



PLANNING BY DESIGN

FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Proposed conversion of barn at property to create a new dwelling with a front extension to support the conversion

Eiling Lodge, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin SG4 8TP

On Behalf of Neil Smallwood

Prepared by **Planning By Design**

Version	Date	Prepared by
1	10/02/2026	KE

Application

Planning By Design (The agent) has been instructed to act on behalf of Neil Smallwood (the applicant) to submit a full planning application to North Hertfordshire District Council (the Local Planning Authority) for the proposed conversion of barn at property to create a new dwelling with a front extension (the proposal) at Eiling Lodge, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin SG4 8TP (the site).

In support of this application, the following Planning, Design and Access Statement has been constructed to demonstrate the suitability of this site for this proposal and evaluate its accordance with national and local planning policy, along with supplementary design guidance.

Site Location

The application site forms part of the wider Eiling Lodge holding, located off Drivers End Lane in a rural area north of Codicote, within the administrative boundary of North Hertfordshire District Council. The barn subject to conversion is situated within the curtilage of Eiling Lodge, a substantial detached dwelling set in approximately 0.8 acres of landscaped grounds.

The barn is a single-storey outbuilding of traditional construction, positioned to the rear of the main dwelling and accessed via a private driveway. The surrounding area is characterised by open countryside, sporadic residential development, and agricultural land, contributing to a distinctly rural setting. Access is already established, and the site benefits from a clear residential context, with Eiling Lodge and other dwellings nearby.

Planning Designations and Constraints

The site is subject to the following planning constraints:

- Green Belt
- Sustainability and Accessibility
- Highway Safety
- Designated Rural Area
- Drainage and Environmental Factors

The Proposal

The proposal involves the conversion of an existing single-storey barn at Eiling Lodge into a two-bedroom residential dwelling. The scheme retains the barn's linear footprint and low-pitched roof, with a small front extension added to facilitate the internal layout. External materials include stained black hit-and-miss timber cladding on a brick plinth and slate roof tiles to match the existing structure. New openings are limited and positioned to provide natural light while maintaining the building's simple agricultural appearance.

Internally, the dwelling provides two double bedrooms, two bathrooms, an open-plan living and dining space, a kitchen, and a separate office. The accommodation is arranged on a single level. Vehicle access will continue to be taken from the existing entrance on Drivers' End Lane, with on-site parking provided within the plot, and the existing garage beside this entry will be relocated to provide improved visibility.

Importantly, the proposed dwelling is intended to provide a safe and accessible home for the applicant's elderly father, enabling close family support while maintaining independence. The single-storey layout, generous internal proportions, and tranquil setting make it particularly well-suited to later-life living. The proposed dwelling will also benefit from generous external amenity space in its curtilage, offering a private garden area that supports residential use, outdoor enjoyment, and long-term adaptability.

The development will sustainably make use of an existing under-utilised structure, be in keeping with the character of the local area and provide much-needed additional rural housing in the locality. The proposed conversion is also expected to be energy efficient.

Further information and the design can be found within the accompanying architectural drawings.

Planning History

There have been four planning applications submitted and one appeal dismissed at the site. The application of relevance includes:

- 11/01764/1 – Single storey rear extension to outbuilding to form two-bedroom dwelling – Appeal dismissed 17/08/2012

This application was refused and dismissed at appeal for sustainable transport and highway reasons. The Inspector considered that the site does not promote NPPF sustainable transport policies due to its countryside location. The Inspector did not regard the bus service adjacent to the site as a public transport means. However, no transport information was provided as part of the application to justify the proposal. We note the following:

- Bus services are travelling towards Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin.
- The site is 2.4 miles from Knebworth Station, which has links to London, including King's Cross, which has wider links across the UK and Europe. Additionally, the adjacent bus services travel toward the rail station. This demonstrates two means of sustainable transport to avoid car use.
- Cycle storage can be provided on site.
- The second reason for refusal relates to the lack of visibility splays for the proposed access. Please see these attached.
- Please see attached Transport Assessment, which addresses access considerations in detail.

The Inspector also noted that there was no suggestion that the proposed dwelling was required to meet housing needs. However, as of May 2024, the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, with the figure standing at 3.9 years as of

February 2025; this has since been updated to 2.6 years as of November 2025. In accordance with Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), this triggers the presumption in favour of sustainable development, meaning that national policy takes precedence over restrictive local policies.

While this does reintroduce the consideration of sustainable transport links, the presence of a clear and demonstrable housing need materially strengthens the case for the proposed barn conversion. The re-use of an existing building to deliver a modest residential unit aligns with national objectives for efficient land use and rural housing delivery.

The Inspector also referenced the issue of isolated homes in the countryside, as defined under Paragraph 80 of the NPPF. However, the proposed dwelling cannot reasonably be considered isolated. There is an existing residential development approximately 310 yards from the site, with further dwellings located at the opposite end of Drivers End Lane, just over 500 yards away. The site is therefore not physically or functionally remote from other dwellings and forms part of a loose-knit cluster of development within the rural landscape.

In this context, the proposed dwelling would contribute positively to social sustainability, supporting the vitality of the rural area without undermining its character or openness. Its proximity to other homes reinforces the argument that it does not constitute isolated development and is instead a logical and policy-compliant reuse of land and buildings.

Planning Designations

National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF)

- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development,
- Section 5: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes,
- Section 9: Sustainable transport,
- Section 11: Making effective use of land,
- Section 13: Protecting Greenbelt land,
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed and beautiful places.
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022)

- SP2: Settlement Hierarchy
- SP5: Countryside and Green Belt
- SP9: Design and Sustainability
- HS3: Housing mix
- D1: Sustainable Design
- D3: Protecting Living Conditions
- T2: Parking

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Design SPD

Assessment

The following section will evaluate the proposed development in accordance with the relevant policies and supplementary design guidance of the NPPF and the Council to demonstrate why the proposal should be considered acceptable in principle and in strict accordance with the Council's development criteria.

Principle of Development

The proposal builds on a site where the principle of residential development has already been established and accepted by the council, providing a clear policy foundation for the acceptability of the scheme.

Section 11 of the NPPF places strong emphasis on making effective use of land, including the reuse of existing and underutilised buildings. The proposal directly supports this objective by converting a permanent rural structure into a functional dwelling without requiring additional land take or new built form in the countryside. It therefore represents an efficient and sustainable use of the site while contributing to identified housing needs. Section 12 promotes well-designed places, and the scheme responds positively to this by adopting a modest scale, low-profile form and restrained material palette that reflect the semi-agrarian character of the area and integrate sensitively with the surrounding landscape.

Importantly, the proposal does not conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt set out in Section 13, NPPF Paragraph 143. It does not contribute to the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (a), as it involves the reuse of an existing building within an established cluster rather than outward expansion. It does not lead to the merging of neighbouring towns (b), with no change to the settlement pattern or separation between communities. The scheme safeguards the countryside from encroachment (c) by retaining the existing footprint and introducing no new spread of development beyond the current plot. It has no bearing on the setting or special character of any historic town (d). Finally, it is consistent with purpose (e), as it supports the reuse of an existing rural building and does not undermine urban regeneration objectives. Crucially, the scheme also meets the Green Belt exception set out in Section 13, Paragraph 154(h) of the NPPF, which allows the reuse of permanent and substantial buildings in the Green Belt where the proposal preserves openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 154(h) makes clear that such reuse is *not* inappropriate development, provided the works are sensitive to the building's form and setting. The existing barn is of permanent and robust construction, and the proposed conversion has been designed to respect its simple rural character, ensuring compliance with this policy requirement. The proposal also accords with Paragraph 154(c), which permits extensions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt where they do not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original structure. The front extension is modest, functionally necessary to support the residential use, and carefully scaled so that it is clearly subordinate and does not alter the building's overall visual presence. As such, it does not amount to a disproportionate increase. Therefore, the proposal does not constitute inappropriate development under national policy. The principle of residential use

has previously been accepted on this land, and the Council recognises that the reuse of buildings in the Green Belt is not inappropriate where openness is preserved.

Under Section 5 of the NPPF, the delivery of a sufficient supply of homes is a central national priority. The Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (February 2025) identifies a shortfall of 3.9 years, further reduced to 2.6 years in the November 2025 update. This deficit engages the presumption in favour of sustainable development, meaning permission should be granted unless adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. In this context, unmet housing need becomes a material consideration of substantial weight. Paragraph 155 of the NPPF reinforces this position by confirming that development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where it utilises existing land or buildings, meets a demonstrable need, and is located sustainably. The development will utilise an existing building, and the site occupies a sustainable location, sitting within an established residential cluster and benefiting from safe access, nearby bus services, and convenient walking and cycling connections to the amenities and services in Codicote and surrounding settlements. The accompanying Transport Statement provides robust evidence that the site can be safely and sustainably accessed and that the development will not generate harmful transport impacts, especially with the relocation of the existing garage. It confirms that *"visibility splays of 43m are achievable in both directions"* and that the proposal *"is not expected to result in a significant increase in car trips"*. It also demonstrates that the site benefits from nearby bus services and that *"many amenities [are] within the preferred walking distance"*, addressing historic transport concerns and supporting the principle of development. The combination of the Council's significant unmet housing need and the site's demonstrably sustainable location constitutes clear, very special circumstances, carrying substantial weight in favour of the development within the Green Belt. Particularly as the dwelling is intended to provide a safe and accessible home for the applicant's elderly father, delivering a clear social benefit that complements the NPPF and Local Plan's wider sustainability objectives.

In further support of the proposal, NPPF Section 15 seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment. The development retains openness and avoids encroachment into the agricultural gap between the site and the village. Contrary to previous concerns, the site does not constitute an isolated location for a home: it sits within a small cluster of dwellings and is well-connected to local facilities. This position is supported by the Court of Appeal in *Braintree DC v SSCLG* [2018] EWCA Civ 610, which confirmed that "isolated" refers to physical separation from other dwellings, not remoteness from services. Should the Council nonetheless consider the site isolated, Paragraph 84(e) provides an exception for homes of exceptional quality. The proposed dwelling can meet this requirement through contextual design, sustainable construction, and high energy performance, with opportunities for low-carbon heating, rainwater harvesting, permeable surfacing and biodiversity enhancements, secured via condition.

At the local level, the proposal aligns with several key policies in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The design responds positively to Policies D1 (Sustainable Design) and SP9 (Design and Sustainability) through its modest scale, low-profile form and restrained material palette that reflect the semi-agrarian character of the area. The two-bedroom layout also supports Policy HS3 (Housing Mix) by providing a dwelling suitable for later-life living.

The scheme is consistent with Policy SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy), which supports appropriate development within and adjacent to established settlements, and with Policy D3 (Protecting Living Conditions), as it provides a high standard of internal and external amenity. Parking provision meets the requirements of Policy T2, and the internal layout exceeds national space standards, ensuring accessibility and long-term adaptability.

Overall, the proposal represents a sustainable, well-designed and contextually appropriate form of rural development that:

- Builds on a site where the principle of residential use has already been accepted;
- Sits within an existing residential cluster;
- Responds to national housing delivery objectives and the Council's supply shortfall;
- Provides accessible housing;
- Does not conflict with green belt purposes;
- Preserves openness through the reuse of an existing building;
- Satisfies paragraph 84(e) if the site were considered "isolated";
- Occupies a sustainable and well-connected location; and
- Benefits from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

It can therefore be considered acceptable in principle.

Design

The accompanying architectural drawings demonstrate that the proposal delivers a high-quality and contextually appropriate design. The conversion adopts materials, detailing and proportions that are sensitive to the rural setting, with a restrained palette that complements the existing Eiling Lodge dwelling and the wider semi-agrarian character of the area. The form, roof profile and overall appearance are consistent with the established built form on the site and integrate well within the existing group of buildings.

As the scheme involves the conversion of an existing underutilised structure within an established residential curtilage, it does not introduce any new built form into the countryside or Green Belt, nor does it result in overdevelopment of the plot. The proposal reuses and adapts existing floorspace efficiently, maximising the use of the site while avoiding any additional notable encroachment. The building will continue to be read in the context of the surrounding built elements, ensuring no new impact on openness or the wider rural landscape.

Overall, the proposal represents a well-considered and appropriate design, with careful attention given to materials, scale, massing, layout and setting. It conserves the character of its rural environment and accords with the relevant design policies of the Local Plan.

Amenity Considerations

The proposed barn conversion sits on a large plot with generous separation from neighbouring dwellings, ensuring it will not appear overbearing or intrusive. As the wider site is already in residential use, the introduction of a modest additional dwelling is compatible with the existing pattern of development. The extension remains clearly subordinate to the host structure, and the scheme does not result in overdevelopment, with substantial undeveloped land retained around the building. The building's position and orientation also ensure that the proposal will not give rise to harmful overshadowing or overlooking of nearby properties. The internal layout avoids direct views toward neighbouring dwellings, and the rural separation distances further protect privacy. Given the single-occupancy nature of the dwelling, no material noise impacts are anticipated.

For the future occupier (the applicant's father), the proposed Gross Internal Area meets the Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standards. The dwelling provides all necessary rooms and functional spaces to support a high standard of living, with adequate natural light and ventilation to all habitable rooms. The layout has been designed to support accessible living, offering level access, generous circulation space and a single-storey arrangement that can accommodate later-life mobility needs. Sufficient on-site parking and private outdoor amenity space are also provided. Owing to its rural setting and separation from neighbouring dwellings, the home will not be subject to overlooking or loss of privacy.

The proposal is therefore fully compliant with relevant national and local amenity and accessibility policies.

Waste

Waste/recycling storage and bin area will be within the curtilage of the site to ensure sustainable waste and storage. As with any dwelling, the occupant will take responsibility for sorting and recycling of waste, having regard for the council's residential waste removal services.

Drainage

A detailed drainage strategy has been prepared to support the proposed residential development. This is summarised below:

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and is not identified as being at risk of surface water flooding, as confirmed by the Flood Warning Information Service. This establishes a low baseline flood risk, consistent with the requirements of Policy NE7 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, which seeks to reduce flood risk through appropriate site selection and mitigation.

The underlying geology comprises Lowestoft Formation (chalky till) over Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation, which presents poor infiltration potential. As a result, conventional soakaway systems are unsuitable. In response, the proposed surface water drainage strategy incorporates a Permavoid® distribution tank to manage runoff from the new extension (approximately 20m² roof area), discharging to the existing gravel driveway. A rainwater

harvesting butt is also proposed, contributing to water efficiency and aligning with the sustainability objectives of the Local Plan and NPPF.

The system is designed to accommodate a 1-in-100-year storm event with a 40% climate change allowance, ensuring resilience against future rainfall extremes. No flooding is predicted under this scenario, and the proposed layout avoids any increase in off-site flood risk. This satisfies the requirements of Policy and reflects best practice in sustainable drainage design. Foul water from the new dwelling will discharge to the existing on-site septic tank, with minimal additional flow generated by the inclusion of a second bedroom. The strategy confirms that the existing infrastructure is sufficient to accommodate the proposed use without adverse impact, supporting compliance with Policy D3, which seeks to protect living conditions and ensure safe, functional development. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) have been incorporated where feasible. While options such as green roofs, swales, and ponds were ruled out due to site constraints, the inclusion of attenuation pipework, rainwater harvesting, and permeable surfacing demonstrates a commitment to low-impact design. These measures are consistent with the policy principles, which encourage the use of SUDS to manage surface water and enhance environmental performance.

Maintenance responsibilities will lie with the homeowner, with annual inspection of catchpits and routine upkeep of drainage infrastructure. This ensures long-term functionality and aligns with the Local Plan's emphasis on sustainable, well-managed development.

The drainage strategy is robust, site-responsive, and policy-compliant. It supports the proposed development's environmental credentials and contributes positively to its overall sustainability, in accordance with the North Hertfordshire Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Parking and Highways

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF (December 2024) states that *"development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe."* The accompanying Transport Statement provides a comprehensive, up-to-date assessment of access, visibility, trip generation and sustainable transport options, and demonstrates that the proposal falls well within these national thresholds.

The Transport Statement confirms that the development will utilise the existing private driveway onto Drivers End Lane, a lightly trafficked rural road serving a small cluster of dwellings. The access has been reassessed against current design standards, and the Statement concludes that *"visibility splays of 43m are achievable in both directions at the access in line with current standards"*. This represents a material improvement over the historic 2003 refusal, which was based on a 25m requirement that no longer applies. The applicant is also willing to reposition an existing outbuilding to fully secure the visibility envelope, a measure that the Transport Statement notes can be conditioned if necessary.

Trip generation is minimal. As the Transport Statement sets out, the proposal introduces only one additional dwelling and *"is not expected to result in a significant increase in car trips"*.

This modest level of activity is comfortably accommodated within the existing road network and does not give rise to any capacity or safety concerns. Parking provision also meets the Local Plan requirement for a two-bedroom dwelling, with two on-site spaces and secure cycle storage provided, ensuring compliance with Policy T2 and avoiding any reliance on on-street parking.

The Transport Statement also provides a detailed review of sustainable transport accessibility. Bus stops on the B656 are located approximately one minute's walk from the site, offering regular services to Hitchin, Welwyn, Stevenage and Luton. Knebworth Station lies around 3.8km away— *“an approximate 11-minute cycling journey”*—with direct rail services to London and Cambridge. The Statement further demonstrates that a range of day-to-day amenities in Codicote fall within recognised walking and cycling distances, concluding that *“the location is sustainable with many amenities within the preferred walking distance”*. This aligns the proposal with Section 9 of the NPPF, which encourages opportunities for sustainable travel even in rural contexts.

Highway safety has been robustly assessed. Using Crashmap data, the Transport Statement confirms that *“there have been no collisions within the study area within the most recent five-year period (2019–2023)”*, demonstrating that the existing access arrangements operate safely and that the proposal will not introduce new risks.

Taken together, the Transport Statement provides a clear, evidence-based justification that the development will not result in any unacceptable impact on highway safety or the operation of the local road network. It demonstrates full compliance with the NPPF, the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, and current design guidance, and confirms that there are no transport-related grounds on which planning permission should be withheld.

Biodiversity Considerations

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment has been undertaken in support of the proposed residential development. This is summarised below:

The report uses the DEFRA Small Sites Metric (SSM v1.1.2) to quantify baseline and post-development habitat values. The site comprises a vegetated garden and unsealed, unvegetated land, with no priority habitats, protected species, or designated ecological sites within 500 metres. The development involves a modest extension to an existing building and retains the existing habitat types post-completion. Despite the retention of baseline habitats, the proposal does not achieve the statutory 10% biodiversity net gain. The metric identifies a shortfall of 0.0022 habitat units. Due to national guidance restricting the inclusion of new or enhanced habitats within private gardens, where public access and legal security cannot be guaranteed, the report concludes that on-site delivery is not feasible. To meet the legislative requirement, the applicant proposes to secure off-site biodiversity units through a registered habitat bank provider. This approach aligns with the requirements of the Environment Act 2021, which mandates a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain for most developments in England. The applicant has voluntarily undertaken the assessment and committed to full compliance via off-site delivery. This demonstrates a proactive and responsible approach to environmental stewardship.

The document titled *Offsite Mitigation Assessment – Codicote, Hitchin*, has been prepared in direct response to the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report submitted for the proposed residential development. As discussed, the initial BNG assessment, using the DEFRA Small Sites Metric (SSM v1.1.2), identified a shortfall of 0.0022 habitat units, confirming that the development could not achieve the statutory 10% net gain on-site due to national restrictions on recording biodiversity enhancements within private gardens. The follow-up report outlines the applicant's strategy to meet the BNG requirement through off-site mitigation. It confirms that the necessary habitat units will be secured from Harold's Park Wildland Limited, a government-registered biodiversity gain site (Ref: BGS-190325001) located in Essex. Harold's Park is a 206-hectare Green Belt site undergoing landscape-scale ecological restoration, including ancient woodland, species-rich grassland, and wetland habitats. The offsite units will be legally secured via a Section 106 agreement or Conservation Covenant, with a 30-year management and monitoring plan in place, in full compliance with the Environment Act 2021.

The report demonstrates alignment with the Environment Act 2021, Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), which requires development to conserve and enhance biodiversity, including measurable net gains. At the local level, the proposal complies with biodiversity and ecology policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, which require measurable biodiversity enhancements for all development. The offsite mitigation strategy also supports Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability) and Policy D1 (Sustainable Design), by ensuring that ecological best practice is embedded into the development process, even where physical constraints limit on-site delivery.

In summary, the *Offsite Mitigation Assessment* provides a robust and policy-compliant solution to the BNG shortfall identified in the original report. It ensures that the development at Eiling Lodge delivers the required biodiversity uplift in a legally binding and ecologically meaningful way, satisfying both national legislation and local planning policy.

Planning Balance

In accordance with Section 2 of the NPPF (2024), the presumption in favour of sustainable development requires decision-makers to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives in assessing planning developments.

Economically, the proposal contributes to rural vitality by supporting local trades and suppliers during the construction phase and by enabling the long-term occupation of an underutilised building. The introduction of a new household will also generate ongoing expenditure in nearby shops, services and community facilities, providing a modest but meaningful boost to the local economy.

From an environmental perspective, the proposal makes efficient use of an existing permanent structure, minimising land take and avoiding unnecessary new build in the countryside. It preserves the openness of the Green Belt, introduces no encroachment beyond the established curtilage, and does not conflict with the five purposes of Green Belt designation. The design is restrained and contextually appropriate, incorporating sustainable construction measures, biodiversity enhancements, and low-carbon features such as rainwater harvesting and the potential for electric vehicle charging. The proposal achieves

these environmental benefits without generating any adverse impacts on neighbouring properties, maintaining a high standard of design and residential amenity.

Socially, the development supports family cohesion and later-life care while contributing to the local housing supply in a district where delivery remains below target. The dwelling is specifically designed to accommodate the applicant's elderly father, providing a secure, adaptable and accessible home that enables independent living and reduces pressure on public services.

In accordance with NPPF Section 11, the proposal makes effective use of an existing underutilised building, avoiding unnecessary sprawl and supporting compact, efficient development in a location that is demonstrably not isolated, consistent with *Braintree DC v SSCLG* ([2018] EWCA Civ 610). Moreover, the district's significant unmet housing need, combined with the site's demonstrably sustainable location, together amount to very special circumstances under Section 133 of the NPPF that clearly outweigh any limited Green Belt harm.

Overall, with NPPF Paragraph 11 engaged, the tilted balance applies, and the scheme's clear sustainability benefits weigh strongly in favour of approval. The proposal delivers a well-designed, environmentally responsible and socially beneficial form of development in a sustainable location. It makes effective use of land, supports rural vitality, and contributes to housing delivery in a district with an acknowledged shortfall. There are no adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh these benefits, and the proposal aligns with the NPPF (2024) and the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011–2031). Therefore, planning permission should be granted in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Conclusion

Overall, the proposal will deliver significant social and economic benefits to this area while not resulting in any detrimental harm to the area's surrounding environment and contribute to housing supply.

Therefore, we see no reason for the Council not to support the principle of development outlined above, and we kindly request that the Council make a reasonable decision on this submission in line with the developmental objectives and timescales of the National Planning Policy Framework.