

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

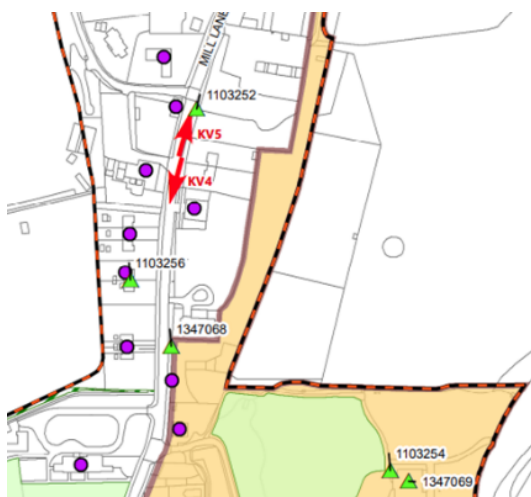
APPLICATION REF:	26/00752/PIP
CASE OFFICER:	HS
APPLICATION SITE:	Land adjacent to Model Farm, Village Street, Hexton, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3JE.
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Erection of up to three dwellings.

RECOMMENDATION:

In my opinion whilst there is a case for perhaps supporting some development, I am unconvinced by the case for 'up to three' as this may be considered an over intensive use of the site. I am concerned regarding the loss of the frontage trees (but that is for the Tree Officer to comment on). Emphasis will need to be placed on a high-quality design at the Stage 2 process if PiP is granted. As the scheme stands it is considered that development of up to three will occasion less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the Hexton Conservation Area thereby failing to satisfy the provisions of Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SITE CONTEXT:

The site lies within the Hexton Conservation Area to the south-east of KV4 on the conservation area map (see below). The selected extracts below the map are pertinent.

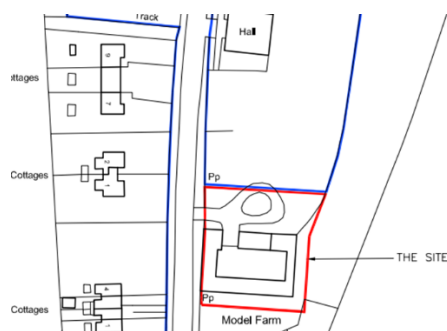


2.1 Character

- 2.1.1 Hexton Conservation Area is small and contains relatively few buildings but has a very distinct character derived jointly from the mostly 20th century estate buildings and their juxtaposition with the older, imposing wall of Hexton Manor. There is also something of a contrast between the quiet street running north to south through the village, and the somewhat busier Barton Road which runs east-west along the south of the village.

The character of the Conservation Area is dominated by a series of late 19th and early 20th century estate houses, which are individually different, but of a similar overall style (Figure 2.2). They are generally of two storeys and either wholly pebble-dashed or pebble-dashed on the upper storey. Most of the estate houses incorporate imitation timber-framing. With one exception, these houses are set back behind generous gardens and those along the main village street are mostly obscured by thick hedges. There is a trio of slightly later estate buildings at the north end of the Conservation Area, of 1 ½ storeys and pebble-dashed. Dower House, towards the south end of the

Directly south of the application site is a scheme recently completed for the '*Erection of two attached 4-bed dwellings following demolition of existing barns together with associated car parking, detached car barn and relocated vehicular access*' under ref: 22/02775/FP. Conservation was not consulted on that application which was submitted by Hexton Estates. The red line included most of a gravel turning circle (see below left) with other land and buildings in the Estate's ownership edge blue. A timber post-and-rail fence now delineates the boundary to that site (see below right).



The query I have is how can the current proposal 'claim' land to be within its red line when part of this forms the land within the implemented scheme to the south (see below)?



This has a significant bearing on the perception of space on this site to accommodate three dwellings. The image below left (Google Maps Aug 2024) shows the frontage trees, and little has changed in the two years since the demolition of the Model Farm and the rebuild taking place (although the close board fencing is a disappointing frontage treatment – shown as 900mm high picket fence with hedgerow behind on original approved plan but subsequently approved under ref: 24/01764/DOC).





DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

I note that this is an application for Permission in Principle (PiP). I am aware that the permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second ('technical details consent') stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. The permission in principle route is designed to establish the acceptability of the proposed use, location, and amount of development only. The temptation however is to view a proposal considering the schematic below.



The first question to raise from a Heritage viewpoint is whether the site possesses significance to the extent that the principle of development ought to be resisted. I turn first to the earlier editions of the OS. Part of the site immediately north of the Model Farm appears to have been maintained as open land whilst an area further to the north looks as though it may have been planted as an orchard (?).

Bedfordshire Sheet XXVI.SW
Surveyed: 1880 to 1881
Published: 1887



Bedfordshire Sheet XXVI.SW
Revised: 1922
Published: 1925



Bedfordshire Sheet XXVI.SW
Revised: 1947 to 1948
Published: ca. 1950



With permission from the National Library of Scotland

What this does show is little by way of development on the east side of the road and does show the village hall on the 1950 edition with the semi-detached houses to the north thereof coming later.

This site does have a verdant 'open' character which contributes to the settlement's rural character and is complimented by a similar verdant space to the north of the village hall

but that is perhaps where significance of the site ends. It is also plausible that development of this site may be seen as establishing a justification for perhaps developing the site to the north also which is in the same ownership but that would be considered on its own merits.

I note the following in the Planning Statement:

5.1.0 The proposal seeks approval for the erection of up to three residential dwellings on the application site. An illustrative plan has been provided to demonstrate how the dwellings could be accommodated on the site in a linear arrangement. The detailed layout would be determined at the second stage of the process should Technical Details Consent be sought.

5.1.1 Matters relating to appearance and scale are also reserved for the Technical Details Consent stage. However, a concept sketch has been prepared for illustrative purposes to demonstrate a potential design approach. The sketch indicates the potential for two-storey dwellings arranged in a modest terrace form.

5.1.2 The illustrative design shows dwellings with pitched roofs incorporating front gables and modest dormer windows set within the roof slope. This approach reflects the traditional cottage forms and roofscape that characterise the surrounding street scene.

5.1.3 Access to the site is proposed from Village Street, with the finalised access arrangements to be confirmed at the Technical Details Consent stage. The access would be designed to ensure appropriate visibility splays and safe vehicular access, turning, and parking.

In considering this scheme I have considered built forms in the locality (see below) which include terraced and semi-detached types.



Although objections on heritage grounds have been received, I see no justification for resisting development on this site. For me, the question is how much development? I am unconvinced that the site can receive 2no. x 3-beds and 1no. x 4-bed without impacting upon the site's contribution to the character of this rural settlement. However, a modest and well-designed terrace of let's say 2-bed units may be feasible. Alternatively, if taking into account, my point that the site is actually smaller than the red line indicates and the fact that spacing between built forms serves to maintain the rural character of the village, I am minded to say that a pair of well-designed dwellings might also be feasible (if indeed development is supported in planning terms).

I am concerned that for any new build to meld with its surroundings it should read as being of a similar height as existing terraced or semi-detached dwellings in the vicinity or displaying only a slight difference in height. I am concerned that building to current

Building Regulation standards may result in dwellings much larger than the estate-norm. Benchmarking heights with nearby estate dwelling could form part of the Stage 2 process. As such, I consider that the section of building outlined in red on the preceding page of my comments with a catslide roof and low eaves line may work successfully for a pair of dwellings and would be a modest improvement when compared with the full two-storey eaves height of the properties as seen on the left in the bottom row above. I refrain from making further design comments at this stage.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:
Sections 66(1) and 72(1)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:
Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **207** (*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*)
- **210** (*desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*),
- **212** (*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*),
- **213** (*clear and convincing justification*), and
- **215** (*harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*).
- **218** (*developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible*).
- **219** (*opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably*).

CONCLUSION:

I find the current proposal as submitted **OBJECTIONABLE**.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 15/05/2026