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2025

Planning Statement

GA2, Land north of Great Ashby

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of
Picture Estates Limited

December 2025

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ON BEHALF OF PICTURE
ESTATES LIMITED

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Planning Statement
GA2, LAND NORTH OF GREAT ASHBY

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Iceni Projects Limited ('Iceni') on behalf of Picture Estates Limited (the 'Applicant') in support of a hybrid planning application, part full and part outline (the 'Application'), submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council ('NHDC') for the residential-led development of land at GA2, Land north of Great Ashby (the 'Site').
- 1.2 The Site (known as 'GA2') is allocated within the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, which was adopted in November 2022. The Site is allocated for approximately 600 dwellings, neighbourhood-level retail facilities, and education provision.
- 1.3 The allocation requires a masterplan to be agreed with NHDC before a planning application is submitted. On 29 November 2024 a Strategic Masterplan Framework was agreed with NHDC and adopted as a material planning consideration for the Site.
- 1.4 The development proposals are residential-led and seek to deliver up to 640 new homes, including 40% affordable housing. The proposals also seek to secure a site for a primary school, a community hall, new green infrastructure, allotments and new transport infrastructure, including a bus loop and access into the Site. In addition, the proposals reserve land for additional education use.
- 1.5 The Applicant seeks hybrid planning permission (part full and part outline) for the following development ('Proposed Development') at the Site:

"Hybrid application for a residential-led development comprising residential (Use Class C3), educational use (Use Class F1), a community hub (Use Class F2) with associated new internal roads, access, parking, cycling infrastructure, landscaping and other associated infrastructure.

Full application comprises the construction of vehicle access and an active travel link via Mendip Way, with associated landscaping and drainage works.

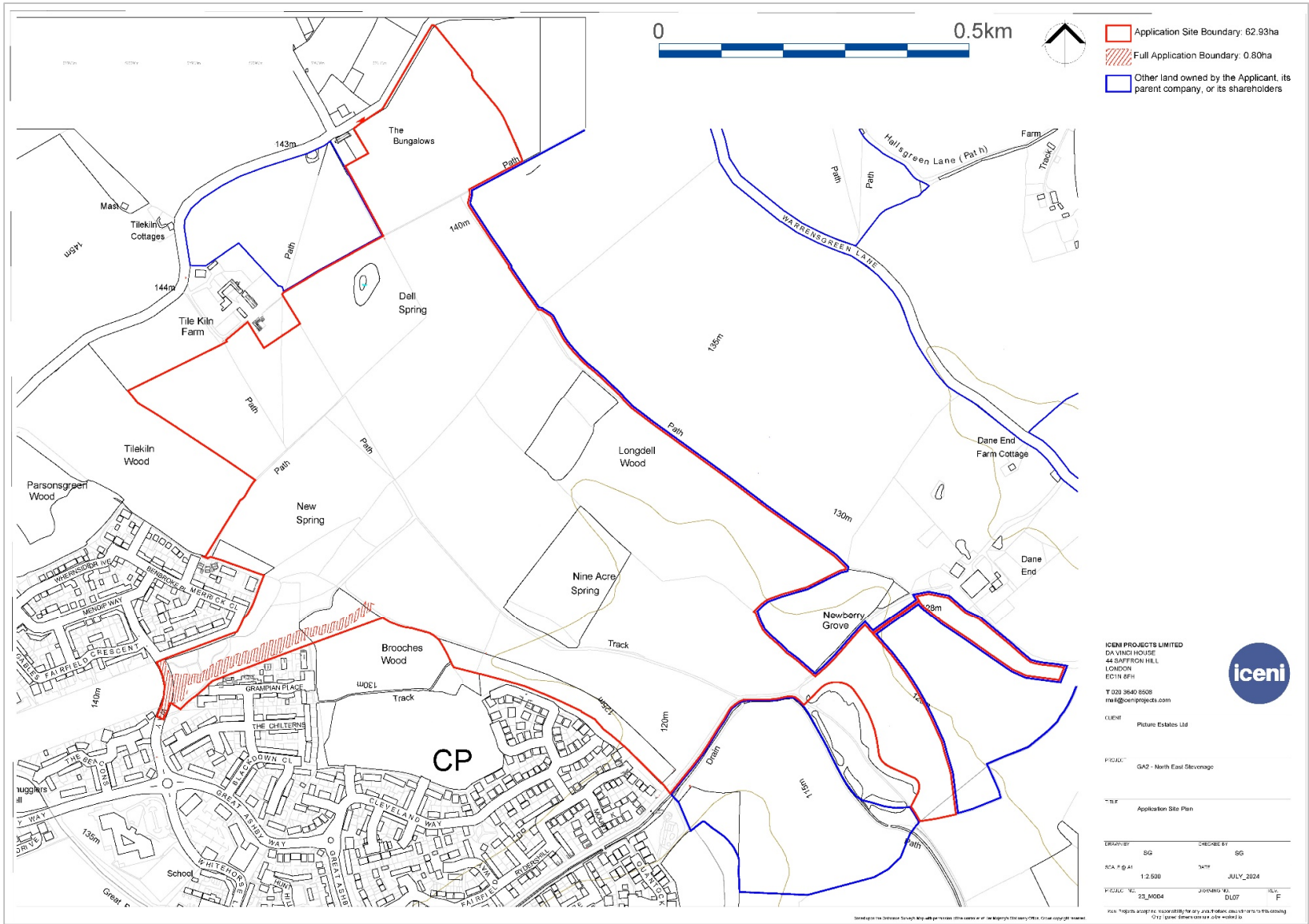
The outline application, for which all matters are reserved except for means of access, comprises the erection of up to 640 dwellings (Use Class C3), a site for a primary school, further land reserved for educational use (Use Class F1), a site for a community hub (Use Class F2), with associated infrastructure."

- 1.6 This Planning Statement covers the principal planning considerations raised by the Proposed Development and matters raised by the Council and other key stakeholders during the pre-application process. In our view, the Proposed Development wholly accords with the Development

Plan and planning permission should be granted. Importantly, the Proposed Development will deliver a number of significant public benefits and is overall of considerable societal gain.

- 1.7 The Planning Statement also summarises the findings of various supporting technical reports that accompany the hybrid planning application. This Planning Statement is to be read alongside the planning application documents. The documents to accompany the application is listed in the cover letter.

Figure 1.1: Planning Application Boundary



2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Site Description

- 2.1 The land within the continuous solid red line in **Figure 1.1** extends to 62.93 hectares (ha) and is wholly located within the NHDC administrative boundary. The Site is located to the northeast of Great Ashby, a civil parish which adjoins Stevenage to the northeast at Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid Reference (NGR) TL262278.
- 2.2 The Site comprises eight arable fields/parts of arable fields, two fields/parts of fields used for grazing, and two woodland blocks, as well as an area of recreational land located under the pylon and overhead powerline corridor, which leads east towards the Site from Mendip Way.
- 2.3 The majority of woodland areas within the Site have been identified as Ancient Woodland, including areas of woodland not identified on the national inventory, although these have been identified through recent field surveys.
- 2.4 There are a number of footpaths and bridleways running through, and adjacent to, the Site. The Site also accommodates a pylon corridor located within the central section, intersecting at an east west direction.
- 2.5 Vehicular access to the Site is currently taken via Warrensgreen Lane to the north and comprises a field access point, allowing for agricultural vehicles to enter.

Surrounding Area

- 2.6 The surrounding area is characterised by agricultural land use to the north, east and south of the Site, with residential land use located to the west. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the key areas surrounding the Site for ease of reference.
- 2.7 To the north of the Site are arable fields and small residential pockets. The Tilekiln Farm complex lies immediately beyond the northern boundary comprising three Grade II listed buildings. Two residential dwellings, known as 'The Bungalows', lie immediately beyond the northern boundary, on Warrensgreen Lane.
- 2.8 To the east of the Site are areas of woodland and arable fields. Danes End Farm lies immediately east of the south eastern boundary of the Site. There are two Local Wildlife Sites ('LWS') approximately 20m east, and 40m north east of the south eastern edge of the Site.

- 2.9 There are arable fields to the south and a parcel of Ancient Woodland situated approximately 100m south of the south western corner of the Site.
- 2.10 There are two areas of Ancient Woodland, known as Brooches Wood and Tilekiln Wood, and two LWS situated immediately beyond the Site's western boundary. Beyond the wooded areas lies the parish of Great Ashby, where the local area is predominantly residential and comprises low density dwellings, typically one to three storeys.
- 2.11 Further beyond the Site's northern, eastern and southern boundaries are arable fields, hedgerows and scattered areas of Ancient Woodland. Further beyond the Site's western boundary, lies the urban area of Stevenage.
- 2.12 The nearest residential properties are located immediately beyond the Site's northern boundary at Tile Kiln Farm.

Figure 2.1: Key areas near the Site

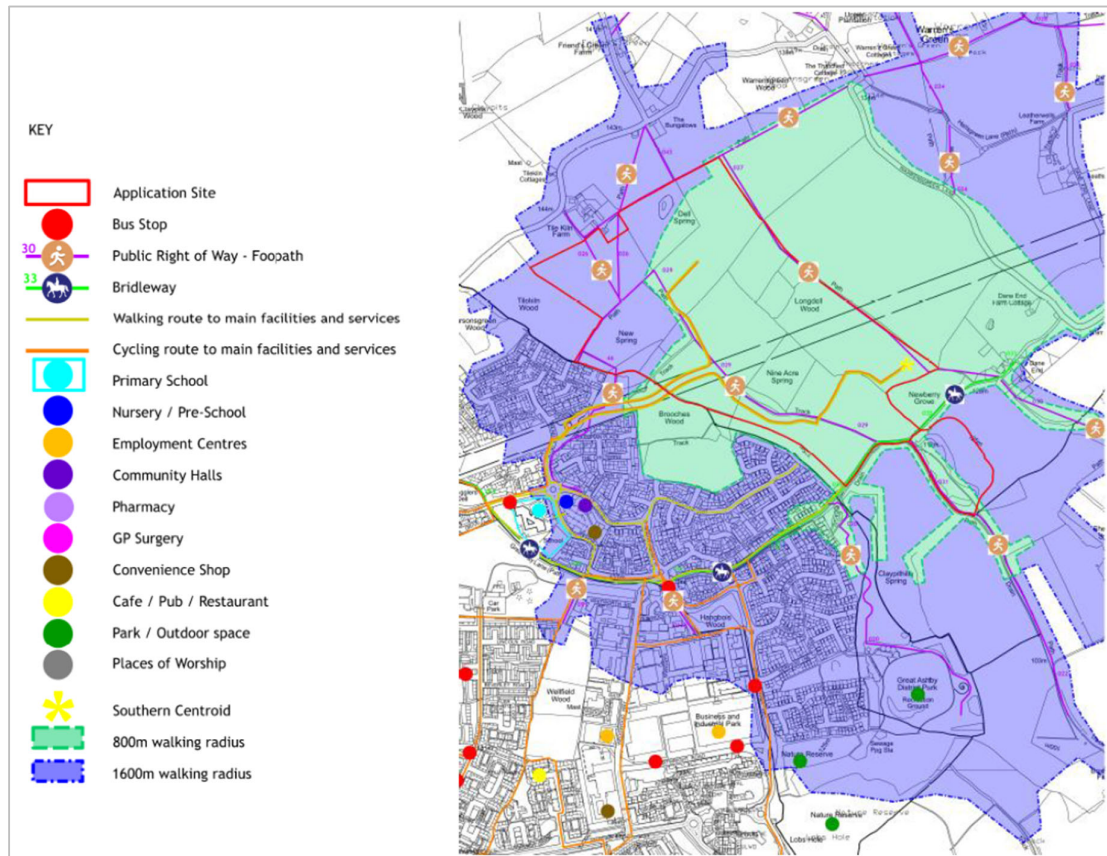


- 2.13 The nearest local amenities are within the Neighbourhood Centre in Great Ashby, which is approximately 5-10 minutes' walk from the Site. These amenities include:
- a supermarket;
 - a pharmacy;

-
- a day nursery and pre-school;
 - a community centre and community church; and
 - a dry cleaners.

2.14 **Figure 2.2** shows amenities that can be reached within 800m and 1600m walking distance, taken from a central point of the Site.

Figure 2.2 Amenities within Walking Distance of the Site



- 2.15 Stevenage town centre is reachable via bicycle, bus and car, offering a wide range of important services, entertainment and leisure opportunities. Stevenage train station is in the town centre, offering regular services to London King's Cross, Cambridge, Peterborough, Horsham, York, Moorgate and Edinburgh. There is also a bus interchange in the town centre, offering services to Luton, Bedford and Hitchin.
- 2.16 The Site is in a highly sustainable location for the use sought, with all the infrastructure required to support the Proposed Development in situ, including community infrastructure, pedestrian and cycle infrastructure and public transport connectivity.

Planning History

- 2.17 In respect of the Site, the applications listed in Table 2.1 are relevant.

Table 2.1 Planning History of the Site

Application Reference	Description	Decision
22/00329/SO	Screening Opinion: Proposed residential development of approximately 650 dwellings with access from Mendip Way	EIA required
23/00806/SCOP	Scoping Opinion: Residential development of up to 650 homes, access road, up to 500sqm retail, food and beverage and medical and social floorspace, up to 4ha of non Green Belt land to make provision for a 2FE primary and possible 4FE secondary school, parking infrastructure and associated works.	See Scoping Opinion in Environmental Statement Appendix 1.3.

Surrounding Sensitivities

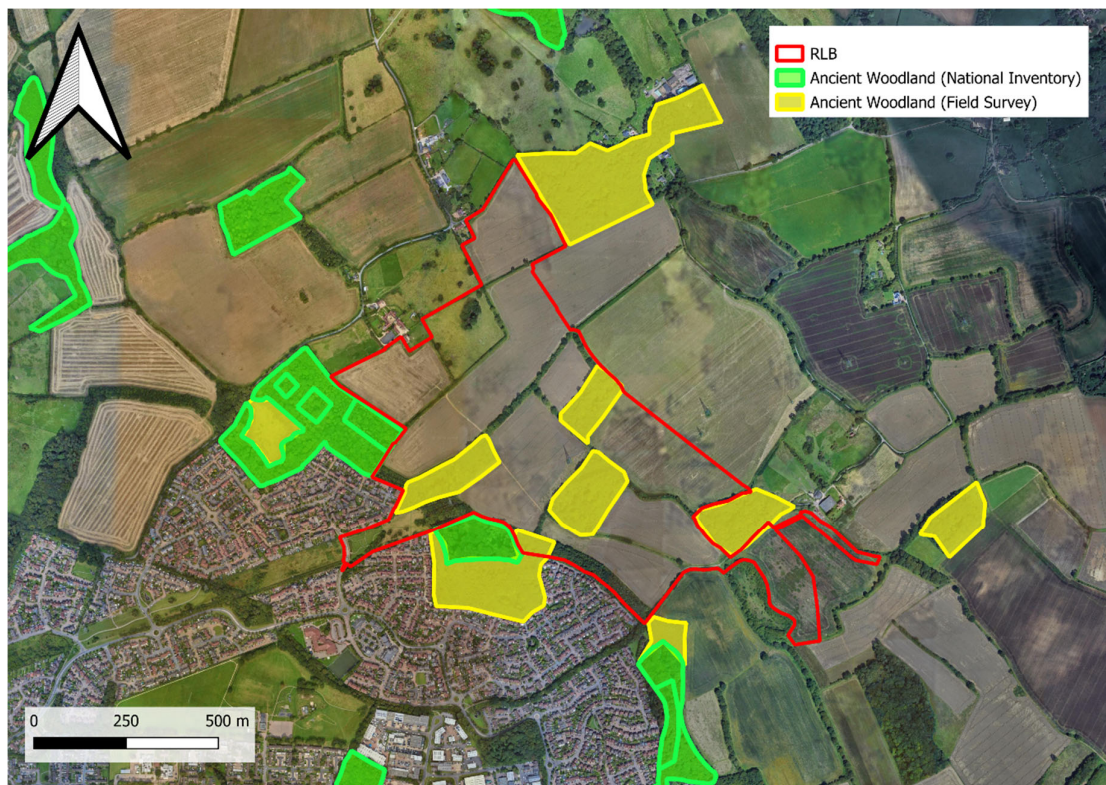
- 2.18 **Figure 2.4** shows the key environmental sensitivities in proximity to the Site.
- 2.19 The Site does not contain any heritage assets designated of being national importance, such as Listed Buildings or Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. There are no Scheduled Monuments within the Site. St Nicholas / Rectory Lane Conservation Area lies approximately 1.6m south east of the Site. There are no locally listed buildings within the Site.
- 2.20 The Tilekiln Farm complex lies beyond the northern boundary, comprising three Grade II listed buildings:
- Tilekiln Farm House, List Entry Number: 1102483
 - Barn to East of Farmhouse at Tilekiln Farm, List Entry Number: 1102485
 - Barn Group around Courtyard at Tilekiln Farm, List Entry Number: 1102484
- 2.21 The Dane End Farm complex lies beyond the south eastern boundary, comprising two Grade II listed buildings:
- Dane End Farmhouse, List Entry Number: 13747416
 - Granary at Dane End Farm, 4 Metres West of House, List Entry Number: 1102518
- 2.22 The Site does not fall within any statutory designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Natural Nature Reserves (NNR) or Local Nature Reserves (LNR).

2.23 Two non-statutory designations lie within the Site, New Spring Wood Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Brooches Wood LWS. There are further LWS in proximity as set out below:

- Tilekiln Wood LWS, immediately adjacent to the north west;
- Parsonsgreen Wood LWS, immediately adjacent to the north west;
- The Warren LWS, 35m to the south east; and
- Claypithills Spring Wood LWS, 60m to the south.

2.24 Each of these comprise areas of Ancient Woodland and semi-natural woodland. Field surveys undertaken on the Site have identified parcels of Ancient Woodland that have not been listed under the national inventory. These are shown below in **Figure 2.3**.

Figure 2.3 Ancient Woodland within and adjacent to the Site



2.25 An extensive programme of ecological surveys was carried out between 2023 and 2025. Surveys recorded activity from at least seven bat species. The Site supports an active badger population with multiple setts and foraging areas confirmed and hazel dormice were detected in boundary woodland and hedgerow habitats.

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- 2.26 Breeding and wintering birds typical of farmland and woodland environments were recorded, including skylark, yellowhammer, and other red- and amber-listed species of conservation concern. Surveys also identified limited potential for reptiles in grassland and field margins, and great crested newt suitability in nearby ponds within 500 metres of the site, though none were confirmed onsite. Invertebrate surveys found assemblages typical of mixed farmland and woodland habitats without rare or specialist species. Overall, the site supports a range of protected species associated mainly with its woodland edges, hedgerow network and open grassland.
- 2.27 In respect of the proposed Merrick Close access, a bat survey was requested by NHDC prior to determination. The existing 2023 bat survey data remains valid for impact assessment purposes. This is supported by a 2025 habitat update confirming no substantive habitat changes and described further in the appended letter prepared by CSA (Appendix A1). This letter states that additional surveys would not meaningfully alter the Environmental Statement conclusions or the comprehensive mitigation measures already embedded in the scheme.
- 2.28 The Site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is not considered to be at risk from fluvial or tidal flooding. The Site is underlain by Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation and Seaford Chalk Formation at bedrock, a principal aquifer, with superficial deposits of Head and Lowestoft Formation, a secondary (undifferentiated) aquifer. The Site is at Medium and High risk of groundwater flooding. The Site is located within a Source Protection Zone 3.
- 2.29 The majority of the Site is not at risk of surface water flooding, as shown in **Figure 2.5**. Surface water flow routes follow the Site's topography.
- 2.30 The Site is not located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). There are no AQMAs nearby.
- 2.31 A number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) intersect the Site and run adjacent to the boundaries, comprising mainly footpaths and some bridleways. These are shown on Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: PRoW on or adjacent to the Site

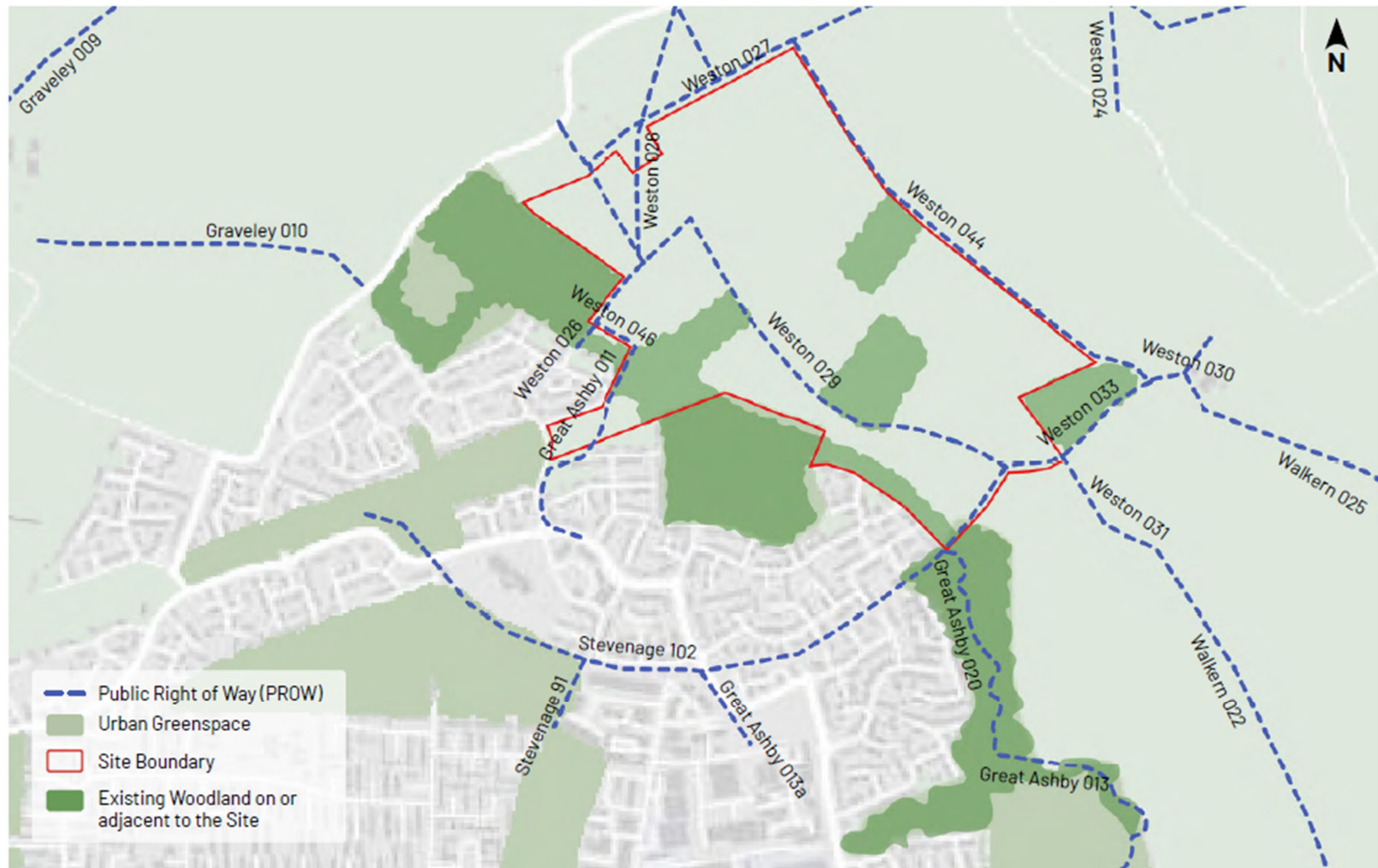
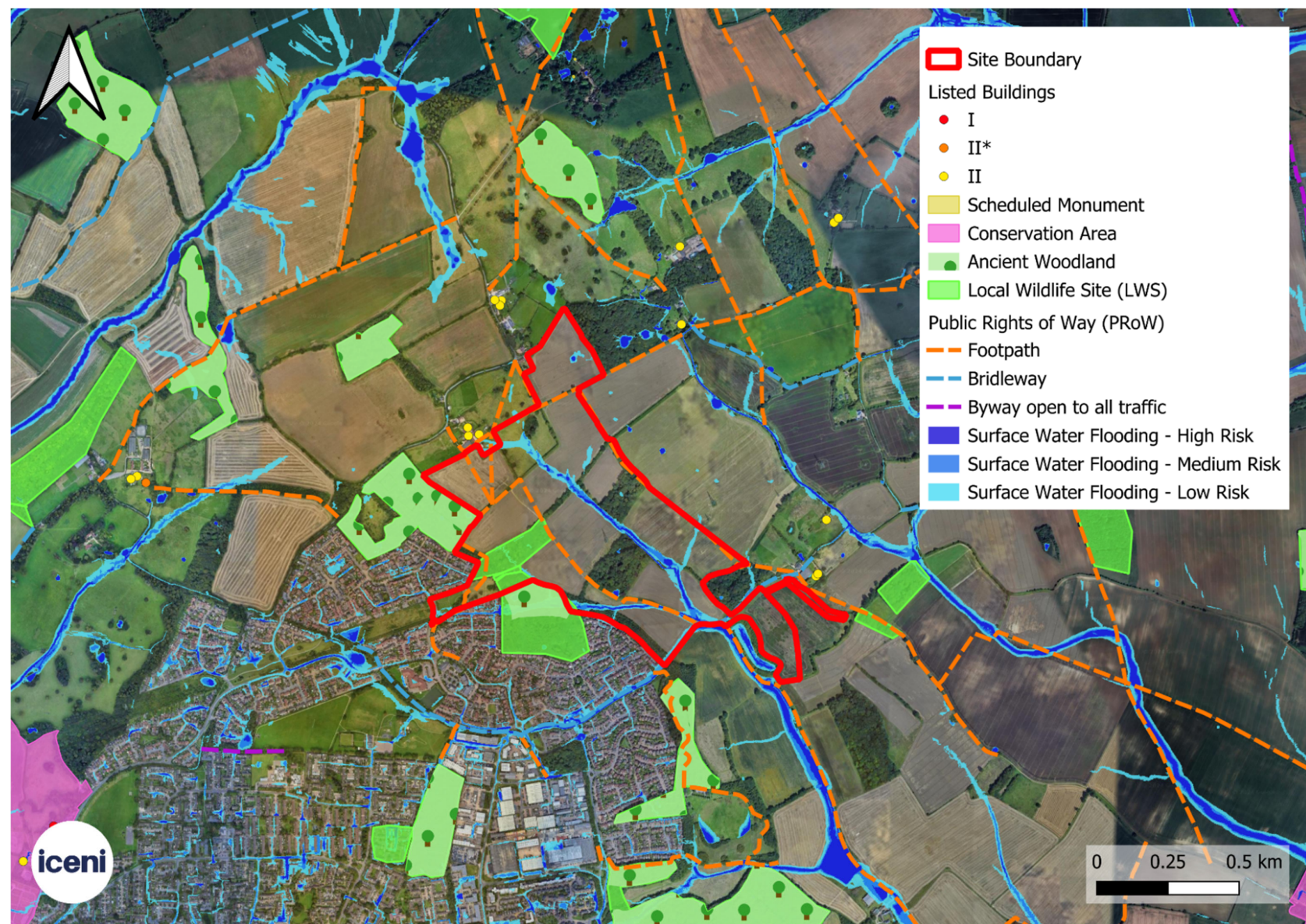


Figure 2.5 Environmental Sensitivities



3. CONSULTATION AND SCHEME DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 Crucial to the development and formation of the proposals that form this application has been the extensive and collaborative pre-application process undertaken. The Applicant has engaged regularly with the Council and other key stakeholders since 2023 under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA), established in accordance with paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This section seeks to describe that process and explain how this engagement and feedback received has informed the evolution of the Proposed Development.
- 3.2 The consultation programme undertaken by the Applicant has sought to engage with a wide range of groups and individuals to ensure they were informed and had the ability to input into or provide feedback on the emerging proposals.
- 3.3 This approach is consistent with the national policy requirement for early engagement which has the significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.
- 3.4 The Applicant has held a significant number of pre-application meetings. It is this transparent and collaborative consultation that the Applicant believes has driven the positive progression of the proposals.
- 3.5 Alongside the pre-application process, a programme of consultation with the public has taken form. A consultation website¹ has been live throughout the design process. This website includes a summary of the key principles of the development, the proposals and a contact form. A public consultation event (in-person) was held on 23 May 2024 as a forum for discussing the proposals. A further meeting was held with two Council members representing the Great Ashby community in November 2025. The feedback from this session is summarised in the Statement of Community Involvement submitted with the application.
- 3.6 A summary of key events during the consultation process is provided in **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1 Summary of Consultation

Date	Event	Summary
March 2023	Planning Performance Agreement (PPA)	A PPA was put in place in March 2023.

¹ <https://shapingga2.co.uk/>

March 2024	Draft Strategic Masterplan Framework presented to the Council Project Board	The Council Project Board recognised the work undertaken to that date as an appropriate basis for public consultation and recognised that further refinement of the proposal would be required.
23 May 2024	Public Consultation	Invites were sent to local councillors, stakeholders and residents in the local area. The event was attended by around 190 visitors and 156 feedback forms and email comments were received. Many of the comments made by the community were related to the principle of development, and many had not been aware that the Site had been allocated for residential developments. Concerns were expressed in relation to the lack of medical facilities in the local area and the difficulties experienced in booking an appointment with a doctor or a dentist. Comments were also raised in relation to the local highway network and queries on the proposed access design. The design team explained that the Proposed Development was designed to maximise active and public travel, and that the Highways Authority were consulted at every stage of the design process.
June 2024	Great Ashby Community Council (GACC)	The design team met with members of the GACC to discuss the proposals and answer questions. Key concerns raised by GACC related to the local highways capacity and the lack of local services and facilities such as doctors and hospital spaces. The design team shared the findings of preliminary highways and transport assessments with GACC and continued to respond to any queries raised ahead of the submission of the planning application. The design team also noted that the use of the proposed Community Facility was not fixed, and that it could be used as a medical centre, should the local NHS Trust deem it a suitable, necessary, and viable location.
June 2024	Herts and Middlesex Badger Group	The design team, including the Ecologist, met with the Badger Group to discuss the proposals. The Badger Group made some suggestions as to how the scheme could be amended to benefit badgers better. The design team took their comments into consideration, including additional areas of wildflower grass across the wider development, to benefit badger habitats. A second meeting was held with the Badger Group to discuss the proposals in May 2025.
September 2024	NHDC feedback on Masterplan Draft	The Council project team provided feedback on a full written draft of the Strategic Masterplan Framework at the beginning of September 2024.
9 September 2024-	Pre-application meetings	An inception meeting was held with NHDC Officers on 9 September 2024.

		25 Sept 2024 – Meeting in relation to Illustrative Layouts and Design Cameos: A workshop was held to discuss the key layout principles, as well as principles in relation to the layout of housing within the various character areas. The Council set out their vision for denser, more formally laid out development within the centre of the Site, and looser development on the outskirts. The Community Hub was discussed and subsequently relocated, as was the play area and allotments.
19 November 2024	Strategic Masterplan Presentation to Cabinet	The Strategic Masterplan Framework for the Site was presented to the Cabinet on 19 November 2024. The Cabinet recommended the approval of the Strategic Masterplan Framework for the Site to Full Council.
29 November 2024	Strategic Masterplan Presentation to Full Council	The Strategic Masterplan Framework was presented to Full Council on 29 November 2024, where it was approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the Site.

GA2 Strategic Masterplan

- 3.7 To accord with the policy requirements of the Site allocation, a comprehensive and deliverable Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation was prepared and agreed between the Applicant and NHDC.
- 3.8 The Applicant has undertaken extensive consultation with the Council, to inform the preparation of a Strategic Masterplan for the Site. Production of the Strategic Masterplan has followed the key stages as set out in the Council's approved masterplanning guidance. A summary is provided in **Table 3.1**.
- 3.9 A multi-disciplinary evidence base was prepared to inform the proposals. This evidence base included matters such as ecology, landscape, heritage and transport and access. Key spatial options were considered and tested for the Strategic Masterplan, including (but not limited to) options for the location of:
- Land for the school and land reserved for education provision;
 - Allotments;
 - Drainage basins;
 - The bus route / internal road loop; and

-
- The access corridor from Mendip Way.

3.10 Following consultation and Design Review, the Applicant and the Council worked collaboratively to further refine the Strategic Masterplan and address the issues raised. The key changes implemented are summarised below:

- Bringing the proposed allotments into the centre of the site to create a community heart alongside the school, community hub and Dell Spring;
- Changing the route of the proposed emergency access so it does not pass through the sensitive area at Dell Spring;
- Increasing the set-back / buffer between the proposed edge of the development and the listed buildings at Tilekiln Farm;
- Removing proposed housing to the south of Nine Acre Spring woods and replacing this with additional green infrastructure;
- Rationalising and realigning the transport infrastructure in the access corridor to separate the pedestrian and cycle route from the highway and minimise impacts on surrounding habitat to the best possible degree;
- Amending and simplifying the suite of frameworks, particularly those dealing with access and movement to respond to Council and Design Review Panel (DRP) comments, in particular reserving greater discretion around future street structure and design beyond the access corridor and initial north-west to south-east axis;
- Identifying how future development might address the standards in the Council's recently adopted Sustainability SPD; and
- Establishing a complementary programme between the masterplan and subsequent design development of the planning application to ensure the Masterplan could be evolved to capture all the key issues and could simultaneously inform the planning application scheme.

3.11 The development proposals are in compliance with the GA2 Strategic Masterplan Part 2: Design Framework, that was presented to councillors and endorsed on 29 November 2024.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Overview

- 4.1 The Application is a hybrid planning application with part being applied for in full (the 'Full Component') and part being applied for in outline (the 'Outline Component'). The Applicant is seeking full permission for access into the Site from Mendip Way and associated landscaping and drainage works. Outline planning permission is sought for all other matters, except for means of access.

- 4.2 This planning application seeks hybrid planning permission for the following:

"Hybrid application for a residential-led development comprising residential (Use Class C3), educational use (Use Class F1), a community hub (Use Class F2) with associated new internal roads, access, parking, cycling infrastructure, landscaping and other associated infrastructure.

Full application comprises the construction of vehicle access and an active travel link via Mendip Way, with associated landscaping and drainage works.

The outline application, for which all matters are reserved except for means of access, comprises the erection of up to 640 dwellings (Use Class C3), a site for a primary school, further land reserved for educational use (Use Class F1), a site for a community hub (Use Class F2), with associated infrastructure."

- 4.4 The drawings submitted for approval are listed in **Table 4.1**. Further information and illustrative figures to aid understanding of the proposals are provided within the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

Table 4.1 Plans Submitted for Approval

Title	Drawing Reference	Revision
Application Boundary Plan		
Application Site Plan	DL07	F
Outline Component - Parameter Plans		
Developable Area	DL19	B
Access	DL27	B
Building Heights	DL21	B
Outline Component – Unreserved: Means of Access		
Merrick Close	DL05	E

Emergency Access Lane	19244-ASHB-5-119	D
Full Component - Drawings		
Proposed Access Road Sections	19244-ASHB-5-SK009	B/C (2 sheets)
Access off Mendip Way: Planting Plan	DL50-1	B
Mendip Way – Means of Access	19244-ASHB-5-SK005	G
Mendip Way – Proposed Refuse Tracking	19244-ASHB-5-SK012	-
Mendip Way – Proposed Bus Tracking	19244-ASHB-5-SK013	-
Mendip Way – Gully Catchment Plan	19244-ASHB-5-SK014	A

Full Component

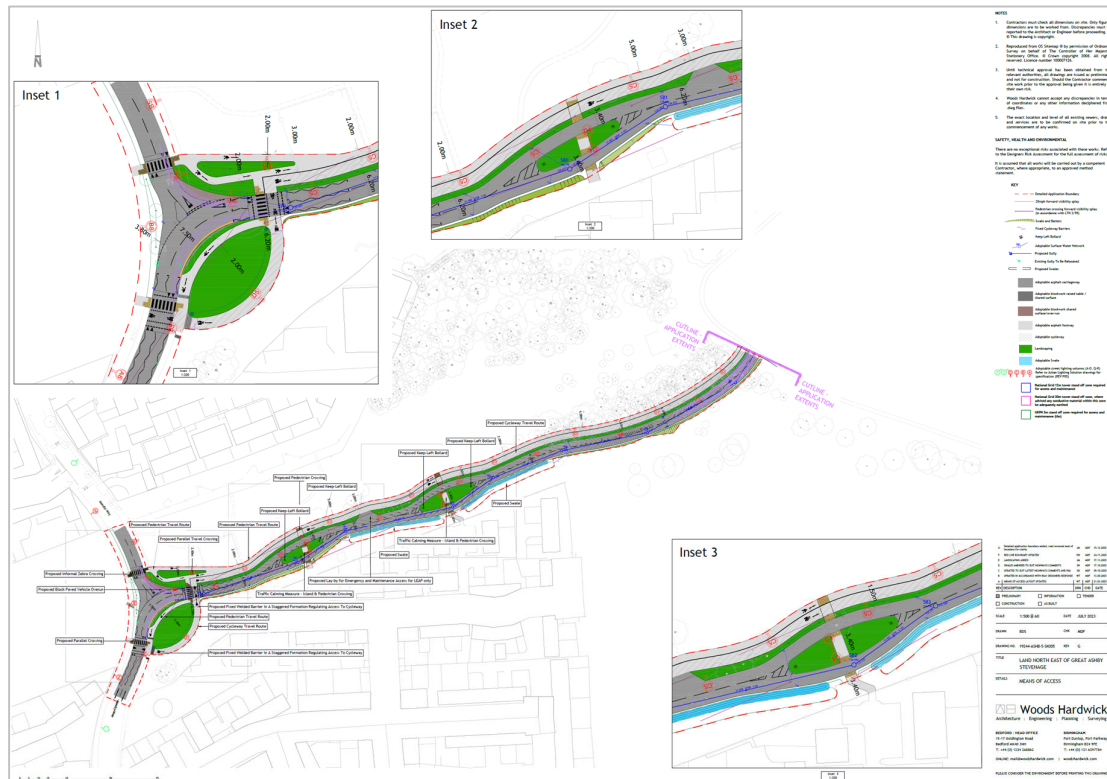
Overview

- 4.5 The full component comprises a primary access point from Mendip Way. The full component also comprises landscaping alongside the access road and active travel route off Mendip Way, including SuDS.

Site Access off Mendip Way

- 4.6 Vehicular access to the Site will be provided in the form of a priority junction from Mendip Way. The carriageway width will be set at 6.2m, which will increase to 7.5m on the junction bend. This width would be appropriate to accommodate bus services. Carriageway widths on the Site will be designed in accordance with guidance contained in the Herts Design Guide and HCC guidance obtained through scoping. It is proposed that the new access road would become a major arm extension of Mendip Way, changing priority on the junction for the northern section of Mendip Way, which would become a minor arm of the proposed junction.
- 4.7 The road will be designed to have a 20mph speed limit and will include traffic calming measures to keep speeds low.

Figure 4.1: Means of Access – Mendip Way



- 4.8 The new junction will connect to an access corridor, which will lead eastwards, under the pylon corridor and into the centre of the Site. This access point will also be utilised by cyclists and pedestrians on designated footpaths and cycle lines. The access will be constructed with a 3.0m cycleway and 2.0m footway on the northern side of the spine road, which will tie into the existing provision on Mendip Way to the west of the Site.
- 4.9 The access corridor would require the removal of the existing play area at Mendip Way. However, as shown on the Illustrative Masterplan and in the illustrative proposal for Mendip Way Park, a new Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) will be located west of Mendip Way, south of Cromdale Walk and north of the new road.
- 4.10 The route of the street has been designed to avoid the pylons and their associated off-sets and the areas of Ancient Woodland. The street does encroach into the 15m buffer to the Ancient Woodland along its central section, however, the adjoining area of woodland is already compromised due to the overhead powerlines which cross it, and the need for maintenance access for these powerlines.
- 4.11 Areas of existing woodland (not Ancient) would require removal under the pylon corridor in order to create the access corridor. Field surveys have determined that this woodland is not Ancient Woodland and much of it is already heavily managed to allow maintenance of the overhead power lines.

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- 4.12 A minor diversion of PRow Footpath 011² is required as described further under 'Framework Plans'.

Landscaping at Mendip Gateway Park – Part Full, and Part Outline Application

- 4.13 The access road at Mendip Way will be set within a newly created parkland setting, known as Mendip Gateway Park. The layout of the Park is an outline matter and shown illustratively (Illustrative Proposal for Mendip Way Park 23_M004_DL67_Rev B), and only the swales serving the access road and the landscaping around the access road are submitted in detail (Access off Mendip Way: Planting Plan 23-M004-DL50).
- 4.14 A key feature of the design is the incorporation of sustainable drainage measures, including swales running parallel to the road, which are linked to a broader network of landscaped swales and attenuation basins across the Site. These features will manage surface water runoff in accordance with the SuDS hierarchy, using infiltration where possible and conveying excess flows through vegetated channels and basins that discharge at greenfield rates.
- 4.15 The swales and bunds are to be planted with native thicket and meadow species to provide ecological enhancement, visual screening and a naturalistic transition between the built edge and adjoining woodland. Complementary landscaping will frame Mendip Gateway Park and reinforce its parkland character while maintaining clear separation between pedestrian, cycle, and vehicular routes.
- 4.16 Together, these components establish a multifunctional corridor that integrates movement, drainage, biodiversity, and amenity into a coherent and sustainable design around Mendip Way.

Outline Component

Overview

- 4.17 The outline component will be controlled by the three parameter plans, the means of access drawings, the description of development, planning conditions and legal obligations.
- 4.18 Article 5(1) of the DMPO explains that *"where an application is made to the local planning authority for outline planning permission, the authority may grant permission subject to a condition specifying reserved matters for the authority's subsequent approval"*.
- 4.19 In accordance with Article 2(1) DMPO, the following matters can be reserved for future approval:

² Footpath Great Ashby 011 connects from Great Ashby District Centre across the pylon/proposed access corridor to the south western edge of the Site.

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- ‘Appearance’ – the aspects of a building or place within the development which determine the visual impression the building or place makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.
 - ‘Layout’ – the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces within the development are provided, situated and orientated in relation to each other and to buildings and spaces outside the development.
 - ‘Scale’ – the height, width and length of each building proposed within the development in relation to its surroundings.
 - ‘Landscaping’ - the detailed treatment of the land within the outline area to enhance or protect the amenities of the outline development, including screening and tree planting

4.20 Subsequent reserved matters will be submitted in due course, providing this detail and pursuant to the Parameter Plans.

Unreserved matters

4.21 Means of access is unreserved.

Active Travel Connection off Merrick Close

4.22 An active travel access point will be located off Merrick Close at the existing PRoW access point to the Site.

4.23 The existing PRoW would be widened from 2m to 3m to allow a footpath and a cycleway to be located here. The path would be resurfaced with permeable asphalt laid on a no-dig base to protect nearby tree routes within the adjacent Ancient Woodland. A new 1.2m high fence would be installed to provide safety and delineation.

4.24 The remaining alignment of the route further east will be refined through subsequent reserved matters applications to ensure it ties into the wider active travel and green infrastructure network across the Site.

Emergency Access off Warrensgreen Lane

4.25 The emergency access point will be located off Warrensgreen Lane and will be controlled with a gate or bollards to ensure its use is restricted to emergencies. The emergency access provides a secure alternative route for emergency vehicles coming from the fire stations in Stevenage or Baldock in case of blockage of the main access corridor or other congestion issues elsewhere in the Stevenage road network.

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- 4.26 The emergency access point will be 3m wide with an additional 0.5m clearance on either side to accommodate the overhang of emergency vehicles. It will be surfaced with either reinforced grass or hogg-in-type material laid over a suitable base.
- 4.27 The emergency access point will link to the north of the Site, near the primary school. It will also be usable by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

Parameter Plans

PP1: Developable Areas

- 4.28 The location and developable area within the Site and the general approach to layout, open space provision, landscaping and amenity space are shown on this plan. The Site will provide a built development area of 25.5ha along with 36.63ha of green infrastructure.

PP2: Access

- 4.29 The Site will incorporate a network of access points that will connect the new neighbourhood to the surrounding countryside and the existing Great Ashby community. There will be ten access points via public footpath and two via bridleway. A further public footpath will be upgraded to a foot and cycle way. Access off Mendip Way will connect into the wider development from the western end of the detailed access link.

PP3: Building Heights

- 4.30 Maximum parameters for the future development are proposed to ensure that the likely nature and impact of development within these areas is understood and considered as part of this application.
- 4.31 The Proposed Development will range in height from 2 to 3 storeys. Buildings of up to 3 storeys will be clustered within the north western section of the Site. Buildings of up to 2 storeys will be located along sensitive boundaries within the north, south east, south and south west of the Site. Buildings of up to 2.5 storeys (2 storeys plus accommodation in loft/roof) will be located within the northern, eastern and southern sections of the Site.
- 4.32 Heights of the residential zones are clustered in the centre of the development and in the north western section of the Site, adjacent to the existing residential development in Great Ashby.
- 4.33 There is a stepping down of heights towards sensitive boundaries to the north, east and south of the Site.

Framework Plans

4.34 The Parameter Plans are supported by a series of 13 Framework Plans which develop the principles and objectives and set out further detail for the land use and open space elements. These plans are indicative and informative only with the Application.

4.35 The 13 Framework Plans for information only are:

- Land Use;
- Drainage;
- Habitats and Ecology;
- Ecology Mitigation;
- Phasing;
- Public Right of Way;
- Building Typology;
- Vehicular Movement;
- Active Travel;
- Public Transport;
- Green Infrastructure;
- Recreational Routes; and
- Built Form.

Land Use Framework Plan

4.36 The Land Use Plan shows the key elements of the Proposed Development:

- 21.30ha of residential development land;
- A 2.1ha site for a primary school and a further 1.9ha of reserved land for educational uses;
- A 0.2ha site for a Community Hall;
- 36.63ha of green infrastructure, including the retained woodland, hedgerows, trees and Dell Spring, as well as large new areas of open space and planting; and

-
- Allotments: 0.43ha.
- 4.37 Up to 640 residential dwellings are proposed (Use Class C3), including 40% affordable housing and 6 self-build plots. The total proposed residential area extends to 21.30ha. Residential areas are present throughout the development.
- 4.38 The Proposed Development would provide a site for a primary school, as well as additional land for education use (Use Class F.1). The 2.1ha site would accommodate a 2FE primary school. There is additional land reserved for education use, which extends to 1.9ha. The proposed primary school land, as well as the additional land reserved for education use, are both situated within the north east of the Site, adjacent to Dell Spring.
- 4.39 The Proposed Development would provide a community hub (Use Class F.2) immediately west of the proposed primary school, in the north eastern area of the Site, adjacent to Dell Spring. The community hub would extend up to 0.2ha (2,000sqm equivalent) and would be for flexible community use. The exact use of the community hub will be determined through future reserved matters applications.

Drainage Framework Plan

- 4.40 This Framework Plan shows an existing drainage basin and ditch along the southern boundary which currently collects runoff from the surrounding agricultural land. This existing system will be retained and integrated into the proposed drainage strategy.
- 4.41 The proposals will introduce a network of SuDS including swales, permeable paving and new attenuation basins to manage surface water onsite. The system has been designed with a 40% climate change allowance.

Habitats and Ecology Framework Plan

- 4.42 This Framework Plan shows how the Site will include a variety of new and enhanced habitats to support biodiversity and community use. These include the creation of traditional orchards as part of the green infrastructure strategy, designed to provide both wildlife habitat and amenity value. Allotments and community gardens are proposed to encourage local food production and ecological engagement while also delivering foraging and nesting opportunities for species such as pollinators, birds, and small mammals.
- 4.43 Ponds and wetland features will form part of the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS), designed with naturalistic profiles and native planting to create aquatic and marginal habitats suitable for amphibians, invertebrates, and birds. Areas of mixed native scrub will be established to provide shelter, nesting, and foraging resources, especially along green corridors linking woodland areas.

4.44 Children's play areas and open spaces will be integrated within this green network, designed with biodiversity-friendly planting and managed grassland edges to support informal recreation while retaining ecological value. Collectively, these habitats contribute to the overall Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for the scheme and are to be managed under the long-term Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) with an outline LEMP submitted with the application.

4.45 The Proposed Development will achieve in excess of 10% biodiversity net gain.

Ecology Mitigation Strategy Framework Plan

4.46 Ecological mitigation and enhancement measures are included to protect and enhance biodiversity within and around the Site. These include strategic habitat creation such as new woodland, grassland and wetland habitats to strengthen connectivity between Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Sites.

4.47 A 15m buffer will be implemented around all Ancient Woodland. There will be a small incursion into the 15m buffer to the Ancient Woodland along the central section of the access corridor. However, this area of woodland is already compromised as maintenance access to the overhead power lines is taken here.

4.48 Further incursions into the 15m Ancient Woodland buffer are expected between Longdell Wood and Nine Acre Spring, where the 15m buffers of these woods overlap, and where the proposed bus loop will need to lead through in order to provide access to the whole Site. However, in this area, the spine street is proposed to be reduced in width to a single lane, in order to minimise incursion into the buffer. This incursion also occurs below the powerlines, where the Ancient Woodland is already managed to avoid conflict with the overhead lines.

4.49 Habitat corridors are incorporated into the layout to maintain ecological linkages for species such as bats, badgers, and dormice, with mammal tunnels or underpasses provided beneath access roads to facilitate safe wildlife movement. Bat 'hop-over' features are proposed at key crossing points to maintain bat flight lines where vegetation removal or lighting could otherwise cause disruption. Protective fencing will be installed around ancient woodland and retained trees to prevent encroachment or damage during construction, maintaining buffer zones typically of 15 metres or more. Together, these measures are supported by a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) and a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) to ensure their long-term effectiveness and deliver biodiversity net gain across the site.

Phasing Framework Plan

4.50 This plan provides an indicative strategy to guide the delivery of the Proposed Development in broadly three phases. This approach aims to ensure that each phase functions as a comprehensive, sustainable and well-connected place in its own right.

4.51 Key elements planned for delivery across the phases include:

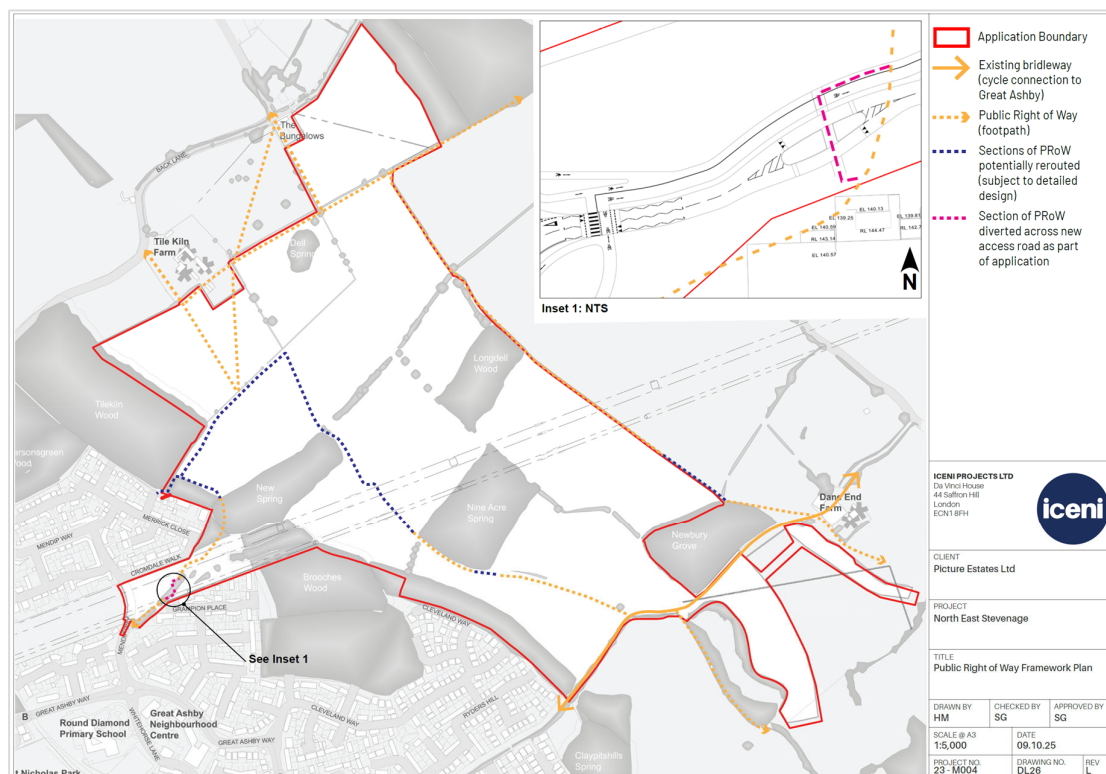
- Phase 1: Access, Infrastructure and Northern Housing Core
 - Phase 1 establishes the key access, infrastructure and initial housing elements of the Proposed Development. This includes construction of the main access road into the Site off Mendip Way and the delivery of the serviced primary school (2.1ha). While the school site will be prepared during this phase, the school building itself may be constructed at a later stage, depending on need.
 - Residential development will begin along the initial section of the spine street in the northern part of the Site, with potential locations for self-build plots also identified. This phase will also deliver key drainage infrastructure, including the western drainage basin and the swales and basins located in the east and south of the Site, which are required to serve the Community Hub area.
 - The bus route is intended to be implemented in Phase 1, so as to serve the school site as it is brought into occupation and utilise a temporary turning area before exiting the Site. Habitat creation and new woodland planting as part of the BNG strategy will commence during the first planting season following the start of construction, early in Phase 1.
- Phase 2: Northwest and Southwest Housing, Community Facilities
 - Phase 2 will deliver key community infrastructure alongside new residential areas. This phase will bring forward housing development in both the northwest and southwest parts of the Site. It will also include the creation of allotments at Dell Spring. In addition, the Community Hall will be delivered during this phase.
- Phase 3: Completion
 - Phase 3 will complete the residential development and associated supporting infrastructure. The remaining housing and public open spaces across the Site will be delivered during this phase. The spine street will also be completed, enabling the implementation of the full looped bus route, which will operate through the Site in a clockwise direction.

Public Right of Way Framework Plan

- 4.52 The Site contains and adjoins several existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and a bridleway. These proposals will aim to retain and enhance all existing routes, integrating them within the new green infrastructure network.

- 4.53 These PRow will be improved with landscaping, planting and natural surveillance from adjacent homes to make them feel secure and welcoming. Where necessary, new sections or diversions will be created to maintain connectivity and links to Great Ashby and nearby villages will be strengthened.
- 4.54 A minor diversion of PRow Footpath 011 is required to accommodate the design of the proposed access road, which intersects a small section of the existing footpath. The diversion involves a slight realignment of the path and the provision of appropriate crossings. The location of Footpath 011 is shown on Figure 2.4. The proposed footpath diversion plan is shown on Figure 4.2.
- 4.55 The diversion is necessary to enable the development and will be progressed under the appropriate statutory route following the grant of planning permission.

Figure 4.2: Public Right of Way (including diversion of Footpath 011)



Building Typology Framework Plan

- 4.56 The proposals include a varied mix of building typologies to create distinct character areas and a balanced community. The housing will comprise terraced, semi-detached and detached homes, alongside some low-rise apartment buildings in key locations such as near local centres or along mains streets. The layout is designed to reflect a transition from higher-density areas near community hubs and main routes to lower-density housing along the rural edges adjoining open countryside and woodland.

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- 4.57 Terraces and apartments will provide a more urban feel and efficient use of land, supporting affordability and active frontages, while detached and semi-detached homes will form softer, more spacious edges that respond to the rural landscape setting. This mix will help deliver housing choice and visual diversity.

Access and Movement Framework Plan

- 4.58 Three Framework Plans set out the primary access points into the Site and indicatively illustrate the configuration of the road network proposed on site and where key transport nodes are located. They show the key movement corridors and networks across the Site with the final form of the internal access routes and intra-site connections to be determined under subsequent approvals.

Vehicular Movement Framework Plan

- Primary street as a loop through centre of the Site, connecting to primary access point in west of the Site off Mendip Way
- Emergency access route proposed within the northwest corner of the Site, connecting to Warrensgreen Lane
- Pedestrians, cyclists and public transport prioritised over private car use

Active Travel Framework Plan

- Retention of PRowS
- New routes proposed to connect to existing PRowS
- Pedestrians, cyclists and public transport prioritised over private car use

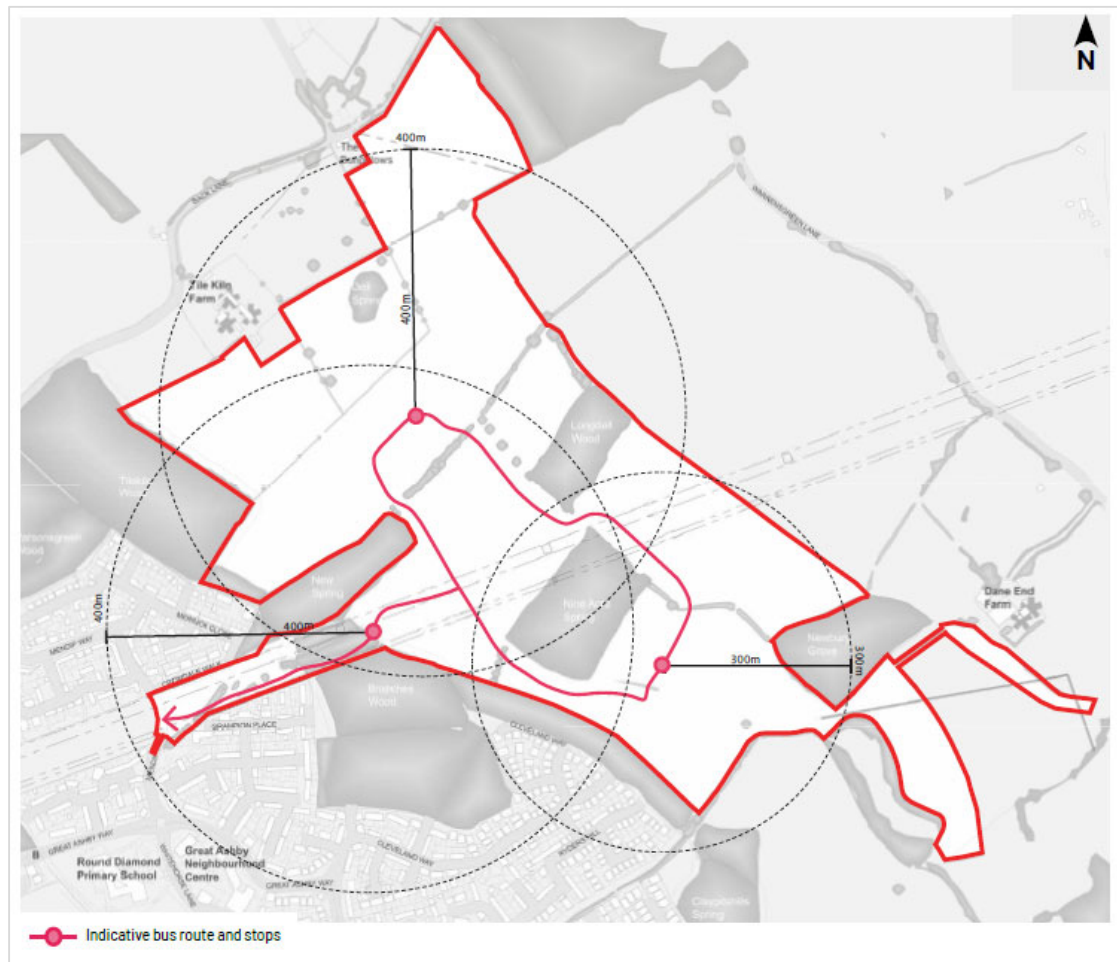
Public Transport Framework Plan

- A dedicated bus loop will connect directly to the main access of Mendip Way. This will enable buses to circulate efficiently through the Site and re-join the wider Great Ashby and Stevenage network without requiring turning manoeuvres.
- It is proposed to reroute the SB7 bus service to enter the Site after travelling eastbound along Mendip Way and then loop around the internal spine road before exiting the Site. The new bus service will be 'SB12' and will be provided on every half an hour basis to provide new direct links to Lister Hospital, Stevenage Old Town, John Henry Newman school and Stevenage Interchange.
- The plan identifies three new stops to ensure that the vast majority of homes are within 400m of a bus stop, meeting national accessibility standards. The route will serve the heart of the new

neighbourhood, where the school, community hall, allotments and Dell Spring are located, emphasising this area as a core meeting space.

- During early phases, the initial sections of the bus route (up to the school) will be delivered first, including a temporary turning area to allow buses to enter and exit efficiently until the full loop is complete.

Figure 4.3: Bus route and stops



Green Infrastructure and Recreational Play Framework Plan

- 4.59 Two Framework Plans illustrate the Site's Green Infrastructure (GI) network and its extensive, multi-functional system of recreational and leisure routes. The GI network forms the structural backbone of the Site's layout and has been designed in accordance with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. It comprises existing retained features such as woodlands, hedgerows and trees, along with substantial new areas of formal and informal public open space and landscape planting. Within these green corridors, key components such as the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) features (swales and basins), active travel routes, and recreational paths are strategically located, ensuring movement routes for both people (walking and cycling) and wildlife, while connecting the various

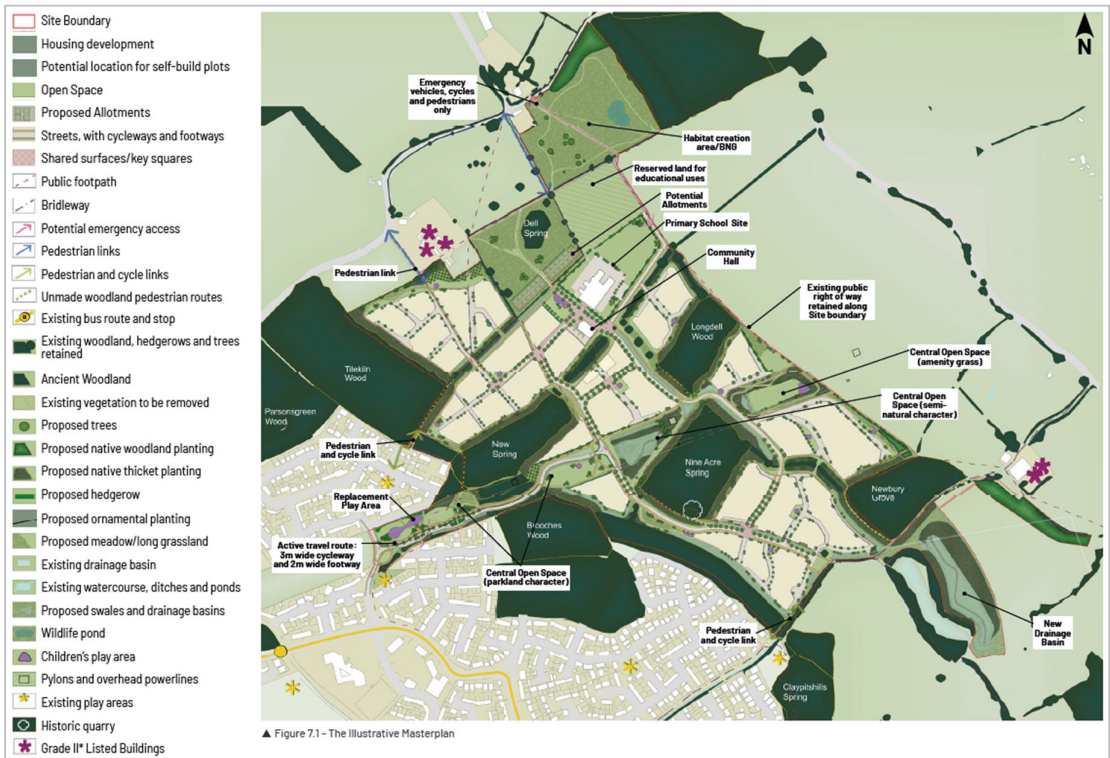
parts of the development. Structural planting will reinforce boundaries, notably along the new Green Belt edge, while sensitive areas such as Ancient Woodlands will be safeguarded through minimum 15-metre off-sets, complemented by new thicket and meadow planting.

- 4.60 Recreational routes are an integral part of the GI network. The network connects new leisure and active travel routes with existing PROWs, maintaining and enhancing connections to the surrounding countryside. Informal recreational opportunities are also embedded within the design, including "Play on the Way" features along key routes and a waymarked exercise or trim trail within the green spaces. Together, these measures promote health and wellbeing and encourage active lifestyles for residents of all ages.

Illustrative Masterplan for Outline Component

- 4.61 Whilst the Outline Component will be subject to the controlling documentation discussed above, the Applicant has prepared an Illustrative Masterplan, showing one way in which the development can be delivered, in line with the Parameter Plans which fix some principles and Framework Plans providing additional guidance.
- 4.62 This scheme does not comprise a formal part of the Application or Proposed Development because it is illustrative, and NPPG confirms that details such as this which have been submitted for illustrative purposes only should not be treated as forming part of the development for which the application is being made.
- 4.63 A full description of the Illustrative Masterplan is provided in Section 7 of the Design and Access Statement. Based on the illustrative masterplan it is anticipated that approximately 640 new homes could come forward in the Outline Component.

Figure 4.4: Illustrative Masterplan



5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

5.2 The Development Plan for the Site comprises:

- The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022); and
- The Minerals Local Plan and Waste Local Plan for Hertfordshire (adopted March 2007).

5.3 There are various Neighbourhood Plans for selected neighbourhoods in North Hertfordshire, although there are none that cover or adjoin the Site.

5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), the National Planning Practice Guidance ('NPPG') and the Development Plan are all material considerations in assessing the Proposed Development.

National Planning Policy Framework

5.5 The latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 12 December 2024, taking immediate effect for decision-making. It provides the planning policies for England and how these should be applied. This section provides an overview of the Government's national planning policy and guidance that is relevant to the Proposed Development, summarised in **Table 5.1** below.

Table 5.1 NPPF policies

Achieving Sustainable Development	Paragraph 7 states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF highlights that achieving sustainable development has three overarching objectives – an economic, a social and an environmental objective, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways: • an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy; • a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities; and • an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment.
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	Paragraph 9 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable development solutions, but in so doing, should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.
Decision Taking	Paragraph 11 states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development and identifies how decision taking should be undertaken. Paragraph 11 C states development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan should be approved without delay. Paragraph 39 advises that local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible
Delivering a sufficient supply of homes	Paragraph 61 states that to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay. Paragraph 62 outlines that to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning practice guidance, and that any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account. Paragraph 63 states that within this context, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing (including Social Rent), families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes). Paragraph 66 states that where major developments involving the provision of housing is proposed, policies and decision should expect that the mix of affordable required meets identified local needs, across Social Rent, other affordable housing for rent and affordable home ownership tenures. Paragraph 71 states that mixed tenure sites can provide a range of benefits, including creating diverse communities and supporting timely build out rates. The 'Maintaining Supply and Delivery' section of the NPPF (Paragraph 78) set out requirements for the Council to 'identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing'.
Building a strong, competitive economy	Paragraph 85 states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into

	account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
Promoting healthy and safe communities	Paragraph 96 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which: a) promote social interaction; b) are safe and accessible; and c) enable and support healthy lifestyles. Paragraph 98 states that to provide social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities and other local services to enhance sustainability of communities and residential environments; b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being; e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services. Paragraph 100 states local planning authorities should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the decisions on application and work with school promoters and delivery partners to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted. Paragraph 103 states that access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Paragraph 104 states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or land is surplus to requirements; or b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location. Paragraph 105 states that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users.
Promoting sustainable transport	Paragraph 109 states that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan making and development proposals. These include the potential impact on the transport network, assessing the opportunities that exist or are proposed, opportunities to promote sustainable modes of transport, environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure and the patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations that contribute to making high quality places. Paragraph 110 states that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. Paragraph 115 states that it should be ensured that

	sustainable modes of transport can be or have been taken up, the site is safe and accessible for all, designs reflect national guidance and any impacts on the transport network can be cost effectively mitigated. Paragraph 116 states development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe, in all tested scenarios. Paragraph 117 states within this context, applications for development should give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements first and second facilitate other sustainable modes of transport. They should address the needs of all users, create safe, secure and attractive places, allow for efficient delivery of goods and emergency vehicles and be designed to enable electric vehicle charging. Paragraph 118 states that all developments that will generate significant amounts of movement should be required to produce a travel plan, and the application should be supported by a transport statement or transport assessment so that the likely impacts of the proposal can be assessed.
Making effective use of land	Paragraph 124 states that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Paragraph 129 states that planning decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land. Paragraph 130 states that where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of each Site's potential.
Achieving well-designed places	Paragraph 131 states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Paragraph 135 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: a) add to the overall quality of the area; b) are visually attractive; c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities); d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit; e) optimise the potential of the site to sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development; f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. Paragraph 136 states that trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments. Planning decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, and opportunities are

	taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments, they are maintained and existing trees retained, wherever possible. Paragraph 137 states that design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs and take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those who cannot.
Protecting Green Belt Land	Paragraph 142 states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change	Paragraph 164 states that new development should be planned for in ways that avoids increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change and can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Paragraph 165 states that to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should: • provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts); • consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and • identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers. Paragraph 166 states that new development should comply with policies for decentralised energy and should take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption. Paragraph 170 states that development should be directed away from areas at highest risk of flooding. Paragraph 181 states that when determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment. Paragraph 181, part C, states that major developments should incorporate sustainable drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate. Paragraph 182 states that applications should incorporate sustainable drainage systems, which are proportionate to the nature

	and scale of the proposal. These should provide multifunctional benefits, where possible. They should take account of advice from the Lead Local Flood Authority.
Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	Paragraph 187, part B, states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: recognising the intrinsic character, beauty and wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of trees and woodland. Paragraph 187, part E, states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Paragraph 193, part C, states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles - development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists. An example of a wholly exceptional reason includes infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat. Paragraph 193, part D states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles – opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around development should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where appropriate. Paragraph 198 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects of pollution on health, living conditions and natural environment and should: a) mitigate and reduce noise that would impact on health and quality of life; b) identify tranquil areas relatively undisturbed by noise and prized for their recreational and amenity value; and c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity. Paragraph 199 states that planning policies and decision should sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones. Opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified, such as through traffic and travel management, green infrastructure and enhancement.

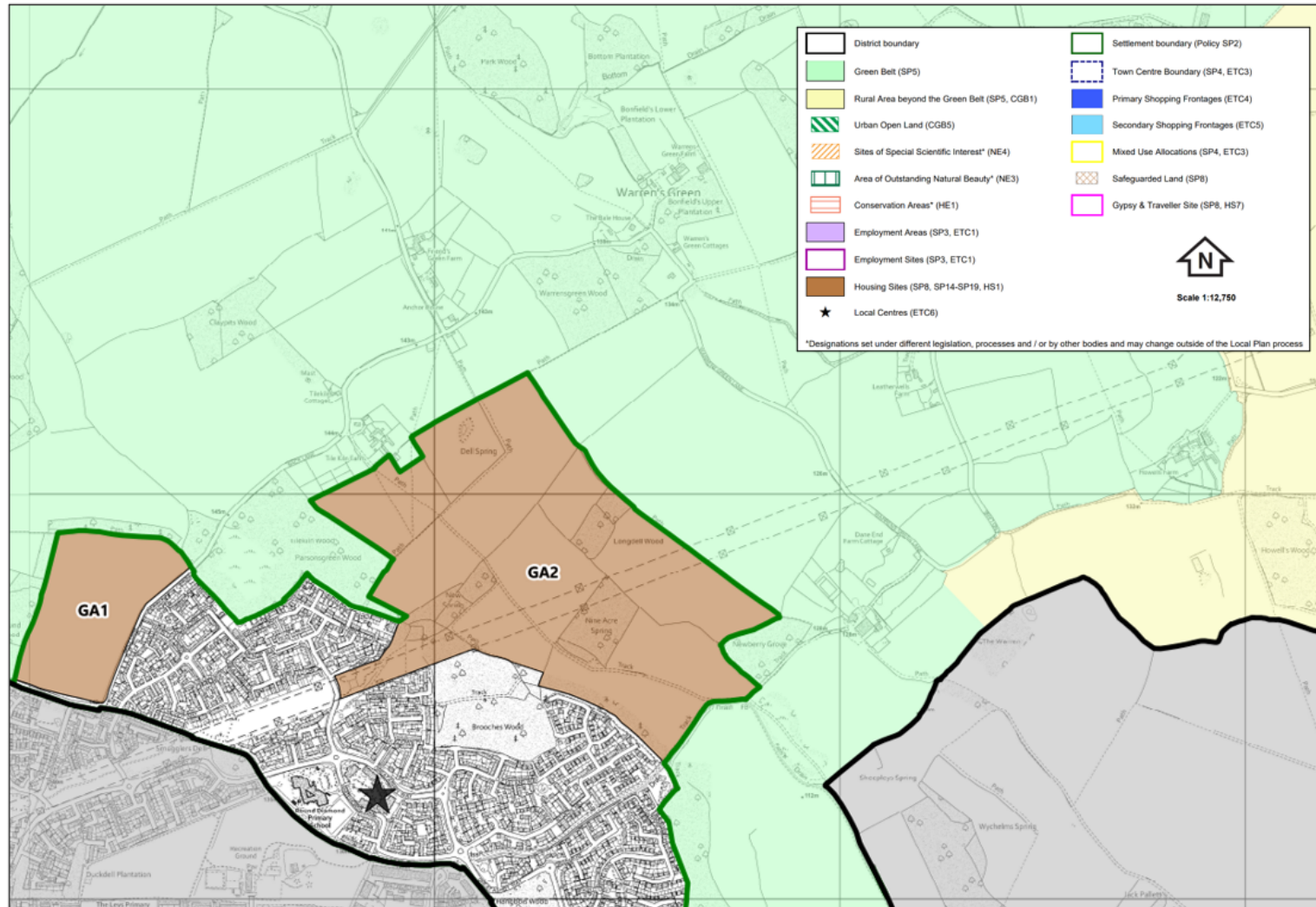
Conserving and enhancing the historic environment	Paragraph 207 to 211 consider proposals affecting heritage assets. These include describing the significance of any heritage assets affected, the requirement to submit a desk-based assessment, local planning authorities taking account of the positive contribution that heritage assets make and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Paragraph 212 to 221 consider the potential impacts to heritage assets and state that great weight should be given to assets conservation. Any loss or harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear justification. Local Authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated the loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or that it prevents all reasonable uses of the site, no viable use of the asset can be found in the medium term or the loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.
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The Development Plan

- 5.6 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan was adopted in November 2022, replacing the saved policies of the District Plan Second Review with Alterations (1996). The Local Plan sets out the spatial strategy and the vision for the District for the period 2011-2031, by identifying how and where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be delivered.
- 5.7 A key component of the Council's vision is housing growth and the release of land to provide new homes for the District. There are six Strategic Housing Sites allocated in the Local Plan, defined as sites providing 500 or more homes and making a substantial contribution towards housing requirements. GA2 is one of these six strategic allocations, intended to deliver approximately 600 homes. These six sites collectively contribute 7,700 homes to the housing strategy.
- 5.8 The Site (GA2) was subject to rigorous assessment as part of its allocation as a Strategic Housing Site in the Local Plan, including a full planning and Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This allocation process was informed by the substantial Local Plan evidence base.
- 5.9 Land within the GA2 allocation was formerly within the Green Belt. However, with the adoption of the new Local Plan in 2022, the land was released. The red line boundary extends outside the GA2 allocation, to encompass land within the Green Belt as shown in **Figure 6.3**. This is described in Section 6 and not repeated here. Some areas of the Site lie within Landscape Character Areas 220 and 221, as designated by the North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment. An extract of the NHDC Local Plan Policies Map is shown in **Figure 5.1**.
- 5.10 The allocation states that a Strategic Masterplan must be agreed between the Applicant and NHDC to ensure the development is properly planned, integrated and sustainable. **The development**

proposals comply with the GA2 Strategic Masterplan, which was presented to councillors and endorsed on 29 November 2024.

Figure 5.1 Local Plan Designations



Source: NHDC Local Plan (adopted in November 2022)

5.11 The strategic policies in **Table 5.2** are relevant to the Proposed Development.

Table 5.2 Summary of Relevant Strategic Policies

Relevant Policy	Policy Summary
SP1 – Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire	The Local Plan supports the principles of sustainable development within North Hertfordshire and NHDC will support growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities.
SP2 – Settlement hierarchy and spatial distribution	Between 2011 and 2031, the Local Plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes. The adjusted settlement boundaries of Stevenage (including Great Ashby) will provide for 1,705 new homes.
SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt	The Local Plan supports the Green Belt and its intrinsic value to the countryside. Land has been released from the Green Belt to enable strategic development at locations referred to in Policy SP8 (including the GA2 allocation).
SP6 – Sustainable transport	The policy promotes sustainable travel by encouraging development in accessible locations with good transport options. It requires early delivery of sustainable travel infrastructure, implementation of Travel Plans, and provision of appropriate parking. Proposals must demonstrate safe and sustainable access while protecting existing public rights of way, cycling, and equestrian routes.
SP7 – Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions	NHDC requires development proposals to include the necessary infrastructure to meet the additional demands they create. This may involve financial contributions or the direct delivery of infrastructure in a timely manner to support each phase of development. The Council will collaborate with landowners, developers, and relevant agencies to enable site delivery and address any barriers to implementation.
SP8 – Housing	Housing growth will be supported across the District over the period 2011-2031. NHDC is required to deliver 13,000 dwellings over the 20 years of the Local Plan and has an annualised housing requirement of 650 dwellings per year.
SP9 – Design and sustainability	Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. New development should be well-designed and located, and should respond positively to its local context. Strategic Masterplans must be produced for Strategic Housing Sites and should be informed by a technical evidence base and follow good design principles, and agreed with the Council prior to the submission of any planning application.
SP10 – Healthy communities	This policy seeks to support healthy, inclusive communities across the District. New development should provide suitable community, cultural, leisure, and sports facilities, ensure adequate healthcare provision in collaboration with health partners, and work with education providers to deliver sufficient and well-located school places.
SP11 – Natural resources and sustainability	This policy encourages developments to incorporate renewable and low-carbon energy solutions while managing environmental risks responsibly. Proposals should steer development away from areas of flood risk, include SuDS, protect and enhance the water environment, address land contamination where present, and work with utilities and partners to ensure adequate wastewater treatment capacity without harming protected sites.

SP12 – Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity	New development should protect and enhance the natural environment, including designated and non-designated sites that support important habitats and species. Proposals must contribute to measurable biodiversity net gains, strengthen ecological networks, and support the protection and creation of high-quality open spaces across the District.
SP13 – Historic environment	Development should balance growth with the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. Great weight will be given to conserving designated heritage assets and their settings, with a strong presumption in favour of retaining, preserving, and enhancing heritage features in line with their significance.

Table 5.3 Summary of Relevant Development Management Policies

Relevant Policy	Policy Summary
T1 – Assessment of transport matters	The policy requires development proposals to demonstrate that they will not create highway safety issues or unacceptable impacts on the transport network. It also expects major developments to include sustainable transport measures, provide safe and convenient routes for walking and cycling, ensure good public transport access, and submit appropriate transport assessments in line with Policy SP7
T2 – Parking	The policy requires residential developments to provide parking in line with the minimum standards in the Local Plan and non-residential schemes to meet the standards in the SPD. Proposals must also show how all parking needs will be met safely and that parking areas are designed and laid out to function effectively.
HS2 – Affordable housing	For development proposals of 25 or more dwellings, 40% must be affordable.
HS3 – Housing mix	Development proposals should provide an appropriate range of house types and sizes and should take into account the location and accessibility of the Site, the overall targets of the Local Plan and draw from up-to-date evidence including the most recent SHMA and the Council's Self-Build Register and any other relevant evidence. Development proposals should provide a density, scale and character appropriate to the surrounding context.
HS5 – Accessible and adaptable housing	Planning permission for residential developments of 100 units or more will be granted provided that an element of accommodation within Use Class C3 for older persons housing.
D1 – Sustainable design	The policy requires developments to respond positively to their local context and make the most of opportunities to enhance the public realm, integrate sustainable design features, and promote accessibility and connectivity. Proposals should follow the Design SPD, meet national space and water efficiency standards, and ensure layouts that are safe, attractive, and adaptable to future needs.
D3 – Protecting living conditions	Development proposals must not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. If a development proposal gives rise to adverse effects on living conditions, the Council will consider whether mitigation measures can be implemented to mitigate harm to an acceptable level.
D4 – Air quality	Development proposals must not cause an unacceptable impact on local air quality, during demolition / construction and its operational phases. Mitigation

	should be proposed if there are potential effects upon health and the local environment. Air quality impact assessments must be undertaken where required.
HC1 – Community facilities	Developments which propose new community facilities should be appropriate in scale in relation to their local context, be accessible by a range of transport modes and must be meet an identified need in the local community.
NE1 – Strategic green infrastructure	The policy requires development to protect, conserve, and where possible enhance the strategic green infrastructure network. It seeks to avoid any loss or harm to its function, promote the creation of new green infrastructure where appropriate, and ensure long-term management and mitigation for any adverse impacts.
NE2 – Landscape	The policy requires development to respect the character and sensitivities of the surrounding landscape and follow relevant design and management guidelines. Proposals should avoid unacceptable harm to landscape character, protect important landscape features, and include plans for their long-term management and maintenance.
NE4 – Biodiversity and geological sites	Development must protect, enhance and manage biodiversity in accordance with Policy SP12, securing measurable net gains and supporting ecological networks. Proposals should include an ecology survey, avoid or minimise harm to biodiversity, and integrate suitable buffers and habitats into the site layout. A minimum 12-metres of complimentary habitat should be provided around wildlife sites, trees and hedgerows. Long-term management, monitoring and any necessary mitigation must also be secured.
NE5 – Protecting open space	Where any open space is lost as a result of a development, it must be demonstrated that the open space is surplus to requirements and justified on the basis of its quality and accessibility and its ability to serve its purpose. A loss of open space must be mitigated by re-providing appropriate open space and / or financial contributions towards new or existing open space.
NE6 – New and improved open space	Requires consideration of the NHDC open space standards and other relevant guidance, contribute towards improving the provision, quality and accessibility of open space, and incorporate any necessary open space buffer(s) for landscape, visual, ecological or air quality reasons. Any on-site provision for new open space must include a long-term maintenance and management plan.
NE7 – Reducing flood risk	Development proposals must be located outside of medium and high-risk flood areas (flood zone 2 and 3) and other areas affected by other sources of flooding, where possible. A Flood Risk Assessment must be prepared and submitted in accordance with national guidance that considers the lifetime of the development, climate change impacts and safe access and egress.
NE8 – Sustainable drainage systems	Development proposals must use the most appropriate sustainable drainage solution and account for technical, viability and design issues to reduce the risk of surface water flooding, enhance biodiversity, water quality and provide amenity benefits. The sustainable drainage solution selected for a development proposal must aims to mimic the natural drainage patterns and processes as far as possible. Drainage solutions must follow the SuDS hierarchy.
HE1 – Designated heritage assets	Requires development proposals that relate to a designated heritage asset or their setting to be accompanied by a Heritage Assessment / Justification Statement which assess significance of heritage assets and their setting,

		justifies and details any impacts arising from a development proposal, and informs necessary measures to mitigate identified harm.
HE4 Archaeology	–	Development proposals affecting assets of archaeological interest must submit a desk-based assessment and where necessary, an archaeological field evaluation, to demonstrate how archaeological remains will be preserved and incorporated into the layout of the development.

6. PLANNING ANALYSIS

- 6.1 The preceding section of this Planning Statement sets out the relevant policy background to the proposal. This section considers the application of policy to the proposal and conformity with the Development Plan.

Compliance with Policy SP18

- 6.2 The starting point for the determination of any planning application is the adopted Development Plan, taken as a whole. The majority of the Site is allocated under Policy SP18 as a Strategic Housing Site within the adopted Local Plan.
- 6.3 Allocation Policy SP18 concerning the Site identifies a neighbourhood of '*approximately 600 homes*'. The proposal seeks to deliver around 640 dwellings. The use of the term *approximately* within the policy provides an inherent degree of flexibility, and the proposed quantum is therefore considered fully consistent with the intent and objectives of the allocation. This type of wording in policy frequently results in subsequent planning applications that are typically within 10% of the figure referenced in the Development Plan. The obvious benefit of the housing quantum slightly exceeding the guide figure is that the site is able to maximise the delivery of market and affordable housing in this location, achieving a slightly higher density than envisaged. This is considered to be of societal benefit.
- 6.4 Policy SP18 establishes a series of site-specific criteria which the development is required to address. These are summarised in the table below, together with an assessment of how the proposals respond and comply with each requirement.

Table 6.1 Policy SP18 Compliance

Policy Details	Policy met?	Commentary
A comprehensive and deliverable Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation is to be prepared and agreed between the landowner/developer and the Council.	Yes	A Strategic Masterplan Framework was developed after consultation with key stakeholders. The Strategic Masterplan Framework was presented for consideration at a Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2024, where the Cabinet recommended it for approval for Full Council. Then, the Strategic Masterplan Framework was presented to Full Council on 29 November 2024, where it was approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the Site.
a) Neighbourhood-level facilities providing approximately 500m ² (net) of retail and food and beverage floorspace and other	Yes	Since the Local Plan was prepared, there have been significant changes in the local retail environment. Retail-led neighbourhood centres are no longer viable or required at the scale that was initially envisaged for these developments. This is supported by the Council's recently updated evidence which identifies a substantial drop in

necessary medical and social infrastructure;		future retail floorspace requirements compared to figures that underpin the Local Plan. Instead, the Proposed Development provides 0.2ha of land for flexible community use within the community hub. The exact use of the community hub will be determined through subsequent Reserved Matters applications.
b) Four hectares of land at the north of the allocation site, broadly bounded by Footpaths Weston 044 and Weston 027 and Dell Spring reserved for education use to accommodate 2FE of primary-age provision and 4FE of secondary age provision.	Yes	Discussions between HCC Education team, North Herts District Council, and the Applicant have taken place to determine the educational provision strategy. Since the adoption of the Local Plan, HCC have confirmed that, due to the difference in anticipated timing of the demands for the primary and secondary schools, these should be planned to be functionally separate. While the Local Plan set out that a 4ha combined education site should be provided within the northernmost part of the Site, the requirements are now as follows: • A 2.1ha primary school site, to be located either in the far north of the Site or within the centre of the Site; • A 1.9ha reserve site for educational use, to be located within the far north of the Site, with the potential to extend playing fields into the adjoining Green Belt at a later stage. The Proposed Development provides a 2.1ha site for a primary school, and a further 1.9ha of reserved land for education use. The 2.1ha site is located in the north of the Site, and is bound by Footpaths Weston 044 and Weston 027 and Dell Spring. This land would accommodate a 2FE primary school. The further 1.9ha of land reserved for education use is also located in the north of the Site, although it is adjacent to the eastern boundary.
c) Principal access from Mendip Way with: i. provision for sustainable modes of transport having regard to the Stevenage Mobility Strategy; and ii. comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks.	Yes	The proposals include strong provision for sustainable travel, aligning with the objectives of the Stevenage Mobility Strategy. The principal access from Mendip Way will incorporate highway, bus, pedestrian, and cycle routes, integrating seamlessly into the existing transport network. Additional pedestrian and cycle links connect to Great Ashby, Warrensgreen Lane, and surrounding Rights of Way, ensuring comprehensive integration with local walking and cycling infrastructure.
d) Transport Assessment to identify and secure measures to manage traffic flows arising	Yes	A Transport Assessment is submitted with the application. Assessment work has been undertaken to identify and secure the necessary measures to manage traffic flows arising from the development. An emergency access point is proposed in detail. The emergency access point will be located off Warrensgreen

from the development along Back Lane		Lane, which connects to Back Lane. The emergency access point will be controlled with a gate or bollards to ensure its use is restricted to emergency vehicles in cases where the primary access point may be blocked. Only emergency vehicles will use this access point. It will also be usable by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. The Proposed Development will not create traffic flows from the development along Back Lane.
e) A detailed drainage strategy identifying water infrastructure required and mechanism(s) for delivery.	Yes	A detailed drainage strategy is submitted with the application. A Flood Risk Assessment and technical assessment work has informed the drainage strategy to identify the water infrastructure required and mechanisms for delivery. As part of the Strategic Masterplan preparation, consultation was undertaken with Thames Water. Further modelling will be undertaken as the scheme progresses to identify the most appropriate drainage strategy for the Site.
f) At least 6 serviced plots for self-build development	Yes	The Proposed Development will provide up to 640 homes including up to 6 self-build plots. A potential location for the self-build plots is shown on the Illustrative Masterplan within the centre of the development in Phase 1. The most appropriate location of the self-build plots will be considered further and secured by subsequent reserved matters applications.
g) Structural planting along site boundaries as informed by detailed landscape assessments to reinforce the revised Green Belt boundary and mitigate landscape impacts	Yes	Landscaping surrounding the proposed access point off Mendip Way is submitted in detail. The Illustrative Masterplan shows new structural planting along site boundaries to mitigate potential landscape impacts and reinforce the revised Green Belt boundary. New hedgerow planting is proposed along sensitive boundaries including the northern boundary in the vicinity of Tilekiln Farm complex to mitigate landscape impacts and along sections of the eastern boundary to reinforce the revised Green Belt boundary. New broadleaved woodland planting is proposed along the northern boundary in the north east of the Site to reinforce the revised Green Belt boundary and along the south eastern boundary complex to mitigate landscape impacts and shield views from Dane End Farm. In places a more permeable edge will be allowed to accord with the recommendations of the Council's appointed Design Review Panel. This is considered an appropriate balance between the site-specific policy and local and national design policies and advice. The Illustrative Masterplan only shows one way that the Proposed Development could come forward, and the most appropriate location of new planting and landscaping will be considered further and secured by subsequent reserved matters applications. However, the reinforcing of the revised Green Belt boundary and the mitigation of any potential adverse landscape impacts will be a key consideration of any future reserved matters application.

h) Address existing surface water flood risk issues, particularly running south-east from Dell Spring to Newberry Grove, through SUDs or other appropriate solution	Yes	A Drainage Framework Plan is submitted, as described in Section 6. The Applicant has undergone extensive pre-application discussions with the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). A Flood Risk Assessment is submitted with this planning application which concludes that the proposed development will not lead to the impedance of flood flows and will not increase the risk of flooding on the site itself, adjacent properties or to third parties situation either upstream or downstream of the Site. The proposed Drainage Strategy is based on a maximum allowance of 40% climate change. This approach accords with standing advice issued by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and the sequential approach to SUDs provision.
i) Appropriate mitigation, compensation and / or enhancement of key features of biodiversity including: i. local wildlife sites at Tilekiln Wood, Parsonsgreen Wood, New Spring Wood, Brooches Wood and Claypithills Spring Wood; ii. identified protected species and priority habitats; and iii. retention of green infrastructure connectivity and corridors to the wider countryside.	Yes	The majority of woodland areas within and adjacent to the site have been identified as Ancient Woodland (including areas of woodland not identified on the national inventory, although these have been identified through field survey). The Illustrative Masterplan includes buffers around the Ancient Woodland to accord with national guidance and, in line with the Design Review Panel recommendations, identifies the need for appropriate long-term management proposals as the scheme progresses through the planning process. Infrastructure in the access corridor has been rationalised and realigned to minimise impacts. The green infrastructure frameworks seek to protect key corridors, recognising that the introduction of development will inevitably have some adverse impacts. The Illustrative Masterplan demonstrates that the scheme could deliver in excess of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain through habitat creation. The work demonstrates this commitment can be met including through the provision of additional complementary habitat beyond the allocation boundary but adjoining the site within the same land ownership.
j) Integration of existing public rights of way within and adjoining the site to provide routes to the wider countryside including i. Footpaths Weston 027 and Weston 044 and Bridleway Weston 033 as features which help define the perimeters of the site; and ii. Footpath Weston 029 as a potential	Yes	An active travel access point is proposed in detail, off Merrick Close and connecting to an existing PRoW. The existing PRoW would be widened to allow foot and cycle access here. As the Proposed Development is being submitted as an hybrid application, the integration of the other existing PRoW within and adjoining the Site, to provide routes to the wider countryside, are not considered in detail at this stage and this will be secured at a later stage through future reserved matters applications, however the Framework Plans and Illustrative Masterplan show how this could be achieved. The proposals will integrate the existing PRoWs within and adjacent to the Site, and will provide new pedestrian and cycle connections to the existing PRoW network. The Illustrative Masterplan shows that much of the alignment of Footpath Weston 029 falls within areas of green

green corridor through the site;		infrastructure and / or ancient woodland buffers and it is envisaged that it will be a green corridor through the Site. Precise treatments for the routes will be fixed at a later stage in the design process and secured through subsequent reserved matters applications.
k) Provision of a green infrastructure corridor beneath the current alignment of the pylon lines to respect statutory safety clearance requirements for residential development;	Yes	Mendip Gateway Park will pass beneath the existing pylon corridor, acting as a linear green space for people arriving at the development by foot, bike or vehicle. The proposals will comply with the safety clearance requirements imposed by National Grid and UKPN. A response to drawings from National Grid and UKPN in October 2025 has indicated that there is sufficient clearance to the overhead line and there is no objection to proceeding (Appendix A2).
l) Lower intensity development and / or green infrastructure provision to the north of the site to minimise harm to the setting of listed buildings	Yes	The Illustrative Masterplan shows how an area of open space is proposed within the north west of the Site, with the new homes set back behind it, allowing a large separation between the Listed Buildings and the new settlement edge. New structural planting, including thicket and orchard planting, is proposed in this open space, to visually separate the dwellings whilst maintaining a relatively low and open vegetation character in this area which will not overbear the Listed Buildings. A Built Heritage assessment is submitted as Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement which concludes that there will be no significant adverse effects to listed buildings when the Proposed Development is complete and operational.

- 6.5 A full suite of planning conditions is expected to be attached to a future planning permission, which the Applicant looks forward to discussing and agreeing with the Council, and in accordance with consultee responses being received. It is envisaged that a number of conditions will be attached to ensure that the solutions presented above are captured and where necessary, evolved, through a future reserved matters application/s.

Need/Principle of Development

- 6.6 The principle of development is established by virtue of the Site's allocation under Policy SP18 in the NHDC Local Plan.
- 6.7 Section 70(2) of the TCPA 1990 states that, in dealing with proposals for planning permission, regard must be had to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.

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- 6.8 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 directs Local Planning Authorities to determine planning applications in accordance with the policies of the Adopted Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Development Plan Conformity Determination

- 6.9 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, where Paragraph 11 sets out the policy for decision making.
- 6.10 NPPF paragraph 11c) clarifies that development proposals that accord with an up-to-date Development Plan should be approved without delay.
- 6.11 The Site will deliver approximately 640 new homes. It is one of six Strategic Housing Sites and as such, the Site is critical to the success of the Local Plan's spatial strategy. The proposals fully comply with the requirements set out in the Site Allocation under Policy SP18, as detailed in Table 6.1.
- 6.12 It also plays a vital role in boosting five year land supply. Failure to bring forward such allocated sites could expose the Council to speculative planning applications that undermine the plan-led approach. The Applicant is therefore committed to ensure that the development makes a positive and timely contribution to housing supply and delivery, to ensure the Plan strategy succeeds. Policy SP8 'Housing' sets out a requirement for provision of 13,000 dwellings over the 2011-2031 plan period, equivalent to an average of 650 dwellings per annum and once under construction, the application site can make a significant contribution to achieving this target.
- 6.13 The application wholly complies the Development Plan and should therefore be approved without delay in accordance with the Paragraph 11c of the Framework.

Alternative Determination Scenario where Decision Taker concludes the application to not accord with the Development Plan

- 6.14 In the event a decision taker disagreed that the proposal accorded with the Development Plan, Paragraph 11d) of the Framework would be engaged, which states:
- 6.15 *"Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:*
- i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
 - (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard*

to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination”.

- 6.16 Footnote 8 of the Framework highlights that for applications involving the provision of housing, the most relevant policies will not be deemed up to date where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The Council's Authority Monitoring Report 2023/24 ('AMR') dated May 2024 clarifies that the authority cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, as the AMR identifies a supply position of **3.9 years**. Accordingly, the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date in this instance.
- 6.17 The policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance are defined in Footnote 7 of the Framework. In this case, there are no Footnote 7 policies that are engaged by this development that provide a strong reason for refusal.
- 6.18 It is therefore clear that NPPF paragraph 11(d) would be engaged in a scenario where a decision taker concluded the site did not accord with the Development Plan and that the practical effect of Paragraph 11d is to apply a tilted balance in favour of granting planning permission, unless there is a strong reason for refusing permission that significantly and demonstrably outweighs the benefits.
- 6.19 It is the Applicant's contention that the benefits of the development greatly outweigh any disbenefits, such that under a Paragraph d) determination, planning permission must be granted for the development. Demonstration of how the benefits outweigh the disbenefits in this case has been provided in this Planning Statement.

Provision of Housing

- 6.20 The Site will deliver approximately 640 new homes. As such, the Site is critical to the success of the Local Plan's spatial strategy. It is one of six Strategic Housing Sites and plays a vital role in boosting five year land supply. Failure to bring forward such allocated sites could expose the Council to speculative planning applications that undermine the plan-led approach. The Applicant is therefore committed to ensure that the development makes a positive and timely contribution to housing supply and delivery, to ensure the Plan strategy succeeds.
- 6.21 The policies of the NPPF support the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes in order to meet housing needs, by ensuring that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed (Paragraph 61). Additionally, the NPPF requires the planning system to ensure that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet needs (Paragraph 63). The proposals include provision for at least six serviced plots for self-build

development, in line with the Site's allocation. These plots will allow individual owners to design and construct their own homes.

- 6.22 At least 50% of the houses will be built to M4(2) Accessible and Adoptable standard, as required by Policy HS5.

Affordable Housing

- 6.23 Affordable Housing is highlighted as one of the key challenges in the Local Plan and in paragraph 2.71 it states that there is a need for more affordable housing. Part f of Policy SP8 sets out the Council's affordable housing target. The policy supports a range of housing tenures, types and size measured against targets to provide 33%, with targets to deliver up to 40% 'where viable'.
- 6.24 The latest AMR (2023-2024) states that in the latest monitoring year, the Council *fell below this target of 33% 'achieving only 19% affordable housing completions'*.
- 6.25 There is a significant under provision of affordable housing across the district. This is further qualified in a recent appeal decision (June 2025)³, where an Inspector wrote: *"The evidence suggests the Council has not met its targets in delivering affordable housing over recent years"*.
- 6.26 The AMR goes on to say that the Council have fallen below the plan's target, and this is *'partially attributed to the delay in larger allocated sites coming forward which would provide 40% affordable housing'*.
- 6.27 The Proposed Development will deliver 40% affordable housing on-site. This is in accordance with the target for '25 or more dwellings' set out in Policy HS2 'Affordable Housing'. Policy HS2 requires the split to be 65% rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing. The affordable provision will follow the required tenure split, comprising 65% rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing. This equates to 166 rented and 90 other affordable homes. This is also in accordance with the Developer Contributions SPD.
- 6.28 The proposed mix is provided in the Affordable Housing Statement submitted with this planning application. This accords with the mix agreed in a meeting held with NHDC' Housing Supply Officer in November 2024.
- 6.29 Affordable housing will be provided proportionally within each phase of construction, ensuring that a minimum of 40% of dwellings in every phase are affordable. The affordable housing tenure will be secured in the s106 agreement.

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- 6.30 In line with the design strategy, affordable dwellings will be integrated within the development, arranged in small clusters and designed to be indistinguishable from market housing in appearance and quality.
- 6.31 To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, 10% of the affordable units will be constructed to M4(3) standards, consistent with the requirements of Policy HS5.

Older Person's Housing

- 6.32 Policy HS4 (Supported, sheltered and older persons housing) of the Local Plan states that planning permission for residential developments of 100 units or more must include an element of accommodation within Use Class C3 suitable for older persons' housing. In addition, the Strategic Masterplan brief sets an expectation that within the overall housing mix, the development should deliver accommodation suitable for older persons in accordance with Policy HS4, located close to social infrastructure and public transport connections.
- 6.33 To assess the suitability of the Site for such provision, Savills was commissioned to prepare a Senior Living and Care Report (February 2025). This is appended to this Planning Statement (Appendix A3). The report considered planning policy, market demand, demographic profile, and developer feedback. It concluded that the Site is not suitable or viable for senior living uses, primarily due to its distance from Stevenage town centre amenities, which are critical to the operation and attractiveness of senior living schemes. Market engagement with national senior living developers confirmed no current demand for such accommodation in this location.
- 6.34 While the site could technically accommodate a care home use (Use Class C2), the local market is saturated, with recent planning approvals and existing supply already meeting demand within the catchment. Consequently, inclusion of senior living or care accommodation at GA2 would not be deliverable or commercially sustainable at this time.

Provision of Community Infrastructure

Community Hub

- 6.35 Local Plan Policy SP18 requires the proposals to provide *"Neighbourhood-level facilities providing approximately 500m (net) of retail and food and beverage floorspace and other necessary medical and social infrastructure"*. The inclusion of a 0.2ha community hub is a key component in meeting this objective, serving as a focal point for local activity and providing access to essential community services.
- 6.36 The proposed community hub will be located on a dedicated 0.2ha site. The facilities will play an important role in accommodating the needs generated by the new community, helping to establish a

sense of place, promote social cohesion and contribute to the long-term sustainability and inclusiveness of the neighbourhood.

- 6.37 Following consultation with the Council and other stakeholders, it has been determined that a local shop would not be viable due to the modest scale of the development and the proximity of existing retail provision at the Great Ashby Neighbourhood Centre. In response, a flexible multi-use community building is proposed. This building would provide space for a variety of community uses, including activity, meetings and events, and could also accommodate healthcare services should this be supported by the NHS Trust.
- 6.38 The design of the building will follow Sport England's *Village and Community Halls* guidance, ensuring it is functional, accessible, and adaptable to evolving community needs.

Provision of Primary School and Land Reserved for Education Use

- 6.39 Policy SP18 of the Local Plan requires the reservation of four hectares of land for education use to accommodate a 2-form entry (FE) primary school and a 4-FE secondary school.
- 6.40 By delivering the school on-site, the development aims to meet the educational requirements arising from the new development and other neighbouring schemes, to help alleviate pressures on existing local schools, and contribute to the creation of a more sustainable residential neighbourhood by enabling more short-distance journeys to school.
- 6.41 In the case that the reserved educational land is not required, it is proposed to utilise the land for further low-density housing, up to 2 storeys in height.

Design, Setting, Landscape and Visual Impact

- 6.42 Policy at all levels requires high quality design and the protection of amenity. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF sets out that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.
- 6.43 The National Design Guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. Good design is considered to involve careful attention to the components of places, including the context of places and buildings, hard and soft landscaping, technical infrastructure and social infrastructure. A well-designed place comes through making the right choices about layout, form and scale of buildings, appearance, materials and detailing. The Guide identifies ten characteristics which work together to create physical character, help to nurture and sustain a sense of community and work positively to address environmental issues affecting

climate. The characteristics are context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources and lifespan.

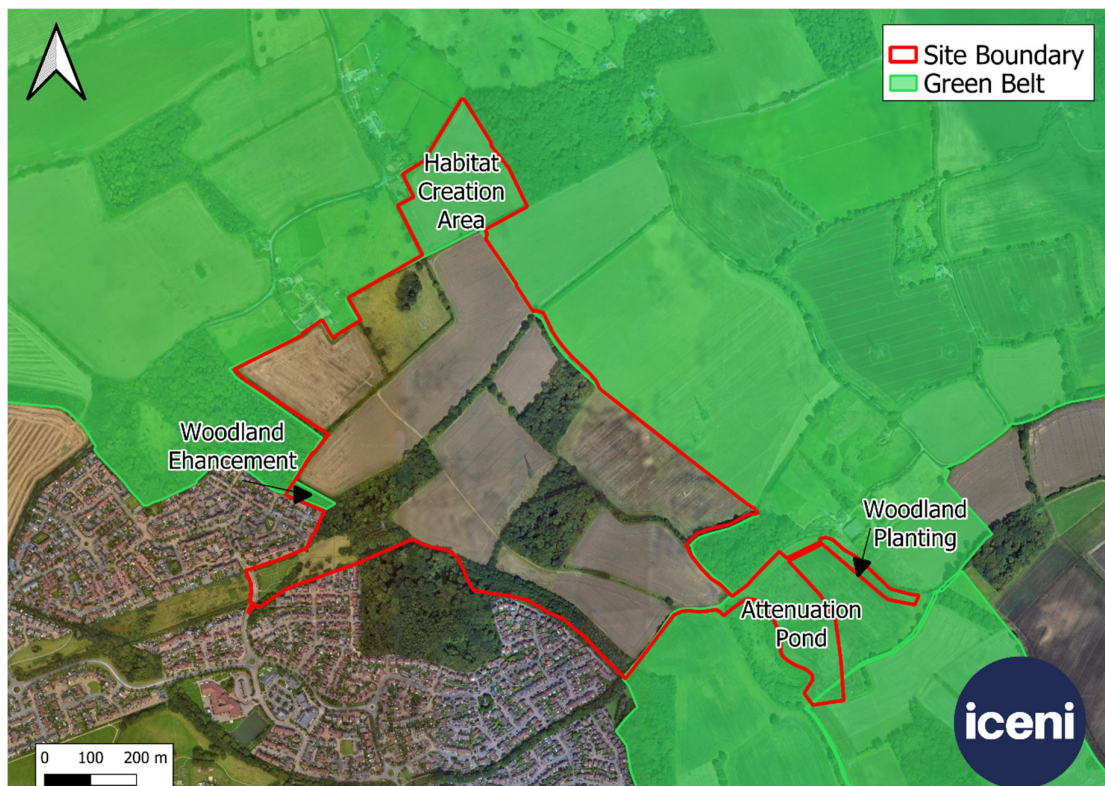
- 6.44 Policy D1 'Sustainable design' states that development must respond positively to the site and the local context taking into consideration position, orientation, scale, height, layout, massing, detailing and use of materials.
- 6.45 Policy NE2 'Landscape' outlines that development proposals must respect the sensitivities of the landscape context and demonstrate that no unacceptable harm is caused to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- 6.46 Given this is a hybrid application, the layout is indicative at this stage. However, the density and layout of the proposed development has been established by a design-led approach and the Proposed Development balances the efficient use of land with the need to respond sensitively to its setting. The scheme would provide approximately 30 dwellings (net) per hectare. The denser development is located towards to the north of the Site, to continue the existing residential area within Great Ashby, to the north west of the Site. The south of the Site will contain lower density residential development and a significant proportion of open space to ensure the development seamlessly integrates with its surroundings.
- 6.47 The Illustrative Masterplan provides further details demonstrating the design principles of the proposals. Further design details would be secured at reserved matters stage, and a full assessment against planning policy related to design would be undertaken at this point.
- 6.48 Chapter 11 of the ES includes a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) that has been undertaken to assess the significance and effect of development proposals on the landscape and receptors' views and visual amenity.

Green Belt

- 6.49 Land within the GA2 allocation has been released from the Green Belt for development. The red line boundary extends outside the GA2 allocation, to encompass land within the Green Belt as shown in **Figure 6.1**. Through the design process and consultation with the Council and other stakeholders, it is apparent that some land uses and functions would be better located outside of the allocation. However, importantly, there is no 'inappropriate' development proposed within the Green Belt through this application.
- 6.50 The proposed housing, education and community uses (potentially inappropriate Green Belt uses) are not proposed within the Green Belt. However, green infrastructure and 'blue' drainage infrastructure is proposed on land within the Green Belt, as shown in **Figure 6.1**.

- 6.51 The fundamental aim of green belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of green belts are their openness and permanence.
- 6.52 Policy SP5 echoes national planning policy in seeking to prevent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and 'will only permit development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated'.
- 6.53 A small field to the north of the allocation, adjacent to Warrensgreen Lane, is proposed to be included within the Site to provide land for further planting to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain, as well as provide additional informal recreational opportunities. Further woodland planting is proposed to the south east of the Site, as shown in **Figure 6.1**.

Figure 6.1: Incursion into the Green Belt



Drainage strategy

- 6.54 The drainage strategy has been developed in consultation with the Council and the LLFA. The drainage strategy framework plan shows a drainage basin to the southeast, within the Green Belt. This is shown in this location due to the relatively steep slope within the south of the Site, and the subsequent landtake that would be required to construct an attenuation basin on this slope. The proposed basin would be located adjacent to the existing drainage basin, which already serves part of Great Ashby. The proposed basin would need to occupy an area of land of around 2.4ha.

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- 6.55 The creation of the attenuation pond proposed is considered development. However, the pond is deemed 'not inappropriate' development in the Green Belt under Paragraph 154 h ii) of the NPPF:

Paragraph 154 (h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

(ii) engineering operations

- 6.56 There would be no above ground signs of the drainage system. It is proposed that the pond would be filled with water except in times of extreme lack of rainfall and would have natural contours and be well landscaped.
- 6.57 It is anticipated that the southern drainage basin will be landscaped so it has less impact on the Green Belt and character of the area than the existing basin that it would adjoin. This would include new areas of thicket planting on the banks, and wet wildflower grass and emergent planting incorporated within the bottom of the basin. Consequently, the visual impact would be minimal with the Site appearing as a soft landscaping pond feature. Therefore openness is preserved and there is no conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt. The Proposed Development would accord with Policy SP5 and the provisions of the NPPF.

Biodiversity enhancements

- 6.58 An area of arable land within the north of the Site will be converted into a species-rich grassland. This will provide an opportunity to create a strategic ecological link between the grassland at Dell Spring and the adjoining Tilekiln Farm, and the woodland and grassland north of the Site.
- 6.59 This area of enhancement will deliver substantially greater benefits for nature, as it can be allowed to develop without as many negative pressures that people can bring. Equivalent biodiversity 'gain' would not be achieved within the GA2 allocation boundary as housing here would diminish any potential gains. This approach demonstrates a commitment to deliverable access to nature and a meaningful contribution to local nature recovery. This approach is consistent with the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy as set out in statute.
- 6.60 In addition, a new area of native broadleaved woodland would be located to the south, which will help to provide BNG and form a habitat link between Newbury Grove and the woodland The Warren. This new planting will also provide privacy to Dane End Farm from the south.
- 6.61 These biodiversity enhancements and woodland planting are not considered development.

Biodiversity

- 6.62 The NPPF seeks to protect and enhance sites of biodiversity value and opportunities for providing net gains, including by establishing coherent ecological networks (paragraph 187). Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons (paragraph 193 part c).
- 6.63 Key to biodiversity is Policy SP12 'Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity' that seeks designated sites to be safeguarded, managed and enhanced. Policy NE4 'Biodiversity and geological sites' states that all development should deliver measurable net gains for, contribute to ecological networks and, the water environment, and/or restore degraded or isolated habitats where possible
- 6.64 The Proposed Development seeks to achieve in excess of 10% biodiversity net gain on the Site, to satisfy the requirement as outlined in Schedule 7A of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order.
- 6.65 Ecology is addressed in Chapter 9 of the ES, which finds that no significant adverse environmental effects are predicted, subject to the implementation of all mitigation measures set out within the chapter, secured appropriately by detailed design, condition and/or other planning obligation. A summary of the protected species on Site is provided in Section 2 of this Planning Statement.
- 6.66 The Proposed Development would primarily result in losses to habitats of very low ecological value, principally intensively managed arable land with some species-poor modified grassland. Habitats of relatively greater ecological value, such as the Ancient Woodland and LWS would be retained. Alongside the retention of existing vegetation, where possible, the Proposed Development will create extensive blue and green infrastructure, with the sustainable drainage features delivering opportunities for biodiversity. New areas of species-rich native habitats will be created, including woodlands, scrub, grasslands.
- 6.67 Hedgerow 11 (shown in the DAS) is a small, unconnected stretch of Category C hedge, which has been proposed for removal in order to rationalise the development area and relocate a new, connected green corridor with swales and new planting.
- 6.68 Potential adverse effects on the LWS could be successfully safeguarded and managed through the implementation of Construction Environmental Management Plan, Landscape and Ecological Management Plan and sensitive lighting.
- 6.69 The Proposed Development will include measures to safeguard ecological sites on and surrounding the Site, together with positively contributing to biodiversity in the District, through creation and long-

term management of biodiversity net gain habitats. This would be in line with the overall aims of policies SP12 and NE4 in the Local Plan.

Ancient Woodland

- 6.70 The NPPF (Paragraph 193, part C) seeks to protect irreplaceable habitats such as Ancient Woodland and suggests that planning applications should be refused where there is a loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, for example where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat, and a suitable compensation strategy exists.
- 6.71 Policy SP12 'Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity' seeks to protect, enhance and manage biodiversity networks including wildlife corridors, ancient woodlands and hedgerows, wetland and riverine habitats. Policy NE4 'Biodiversity and geological sites' requires the integration of appropriate buffers of complimentary habitat for designated sites, stating it may be necessary to exceed a distance of 12m for fragile habitats such as ancient woodland.
- 6.72 The principle of development on a site where there is ancient woodland present is established by virtue of the site allocation under Policy SP18 in the Local Plan. Ancient woodland has remained a key concern throughout the design evolution to ensure the proposals respond sensitively to the habitat.
- 6.73 The Proposed Development would provide a 15m buffer around the ancient woodland on the Site. There would be a small incursion into the 15m buffer to the Ancient Woodland along the central section of the access corridor. However, this area of woodland is already compromised as maintenance access to the overhead power lines is taken here. Further incursions into the 15m Ancient Woodland buffer are expected between Longdell Wood and Nine Acre Spring, where the 15m buffers of these woods overlap, and where the proposed bus loop will need to lead through in order to provide access to the whole Site.
- 6.74 An Ancient Woodland Assessment has been prepared by Kalaco on behalf of Waterman and is submitted with this planning application as Appendix 6.5 of the Environmental Statement. The assessment evaluates the potential air quality impacts of the Proposed Development on Ancient Woodland within and surrounding the Site. Using modelling consistent with the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) and the Environment Agency (EA), it examined emissions of nitrogen dioxide and ammonia from road, and their potential effects on nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition in nearby woodlands.

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- 6.75 To protect ecological sites, 'critical levels' and 'critical loads' have been set either through domestic regulations or through international bodies. 'Critical levels' relates to the concentration of a pollutant in air, 'critical loads' relate to the deposition of air pollution to the ground.
- 6.76 As the Proposed Development's contribution is a maximum of 5% of a critical level or load it is considered that the Proposed Development will not give rise to a significant impact on the ancient woodlands within and close to the Site.

Built Heritage

- 6.77 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 requires local authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or exercise of any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 6.78 Preserving the setting of nearby listed heritage assets has been a key concern in the design process. The scheme reflects the principles of Local Plan Policies SP13 and HE1, which require the protection of designated heritage assets and their settings, as well as Policy SP9 on achieving high-quality, contextually responsive design. Through its landscape-led masterplan, careful siting of built form, and retention of historic landscape features, the development demonstrates a balanced and proportionate response to heritage considerations, consistent with the policy objective of sustaining and enhancing the area's historic character while delivering much-needed housing and community infrastructure.
- 6.79 Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement assesses the potential effects of the Proposed Development on built heritage. The study assesses 11 listed buildings within 1km of the Site (all Grade II) and several non-designated features including historic hedgerows. No heritage assets are located within the Site itself.
- 6.80 Construction impacts would be temporary, with only Tilekiln Farm and its associated barns experiencing a moderate adverse (but reversible) effect. Once operational, the development would result in no significant adverse effects, as design measures such as landscape buffers, setbacks, and the strengthening of hedgerows mitigate change to the setting of nearby assets. Overall, the proposals are considered to cause only minor or negligible impacts, which will lessen further as planting matures, and the scheme's public benefits are judged to outweigh any limited heritage harm. It is considered that the level of heritage harm was considered through the decision to allocate the land for development in the adopted Plan and that the proposal remains in accordance with the Development Plan and should be approved in accordance with Paragraph 11c of the Framework.

Archaeology

- 6.81 Archaeological trial trenching has been undertaken across the site in two main phases to establish the presence, extent, and significance of any buried remains. The first investigation, carried out by Oxford Archaeology in 2008, involved 42 trenches concentrated in the north-western part of the site near Tilekiln Farm. This work revealed limited archaeological activity, including features associated with medieval tile production and a possible medieval field system, together with a single pit of late Iron Age or early Roman date and a small number of undated ditches and pits.
- 6.82 A second, more extensive evaluation was completed in 2023, comprising 72 trenches distributed across much of the remaining site area. This more recent programme identified relatively few archaeological features: one residual Mesolithic flint tool, a small quantity of mainly residual Roman pottery, a possible medieval or post-medieval quarry pit likely linked to the tile-making activity, a post-medieval trackway, and several undated features.
- 6.83 In total, 114 trenches were excavated across both campaigns, with approximately 70% proving archaeologically blank. The results confirm that archaeological remains are sparse, localised, and of low significance.
- 6.84 Chapter 7 of the Environmental Statement assesses the potential archaeological effects of the proposals. The assessment, undertaken in line with national and local policy, draws on desk-based research, geophysical surveys, and the aforementioned trial trench evaluations completed in 2008 and 2023.
- 6.85 Construction works will involve ground disturbance with potential to affect any surviving remains; however, such impacts can be effectively mitigated through a programme of archaeological investigation and recording secured by planning condition.
- 6.86 Once mitigation is complete, residual effects are assessed as minor or negligible and therefore not significant. The proposals are consistent with the NPPF and Policy HE4 of the Local Plan, ensuring that archaeological interests are appropriately protected, investigated, and preserved by record before development proceeds.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 6.87 The Site is located in Flood Zone 1, and has the lowest risk of flooding, therefore making it suitable for residential development as per the NPPF.
- 6.88 An Interim Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy, prepared by Woods Hardwick, accompanies the planning application and confirms that risk of flooding from all sources is considered to be low. Surface water flooding at the Site is considered to be at very low risk, although there are

surface water flow routes through the Site which correlate with the natural valleys. These flow routes will be accommodated within the development proposal or diverted where necessary, and the Proposed Development will not exacerbate the risk of flooding elsewhere. The report concludes that there is no reason, in terms of drainage or flood risk, why the Proposed Development should not be fully supported through the planning process.

- 6.89 The Proposed Development optimises the use of SuDS in line with best practice, national and local policy and has been developed in discussion with the relevant stakeholders. The Site's underlying ground conditions are generally not suitable to support an infiltration based strategy, however permeable paving will be used in localised areas where the conditions allow. The remainder of surface water attenuation will be provided within swales and attenuation basins. The proposed features will provide surface water treatment close to the source while also providing sufficient capacity to accommodate a 1 in 100-year storm event with an additional 40% allowance for climatic change and 10% urban creep based upon the calculated roof area. Discharge to the existing ditch network will be at the calculated Qbar rate.
- 6.90 It is proposed to discharge foul flows from the site into the existing Thames Water network. Foul flows from part of the site will drain via gravity to an onsite adoptable pumping station from which it will be pumped to onsite sewers which will convey the flows along with the flows from the remainder of the site to the outfall via gravity. While Thames Water have confirmed that there is currently not sufficient capacity in the network to accommodate the Proposed Development once fully occupied, they have acknowledged that it is their responsibility to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the network for consented development and will therefore undertake the necessary modelling and subsequent mitigation works. If necessary, Thames Water will provide a temporary solution however this is considered to be unlikely to be necessary.
- 6.91 Chapter 16 of the Environmental Statement assesses the potential effects of the proposals on water resources and flood risk. During construction, temporary risks such as surface water runoff and contamination will be controlled through a Construction Environmental Management Plan. Once operational, residual impacts are assessed as minor or negligible, with the scheme delivering betterment to existing drainage conditions. The assessment concludes that, with the proposed mitigation in place, the development accords with national and local policy and presents no water environment or flood risk constraints to its delivery.
- 6.92 In light of the above, it can be concluded that there are no flood risk, surface or foul water drainage grounds on which to refuse this application.

Transport and Highways

- 6.93 Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement assesses the transport and accessibility implications proposals. The study, supported by a Transport Assessment and Accessibility Audit, evaluates the effects of the proposed development on local highways, junction capacity, public transport, walking, and cycling networks.
- 6.94 Baseline conditions were established using traffic surveys and modelling, with future year assessments completed for 2030 and 2035. The results show that all junctions would operate within capacity except one (Junction 13). The Transport Assessment explains that this result is based on an overestimation of the realistic number of vehicles expected to route through this junction and that all other scenarios demonstrate the junction operating within capacity.
- 6.95 Typically, when a junction operates at above this capacity, physical mitigation works may be considered. However, discussions with the Highway Authority have made it clear that the preferred approach is to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel as opposed to junction improvement works which would make it more convenient for motor vehicles. This is also considering that the junction would be operating above capacity only under extreme conditions.
- 6.96 Key features include new pedestrian and cycle links, upgraded and new bridleways, and a proposed bus loop with stops within 400 metres of all homes. Construction impacts will be managed through a Construction Traffic Management Plan, while a Green Travel Plan will encourage sustainable travel once occupied.
- 6.97 The ES chapter concludes that the proposals would have minor adverse impacts on traffic delay and road safety, but moderate beneficial effects for active travel accessibility and amenity, aligning with both local and national transport policy objectives to reduce car dependency and support low-carbon mobility.
- 6.98 The scheme also supports Hertfordshire County Council's 4th Local Transport Plan (2018–2031), which seeks to reduce reliance on private vehicles, improve road safety, and encourage active and inclusive travel. The design integrates key principles from the Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy, Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy, and the Stevenage 'Future Town, Future Transport Strategy', ensuring strong connections to existing and planned pedestrian, cycle, and bus networks.
- 6.99 Detailed discussions have been held with Arriva regarding the new bus infrastructure (including the proposed loop and three new bus stops) to meet accessibility standards and provide direct links to Stevenage town centre. The proposals further comply with the Local Plan policies that require sustainable transport integration, safe access, and support for low-carbon mobility.

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- 6.100 Overall, the proposals represent a policy-compliant approach that balances necessary highway capacity with a clear emphasis on sustainable transport and modal shift.

Open Space and Recreation

- 6.101 Open space and green infrastructure are central to the design of the Proposed Development, which will deliver a comprehensive and connected network of accessible green spaces across the Site. The Illustrative Masterplan ensures that all homes are located within a five-minute walk of public open space and that existing natural features are retained and enhanced.
- 6.102 Key elements include the green infrastructure corridor beneath the pylon lines, the open space around Dell Spring, and extensive structural planting along the new Green Belt edge to strengthen landscape character and provide recreational connectivity. In total, the Proposed Development will provide 36.62ha of multifunctional green infrastructure, incorporating a variety of open spaces including parkland, play areas, natural and semi-natural greenspace, sustainable drainage features, and amenity areas.
- 6.103 Play provision will meet NHDC's standards, and the landscape design has been informed by the site's topography, vegetation, and local landscape character to ensure that the development is sensitively integrated into its setting.
- 6.104 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Chapter 11 of the Environmental Statement) confirms that while temporary adverse effects would occur during construction, these would lessen over time as planting establishes. By year 15, the proposals would be well-assimilated into the landscape, with no significant residual effects anticipated apart from minor ongoing effects for users of on-site public rights of way. The scheme will therefore deliver a lasting enhancement to local landscape structure, ecological value, and visual quality.
- 6.105 Overall, the landscape strategy is fully aligned with national and local policy objectives, providing a high-quality and accessible network of open spaces that supports recreation, biodiversity, and wellbeing. The proposals will create a green, legible, and attractive environment that promotes healthy lifestyles and active travel, enhances biodiversity networks, and contributes to the wider green infrastructure framework for Great Ashby.
- 6.106 The detailed open space design, planting and management proposals will be secured at the reserved matters stage, guided by the principles established in the Green Infrastructure Framework Plan and the Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan.

Sustainability and Energy

- 6.107 Built environment sustainability is incorporated within policy and regulation at a national and local level. The Climate Change Act 2008 and the NPPF set out national frameworks by which to mitigate climate change, achieve reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, and deliver development that is aligned with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 6.108 Specific policies in the Local Plan seek to minimise the impact of new development with respect to carbon dioxide emissions and environmental impacts, whilst also ensuring new development is resilient to the impacts of projected climate change. Policy SP11 of the Local Plan states that new development proposals should address the challenges of climate change by implementing proportionate measures to reduce carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as passive design measures to minimise energy consumption, and Policy D1 'Sustainable design' requires development proposals to include measure to contribute to the minimisation of water, energy and resource consumption.
- 6.109 Chapter 10 of the Environmental Statement assesses the potential effects of the proposals on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.
- 6.110 The chapter considers both the contribution of the proposals to climate change through construction and operational emissions, and the development's resilience to future climatic conditions. The assessment, undertaken in line with current ISEP and RICS guidance, concludes that total GHG emissions from construction and operation would represent a negligible proportion of national carbon budgets and therefore are not significant in EIA terms.
- 6.111 Embedded design measures such as a gas-free, all-electric energy strategy, high fabric efficiency, renewable energy integration, active travel corridors, and electric vehicle charging will minimise emissions throughout the project's life. The development also incorporates a comprehensive drainage system, drought-tolerant planting, and passive design measures to ensure resilience to future changes in temperature, rainfall, and extreme weather events.
- 6.112 Overall, the assessment finds that the proposed development will make a minimal contribution to national greenhouse gas emissions and is suitably adapted to the effects of projected climate change, fully aligning with national, regional, and local policy objectives to achieve net zero and build climate-resilient communities.

Noise and Air Quality

- 6.113 The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, by preventing new/existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from air pollution or noise (Paragraph 187).

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- 6.114 Policy D4 'Air quality' of the Local Plan accords with the above policy framework, stating that Development proposals must not cause an unacceptable impact on local air quality, during demolition / construction and its operational phases. Similarly, this is endorsed by Policy D3 'Protecting living conditions' which states that development proposals must not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions, in terms of noise or air pollution.
- 6.115 Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement assesses the effects of the development on air quality during both construction and operation. The assessment identifies and evaluates potential impacts on a range of high sensitivity receptors, including existing residential areas around Merrick Close, Cleveland Way, and Orwell Avenue, as well as future residents and school users within the development.
- 6.116 During construction, there is potential for temporary dust emissions and vehicle exhaust impacts; however, with best practice mitigation secured through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Construction Logistics Plan (CLP), residual effects are assessed as negligible.
- 6.117 Air quality dispersion modelling (using ADMS-Roads) was undertaken to predict operational nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} concentrations at both existing and future receptors. The results confirm that pollutant levels will remain well below national air quality objectives in all scenarios, with predicted changes classed as negligible. The nearby ancient woodlands and ecological receptors, including Brooches Wood, were also considered, with effects from pollutant deposition assessed as insignificant. Overall, the assessment concludes that the development will have a negligible impact on local air quality during both construction and operation, with no exceedances of air quality standards and no significant effects on human health or ecological receptors.
- 6.118 Chapter 12 of the Environmental Statement assesses the potential noise and vibration effects during both construction and operation. The assessment, undertaken in accordance with BS5228, BS4142, and other recognised guidance, identifies and evaluates impacts on a range of sensitive receptors including existing residential properties at Tile Kiln Farm, Merrick Close, Dane End Farm, Cleveland Way, Mendip Way, and Grampian Place, as well as future residents and the proposed school within the development.
- 6.119 During construction, short-term increases in noise and vibration are predicted at nearby receptors, but with mitigation through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Construction Traffic Logistics Plan (CTLP), effects would be reduced to acceptable levels and are assessed as not significant.
- 6.120 Operationally, the development—being predominantly residential—is considered a quiet land use, with negligible impacts from servicing, plant noise, and the proposed school sports facilities. Minor to moderate increases in road traffic noise are predicted along Great Ashby Way and Orwell Avenue,

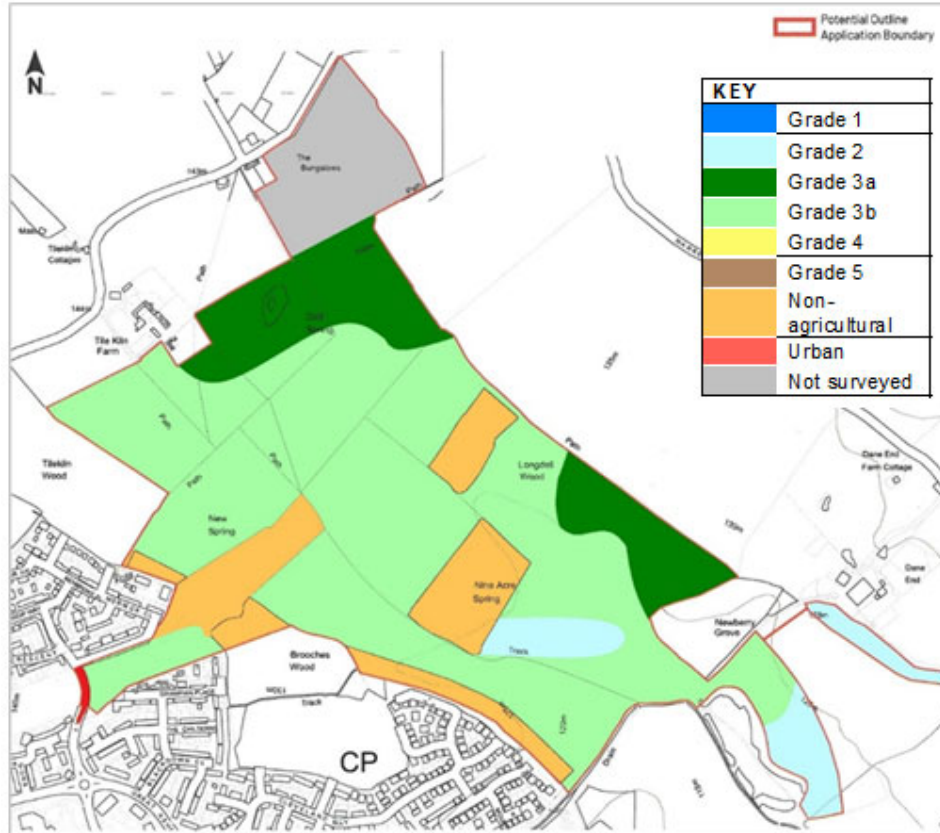
while a more notable increase on Mendip Way and the new site access road is identified, though absolute noise levels remain below the Significant Observed Adverse Effect Level (SOAEL) and can be further mitigated through landscape screening. Overall, residual effects on all existing and future sensitive receptors are assessed as negligible to minor adverse and therefore not significant in EIA terms.

- 6.121 As such, with appropriate mitigation measures in place, the Proposed Development aligns with Paragraph 187 of the NPPF and Policy D3 and Policy D4.

Agricultural Land

- 6.122 Paragraph 112 of the NPPF advises that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.
- 6.123 An Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey prepared by Kernon Countryside Consultants is submitted with the application, Soils and Agricultural Land are also addressed in Chapter 14 of the ES. ALC is graded from 1 to 5. The best quality land is Grade 1 'excellent quality' and the poorest is Grade 5 'very poor'. Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a.
- 6.124 The results of the detailed agricultural land survey completed for the Site are shown in **Figure 6.4**. There is no Grade 1 land within the Site. Grade 2 land comprises 6.4% of the Site. Grade 3a comprises 11.9% of the Site. As such, 18.3% of the Site comprises BMV land.
- 6.125 The majority of the Site is Subgrade 3b land which is of 'moderate' agricultural quality and is not afforded any particular protection in planning policy and is not deemed BMV land.
- 6.126 The Proposed Development will minimise the impact on BMV land by design. The BMV land is mostly proposed for BNG and open space uses, where it will not be disturbed, but nevertheless its return to agricultural use in the future is unlikely. However, within the context of NHDC, the proportion of land within the district likely to be BMV, is above the national average.

Figure 6.2: Detailed Agricultural Land Classification Survey



Ground Contamination and Pollution

- 6.127 The NPPF states that local planning authorities should ensure that land is suitable for its new use taking account of various matters, including pollution arising from previous uses. This is endorsed by Policy SP11 'Natural resources and sustainability' of the Local Plan, which states that consideration must be given to the potential or actual impact of land contamination and Policy NE11 'Contaminated land' which states that planning permission will be granted provided that a contaminated land study is submitted as part of the application and appropriate measures are in place to remove or reduce risks to an acceptable level.
- 6.128 A Ground Investigation Report has been prepared by GEA Ltd and is submitted with this planning application. The investigation included a desk study of historical maps followed by an intrusive ground investigation comprising three deep boreholes, eight shallow boreholes and nine trial pits. Further tests were conducted to assess soil strength and drainage potential. Groundwater monitoring standpipes were installed and soil samples were analysed for geotechnical properties and contamination. The soils are classified as non-hazardous for disposal, and no remediation works are required.

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- 6.129 The findings are consistent with the requirements of the NPPF and the Local Plan Policies on land stability, contamination, and sustainable development, demonstrating that the ground conditions present no significant constraints to the proposed residential and mixed-use development.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

7.1 The Proposed Development falls within Category 10(b) of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations) (England) Regulations 2017 (as amended), which is applicable to 'Urban Development Projects'. The thresholds for such developments that require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are:

- The development includes more than 1 hectare of urban development which is not dwelling house development; or
- The development includes more than 150 dwellings; or
- The overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares.

7.2 The Proposed Development is considered to fall within Category 10(b) of Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations and is therefore EIA development for the purpose of the EIA Regulations.

7.3 An EIA has been carried out, the results of which are set out in the Environmental Statement ('ES') submitted with the Application.

7.4 A Scoping Opinion request was submitted to NHDC on 6 April 2023. A Scoping Opinion was issued on 23 June 2023 (Ref. 23/00806/SCOP). Please refer to the ES for further information on how the scope of the ES was agreed. The topics scoped into the Environmental Statement are:

- Socio-Economics;
- Air Quality;
- Transport;
- Noise and Vibration;
- Ecology;
- Water Environment and Flood Risk;
- Landscape and Visual Impact;
- Archaeology;
- Built Heritage;

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- Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions;
 - Soils and Agricultural Land; and
 - Utilities, Services and Infrastructure.

7.5 The EIA has been undertaken in line with relevant legislation, namely the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended).

7.6 A summary of the residual environmental effects of the Proposed Development is provided in Chapter 18 of the ES.

8. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS

8.1 The NPPF states that the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. Paragraph 7 notes that the NPPF as a whole sets out the Government's view of what constitutes sustainable development, while paragraph 8 identifies three dimensions to sustainable development, comprising economic, social and environmental roles. It is our opinion that the three roles are mutually dependent and should not be taken in isolation.

8.2 The following section provides an assessment of the Proposed development against these criteria, demonstrating how the scheme will bring a range of economic, social and environmental benefits to the local area and the District.

Table 8.1 Scheme Benefits

NPPF Sustainable Development Dimensions	Benefits of the Proposed Development
Economic	The Proposed Development is expected to deliver a range of economic benefits during construction phase and once the new homes are complete and occupied to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy. The provision of new housing is central to supporting economic growth and job creation as set out in Section 1 of the NPPF. Bringing forward the Proposed Development would provide an attractive place for the economically active population within Great Ashby to live, the development would help support the vitality and viability of North Hertfordshire through increasing the number of residents and therefore potential customers, in line with Section 7 of the NPPF. The key economic benefits can be summarised as follows: • Supporting direct construction jobs associated with on-Site construction phase activities. • Injection of significant levels of investment from the private sector to support local businesses. • Generation of direct and indirect GVA over the build period. • On-going resident expenditure per annum once complete and fully occupied. • New Homes Bonus payments. • Council Tax payments per annum, payable in perpetuity.
Social	The Proposed Development will support a strong, vibrant and healthy community by providing new market and affordable housing for up to 640 households, in an area where there is an acknowledged housing market shortfall. The development will contribute towards the provision of community facilities, land for a new school and significant transport infrastructure to promote the creation of healthy communities.

NPPF Sustainable Development Dimensions	Benefits of the Proposed Development
	The headline social benefits of the proposed scheme are set out below: • Delivery of market and affordable homes to meet North Hertfordshire's housing need. • Provision of a suitable mix of smaller and family sized homes to help create a balanced community and meet a wide range of housing needs. • Provision of opportunities for social interaction within the public open space, children's play space and within walking routes, to help support the health and well-being of residents and the wider public. • Implementation of secured by design principles in the design to achieve a safe and crime free living environment. • Provision of land for a new school and further land reserved for education use. • New transport infrastructure, including a new bus loop and three bus stops.
Environmental	The overarching sustainability strategy for the Site has been set out above, a fabric first approach would be pursued to ensure all dwellings meet the latest Building Regulation Standards. The Proposed Development will contribute to protecting and enhancing the environment in the following ways: • Occupants of the Proposed Development would utilise the local pedestrian, cycling and public transport infrastructure providing services into Great Ashby and further afield to Stevenage. Promotion of these sustainable transport modes would be ensured through the Travel Plan. • A range of green infrastructure will be provided as part of the development, including amenity space, place space and drainage features. • The Proposed Development has been assessed to ensure that any noise impacts are mitigated against. • A drainage strategy that incorporates SuDS techniques in line with the hierarchy is included. • Provision for cycle parking and electric vehicle car parking spaces are included as part of the design.

9. PLANNING CONDITIONS AND OBLIGATIONS

Planning Conditions

- 9.1 It is anticipated that the decision notice will be accompanied by an appropriate suite of planning conditions. The application will engage constructively with the Council during the determination period to agree the wording of these conditions.

Planning Obligations

- 9.2 A draft schedule of planning obligations has been prepared and is appended to this Planning Statement (Appendix A4). This schedule reflects several rounds of correspondence with both NHC and HCC. The Applicant remains committed to continuing constructive dialogue to ensure the obligations are appropriately aligned with the needs of the development and the wider area.

10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 10.1 This planning application has been prepared on behalf of Picture Estates Limited for the development of a residential-led development at land at GA2, Land north of Great Ashby.
- 10.2 The Prime Minister, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government ('MHCLG') and the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government have all recently and collectively called for Britain to get building. Delivering economic growth is the foremost objective underpinned by a renewed commitment to 'get Britain building' and to deliver 1.5 million new homes.
- 10.3 In the context of an acute national housing crisis, and in accordance with Paragraph 61 of the NPPF, there is a clear imperative to significantly boost the supply of homes across the country.
- 10.4 The Site and its strategic allocation form a critical component of North Hertfordshire's spatial strategy and are central to achieving the Local Plan's objectives of creating well-planned, sustainable communities. The development will deliver essential infrastructure, meet identified housing needs, and contribute positively to local economic growth.
- 10.5 As set out in statute in Paragraph 2 of the NPPF, the Local Development Plan is the starting point for determining any planning application. Paragraph 11(c) further requires that planning authorities approve development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay. This is especially important in districts like NHDC which are currently struggling to demonstrate the housing strategy is effective and deliverable, by a clear inability to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply.
- 10.6 The Council must re-establish its five-year housing land supply as soon as possible. This relies on the timely delivery of key allocated sites, of which the GA2 allocation is one of the most significant. The delivery of GA2 is a central component of North Hertfordshire's spatial strategy and is essential to achieving the Local Plan's objectives of creating well-planned, sustainable communities. The development will deliver a significant number of new homes, community infrastructure, highways infrastructure and land for a new school.
- 10.7 In accordance with the allocation requirements, a masterplan for the Site was prepared collaboratively with NHDC and formally agreed on 29 November 2024. The Strategic Masterplan was adopted as a material planning consideration and establishes the development principles that underpin the application.

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- 10.8 Whilst this is a hybrid application, it secures the principles of key infrastructure required to support a sustainable new neighbourhood in this location. The proposals fully accord with the approved masterplan and reflect the spatial, design and infrastructure parameters agreed with the Council.
- 10.9 An Environmental Statement accompanies the application and demonstrates that the Proposed Development can be delivered within acceptable environmental limits. It robustly assesses both positive and negative effects and confirms that the scheme will bring substantial social, economic, and environmental benefits to the local area and the wider District.
- 10.10 The key benefits of the scheme are summarised as:
- **640 residential units:** The Proposed Development would be home to an estimated 1,536 residents, who are predicted to spend £15.5m each year on goods and services, and generate further income in Council Tax and New Homes Bonus for NHDC.
 - **Total gross spending of £15.5m per year** by the new residents, could support the vitality and viability of local centres, businesses and services.
 - **Creation of 1,498 construction jobs on-site**, equivalent to 300 construction jobs supported per annum.
 - **Creation of a new bus loop through the Site** designed in consultation with HCC and Arriva, including three new bus stops to ensure all homes are within a short walking distance of public transport.
 - **Delivery of a genuinely sustainable development:** The scheme has been designed to achieve the highest standards of sustainable design and, where possible, exceeding policy requirements set out in the NPPF and the Local Plan, facilitating the optimised economic use of the Site and incorporating sustainable design techniques and prioritising and encouraging sustainable modes of travel.
 - **Enhancing local biodiversity:** In excess of 10% biodiversity net gain compared to the existing.
 - **Provision for a new two-form entry primary school** and additional land for future education use, ensuring flexibility to respond to changing local needs over time.
 - **Generation of substantial Community Infrastructure Levy ('CIL') payments**, business rate contributions for local and regional benefit, as well as supporting wider initiatives, such as skills and training, as part of a comprehensive Section 106 package.

**A1. LETTER PREPARED BY CSA – RESPONSE TO REQUEST
FOR UPDATED BAT SURVEYS**

A2. CORRESPONDENCE WITH UKPN AND NATIONAL GRID

A3. SAVILLS CARE HOME REPORT

A4. DRAFT HEADS OF TERMS