

Officer Liz Anderson – Ecologist
Date 18/03/2026

Ref: 26/00393/FP
Att: Henry Thomas

Firs Hotel , Bedford Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 2TY

Erection of nine dwellings following demolition of existing hotel including landscaping and widening of existing vehicular access.

Consultee comments;

Having read the submitted documents there would be no ecological objection to the proposal. The February 2026 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), finds no significant habitats on site and does not predict any impact to protected species.

A separate Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (February 2026) has been supplied and this provides detail on the site's baseline Biodiversity value being 0.02 habitat units and 0.11 hedgerow units. The post development value of biodiversity units on site is expected to be 0.14 habitat units and 0.13 hedgerow units resulting in a net gain of 591% and 11.84% respectively, thereby meeting the statutory requirement for 10% BNG.

In addition to mandatory BNG the North Herts Local Plan also advises development should consider the inclusion of integrated features in the built fabric of dwellings such as bat, bird and bee bricks. These are also recommended in 4.3 of the PEA, however we would expect these to be integral features rather than the external boxes as described.

Taking the above points into account the following conditions are advised;

Ecological Enhancements

No development shall take place until an Ecological Enhancement Plan (EEP) for the creation of new wildlife features such as the inclusion of integrated bird/bat and bee boxes in buildings/structures and hedgehog holes in fences has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Where building heights allow swift bricks should be used. The approved measures must be implemented on site prior to occupation and retained on site thereafter.

Reason: To ensure development is ecologically sensitive and secures biodiversity enhancements in accordance with the North Herts Local Plan policy NE4.

The case officer should note Biodiversity Gain condition wording should be added to the decision notice, the biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition having its own separate statutory basis and is deemed to apply to every planning permission granted for the development of land in England. To ensure the applicant is clear about this distinction the biodiversity gain condition should not be included in the list of conditions imposed in the written notice when granting planning permission but should remain separate.

Biodiversity Net Gain

*The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition “(the biodiversity gain condition)” that **development may not begin** unless:*

- (a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and*
- (b) the planning authority has approved the plan.*

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be North Herts Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.