demand associated with organised sporting events, school term-time and other peak activity periods.

Transport Modelling Assumptions

Whilst the transport modelling has been amended, it does not appear that the principal assumptions underpinning it, notably the scale of development and the level of traffic it is expected to generate, have materially changed. It is therefore unclear whether the revised modelling materially alters the conclusions previously reached.

COMET reallocates and assigns traffic based upon those assumptions rather than independently testing whether they remain robust. If the underlying assumptions prove optimistic, future traffic impacts may be underestimated regardless of the sophistication of the assignment process.

The Parish Council also seeks evidence of sensitivity testing demonstrating how the transport network would perform if key assumptions regarding travel behaviour, public transport uptake or active travel proved less favourable than forecast. Such testing would provide confidence that the network remains robust under realistic alternative scenarios.

The Parish Council therefore considers that additional evidence is required to demonstrate that the assumptions underpinning the modelling remain appropriate and that the transport network would remain robust should actual travel behaviour differ from that forecast.

Assessment Thresholds

The Transport Assessment also appears to trigger further investigation only where traffic changes exceed specified percentage thresholds.

Whilst this may be appropriate for strategic highway assessment, relatively small increases in traffic can have significant consequences on rural roads such as those serving Bygrave. The issue is not simply traffic volume, but also noise, pedestrian and equestrian safety, accessibility, rural character and the cumulative impact on roads never designed to accommodate substantial increases in vehicle movements.

Impacts on rural communities should therefore be assessed in terms of their local significance, taking account of the character and function of the affected roads, rather than solely by reference to percentage increases in traffic flow.

"Monitor and Manage"

The amended proposals continue to rely upon a "monitor and manage" approach whereby future traffic conditions will be monitored and additional mitigation introduced if required.

Whilst monitoring is an important part of transport management, it does not in itself resolve congestion. Where the existing highway network is already physically constrained, opportunities to provide meaningful additional capacity may be limited once development has taken place.

The application does not clearly identify what specific mitigation measures could realistically be delivered should monitoring identify unacceptable impacts. Simply reserving the possibility of future intervention does not demonstrate that effective mitigation will in practice be available.

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Summary

In the Parish Council's considered view, the submitted Transport Assessment does not yet provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the amended proposals can be accommodated without unacceptable impacts upon Bygrave and the surrounding rural highway network.

Before the application is determined, further clarification is requested regarding:

- how Bygrave and neighbouring villages have been assessed;
- whether weekend traffic associated with Eastern Park has been modelled;
- the assumptions underpinning trip generation;
- whether the transport network has been adequately assessed throughout the phased occupation of the development, including before key transport infrastructure is delivered;
- the treatment of displaced traffic on surrounding rural roads;
- the assessment of relatively small traffic increases in sensitive rural locations; and
- the robustness of the proposed "monitor and manage" approach.

Until these matters have been satisfactorily addressed, the Parish Council considers that the transport impacts of the amended proposals remain insufficiently demonstrated.

2. Eastern Park

Fundamental change in purpose

The Parish Council's principal concern is that Eastern Park has evolved considerably during the Local Plan process. Earlier consultation described this area as a landscape buffer between Baldock and Bygrave, providing informal recreation, biodiversity enhancement and a sensitive transition between the urban edge and open countryside.

The amended proposals fundamentally alter the role of Eastern Park. Instead of functioning primarily as green infrastructure, the site is now proposed as a destination sports and recreation facility incorporating numerous football pitches, a pavilion, children's play areas, multi-use games facilities, parking and associated infrastructure. This significant change in both function and character was not clearly communicated to residents during the consultation events.

Scale of development

The proposed scale of development within Eastern Park is substantial. Taken together, the football pitches, pavilion, play facilities, car parking and associated infrastructure create what is effectively a major regional sports complex immediately adjacent to Bygrave.

Whilst the Parish Council fully supports investment in sports facilities, we question whether this location is appropriate for development of this scale. **This regional sports hub is fundamentally inconsistent with the intended role of Eastern Park as a landscape buffer between the expanding town and the historic rural village of Bygrave.**

Impact upon Lower Bygrave

The most intensive recreational uses are concentrated closest to Lower Bygrave. As a consequence, the village will experience increased activity, traffic movements, parking demand, organised sporting events and associated noise throughout much of the year. Although the proposals include landscape planting, it is difficult to conclude that these measures will offset the substantial increase in activity immediately adjacent to the village.

The concentration of the most intensive recreational uses immediately adjacent to Lower Bygrave will fundamentally change the relationship between the village and its surrounding countryside.

Relationship with the Bygrave Neighbourhood Plan

The current proposals are fundamentally inconsistent with the objectives of the Bygrave Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain the separate identity of Bygrave, protect the rural landscape setting, conserve biodiversity and provide an appropriate transition between settlement and countryside. The current proposals instead introduce intensive organised recreational uses into the countryside, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the

green separation that residents have consistently supported throughout the Local Plan process.

Continuing Engagement and Ecological Mitigation

The Parish Council welcomes the constructive dialogue that has taken place with Urban & Civic throughout the development of the proposals. More recently, following representations made by local residents, our Member of Parliament, Chris Hinchliff MP, met with Urban & Civic to discuss concerns regarding the proposed sports hub and the need to retain an effective green buffer between the new development and Bygrave.

Whilst that meeting did not result in any changes to the current outline proposals for Eastern Park, Urban & Civic gave a commitment to continue working collaboratively with the Bygrave Wildlife Group during the detailed design stage. This commitment includes engagement on the design of green corridors, habitat typologies, ecological enhancement and the character of the development edge adjoining Bygrave.

The Parish Council welcomes this commitment and intends to participate positively in that process. Meaningful collaboration offers the opportunity to maximise biodiversity gains and secure the highest possible standard of landscape and ecological mitigation should planning permission ultimately be granted.

Constructive engagement on detailed design cannot substitute for proper consideration of the strategic planning issues raised by the outline application.

The Parish Council remains concerned that the scale, location and intensity of the proposed sports hub are inconsistent with the intended role of Eastern Park as a landscape buffer between Baldock and Bygrave.

These matters should be addressed through the determination of the outline application itself and should not be deferred to the subsequent detailed design stage.

Biodiversity and landscape

The Parish Council welcomes the ecological enhancements proposed within Eastern Park.

However, biodiversity should be considered alongside the substantial increase in human activity associated with organised sport. The introduction of intensive recreational uses inevitably changes the character of the landscape and has the potential to reduce the value of the area as a relatively undisturbed wildlife corridor.

The proposed ecological enhancements do not, in the Parish Council's view, compensate for the transformation of Eastern Park from a tranquil landscape buffer into an intensively used recreational destination.

Conclusion

Bygrave Parish Council has carefully reviewed the amended planning application and the supporting technical evidence. Whilst we acknowledge that revisions have been made since the previous consultation, the Parish Council remains unconvinced that the application has demonstrated that the proposed development can be accommodated without unacceptable impacts on Bygrave and the surrounding rural area.

In relation to transport, significant work has been undertaken to develop the Transport Assessment. However, **the submitted evidence has not yet demonstrated that the proposed transport strategy would avoid unacceptable impacts on existing communities.** Important questions remain regarding the assessment of neighbouring villages, changes in journey times for existing residents, the modelling of traffic associated with Eastern Park, the assumptions underpinning trip generation, and the long-term resilience of the proposed transport network.

In relation to Eastern Park, the amended proposals represent a fundamental change from the landscape buffer originally presented during earlier consultation to a substantial destination sports and recreation facility incorporating numerous football pitches, a pavilion, children's play areas, multi-use games facilities, parking and associated infrastructure. This represents a development of a scale and intensity that is fundamentally different from the green infrastructure originally envisaged. Whilst the Parish Council welcomes continued dialogue on ecological mitigation and landscape design, such measures cannot resolve the more fundamental planning questions concerning the scale, location and function of the proposed destination sports facility.

For these reasons, the Parish Council considers that the application, in its current form, does not yet provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the transport and planning impacts identified in this representation have been satisfactorily addressed.

The Parish Council therefore considers that outline planning permission should not be granted unless and until these matters have been satisfactorily resolved.