

Land South of Turnpike Lane, Ickleford

Landscape and Visual Technical Note

edp9240_r002a

QA: WGa/NPR_MWI/FJe_260226

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) was commissioned by Hawridge Strategic Land Ltd to undertake a Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Appraisal (LVGBA; report reference: edp9240_r001, dated September 2025) for the proposed development of a residential scheme at Land South of Turnpike Lane, Ickleford (hereafter referred to as 'the Site').
- 1.2 The planning application details are:
- Application No: 25/02401/OP;
 - Location: Land South of Turnpike Lane, Ickleford; and
 - Proposal: Up to 100 dwellings (50% affordable, up to 50 dwellings) with a range of house types, sizes and tenures.
- 1.3 As part of a post submission engagement workshop, the local planning authority (LPA) has requested further information pertaining to Grey Belt matters as follows:
- a. Applicant team to provide further information to supplement the Grey Belt assessment under purpose (a) which currently does not consider the Site in the context of being near to the settlement boundary of Hitchin which is classed as a large built-up area. Red line change (if required) to be informed (and reasoned) within the Grey Belt assessment. Would be helpful to ensure the Grey Belt assessment goes into details regarding the assessment of the site and relationship in respect that assessment with the proposed development.

2 SUBMITTED LANDSCAPE, VISUAL AND GREEN BELT APPRAISAL

Green Belt Context

- 2.1 The submission assessed the site against the Green Belt purposes, within Section 7 of the LVGBA.
- 2.2 The entire Site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt as defined in the *North Hertfordshire Local Plan*. However, Green Belt is a spatial planning designation and does not in itself

denote elevated landscape quality or value. Ickleford village itself is not washed over by the Green Belt.

2.3 The assessment considers:

- a. The five Green Belt purposes set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF, December 2024);
- b. Updated *Planning Practice Guidance* (PPG, 2025) on 'Grey Belt';
- c. The concepts of openness (spatial and visual); and
- d. Whether development would fundamentally undermine the remaining Green Belt.

Contribution to Green Belt Purposes

2.4 The Appraisal focuses particularly on purposes (a), (b) and (d), as required by the 2025 PPG.

2.5 Purpose (a): Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas:

- LVGBA Conclusion: Weak to no contribution
 - Ickleford is a village, not a large built-up area;
 - The site is enclosed by existing development and strong boundaries (river, vegetation, built form); and
 - Development would not result in incongruous sprawl or 'finger' development.

2.6 Purpose (b): Prevent neighbouring towns merging:

- LVGBA Conclusion: Weak or no contribution;
 - The Site does not form part of a meaningful gap between towns;
 - Development would not reduce visual or physical separation between Ickleford and Hitchin; and
 - The River Oughton corridor, tree belts, sports pitches and topography maintain separation.

2.7 Purpose (d): Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns:

- LVGBA Conclusion: Weak or no contribution:
 - The Site does not form part of the setting of a historic town;
 - There is no visual or experiential connection to historic town centres; and
 - Ickleford Conservation Area is not adjacent and has no intervisibility.

- 2.8 In applying the 2025 PPG, the assessment concluded that the Site does not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b) or (d). Therefore, it was concluded to constitute 'Grey Belt' land.

3 FURTHER INFORMATION ON GREY BELT ASSESSMENT – PURPOSE (A)

Clarification of Relevant “Large Built-Up Area”

- 3.1 The NPPF identifies that Purpose (a) of the Green Belt is:

“To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.”

- 3.2 Hitchin is recognised as a large built-up area within North Hertfordshire. Ickleford, by contrast, is a village and not a large built-up area for the purposes of Green Belt policy.

- 3.3 The Site lies on the southern edge of Ickleford and is physically separated from Hitchin by:

- a. The River Oughton corridor;
- b. Associated woodland and riparian vegetation;
- c. Sports pitches and open land;
- d. Established residential development along the northern edge of Hitchin;
- e. Localised topography.

- 3.4 Accordingly, the relevant assessment under Purpose (a) must consider:

- a. Whether the Site contributes to preventing sprawl of Hitchin; and
- b. Whether development would result in unrestricted outward expansion of Hitchin into the countryside.

Assessment of the Site in Relation to Hitchin (as submitted)

Physical Relationship

- 3.5 As submitted, the Site does not adjoin Hitchin's settlement boundary. It is:

- a. Functionally and physically related to Ickleford;
- b. Separated from Hitchin by defensible physical features; and
- c. Contained within a landscape envelope defined by the river corridor and vegetation.

- 3.6 There is no direct built form connection between the Site and Hitchin.

Functional Relationship

- 3.7 The Site does not operate as part of Hitchin's urban edge. It:
- a. Forms part of the Ickleford settlement context;
 - b. Does not extend or project from Hitchin; and
 - c. Would not create a new outward 'finger' of development from Hitchin.
- 3.8 Therefore, development would not constitute sprawl of a large built-up area (Hitchin), but rather consolidation adjacent to a village settlement.

(c) Assessment Against PPG 2025 Criteria – Purpose (a)

- 3.9 The 2025 PPG indicates that land strongly contributing to Purpose (a) is likely to:
- a. Be adjacent or near to a large built-up area; and
 - b. If developed, result in incongruous or extended sprawl.
- 3.10 In this case:
- a. The Site does not adjoin Hitchin;
 - b. Development would not create outward expansion of Hitchin;
 - c. The Site is visually and physically contained (based on the submitted redline boundary); and
 - d. The proposal would not extend development beyond existing defensible boundaries (notably the River Oughton corridor) and the areas of trees/woodland aligning the Site's southern boundary.
- 3.11 Accordingly, the Site continues to be assessed as making a weak contribution to Purpose (a) in the context of Hitchin.

Relationship Between Grey Belt Assessment and the Proposed Development

- 3.12 It is acknowledged that Grey Belt assessment must consider the Site in the context of the proposed development, not in isolation.
- 3.13 The proposed scheme:
- a. Concentrates built form toward the northern and central portions of the Site;
 - b. Provides substantial open space and landscape buffers to the south;
 - c. Retains and enhances structural vegetation; and
 - d. Establishes a defensible southern boundary aligned with the river corridor.

3.14 The form of development is therefore relevant because:

- a. It does not extend development southwards toward Hitchin;
- b. It maintains a clear physical and perceptual break between settlements;
- c. It reinforces containment rather than weakening it.

3.15 In this respect, the nature of the proposal directly informs and supports the Grey Belt conclusion. Furthermore, the embedded mitigation and development control measures can most readily be achieved within the current redline parameters.

Red Line Boundary Considerations

3.16 The current red line boundary has been assessed against Green Belt purposes. However, in response to the Officer's comment:

- a. The southern extent of development has been reviewed to ensure alignment with defensible physical features;
- b. Built development remains set back from the River Oughton corridor; and
- c. No encroachment into the wider open land south of the river is proposed.

3.17 The Grey Belt assessment confirms that the proposed built form does not alter the strategic separation between Hitchin and Ickleford.

3.18 There is no sound planning basis in relation to Grey Belt matters to amend the red line boundary. The existing red line defines a coherent and defensible planning unit, aligned with clear and permanent physical features, most notably the mature woodland and River Oughton corridor to the south and established development to the north, east and west.

3.19 The question under Purpose (a) is whether development would result in the unrestricted sprawl of Hitchin as a large built-up area, is a matter of strategic relationship, settlement morphology and containment, not minor adjustments to parcel geometry.

3.20 Altering the red line would not change the Site's physical and functional separation from Hitchin, would not remove the intervening river corridor, and would not alter the fact that the proposal consolidates development adjacent to Ickleford rather than extending Hitchin's urban envelope.

3.21 The scheme, as proposed, reinforces a clear and permanent southern boundary through substantial open space and landscape buffers, thereby maintaining Green Belt containment. In these circumstances, amendment of the red line would be artificial and would not materially affect the assessment under Purpose (a); that it makes, at most, a weak contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of Hitchin.

Conclusion on Purpose (a)

3.22 When assessed in the correct strategic context:

- a. The Site does not form part of the edge of Hitchin;
 - b. It does not prevent outward sprawl of Hitchin;
 - c. Development would not result in unrestricted expansion of a large built-up area;
 - d. The River Oughton corridor provides a strong and permanent boundary; and
 - e. The proposal reinforces containment rather than undermines it.
- 3.23 Accordingly, the Site remains correctly assessed as making a weak contribution to Purpose (a) and therefore falls within the definition of Grey Belt under the PPG 2025. The southern landscape buffer acts as a permanent boundary.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 This Technical Note has been prepared in response to the local planning authority's request for further clarification regarding the Grey Belt assessment under Purpose (a) of the Green Belt, specifically in relation to the Site's proximity to Hitchin as a large built-up area.
- 4.2 The original Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Appraisal concluded that the Site makes a weak to no contribution to Green Belt Purposes (a), (b) and (d), and therefore constitutes Grey Belt land under the 2025 *Planning Practice Guidance* (PPG). This Technical Note has revisited and expanded the assessment of Purpose (a) in light of Hitchin's status as a large built-up area.
- 4.3 Having undertaken that supplementary assessment, the following conclusions are reached:
- a. The Site does not adjoin Hitchin's settlement boundary and is physically separated from it by the River Oughton corridor, riparian vegetation, sports pitches, established development and localised topography;
 - b. The Site is functionally and physically related to Ickleford, not Hitchin, and does not form part of Hitchin's urban edge;
 - c. Development would not create outward expansion of Hitchin, nor would it result in incongruous or finger-like sprawl from the town;
 - d. The proposed layout reinforces containment by concentrating built form toward the northern and central parts of the Site and maintaining substantial open space and landscape buffers to the south; and
 - e. The River Oughton corridor provides a clear, permanent and defensible southern boundary to development.
- 4.4 In respect of the red line boundary, no amendment is necessary. The existing red line defines a coherent and defensible planning unit aligned with established physical features and settlement edges. Altering the boundary would not change the Site's physical or

functional separation from Hitchin, would not alter the strategic assessment under Purpose (a), and would not materially affect the Grey Belt conclusion.

4.5 When assessed in the correct strategic context, the Site:

- a. Does not form part of the edge of Hitchin;
- b. Does not prevent outward sprawl of Hitchin;
- c. Would not result in unrestricted expansion of a large built-up area; and
- d. Does not fundamentally undermine the performance of the remaining Green Belt.

4.6 Accordingly, the site continues to be properly assessed as making, at most, a weak contribution to Purpose (a), and therefore falls within the definition of Grey Belt under the PPG 2025. The conclusions of the submitted Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Appraisal therefore remain unchanged.