



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW

Date: 19 August 2025
Our ref: 07735

For the attention of: Ben Glover

Application ref: 25/01708/OP
Location: Land Opposite Heath Farm, Briary Lane, Royston, Hertfordshire
Proposal/Description: Outline Application: Erection of up to 84 dwellings with public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS) following demolition of No. 24 Echo Hill with all matters reserved save for access.

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Outline planning application. This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

Summary:

We have concerns that developing this parcel of land would result in adverse harm to surrounding visual receptors and on the localised character of the site and area, notably from Therfield Heath and surrounding PRoWs. Mitigation planting will provide a limited contribution to reducing the visual effects associated with the development owed to the undulating and elevated landform. We advise that mitigation planting is improved to reduce the assessed effects. We advise that Type 3 or 4 Visualisations are provided to demonstrate the visual impact of the development.

Site Context:

The application site is located to the south of Royston, to the east of Briary Lane which runs along the western boundary. Residential development forms the northern and eastern site boundaries. The site itself is rectangular in shape and comprises two fields. Wicker Hall is located in the south-west corner of the site. Two Public Rights of Way (PRoW) run adjacent to the site, along the southern boundary and the eastern boundary. Therfield Heath located close to the west is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Registered Common Land and Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Planning Policy Context:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

Policies to be considered that are relevant to landscape include Policy ENV3, ENV4, NE1, NE2, NE7, NE8, SP9 and SP12.

The site is located within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt and therefore Policy CGB1 is relevant.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA):

The application has been accompanied by the submission of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken by Icení, in May 2025.

The methodology is included within Appendix A8. Whilst we are largely satisfied with the submitted methodology, this approach has not been evidenced within the LVIA itself. We therefore question how the methodology has been used to inform this assessment, since no judgements are provided for susceptibility, magnitude of change or overall effects.

Landscape Character

The Site is located within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 228: Scarp Slopes South of Royston within the North Herts Landscape Study (2011). The LCA is of a high sensitivity, stating “*the pronounced undulating landform and mix of grassland and arable fields creates an open area with panoramic views, while the sections of wooded dip slopes create a sense of enclosure with limited urban influence*” and “*views to and from the scarp slopes including undeveloped and wooded skylines are relatively open and would be highly sensitive to the introduction of urbanising features*”.

We would have preferred LCA 228 Scarp Slopes South of Royston to have been included as a specific landscape receptor, so that the submitted assessment of effects directly relates to the impacts on the characteristics of the relevant LCA.

The Site is assessed as medium-high sensitivity, and medium-high magnitude of change, resulting in a major to moderate adverse landscape effect. We do not disagree with this judgement.

Visual Effects

The effects from Bridleway 013 Briary Lane on the west of the site is assessed as major to moderate adverse at Year 1, reduced to moderate to minor adverse at Year 15. We judge that at least moderate adverse effects will remain at Year 15, owed to the proximity of dwellings to the bridleway edge and the visibility of these beyond the existing hedgerow, even considering the proposed planting.

The effects from Bridleway 014 on the south of the site is assessed as moderate to minor adverse at Year 1, reduced to minor to negligible at Year 15. We judge that the effects from Bridleway 014 have been underassessed on both accounts, considering that the built development breaks the existing vegetated boundary vegetation and will appear closer to the Bridleway edge. The development is also located on higher elevation ground than any of the existing development within Royston and is therefore more visible.

As part of the Decision Notice for 20/00744/OP, it was stated that *“the combination of residential built form on high ground and the associated urbanising infrastructure, and development breaking the skyline, would act to occasion marked and adverse change in the character of the immediate and intermediate locality and wider valued landscape”*. Based on a comparison of the two proposed schemes, the frameworks are very similar. However, the submitted LVIA for this application states (Para 5.24) *“that the proposed houses do not break the skyline”*. We are therefore unsure what design changes have been made to reduce the visual impact of the development on the skyline specifically.

We would therefore advise that Type 3 or 4 Visualisations are submitted to demonstrate this, since the same adverse effects may arise as has been highlighted in the refused scheme. These would also be beneficial from the surrounding PRowS and Therfield Heath. Justification is provided for the reduction in effects for Therfield Heath (VP18) at Year 15, based on the establishment of mitigation planting. Owing to the undulating landform we question the success of visually mitigating the impacts of the development from Therfield Heath, since we judge that the proposed tree planting will not be effective in reducing the visual impact of built development on an elevated slope. We judge that the effects would be mitigated to a limited extent through planting.

Within the Royston Urban Design Assessment (2007), views from the south-west are identified as ‘view corridors to be protected’. On Page 24, Key Issues (LE1: Views) states that *“SWC2A: The most important views of Royston as a whole settlement are from Therfield Heath and Hyde Hill”*. This highlights the importance of protecting external views towards Royston from Therfield Heath.

Significant quantities of tree planting located along the site boundaries and on all streets would have to be proposed to rely on planting to visually screen the development. Based on the level of information provided within the Framework Plan, this is not yet detailed. The worst affected viewpoint receptors include residential receptors on Royse Grove, Wicker Hall/Heath Farm and Echo Hill, and public receptors including Bridleways 013 and 014 and Therfield Heath.

Review of Submitted Information

In April 2021, an Outline application for 99 residential dwellings was refused under 20/00744/OP. Prior to this, in January 2019, an Outline application for 107 dwellings was refused under 18/00747/OP. The April 2021 refusal stated: *“It was noted that due to its prominent position and the topography of the Site outside Royston’s settlement boundary, the proposed development would be ‘likely to result in significant localised adverse impacts on both the character of the area and visual receptors, particularly when viewed from certain locations on Royston Heath.’* It was also noted that *“the combination of residential built form*

on high ground and the associated urbanising infrastructure, and development breaking the skyline, would act to occasion a marked and adverse change in the character of the immediate and intermediate locality and wider valued landscape”.

Comparatively, the developable areas indicated on the Refused 2021 scheme and the current application are largely similar, with some changes including a wider eastern landscape buffer and a larger area for SuDS in the north-western corner. 99 dwellings were proposed within the Refused 2021 scheme, compared to 84 dwellings in the current application. However, the development area looks largely similar across both schemes, despite the removal of 15 dwellings.

We have concerns that the issues raised in the 2021 Refusal are still pertinent to this scheme. The developed land is higher in elevation than the existing surrounding areas of residential development within Royston. As stated above, further information will need to be provided regarding whether the development breaks the skyline, which should be demonstrated through Type 3 or 4 Visualisations.

The highest elevation area of the site is utilised for a generous area of public open space, orchards and play. We would consider this the most appropriate layout for the site whereby development is orientated towards the less prominent areas of the site. Notwithstanding this, the built parcels are still prominent given the undulating landform and available visual receptors.

Some small areas of native woodland, occasional trees and native thicket are proposed surrounding the development parcels. However, we would not constitute this as enough planted mitigation to reduce the visual impact of the development scheme.

There are also constraints across the site related to the topography. Significant earthworks will be required across the site to develop across this undulating landform. It would be important to retain all earth on site and utilised within the red line boundary. We also have concerns regarding whether close-board fencing on top of required tall-retaining walls between rear gardens would form very enclosed rear gardens.

At present, the built edge of Royston is formed of rear garden boundaries on Echo Hill and other roads. There are opportunities within the proposed scheme to form an improved urban edge which is outward facing and provides public open space on the settlement edge.

Submission Documents

If minded for approval, we advise the following documents are submitted:

- Landscape Strategy
- SuDS Strategy
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Hard Landscaping Plans
- Soft Landscaping Plans
- Landscape Management Plan

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries in relation to this advice.

Place Services – Landscape Team

Email: landscape@essex.gov.uk



Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of North Herts Council.

Please note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.