

31 Newton Road
Barton on Sea
New Milton
BH25 7AS

17 August 2025

Ben Glover
Senior Planning Officer
North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

Dear Mr Glover

Reference: 25/01708/OP Outline planning for Land opposite Heath Farm, Briary Lane, Royston

I write in connection with the above planning application. I have examined the plans and supporting technical documents, and I know the site well having lived in Royston for over 40 years, only recently moving away. I wish to object strongly to the development in this location, on the following grounds:

Housing Supply and Local Plan

The development site is not identified in the existing Local Plan for North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and is outside the settlement boundary identified in the plan. Royston is already contributing a significant number of dwellings towards the NHDC 5-year housing land supply. The development of this site would present a significant engineering challenge due to the constrained access, steep topography and the protective covenants in place (which are to be enforced), the site is therefore unable to contribute to the NHDC 5-year housing land supply. The application should also be refused for its problematic location; its negative impact and its failure to comply with the adopted local plan (NHDC Local Plan 2011-2031).

Landscape and Visual Impact

The reasons for refusal of the 2018 and 2020/21 planning applications, for landscape and visual impact still applies, as follows; the prominent position, the topography, the significant localised adverse impacts on the character of the area, the negative impact to visual receptors (which are unchanged), the marked change in the character of the immediate locality and wider valued landscape, such as Therfield Heath (SSSI). The same reason for refusal should therefore still apply to the current application. The proposals conflict with the *NPPF and Policy CGB1, SP5, SP12, NE1 and NE6 of the NHDC Local Plan*.

There has not been any consideration to the direct effects of the access proposals on the character of Echo Hill which would be harmed by the proposed access arrangements. The proposals would therefore be contrary to the general landscape protection policies of the *NPPF (including Paragraph 135), Policies NE1 of the adopted Local Plan*.

Living Conditions

The neighbouring properties (Number 25 and 23) of the house to be demolished (Number 24) and the proposed access road, will have their living standards significantly and detrimentally impacted during both the construction and following habitation of the development. NHDC failed to appropriately assess and address this issue during the last planning application. The proposals conflict with *Policies D3 of the adopted Local Plan*.

The elevated location of the development site in relation to the existing surrounding properties, is likely to give rise to existing residents being left with a sense of being overlooked, overshadowed and dominated by new development. This would detrimentally impact on reasonable expectations of residential amenity and privacy. The proposals would be contrary to the *NPPF and Policies D3 of the adopted Local Plan*.

Highways and Transport

The development site is fundamentally unsustainable due to the location of the site in relation to services, constrained access route to the local primary school, undeliverable proposed site access and constrained nature of the highway network including Echo Hill, Sun Hill, Coronation Avenue and Briary Lane. This conflicts with *paragraphs 108, 109 and 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy T1 of the Local Plan and local planning guidance of the Roads in Hertfordshire A Design Guide*.

The Transport Assessment by gta (June 2025) states the revised site access arrangement is supported by a safety audit by EC Road Safety. The safety audit however has not been consulted on with the approving authority of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Highways, prior to the final design. It is apparent the access has been contrived with little regard to existing users of Echo Hill, Sun Hill and Briary Lane.

No details have been submitted on gradients and proposed levels of the access road. The audit and the Transport Assessment concentrates on the safety of the presumed development “generated” pedestrians, without any consideration given to the following key existing users, the existing drop kerbs associated with the driveways of Numbers 25 and 23, the proximity to existing junctions, the blind/sharp bend leading directly from a steep gradient onto Echo Hill, the continued desire line of Echo Hill residents which could lead to a conflict with oncoming vehicles from the development, the existing blind bend on Sun Hill / Briary Lane, and the constrained single carriageway width along Sun Hill and Briary Lane. This should be considered for both during construction and future occupation.

The proposed access therefore conflicts with *paragraphs 108, 109 and 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy T1 of the Local Plan and local planning guidance of the Roads in Hertfordshire A Design Guide*.

The travel plan significantly underestimates the challenge associated with the steep topography of Echo Hill as the proposed cycle and pedestrian times have been determined using online route mapping software. The site will be heavily car reliant due to the lack of available public transport and the topographical challenges of the site. Based on these issues, the site must be judged to be contrary to *paragraphs 108, 109 and 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy T1 of the Local Plan*. The proposal is also contrary to local planning guidance of the *Roads in Hertfordshire A Design Guide*.

Ecology

The proposed development will have an ecological impact to at-risk species, as specified in the UK’s Biodiversity Action Plan and the RSPB Red list, and other protected species. Records of the protected species have been provided on relevant ecology recording websites, up to present day, and are absent from the ecology report.

The appraisal commissioned by the applicant has not undertaken full surveys prior to the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations submitted in support of the site at planning. The BNG calculations already show a deficit with the proposals unable to comply to the 10% BNG within the site and is reliant on offsite mitigation. This approach will detrimentally impact the neighbouring SSSI and the designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and therefore should not be accepted. A Therfield Heath mitigation strategy was produced in 2022, in support of the adopted Local Plan. However, this should not be seen as a replacement for failure to comply with BNG standards. The impact and

effectiveness of this mitigation study is also not yet fully determined. NHDC recommended ongoing monitoring to inform future site allocations and proposals.

The site being located directly adjacent to the SSSI means that greenspace provision on the site won't be effective. The NHDC 2022 Therfield Heath mitigation strategy references SANG (suitable alternative natural greenspace), but fails to note that this criteria was allocated for Thames Basin Heaths, for which SANG were originally devised, no new homes were allowed within 400m of any of the constituent SSSIs, because new residents would simply walk to the inevitably more attractive SSSI than to any on-site greenspace. The sheer scale and accessibility of Therfield Heath SSSI would still therefore be a major draw.

Paragraph 193b of the NPPF states “development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest”. The current proposals would therefore likely to have an adverse effect on Therfield Heath SSSI and neighbouring LWS.

Flood Risk and Water Quality

Due to the steep topography of the site, the overland flows generated from the access road presents a flood risk to the existing wider highway drainage network of Echo Hill, as the existing system is already struggling to cope with the surface runoff generated. The proposed strategic surface water attenuation and infiltration features are located at elevated levels directly adjacent to properties of Echo Hill. An assessment on overland flow routes has not been considered within the submitted Flood Risk Assessment. Should the infiltration features or attenuation features fail, or exceed their design criteria, this presents a potential flood risk to properties located directly downstream of the site. Due to the topography of the site the factor of safety used in the design of the attenuation features and infiltration device has been underestimated and are not in accordance with the *SuDS Manual (CIRIA 2015)*. Therefore, this is a conflict of the *NPPF and NE7g of the Local Plan*.

The development site lies above a Major Aquifer, this area is also classified as a “Source Protection Zone 1” due to the high risk to groundwater contamination, making the site far less suitable for development.

The existing sewerage treatment for Royston, is located in South Cambridgeshire District Council, operated and maintained by Anglian Water. The treatment works discharges into a local watercourse, which is associated with a chalk stream catchment, a nationally important and protected ecosystem. Residents have found evidence to show regular exceedance of the permit in place at the treatment works. There is little evidence provided by Anglian Water which shows they are competent, nationally, at determining the treatment works has sufficient capacity to accept additional flows and therefore significant concerns they are fit to approve any additional flows from development in the area. Further evidence must be supplied to reassure residents there is sufficient capacity and water quality will be kept to within the existing permit levels, without detriment to the watercourse and local chalk stream catchment.

EIA

It has not been made clear if an EIA screening Opinion has been requested or obtained for this application and no Environmental Statement (ES) has been submitted. NHDC has previously proceeded on the assumption that this is not EIA development. However, the 2018 Application was concluded to likely have a significant environmental impact; a view which was agreed by the then Planning Officer and the Planning Committee. The 2020/21 Application also had concerns raised regarding potential impact with an objection from the Conservators of Therfield Heath and Greens (Conservators), who is a key stakeholder for Therfield Heath (SSSI). The site was also refused at Planning Committee for its landscape and visual impact to Therfield Heath. Therefore, the site poses

a risk to the SSSI and should be subject to a detailed EIA Screening Opinion, with justification provided on any omission of an ES.

Health Capacity

There is no capacity within the local health providers to accommodate speculative development. A recent response from the Cambridge and Peterborough Integrated Care System, Property Service for Land Off Barkway Road and North of Flint Hall, Barkway Road, Royston (Application reference 21/00765/OP) states the *“GP practices show a significant health infrastructure deficit, and existing surgeries do not have capacity to absorb any additional residents”*. Therefore, this site and other speculative development in Royston and surrounding villages, are likely to significantly and adversely affect health services in the area. Whilst funding is mentioned as mitigation, the GP practices are all land locked and unable to provide the additional space and facilities needed. Suitable infrastructure to support any expansion, especially speculative, should be considered a significant risk to the health, care and wellbeing of existing residents of Royston. The site would therefore conflict with *Policy SP7 of the NHDC Local Plan and 55 to 58 of the NPPF*.

Agricultural Land

The development of the site will result in the loss of high-quality agricultural land.

Conclusion

To summarise, in considering all the above points, I strongly urge the Council to reject this damaging and unsustainable planning proposal in accordance with the NPPF and Local Plan. The significant impacts this site has outweigh any potential benefits and I urge the Council to consider the strong and well-reasoned objections from residents.

Yours sincerely

S M Verrall (Mrs)