

Planning Support Statement

Land at Station Road, Ashwell

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Executive Summary

This Statement supports a planning application for residential development on land at Station Road in the village of Ashwell. The planning application has been prepared by Beck Homes seeking approval of full details for 22 open market houses and 14 affordable houses across the site.

The site lies immediately adjacent to the Senuna Park development, which has been developed over the last three years since consent was allowed on appeal in April 2022. That development was allowed by the Planning Inspector largely on the basis that North Hertfordshire Council could not demonstrate a five years supply of deliverable housing sites, and therefore the local plan was out of date and the presumption in favour of sustainable development was engaged. This is still the case now, and a new Local Plan has not been progressed to any significant stage.

In addition to providing new housing to meet housing need, the Inspector opined that *“the site was a relatively short drive and walk from the centre of Ashwell, and so village facilities are likely to be accessible to a range of residents, and it would also bring socio-economic benefit during and after construction through custom for local facilities, businesses and services, which would contribute towards sustaining them, including through new bus stop provision.”*

The Inspector considered the tilted balance under the National Planning Policy Framework, and approved planning consent. Since approval the development has been built and construction is approaching completion, demonstrating that new housing development in this location is deliverable within five years once approved.

This Statement summarises that this application has been prepared on the basis that there is still a significant undersupply of new homes in the district, and the number of new homes needed into the future has been increased significantly by the governments new standard method for calculating future housing supply. The Council will need to meet this supply through devising and adopting a new Local Plan, and in the meantime whilst a five year supply of housing against the adopted Local Plan is not demonstrable, approve planning consents new sustainable development sites.

Ashwell village is a sustainable settlement, the centre of which is constrained from new development by a Conservation Area. The application site is considered well-located to the village, in terms of walking, cycling and by public transport, but is not within any area of constraint that would prevent consideration under paragraph 11 of the NPPF. In terms of landscape impact, when compared with the open, expansive nature of the surrounding agricultural landscape to the east and south, the site's boundary vegetation provides a high level of containment. The design of the proposals, as detailed in the submitted documentation, have been landscape-led and provide a high-quality development meeting both open market and affordable housing need and additional benefits to the local area.

The proposal has been submitted as a full application to allow for detailed assessment of the merits of the proposed development, and apply the tilted balance under the NPPF appropriately in making a decision.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document forms a Planning Support Statement submitted alongside a FULL planning application for the erection of 36 no. dwellings (including 22 open-market homes and 14 affordable homes). The proposal also includes landscape improvements and a new play area on site, on land off Station Road in the village of Ashwell. The document sits alongside other professional reports that describe the proposals in detail.
- 1.2. The Statement details the existing characteristics of the site and the local context, based on site surveys and assessments prepared by relevant professionals. These have been used to formulate the proposed development and are submitted with the application. The Statement outlines the details of the proposed development and discusses the positives and potential impacts of the proposal on the area in this context, to allow a balanced assessment of the proposals by the decision-maker.
- 1.3. A summary of relevant national and local planning policies is also set out in this Statement, alongside other material planning considerations, followed by a detailed assessment of the suitability of the site and sustainability of the proposals in the planning balance to present a robust case that a positive determination should be forthcoming.
- 1.4. The application helps to address the significant shortfall of housing supply in the district and would be delivered at an early stage within the next five years following approval, so could be included within the five year supply assessment.

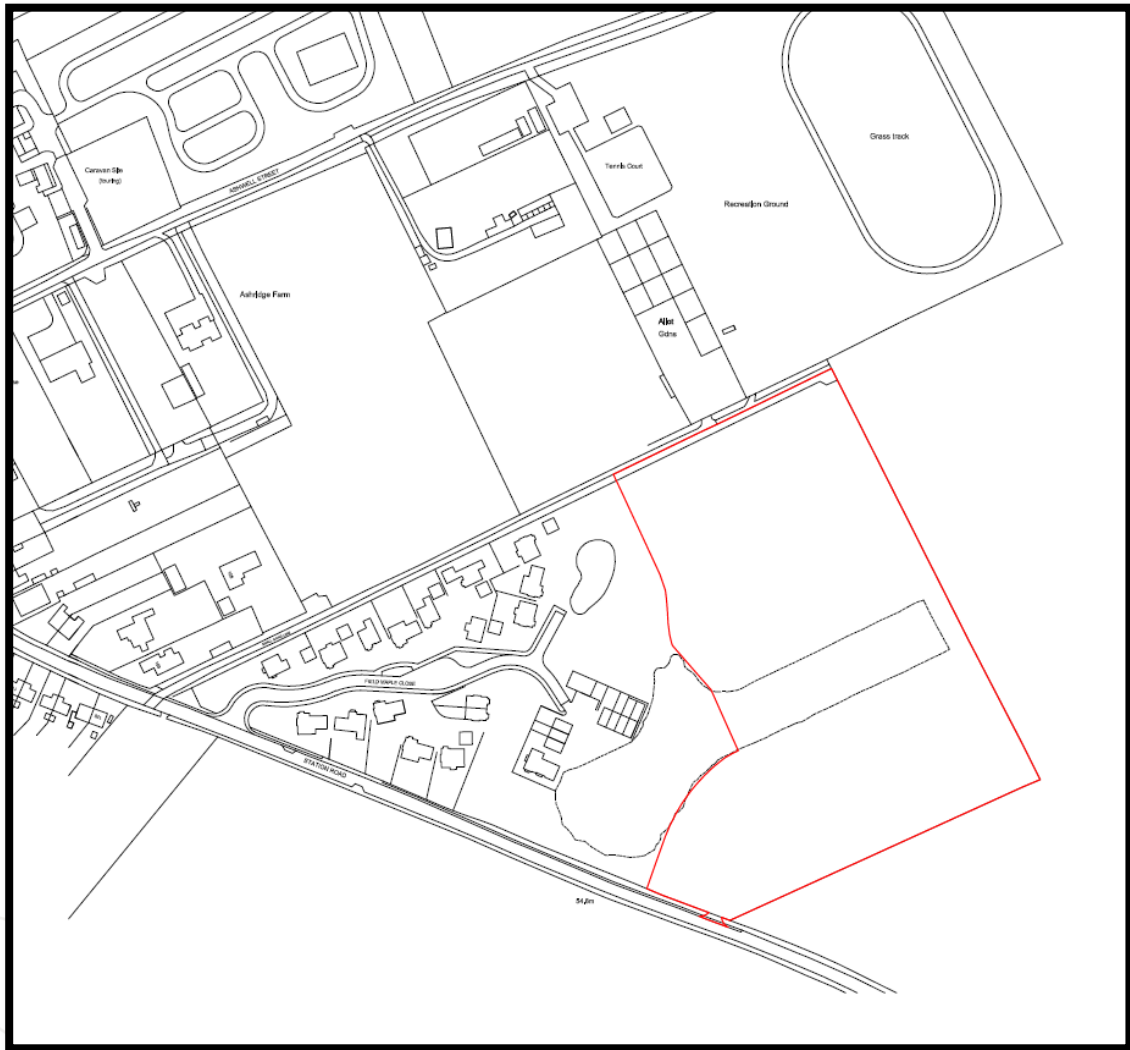
- 1.5. The following reports and plans are submitted to form the planning application alongside this Planning Support Statement:

25-167-P01 LOCATION PLAN A1
Ecological Appraisal – aLyne
Phase 1 Site Investigation – GEA
Transport Statement – Paul Basham Associates
Utilities Assessment – Brookbanks
Flood Risk Assessment – Ingent
Arboricultural Assessment - Haydens
Tree Survey and Constraints Plan - Haydens
Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Matrix– aLyne
Archaeology Assessment – Headland Archaeology
Badger Monitoring Report – aLyne
Air Quality Assessment – Mayer Brown
M3942-PA-01-V12 PLANNING LAYOUT A1
M3942-PA-02-V02 SUPERIMPOSED AERIAL PLAN A3
M3942-PA-06-V02 LANDSCAPE LAYOUT WITH KEY AND NOTES A1
INFORMATIVE ARTIST’S IMPRESSION VIEWS 1-4 A3
INFORMATIVE VIEW POINT 11 PHOTOMONTAGES A3
Design and Access Statement – Barnes Walker
Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Barnes Walker
Noise Impact Statement – Mayer Brown
Outdoor Lighting Report – HDS
Tree Protection Plan – Haydens
Affordable Housing Statement – JWPC Ltd
Deliverability Statement – JWPC Ltd
25-167-P02 PLOTS 1-4 FLOOR PLANS A3
25-167-P03 PLOTS 1-4 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P04 PLOTS 5-14 FLOOR PLANS A1
25-167-P05 PLOTS 5-14 ELEVATIONS A1
25-167-P06 PLOT 15 FLOOR PLANS A3
25-167-P07 PLOT 15 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P08 PLOT 16 FLOOR PLANS A3
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25-167-P27 PLOT 25 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P28 PLOT 26 FLOOR PLANS A3
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25-167-P30 PLOT 27 FLOOR PLANS A3
25-167-P31 PLOT 27 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P32 PLOT 28 FLOOR PLANS A3
25-167-P33 PLOT 28 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P34 PLOT 29 FLOOR PLANS A3
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25-167-P36 PLOT 30 FLOOR PLANS A3
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25-167-P43 PLOT 33 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P44 PLOT 34 FLOOR PLANS A3
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25-167-P46 PLOTS 35 AND 36 FLOOR PLANS A3
25-167-P47 PLOTS 35 AND 36 ELEVATIONS A3
25-167-P48 PLOTS 36 GARAGE DETAILS A3
25-167-P49 DOUBLE GARAGE A A3
25-167-P50 DOUBLE GARAGE B A3
25-167-P51 STREET SCENES A1

2. Site Characteristics

- 2.1. The site subject to the planning application measures 3.18 hectares and includes land to the rear of the Senuna Park development and adjacent field to the south.



Site Plan – Edged Red

- 2.2. The site lies towards the southeastern edge of the village of Ashwell, within the North Hertfordshire District Council boundary. It lies adjacent to Station Road, which connects the village to the Ashwell and Morden Railway Station to the southeast and the wider road network. Whilst the train station lies outside of the District Council boundary, it is less than 1.5 miles from the application site. An excellent train service from this station provides links

to London and Cambridge and stations in-between on a regular service, providing good access to both cities and the wider railway network.

- 2.3. The village of Ashwell has a population of approximately 2,000 people and is a large village with an excellent range of local shops and services set around High Street at its centre. These facilities provide for local needs, including a primary school, doctors and dentist surgeries, pharmacy, local church, village hall, nursery, public houses, post office facilities, café and several village shops and stores. The application site is within walkable distance of the main facilities and as such is considered a sustainable location for new residential development, being similar in these terms to the Senuna Park development that the site lies adjacent to on Station Road.

Location and Movements

- 2.4. A new bus stop, on Station Road, is currently being delivered by the adjacent Senuna Park development, approximately 350 metres from the site's existing access, and will improve access from the application site to the local bus network. The existing stop is approximately 600 metres away, which is still considered an acceptable walkable distance for future residents of the development. Further details in relation to site accessibility is set out in the Transport Statement submitted with the planning application, and this also provides evidence from a traffic count survey undertaken by the applicant in preparation for this planning application.
- 2.5. The site lies adjacent to newly built houses to the west. To the north of the site, opposite Small Gains lane lies existing sports pitches and recreation facilities, with football pitches, allotments, a cycling track and tennis facilities. These are all accessible from the north eastern end of the site, where an existing farm gated access from the site on to Small Gains will be made a pedestrian link to connect the site.



Site Plan – Edged Red

- 2.6. The application site has good pedestrian connections to the local network via the existing access and footway along Station Road. This connects to the local public rights of way, providing good opportunity for connectivity to Ashwell and further afield.

Local Context

- 2.7. Due to the gentle topography and low vehicle volumes on the road, on-road cycling is considered to be a desirable option for residents. The site is well-located to provide access to the village centre within 5-minutes.
- 2.8. The site boundary to the southern and eastern ends are confined by a high hedged and treed border that largely prevents views into the site from the open areas beyond. The south western boundary of the southern field along Station Road is also bound by a hedged and

treed border, with an existing gap providing access into the field. The northern field's south western border is the existing Senuna Park development. The whole application site is well contained from the open rural areas beyond its boundaries.

- 2.9. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) submitted with the planning application provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing site in the context of topography, landscape character and visual analysis and provides photographs of the site.

Existing Access

- 2.10. The southern field that forms part of the application site is currently served by a farm gated access, which provides access to the field and to the land to the rear of the Senuna Park development around the end of the millennium wood at the eastern boundary of the site. A secondary field access is located to the rear of the site off Small Gains.

Flood Risk

- 2.11. The site lies wholly within Flood Zone 1 on the Environment Agency's Flood Zone Maps, representing an area at the lowest risk of flooding. All other forms of potential flooding are considered to be low-risk at the site. The planning application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment, prepared by Ingent Consulting Engineers, which details the evidence on risk from flooding. It also provides details of infiltration testing at the site to inform a drainage strategy and design for the proposed development. It is considered from this assessment document that the low level of risk of flooding is acceptable and in keeping with current policy.

Planning History

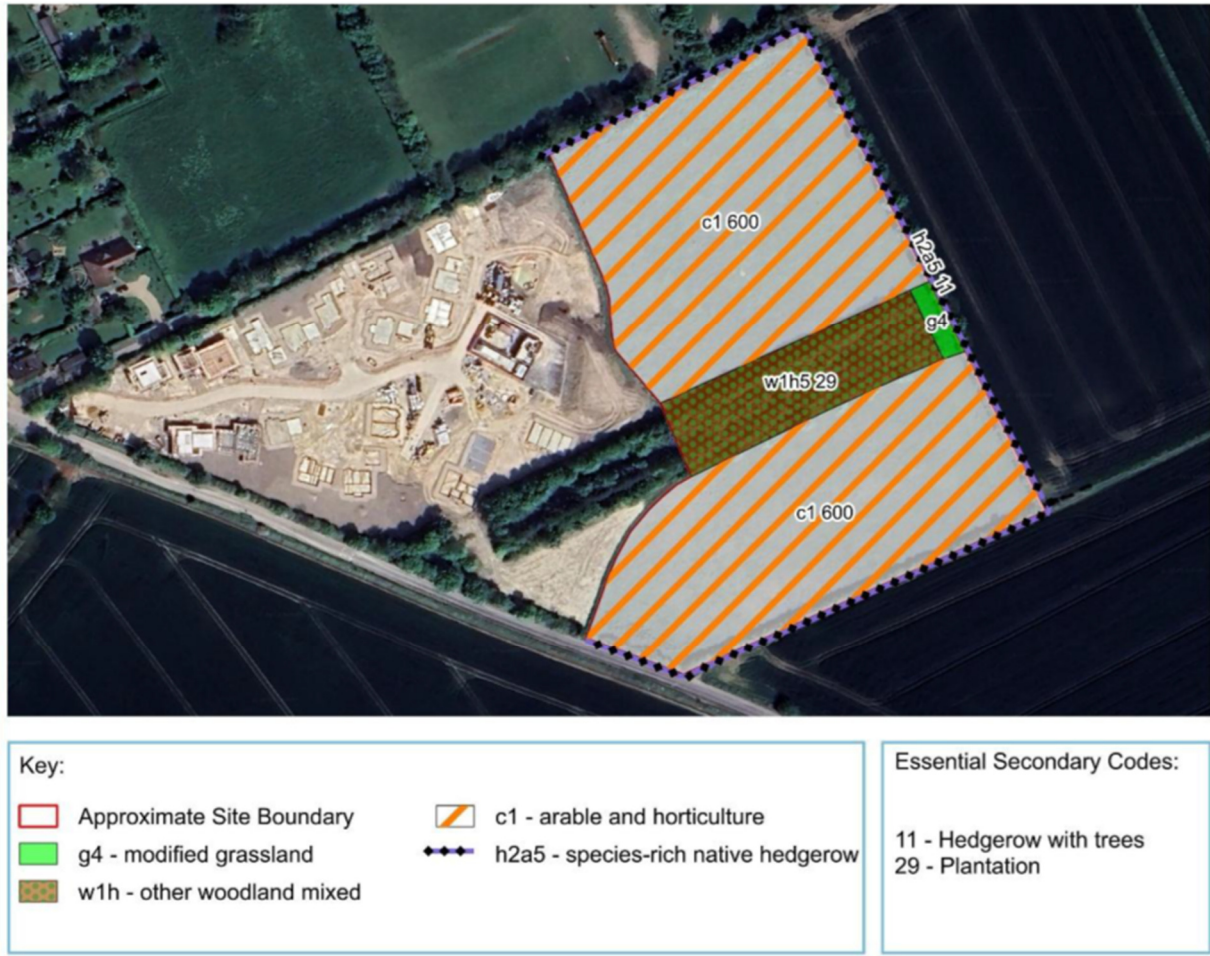
- 2.12. The northern section of the application site formed part of a previous wider planning application submission in 2017, which at that time included proposals on that part of the site

for a new sports pavilion building and two new sports pitches. This application was refused and an appeal dismissed.

- 2.13. Whilst not part of the application site, an appeal was allowed in 2022 for 28 new dwellings on the land immediately adjacent to the application site (Ref:APP/X1925/W/21/3279843), which is now being developed as Senuna Park.

Preliminary Ecological Assessment

- 2.14. An assessment of the existing ecological features of the site has been undertaken by aLyne Ecology Ltd and is detailed in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) submitted with the planning application. This details that the site can be made suitable for development by making recommendations for avoidance, mitigation and enhancement of the existing ecological features on site. The report recommended further reports were undertaken in relation to Badgers, Hazel Dormice and Bats. These reports have been undertaken and are submitted with the application as separate documents.
- 2.15. A plan of the site from the PEA is shown below. This highlights the boundary of the site as species-rich native hedgerow, with some trees, and a mixed woodland running through the centre of the site. Two ploughed arable fields form the majority of the site area, either side of the woodland belt, with a narrow strip of modified grassland connecting the fields to the rear of the woodland. The consultants aLyne ecology also undertook the baseline assessments for biodiversity net gain which are submitted with the application.



Extract plan from PEA

- 2.16. Proposed mitigations in this report can be accepted as separate planning conditions or shown on approved plans.

Ground Conditions

- 2.17. A Phase 1 Desk Study has been prepared by Geotechnical and Environmental Associated Limited (GEA) and is submitted with the planning application. This report investigates the potential for contaminations at the site based on historical evidence to inform the development of the site. It also assesses the ground conditions to inform drainage and foundations options for the development. It concludes there is a low contamination risk from the site and the site is technically suitable for the development proposed.

Arboriculture/Tree Survey

- 2.18. An assessment of the existing trees and hedges across the site has been prepared by Haydens and is submitted with the planning application.

Other Assessments

- 2.19. Other assessment were also undertaken, including a Utilities Assessment, Noise Assessment and an Air Quality Assessment. These report have also been submitted with the planning application and informed the proposals.

Heritage/Archaeology

- 2.20. The site contains no listed or protected status buildings or features and is more than sufficient distance from any features in the village that could be considered to be impacted from the site or its development. Most importantly, the site is located well outside of the Ashwell Conservation Area, which contains much of the main part of the village.
- 2.21. An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of the site has been prepared and is submitted with the planning application. Any requirement for further assessment in this regard can be suitably conditioned if necessary.

Site Summary

- 2.22. The documents and reports summarised above provide a clear statement that the site is technically capable of providing a suitable site for a new residential development, with connections to existing infrastructure being present or easily deliverable as part of a development.
- 2.23. The site has no statutory protected designations and as such presents land capable of development with limited impact. Much of the rest of the village of Ashwell is constrained

from development by statutory designations, such as the conservation area or listed buildings, none of which would be affected by development on the application site.

- 2.24. The documents and evidence has also been used to devise the proposed development in this planning application, which is detailed in the next chapter and in design and landscape terms in the DAS.

3. Application Proposal

- 3.1. This full planning application seeks consent for 36 new residential dwellings, with 40% proposed to be affordable dwellings. Matters of access, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance are applied for and set out in the submitted documents that form the application, and are summarised and discussed below.

Access Proposal and Transport Statement

- 3.2. In preparing the application, Paul Basham Associates reviewed the access arrangements at the site and conducted traffic counts to understand volumes and speeds of vehicles passing the site. Pre-application discussions were held with the Highway Authority to understand the technical matters and best options for delivering an improved highway access into the site and any other relevant highways related upgrades which would benefit new and existing residents alike. Details of this evidence and assessments are set out in the submitted Transport Statement.
- 3.3. The proposal includes changes to the site access and Station Road showing the proposed site access with a 2-metre wide footway into and through the site, and the relocation of the 30mph speed limit approximately 120 metres to the east of the access, in the form of a gateway feature, encouraging lower vehicle speeds on approach to the village and enhancing the overall highway safety in the area for new and existing residents.
- 3.4. The Transport Statement details that based on a trip generation and distribution assessments, the development will not have a significant impact on the operation of the local highway network.

Housing Mix

- 3.5. The proposed development includes a mix of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 bedroom properties, including apartments, mews houses, semi-detached and detached properties across the site.
- 3.6. Policy on new houses in the Local Plan, detailed in Chapter 4 set a target of 40% of new homes to be affordable, and the scheme has been devised with this in mind. The number, type and style of property and how they are distributed within the development are explained further in the Design and Access Statement and the separate Affordable Housing Statement.
- 3.7. The following sizes of properties are proposed across the site:

1-bedroom	5	Apartments
2-bedroom	5	Mews houses
3-bedroom	6	Mew houses and semi-detached
4-bedroom	18	Detached
5-bedroom	2	Detached

Affordable Housing Proposals

- 3.8. Of the 36 new dwellings, 14 are proposed to be affordable homes. This includes a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units of apartments and mews houses. The affordable dwellings are located to the front of Station Road within the farmstead cluster of the development proposals. Whilst there are sound site design reasons to be located in this part of the development it also

ensures the affordable properties are closer to the public transport and walking and cycling to the facilities of the village.

Landscaping and Biodiversity Improvements

- 3.9. Integral to the development are extensive landscaping proposals, that also feature significant ecology and biodiversity improvements in accordance with national requirements and supported by local policy. These are set out in the plans on the layout below, and detailed in the DAS, LVA and the Biodiversity Net Gain Report. This report demonstrates a 52% net gain in habitat units and a 16.87% net gain in hedgerow units, which are significant improvements above the required 10%.

Planning Layout

- 3.10. The proposed plan (below) has been developed in design terms from key principles set out in the DAS document, informed by the opportunities and constraints of the site and policies in the NHLP. The scheme was conceptualised in the DAS as four development areas that contain new housing and three connected defined landscaped area across the site, which are outlined below.



Planning Layout Plan

Housing Development Areas within the Scheme

- 3.11. The first area of new housing is a **Farmstead Cluster** at the access from Station Road. The design approach for the Station Road frontage positions the Farmstead Cluster as the first element encountered on the approach to Ashwell, arranged in a traditional farmstead layout with architecture to reflect this narrative. This area contains 16 residential units of mixed sizes and types, designed to represent a cluster of buildings associated with a traditional farmstead.



Fig.19 Extract of Landscape Layout Plan



Farmstead of Hill Farm on the approach to Ashwell from Station Road - barn backs onto the road



Farmhouse at Highfield Farm on Royston Road with barns visible beyond

Farmstead Cluster from Design and Access Statement

- 3.12. Beyond the farmstead cluster, to the east of the site, is proposed the **Village Green** area of new detached houses. A generous area of green space divides the farmstead from the village green character area. The Village Green area includes an informal cluster of housing, part-fronting small central greens and around a central 'village green'. This low-density arrangement of seven dwellings reflects the position at the edge of the settlement and affords views through the site.



Village Green from Design and Access Statement

- 3.13. To the north of the site are two adjacent development areas, the first of which is the **Eastern Fringe**. This is a meandering, yet generously spaced, row of dwellings fronting the eastern wooded boundary of the site. Significant new tree planting and garden boundary hedgerows will create a verdant rural character at the site's boundary to the countryside beyond and the footpath network within the site. This area includes five detached dwellings in generously sized plots.



Eastern Fringe Plan from Design and Access Statement

- 3.14. The **North-Western Cluster** is a dispersed arrangement of 8 detached homes, with dwellings orientated to overlook the streets and paths, with dual aspect homes positioned to overlook the public open space to the west, enhancing natural surveillance. Public footpaths are set within green corridors enhancing connectivity and introducing green visual corridors within the site.



North-Western Cluster Plan from Design and Access Statement

Landscaping Features within the Scheme

- 3.15. The design approach in the DAS also sets out clearly defined landscaped areas that link the built development, referred to in the DAS as the **Green Wedge**, **Millenium Wood** and **Wooded Edge**. These are shown below.
- 3.16. A generous **Green Wedge** extends through the site as a landscaped corridor reinforcing the rural character of the settlement edge while providing visual and physical connectivity to the open countryside to the south. The open space responds to existing landforms and provides positive aesthetic, functional recreation and enhanced biodiversity.



Green Wedge from Design and Access Statement

- 3.17. The proposed reshaping of the woodland plantation known as **Millenium Wood** will create a woodland block appropriate to its landscape setting and context. This will be undertaken by new woodland planting and positive woodland management works.



Millenium Wood from Design and Access Statement

- 3.18. The **Wooded Edge** involves the existing hedgerow along the eastern and southern boundaries being enhanced and supplemented to create a more substantial, woodland-style edge where the site meets the open countryside. Footpaths will weave through this landscaped boundary, offering recreational routes and connecting the development to its wider setting.



Wooded Edge from Design and Access Statement

Development Appearance

- 3.19. The new dwellings are traditional, in that the massing, style and detailing reflects the vernacular buildings and buildings of interest in the local village of Ashwell. Full details of all dwellings are provided within the application drawings and explanation of the design provided in the DAS. A range of materials are proposed, including facing brick, weather board cladding, white render and red clay pitched roofs.
- 3.20. Sketch views of the proposals are shown below using an accurate 3D modelling base. The design demonstrates a development that is truly landscape led and befitting of the high-quality village edge setting.





View 2



View 3



View 4

4. Planning Policy

- 4.1. This chapter outlines the national and local planning policies and guidance documents that have been considered in preparing the planning application, and which will be relevant to the determination of the application.

Planning Law and Decision-Taking

- 4.2. Section 38 (6) of the Town and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that decisions made on planning applications are based on the 'development plan', unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The North Hertfordshire Local Plan (NHLP) is the district's main adopted planning document and forms part of the development plan under section 38(6). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in planning decision and must be taken into account in preparing the development plan.
- 4.3. As the NHLP was adopted (2022) prior to the current version of the NPPF (2024), policies in the NHLP that conflict with the NPPF may be out of date. The NPPF provides clear guidance at paragraph 11 in relation to situations where housing policies in the development plan are considered to be out of date, and specifies how a presumption in favour of sustainable development should apply in decision-taking.
- 4.4. Further to the adoption of the NHLP in 2022, the district announced in January 2024 that it would undertake a full review and update of the Local Plan. This was due to a requirement in the NHLP, at the behest of the Planning Inspector, to undertake a review of the plan by the end of 2023. This full review of the plan is in the early stages and there are no new documents relevant to the planning application that carry any weight in decision-taking.

Strategic Policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan

4.5. The following policies are contained within the NHLP and provide the strategic policy approach to new housing development.

4.6. Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire - states that the Council supports the principles of sustainable development and, in relation to new housing will:

- a) Maintain the role of key settlements within the district as the main focus for housing and new development;
- b) 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;
- c) Grant planning permission for proposals that
 - i. Deliver an appropriate mix of homes that contribute towards the targets and aspirations in the plan;
 - ii. Create high-quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings and provide opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices;
 - iii. Provide the necessary infrastructure required to support an increasing population;
 - iv. Protect key elements of the districts environment including biodiversity, important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure (including the water environment); and
 - v. Secure any necessary mitigation measures that reduce the impact of development, including on climate change; and
- d) Support neighbourhood plans and other local planning initiatives where they are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan.

4.7. Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution – states that between 2011 and 2031, the local plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes, with 93% being within the main towns and five villages. The policy states that the remaining development will be dispersed across the district, at three different types of village, defined hierarchically as Category A, Category B and Category C. The village of Ashwell is defined as a Category A village and this policy states that in Category A villages general development will be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries. The policy also notes that development outside of these locations will be permitted where supported by an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

4.8. Supporting text to Policy SP2, at paragraph 4.11, states that:

“it is important to allow growth of the villages in order to allow these communities to continue to function”

4.9. Paragraph 4.13 states that although much of the housing growth will be delivered on sites allocated for development, this will be supplemented by (often smaller) ‘windfall’ sites which come forward within the settlement boundaries and parameters identified in Policy SP2 “as well as any further sites subsequently identified through Neighbourhood Plans.”

4.10. Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt – states that the Council supports the principles of the Green Belt and recognise the intrinsic value of the countryside, noting that Green Belt and Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt are shown on the Policies Map. The application site is located to the east of the defined settlement boundary of the village of Ashwell, in an area the Map Key defines as ‘Rural Area beyond the Green Belt (SP5, CGB1)’.

4.11. This Policy states that the Council will only permit development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated; and will operate a general policy of restraint in Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt through the application of detailed policies. Paragraph 4.66 of the supporting text notes that both the Green Belt and the Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt are policy designations designed to restrict the types and amount of new development that can occur.

4.12. Paragraph 4.63 notes that in terms of intrinsic character and beauty, the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt contains some of the highest quality countryside in the District. However, the settlements are generally more dispersed meaning a Green Belt designation cannot be justified. This sparser pattern of development additionally means that, **outside of the defined**

settlements, many sites are not well located in relation to key services (our emphasis). On these grounds it remains appropriate to restrain the types of development allowed in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt.

- 4.13. Paragraph 4.65 continues, noting that wherever possible, the inner boundaries of the Green Belt and Rural Area have been drawn around our settlements using strong features that provide clear, defensible boundaries.
- 4.14. Strategic Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport - states that the Council will deliver accessibility improvements and promote the use of sustainable transport modes insofar as reasonable and practicable. They will do this by; encouraging development in locations which enable sustainable journeys to be made to key services and facilities; ensure a range of sustainable transport options are available, which may involve new or improved pedestrian, cycle and passenger transport links and routes; require applicants to provide assessments, plans and supporting documents to demonstrate safety and sustainability of their proposals; and protect existing rights of way, cycling and equestrian routes.
- 4.15. Strategic Policy SP7: Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions – states that the Council will require development proposals to make provision for infrastructure that is necessary in order to accommodate additional demands resulting from the development, requiring finance for such measures if fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 4.16. Strategic Policy SP8: Housing – states that over the period 2011-2031 housing growth will be supported across the district and sets out the level of houses identified for development through existing consent or site allocations in the plan for at least 11,600 net new homes. This includes sites identified within the defined settlement boundaries of the Category A villages.

4.17. To support this level of housing growth, Policy SP8 also states that the Council will, inter alia:

d) *“maintain a five-year housing land supply”*

e) *Seek to provide long-term certainty by:*

iv. “undertaking a review of this plan by the end of 2023”

4.18. The need for a review of the plan in Policy SP8 is also included as a separate policy in the plan, Policy IMR2: Local Plan Early Review – which states that the Council will undertake a whole plan review by the end of 2023 at the latest.

4.19. supporting text to policy SP8, at paragraph 4.96, states that new development will include “windfalls (those sites which will continue to come forward for development outside of the local plan process)”.

4.20. Strategic Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability - states that the Council considers good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development, and will support new development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context. It also states that they will assess proposals against detailed policy requirements in the plan and have regard to the Design Supplementary Planning Document.

4.21. Strategic Policy SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability – sets out how the plan seeks to meet the challenges of climate change and flooding. This includes directing development to areas at the lowest risk of flooding and ensuring the provision of sustainable drainage systems within proposals.

- 4.22. Strategic Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity – states that the Council will ensure that the natural environment is protected and enhanced whilst accommodating significant growth during the plan period, through protecting and managing green infrastructure, and considering and respecting landscape character, scenic beauty and locally sensitive features. The Council will also protect, enhance and manage biodiversity networks including wildlife corridors, ancient woodlands and hedgerows, wetland and riverine habitats, Local Geological Sites, protected species, priority species and habitats, and non-designated sites of ecological value and ensure measurable net gains for biodiversity. Other open spaces will be protected and new and improved open space supported.

National Planning Policy Framework – Presumption in Favour

- 4.23. Paragraph 10 of the NPPF states that at the heart of the Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development** (emphasis in the NPPF). Paragraph 11 then states that this presumption in favour of sustainable development for decision-taking means that permission should be granted where there are no relevant development plan policies or where the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date. Footnote 8 defines that policies would be considered out-of-date for applications involving the provision of housing, where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites.
- 4.24. There are two caveats to the presumption in favour applying, at paragraph 11di and ii, which are where issues relevant to footnote 7 apply, such as development impacting nationally protected sites. Also, where any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes.

4.25. Chapter 5 of the NPPF sets a national agenda for the support and delivery of housing growth across the country to meet objectively assessed housing need. It also sets out measures to ensure Local Planning Authorities are meeting this housing need through policy and decision making, by maintaining a five year housing land supply and through the Housing Delivery Target assessments. These aspects of housing supply and delivery to support housing growth are considered below with regard to North Hertfordshire.

The Neighbourhood Plan

4.26. Paragraph 12 of the NPPF states that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan) permission should not usually be granted. Paragraph 14 clarifies that in situations where the presumption at paragraph 11dii applies to applications involving the provision of housing, the adverse impacts of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, provided the following apply:

- The NP became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made; and
- The NP contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement (para 69-70)

4.27. The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan (AshNP) was made in April 2022 and forms part of the development plan for the district. However, paragraph 5.9 of the AshNP states that it does not seek to allocate additional sites for development nor does it consider that the requirement to contribute to the District's five year housing land supply should take priority over other policies in the case of planning decisions in Ashwell Parish. This approach is clearly contrary to paragraph 14 of the revised NPPF. This means that any conflict the development may have with the AshNP would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development in the tilted balance at paragraph 11dii.

General Policies in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan

- 4.28. In addition to the strategic policies outlined above, the NHLP also contains other specific policies that may be relevant to the proposal.
- 4.29. Policy CGB1: Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt – is a permissive policy that provides criteria under which planning permission will be granted in rural areas beyond the green belt. This includes affordable housing in an appropriate location. This policy is referenced on the Policies Map for the application site alongside policy SP5.
- 4.30. Policy CGB2b: Community Facilities, Services and Affordable Housing in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt – states that affordable housing adjoining Category A villages will be granted provided that the land is identified in a Neighbourhood Plan or it meets a proven local need, or there are no alternative sites within the village settlement. The policy also allows for limited market housing alongside, if certain criteria are met.
- 4.31. Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters – states that planning permission will be granted provided that development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network. For major developments, applicants should also demonstrate how the scheme would be served by public transport, and provide safe, direct and convenient routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Supporting text to this policy, at paragraph 7.2 states that in assessing development proposals, the Council will generally be guided by the advice and responses of Hertfordshire County Council as the local highway authority. It also shows that generally only schemes of over 50 residential homes require a Transport Statement or Travel Plans.

- 4.32. Policy T2: Parking – states that planning permission will be granted provided parking for residential development is in accordance with the minimum standards set out in Appendix 4 of the plan. The annex details the requirements for 1 space per 1 bedroom dwelling and 2 spaces per 2-3 bedroom dwelling, with garages counted towards these figures provided they measure at least 7metre by 3metre internally.
- 4.33. Policy HS2: Affordable Housing – sets out a range of target percentages of dwellings to be affordable within new developments, where planning permission will be granted. For sites or 25 or more dwellings, the target is 40%. The targets are sought to be delivered on-site unless robustly justified and genuinely affordable to local people where rents or prices are linked to open-market values.
- 4.34. Policy HS2 also sets out the size, type and tenure of the affordable housing, with the Council having an expectation that 65% of the housing will be rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing. Also that the housing needs of the area are considered alongside the requirements of policy HS3 regarding housing mix.
- 4.35. Policy HS3: Housing Mix – states that planning permission for new homes will be granted provided that the scheme would provide a density, scale and character of development appropriate to its location and surroundings; and within that an appropriate range of house types and sizes taking into account of local evidence in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the location and accessibility of the site. Paragraph 8.21 suggests that on most suburban and edge-of-settlement sites, applicants should make an initial assumption of 60% larger (3+ bed) and 40% smaller (1 or 2 bed) homes, but this is in the support text and not the policy itself. The following paragraph states that “development on the periphery of settlements should generally be at a lower density to mark the transition to the rural area beyond”.

- 4.36. Policy HS5: Accessible and Adaptable Housing – states that planning permission for major residential development will be granted provided that applicants demonstrate that at least 50% of homes can be built to the M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable standard; and on schemes where 10 or more affordable units will be delivered, 10% of these can additionally be built to the M4(3) wheelchair user standard.
- 4.37. Policy D1: Sustainable Design – states that planning permission will be granted provided that proposals; respond positively to the local context of the site; have regard to the Design SPD; meet space and water efficiency standards; and meet other design approaches such as incorporating sustainable drainage systems, maximising accessibility, legibility and physical and social connectivity both internally and with neighbouring areas.
- 4.38. Policy D4: Air Quality – states that planning permission will be granted provided that development proposals give consideration to the potential or actual impact on local air quality and carry out air pollution impact assessments, where required, to determine the impact on local air quality of the development.
- 4.39. Policy NE2: Landscape – states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that are designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features and have considered the long-term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping.
- 4.40. Policy NE4: Biodiversity and Geological Sites – states that all development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity, and contribute to ecological networks and the water environment. It also states that applications should have regard to the status

of any affected site or feature, and submit an ecological survey demonstrating adverse effects or proposed mitigation.

- 4.41. Policy NE6: New and Improved Open Space states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that make provision for new open space which meets need and which incorporates open space buffers for landscape, visual, ecological or air quality reasons.
- 4.42. Policy NE7: Reducing Flood Risk – states that planning permission will be granted provided development is outside of medium and high-risk flood area and a Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared where necessary.
- 4.43. Policy NE8: Sustainable Drainage Systems – states that planning permission will be granted provided that the most appropriate drainage solution is used and follows the SuDS hierarchy.
- 4.44. Paragraph 13.4 to 13.8 of the Local Plan references Ashwell as part of a ‘Communities’ section of the plan that sets out the site allocations for development in each community in North Hertfordshire district. This section states that the village has a relatively good range of facilities and is a Category A village. It further states that the village boundary has been drawn so as to allow for Ashwell’s development needs during the plan period but notes there are no sites allocated for housing. It states that 117 homes have been built or granted planning permission since 2011.
- 4.45. Policy IMR1: Five Year Housing Land Supply – sets out how the Council will identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years’ worth of housing. This sets out a stepped approach to the delivery of 13,000 net new dwellings on the following annual basis:

2011 – 2020	350 per annum
2020 – 2024	500 per annum
2024 – 2031	1,120 per annum

- 4.46. The policy also states that any shortfall in housing delivery since the plan’s start date would be spread evenly over the remaining plan period and that the Council would ensure that the monitoring of completion and permission is undertaken on an ongoing basis to ensure the housing trajectory is based on robust and up-to-date information and assumptions. The plan also includes a Housing Trajectory to 2031, with paragraph 14.30 of the supporting text stating it provides a programme of delivery to allow the plan to demonstrate a five-year land supply at the point of adoption and subsequently, on an on-going basis.

Housing Delivery and Supply

- 4.47. The Council has produced a number of monitoring reports of relevance to the delivery of housing, in addition to the Housing Delivery Test published by the government. This includes the Council’s Annual Monitoring Report 2023-24, the Five-Year Housing Land Supply Position Statement, May 2024, and the Housing Delivery Test. All of these reports were produced prior to the updates made to the NPPF in December 2024.

Five Year Land Supply

- 4.48. The Council published a Five-Year Housing Land Supply Update (5YHLSU) in May 2024, which set out the Council’s position on 31st March 2024. As no update has been provided to this report in 2025, we note that the Council’s Committee in July 2025 is still using the housing

figure from this report, set out below, and it therefore represents the most up-to-date evidence. The Committee Report summarised the position as:

as the Council is currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, the tilted balance of paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is engaged. Any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would need to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits for planning permission to be withheld.

- 4.49. The 5YHLSU notes a cumulative net shortfall in housing supply against the requirement during the plan period up to 2024 of 540 homes.
- 4.50. The report sets out the need for an annual requirement of 1,198 new houses, totalling an overall need for 5,990 new homes between the years 2024 and 2029. In terms of projected deliverable housing supply, the report shows a total of 4,272 new houses on sites with consent or allocated, and also projects an additional 359 windfalls within this five year period. The demonstrated supply of new homes in 2024 was therefore 4,631, which equates to a 3.9 year supply.
- 4.51. The housing trajectory at Figure 6 of the NHLP shows figures for actual housing completions from 2011- 2020, and projected completions onwards from that date. This obviously includes projections for the four year period of 2020 to 2024, for which actual housing completion data is now available in the 5YHLSU. This allows for a review of the delivery of housing against the projection made. This (below) shows that the delivery of houses against the plan projections is 913 dwellings behind schedule.

Period	Projection	Delivery	Difference	Cumulative Difference
2020-2021	467	593	+126	+126
2021-2022	437	333	-104	+22
2022-2023	622	445	-177	-155
2023-2024	1183	425	-758	-913

Housing Delivery Test

- 4.52. The latest results for the Housing Delivery Test in North Hertfordshire is 105%, which represents 1,400 completions over three years against a requirement of 1,333. These results relate to development from 2020-2023, and whilst they are the current results produced nationally, they effectively present a situation as it was two years ago.
- 4.53. With the need for more than 1,000 new homes to be developed per annum from 2024 onward, and a previous average of approximately 400 dwellings per annum, it can be interpreted that the housing completion rate needs to increase dramatically by 150%.
- 4.54. The new standard method for calculating a minimum figure for local housing need, introduced by the government in December 2024, provides estimated figures for each local authorities of how many new homes they will be expected to provide annually. For the North Hertfordshire district this figure is 1,018 new dwellings per annum. This is actually less than the current 5 year annual average, but is projected to be retained over a longer period beyond the existing end date of the Local Plan and is clearly higher than current build rates.

5. Planning Considerations

- 5.1. The main consideration for this planning application is the fact the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year supply of housing. This means that paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is engaged as the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date due to this inability to demonstrate a sufficient supply of housing. The current situation is a significant shortfall of housing supply and it is acknowledged also that the annual requirement for supply set out in this supply requirement would require an approximate 150% increase on previous annual housing delivery rates. In addition, we note that actual housing completions from 2020-2024 are almost 1,000 homes fewer than originally projected for in the Local Plan.
- 5.2. One could question the validity of the 2024-2029 projections in the housing land supply given that the projection in 2020 has fallen so short in terms of actual housing delivery. This is clear evidence that the Local Plan is not delivering on the new homes it proposed and in such situations the Council must act in accordance with the NPPF to increase housing supply by engaging the tilted balance, applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development at paragraph 11. Our evidence is that the proposal is a sustainable development in a suitable location and development should be approved.
- 5.3. The Council's recent Planning Committee confirmed this approach to new housing proposals, noting that *"the tilted balance of paragraph 11(d) is engaged. Any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would need to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits for planning permission to be withheld."*
- 5.4. We acknowledge that the site is located outside of the existing settlement boundary of Ashwell, and that development would likely be considered contrary to relevant policies in the

Local Plan relating to the site location. However, as these policies relate to the supply of housing, these are currently considered to be out of date.

- 5.5. That said, we acknowledge that certain elements of these out of date policies could be considered supportive of the development and addressed as positives in the planning balance. In relation to Policy SP1 for example, the development will help ensure the long-term vitality of the village by supporting growth and sustaining key facilities outlined in SP1b, an argument also made in paragraph 4.11 of the NHLP. The proposals would also conform with SP1c in delivering a mix of dwellings, creating high-quality development, and protecting biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- 5.6. We also acknowledge that whilst Policy SP2 defines Ashwell as a Category A village where development will be allowed within the settlement boundary, it also allows for development outside the boundary where supported by an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Paragraph 4.13 of the NHLP notes that the identified housing sites in the plan will be supplemented by windfall sites which come forward in settlement boundaries as well as any further sites identified through NPs. It is notable that in this instance the AshNP did not seek to allocate any new development in or outside of the village.
- 5.7. Strategic policies SP1 and SP2 and their supporting text refer to additional development coming forward in proximity to an existing category A village such as Ashwell, through various means. Even though these policies are out of date in the context of there not being a demonstrable five year supply of housing, it is acknowledged that the Plan itself allowed for windfall sites outside of identified settlements.

- 5.8. The NPPF is clear that only where a Neighbourhood Plan contains allocations to meet an identified housing requirement would conflict with that NP be likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits in the titled balance.
- 5.9. Strategic policy SP5 that relates to the site designation on the NHLP policies map is also to be considered out of date. That said, it is noted that paragraph 4.63 of the NHLP considered it appropriate to restrain development in these locations as they are generally not well located in relation to key services. The application site under consideration here is however well located in relation to key services in Ashwell. Paragraph 4.65 also notes that the inner boundaries of the rural areas have been drawn around settlements using strong features that provide clear, defensible boundaries. The outer boundaries of the proposed development provide such a boundary from the more rural open land to the east.
- 5.10. Strategic Policy SP8 is also out of date as it relates directly to the supply of housing land. Notably, the policy states that the Council will maintain a five-year housing land supply and undertake a review of the plan by the end of 2023. A five year housing land supply has not been maintained and the review of the plan undertaken by the Council has identified that a full review of the Local Plan is required.
- 5.11. With regard the other strategic policies in the NHLP, the proposals provide an accessible site that will make use of sustainable transport modes, consistent with strategic policy SP6. Also, any requirement for infrastructure contributions can be met, compliant with Strategic Policy SP7.
- 5.12. The design and sustainability of the proposals as set out in detail are consistent with strategic policy SP9. The proposal has been designed to be consistent with relevant design policies, with full details of the justifications set out in the DAS.

- 5.13. The area is located in an area at the lowest risk of flooding and makes good use of sustainable drainage systems, consistent with strategic policy SP11. In this regard, the proposals are also supported by Policy NE7 and NE8.
- 5.14. The proposals include detailed landscaping and proposals for compliant Biodiversity Net Gain, and are therefore consistent with strategic policy SP12. The proposals for biodiversity and landscape improvements are also supported by Policy NE2 and NE4 of the NHLP.
- 5.15. In summary, the proposals are compliant with many of the strategic policies in the NHLP. Those that they may be in conflict with are out of date, however those policies still include some acknowledgement that development for windfall sites may be forthcoming outside of settlement boundaries, and outside of the local plan process (paragraph 4.96).
- 5.16. In considering the tilted balance at paragraph 11, one must first consider if any policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Footnote 7 confirms that these relate to habitat sites, nationally protected designation or locations and areas at risk of flooding. There are no policies in the NPPF that apply to the application site or proposals in this regard and therefore paragraph 11dii is the main consideration, which requires consideration of the balance of adverse impacts and the benefits of the proposals, to allow the tilted balance for the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Benefits

- 5.17. The proposal is made in full and seeks consent for 36 new residential dwellings. A full application of this size can readily be developed within five years, with all dwellings contributing immediately to the five year supply of housing upon approval, as outlined in the

Deliverability Statement submitted with the application. The site proposal would be defined as a medium sized site, which is supported by paragraph 73 of the NPPF, which notes small and medium sites can make an important contribution to meeting housing requirements, and are essential for Small and Medium Enterprise housebuilders to deliver new homes, and are often built-out relatively quickly. These are benefits in the planning balance.

- 5.18. The site is well located in a sustainable location and would benefit the village of Ashwell. There would be socio-economic benefits during and after construction, which would include custom for local facilities, businesses and services, that would contribute towards sustaining them.
- 5.19. The proposal provides a high-quality low density development of a scale and character appropriate to its location and surroundings, consistent with Policy HS3 of the NHLP. As it is on the periphery of the settlement, the low density marks the transition to the rural area beyond the development and is consistent with the approach taken at the adjacent Senuna Park development.
- 5.20. The proposal provides for 40% affordable housing across the development, consistent with Policy HS2 of the NHLP. The Affordable Housing Statement details the size and type of affordable homes and details of tenure will be agreed during the application process. This provision of affordable housing is a significant benefit in the planning balance.
- 5.21. Within the context of a significant shortfall in the district's housing land supply and affordable housing supply, the development would comprise a good mix of housing, including one, two and three bedroom dwellings as well as some larger properties. This housing mix would help provide for a variety of new accommodation needs in the neighbourhood, consistent with policy and specific housing needs. This is a benefit in the planning balance.

5.22. The proposals meet the requirements for biodiversity net gain, but in the context of the full development proposed it goes well beyond that and provides significant improvements to local landscape, biodiversity net gain and visual features whilst also improving accessibility to natural features for existing residents and new residents through additional footpath provision in between woodland and the landscape features across the site. Provision of these new features as a central part of the proposals are benefits in the planning balance.

Adverse Impacts

5.23. The proposals have been developed using a landscape-led approach to minimise any potential harm where possible through careful design and understanding of the existing context, whilst acknowledging that any new development on an existing undeveloped site would result in some form of change.

5.24. It is acknowledge in the planning balance that harm may result from development, but as recognised by the Council's recent planning committee report, only where that harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of development should planning permission be withheld.

5.25. The LVA submitted with the application considers in detail the Landscape and Visual effects from the development and states that upon establishment of the proposed planting, the range of landscape effects are anticipated to be negligible/minor adverse to minor beneficial, and the visual effects to be negligible to minor adverse. Even at year 1, the impacts of the development are at worst considered to be moderate.

5.26. Other impacts generally associated with new development have been demonstrated to be capable of mitigation to satisfactory reduce that impact, consistent with the planning policy. These are not adverse impacts in the planning balance.

5.27. Based on the considerations of the importance of the proposals benefits and the lack of any substantial adverse impacts, the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that the application should be approved.

6. Summary

- 6.1. This Planning Support Statement has detailed the proposals for a new residential development on land off Station Road in the village of Ashwell. It has firstly defined the existing context of the application site, through summarising the site assessments undertaken by the applicant to prepare the application.
- 6.2. It has outlined relevant planning policy, at the local and national level, and importantly acknowledges that much of the Local Plan is considered to be out of date due to the Council's inability to demonstrate a deliverable supply of housing land, and therefore the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged.
- 6.3. It has then outlined the details of the proposal applied for, which is a scheme for 36 new dwellings, of which 14 (representing 40%) would be affordable homes. It has also provided details of the significant open space and landscape improvements as part of the development, which is a low-density high-quality scheme reflecting its location on the edge of the settlement, close to the open rural areas beyond the sites hedgerow and treed boundaries.
- 6.4. It concluded by arguing that the proposal was consistent with national and local policy, and where conflicts did exist, these were on out of date policies. It also outlines the merits of the proposal and summarises the submitted documents as evidence of the benefits and potential adverse impacts of the proposal to conclude that the tilted balance was in favour of the sustainable development on this site being approved.



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