

North Hertfordshire Council

Tree Officer comments

File Ref: 25/02885/OP
Date: 30/03/26
Planning Officer: Anne McDonald
Address: Land At Mill Lane, London Road, St Ippolyts, Hitchin, SG4 7NN
Subject: Outline Application: Erection of up to 41 dwellings with associated infrastructure and open space (all matters reserved except means of access).

1.0 Policy position: NPPF / Local Plan / Supplementary Planning Document

- 1.1 Paragraph 136 of the Achieving well-designed places chapter in the current Framework, addresses the integration of trees within new development. Draft NPPF Policy N3 (December 2025) proposes that trees in new development is included within the natural environment section to ensure consistency and alignment with wider environmental objectives.
- 1.2 North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Chapter 11 deals with the natural environment.

Policy NE2: Landscape Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that: a) Respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area and have regard to the guidelines identified for built development and landscape management; b) Do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located, taking account of any suitable mitigation measures necessary to achieve this; c) Are designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features; and d) Have considered the long-term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping

2.0 Observations

Trees

- 2.1 The proposed development looks to retain most trees to the south and west of the site which is positive. A provisional Tree Preservation Order (TPO) TPO/00226 (2026) has been served recently to ensure this and also to give the LPA more control on tree removals/management on the site prior/post

any development. The TPO also covers a group of trees to the North of the site identified as G4 in the TPO Schedule.

- 2.2 The trees in G4 were identified for TPO protection because of the amenity they contribute to this end of the site collectively as a group. These trees provide a buffer from the proposed new development, highly valued by residents of existing properties along Mill Lane and provide an important landscape feature.
- 2.3 The location for proposed access to the site from London Road and Mill Lane is within the area occupied by G4 and would see the loss of a large proportion of this group to facilitate the development. These trees have been mainly categorised as B or A grade trees meaning, as a minimum, they are as stated in the submitted Barton Hyett Associates Arboricultural Impact Assessment report:

“CATEGORY B: MODERATE QUALITY

Trees or groups of some importance with a likely useful life expectancy in excess of 20 years. Their retention would be desirable; selective removal of certain individuals may be acceptable but only after full consideration of all alternative courses of action.”

These trees would therefore positively contribute to the surroundings and any new development for this period of time or considerably longer. The numerous benefits of trees are also provided in section 6 of the submitted Barton Hyett Ass. AIA report.

- 2.4 If no other access routes that avoids the trees entirely are viable, it may be acceptable to allow the removal of a few individuals within this group, (mitigated by replacement planting), to accommodate alternative access design that retains the majority of trees. However, it considered important to retain the overall appearance of the group in this area and in particular the majority of the larger principle trees such as the line of Horse Chestnuts to the South of the group and the Oak trees. The smaller Walnut trees are also valued members of the group, but the smaller poorer specimens are more easily replaced by new planting.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The proposed development includes the retention of almost all trees in other parts of the site, which is commendable, but also sees removal of many mature trees in the area covered by G4 of the TPO. This is considered excessive and detrimental to the character and appearance of the

surrounding landscape, as G4 provides important amenity, screening and many other benefits to properties along Mill Lane, the wider area and to any new development. It is also a valuable area of tree canopy cover, which is quite often limited in new developments as can be seen in the approved site on the opposite side of London Road.

3.2 As stated in the submitted Barton Hyett Ass. AIA report “*full consideration of all alternative courses of action*” should be given to access positions and appropriate construction techniques that look to retain as many B category trees and as much tree cover as possible, as it is existing tree cover that is already at its peak in environmental benefit and so vitally important in this time of climate crisis. Any mitigation planting will take decades before it delivers significant environmental benefits and even longer to reach the same peak benefits in replacing like for like canopy cover currently provided by the existing trees.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 I recommend that alternative solutions to access are explored, ideally avoiding these trees completely, in order to retain the tree cover provided by G4, that is considered highly important in terms of amenity and environmental benefits to the local area.

Reason: To prevent damage to or destruction of trees to be retained on the site in the interests of the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality, and to comply with Policy NE2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031.

Francis Mabbett
Tree and Landscape Officer