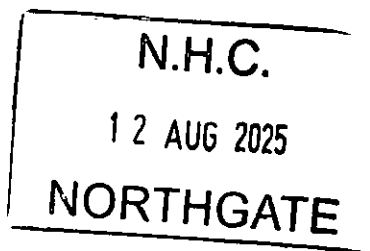


Dr R P Munden
23 Echo Hill
Royston
Herts



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

7th August 2025

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

I write in objection to this planning application.

This application should be rejected for many reasons.

1 Lack of differentiation from previous failed applications

When Echo Hill was first developed the planning application included the land the subject of this application, but was refused. Gladman submitted two more applications to develop the same land, which were unanimously refused by the planning committee. One councillor with 50 years of service commented upon the 2020 application, 20/00744/OP, as 'the worst application I've seen in 50 years.' The officer dealing with visual impact said that he was not prepared to comment as the access was so awful that there was no point.

Nothing significant has changed since these refusals and the new application is virtually identical to previous one. This opportunistic application represents an unmerited extra workload on the already over-stretched planning authorities and planning committees. It should therefore be dismissed immediately as lacking in merit on the basis of those three previous rejections.

2 Impact on neighbours and community

Picture sitting in your garden trying to enjoy the peace, quiet and fresh air. Picture, for 2 or 3 years, large lorries with heavy loads grinding up a steep slope (that exceeds allowable guidelines), just literally a few feet away, emitting unbelievable fumes, noise, vibration, and dust. Picture sitting in your garden with cars, Amazon (and other) delivery vans and refuse lorries accelerating up that slope for ever more.

Picture the noise and vibration from the piles, necessary to support the proposed access road, being driven in immediately on your boundary, and the general noise and dust during construction.

Picture waking up in the morning to pull your curtains and seeing people staring at you from the access road, level with your window. Picture a street light glaring *down* into your window.

This will be the reality for the occupants of nos. 23 and 25, the neighbouring properties, who will have their living standards significantly and detrimentally impacted during both the construction and following habitation of the development. NHDC failed to appropriately assess and address this issue during the last planning application. The proposals conflict with Policies D3 of the adopted Local Plan. The elevated location of the development site in relation to the existing surrounding properties, is likely to give rise to existing residents being left with a sense of being overlooked, overshadowed and dominated by new development. This would detrimentally impact on reasonable expectations of residential amenity and privacy. The proposals would be contrary to the NPPF and Policies D3 of the adopted Local Plan.

I attach photographs, one (Figure 1) showing the view from the ground in our garden which clearly indicates the gradient that the road will have to climb and how overlooked we will be. The second (Figure 2), is taken from our bedroom window, showing how the road, when it reaches the end of our garden, will be level with our bedroom, so pedestrians will have a clear view in. The Beech hedge in no. 24, which even Gladman's arboriculturist said (in the previous application) should be retained if possible, will have to be removed for the proposed access.

We have no desire to move house, having lived here 40 years and having got it how we want it, at considerable expense, and with a lovely wildlife friendly garden. Our children and grandchildren live just short walks away from us. Should circumstance (illness, bereavement) force us to sell and, God forbid, this development goes ahead, then the house would be unsellable during the construction process, or only at a hugely reduced price. Even after construction is complete, local estate agents tell us that the value of the property will be diminished by the proximity of the access road and by being overlooked. If, unbelievably, planning permission were given, it should be with the condition of appropriate compensation to us and no. 25.

Currently Echo Hill is a very low crime cul-de-sac with a wonderful 'sense of place'. This application will completely change the aspect of these two properties leaving little or no defensible space between the proposed access and nos. 23 and 25 as there will literally only be a retaining wall, then footway and road. This will demonstrably reduce the security of these two houses. Number 23 has a side entrance which will open virtually immediately onto the footway. The wonderful 'sense of place' as required by the government Manual for Streets would be destroyed by the proposed application.

3 Highways and Transport

3a The Access Road

The indicative section (Figure 31 in design and access statement 3 of 3, reproduced as Figure 3 at the end of this report) is **totally** misleading. It gives the impression that Echo Hill road takes a continual rise from no. 42 to the top of the proposed access road. This is not correct. The road up from 42 to the access start begins with a gentle

slope and then soon becomes almost flat. It is also at right angles to the access road and so will then turn left into a steep gradient. On the diagram, Gladman have continued the line straight down into no. 41's garden and then turned right to the centre of no. 42, which is lower than the road, thus increasing the apparent rise over the actual for this section. This also has the effect of foreshortening the distance to 42 from the access road. It looks less than 1/3rd the distance from the start of the access road to the top of the access road, in fact it about 1/2. So instead of showing a continual gradient, the line should show a sudden increase in gradient into the access road. **All together this is a glaring misrepresentation.**

Also the following statement is made: 'In order to safely achieve the required gradient the access road has been designed to curve back.' **Once again this is very misleading.** It can't curl until it reaches a level beyond the top of our garden because it is constrained by the very tight limits of the space occupied by no. 24 (and in their plan continues straight for longer than that). So the gradient between nos. 23 and 25, is too steep to comply with requirements and for safety, as confirmed by a Royal Haskoning expert report by Phil Marshall, submitted against the 2020 Application, and the access hasn't changed in this application.

The access road plans for the 2020 application were shown to be inadequate in swept path analysis and gradient, amongst other failures, in that Royal Haskoning report. The new application is even worse with regards to the swept path analysis as the access road is now narrower, by up 1.2 meters, following Gladman's acceptance that they were including my land in the original plans. An expert analysis by Royal Haskoning of the new application has been commissioned but this can't be completed by the deadline of August 17th because of holidays and workload, and so we rely on your statement that you will consider objections received after then.

In a completely new development such poor access would never be considered, so why should it be acceptable now?

3b General access

The development site is fundamentally unsustainable due to the location of the site in relation to services, constrained access route to the local primary school, undeliverable proposed site access and constrained nature of the highway network including Echo Hill, Sun Hill, Coronation Avenue and Briary Lane. **This conflicts with paragraphs 108, 109 and 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy T1 of the Local Plan and local planning guidance of the Roads in Hertfordshire A Design Guide.** The Transport Assessment by gta (June 2025) states the revised site access arrangement is supported by a safety audit by EC Road Safety. The safety audit however has not been consulted on with the approving authority of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Highways, prior to the final design.

It is apparent the access has been contrived with little regard to existing users of Echo Hill, Sun Hill and Briary Lane. No details have been submitted on gradients and proposed levels of the access road. The audit and the Transport Assessment concentrates on the safety of the presumed development "generated" pedestrians, without any consideration given to the following key existing users, the existing drop kerbs associated with the driveways of Numbers 25 and 23, the proximity to existing

junctions, the blind/sharp bend leading directly from a steep gradient onto Echo Hill, the continued desire line of Echo Hill residents which could lead to a conflict with oncoming vehicles from the development, the existing blind bend on Sun Hill / Briary Lane, and the constrained single carriageway width along them.

Figure 3 shows various scenes along Sun Hill and Briary Lane demonstrating how challenging it already is and the unsuitability of increased traffic.

The application claims that a cyclist can cycle from the station in 6 minutes. This is unrealistic, double that is optimistic (see Appendix 1). Similarly, the claimed 11 minute walk time to the station is unachievable, it is actually well above 20 minutes (see Appendix 1).

The application also mentions, casually, that the nearest infants school is 1.5km away, neglecting to mention that the journey involves steep hills both ways, very challenging for young parents with small children, who would therefore inevitably drive.

Currently there is no senior school in Royston so A level students have long journeys. In order to minimise the journey time many would be driven to the station or bus stop.

Whilst considering some of the many inaccuracies, I will mention the reference to a Morrisons Supermarket. There is no such thing, it has been closed for years, and in fact is now just a hole in the ground.

There are no details as to how the access road is to be constructed. In the previous application the plan was to provide the foundations for the retaining walls to the access road by piling. This represents a serious threat to properties number 23 and 25 due to the closeness of the pile to the property boundaries. Therefore a highly qualified and experienced Structural Engineer was commissioned by us to comment upon these plans. The Engineer was, however, unable to comment as the plans were missing vital information that is required in order to be able to judge whether it is achievable without affecting nos. 23 and 25. The engineer commented as follows:

- i It is not clear from the drawings the extent of the proposed piled retaining wall. This should be clearly marked on the plan
- ii What is the maximum and minimum height of the retaining wall at the maximum and minimum height of the retaining wall above the road level?
- iii What is the maximum deflection of the cantilevered pile wall?

No approval should be possible without answers to these questions.

There are many guidelines that are broken by this application. Just to list a few:

- access to more than 150 dwellings should have more than one entry and exit. The whole area around has 370 houses already and only has one entrance (Briary Lane), so adding more houses (to around 450) further stretches the failure to comply with these guidelines. In Echo Hill plus the proposed development alone there will be 136 houses with a very narrow, steep and windy single access.

- There are regulations about how close road entrances can be to existing drives. The proposed access road virtually touches the drives of nos. 23 and 25, substantially failing those guidelines.
- There are also guidelines about how close a new turning can be to an existing one. This guideline is broken by the proposed application.

While these may only be guidelines, how many broken guidelines does it take to become a mandatory refusal?

While access was incorrectly not given as a reason for refusal in the previous application, this omission can now be rectified, strengthened by the fact that the immediate access is narrower and even worse.

4 Ecology

The proposed development will have an ecological impact to at-risk species, as specified in the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan and the RSPB Red list, and other protected species. Records of the protected species have been provided on relevant ecology recording websites, up to present day, and are absent from the ecology report. The appraisal commissioned by the applicant has not undertaken full surveys prior to the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations submitted in support of the site at planning. The BNG calculations already show a deficit with the proposals unable to comply to the 10% BNG within the site and is reliant on offsite mitigation.

The largely desk based survey has significantly under-estimated the bio-diversity on this site. For example the presence of red-listed hedgehogs has been played down and it states that 'there was no evidence of badgers found during the survey'. In fact I have numerous date stamped videos from 2020 until now (literally hundreds now) of badgers in my garden, which they enter from the field (they visit on the vast majority of nights and we have identified at least 5 different individuals). Other neighbours also have photographic proof.

Furthermore the report fails to note the existence of an in-use badger sett that goes under the field from a garden on Royse Grove.

We residents, who include many knowledgeable people (I am a volunteer warden at Fowlmere RSPB nature reserve) also have had many sightings of hedgehogs over the past few years (unlike the Gladman ecology report which states no reportings since 2020) and I have photographic evidence, including on 10 occasions in July and until the time of writing this objection (Aug 5th).

Likewise there is photographic evidence of deer (Roe, Fallow and Muntjac), fox and regular Brown Hares in the field. A total of 16 different species of mammals. We also have toads, smooth newts, frogs and lizard plus records of numerous insects available due to the expertise of a professional ecologist who lived backing onto the field.

The list for bird sightings in my garden and the field is now 66 species, of which 10 are currently on the red list (including frequent visits by Greenfinch) and 17 on the amber list.

The ecology report mentions 'One of these records was for anecdotal evidence of a bats (sic) within a bat (sic) in a garden to immediate north of the Site in 2020'. This probably refers to a bat box *on a tree in the field, not garden*, for which the Herts bat group detected evidence of use due to staining beneath the entrance.

This application will detrimentally impact the neighbouring SSSI and the designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and therefore should not be accepted.

A Therfield Heath mitigation strategy was produced in 2022, in support of the adopted Local Plan. However, this should not be seen as a replacement for failure to comply with BNG standards. The impact and effectiveness of this mitigation study is also not yet fully determined. NHDC recommended ongoing monitoring to inform future site allocations and proposals. The site being located directly adjacent to the SSSI means that greenspace provision on the site won't be effective. The NHDC 2022 Therfield Heath mitigation strategy references SANG (suitable alternative natural greenspace), *but fails to note that this criteria was allocated for Thames Basin Heaths, for which SANG were originally devised, no new homes were allowed within 400m of any of the constituent SSSIs*, because new residents would simply walk to the inevitably more attractive SSSI than to any on-site greenspace. The sheer scale and accessibility of Therfield Heath SSSI would still therefore be a major draw and which is well withing 400 meters of the proposed development.

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

We have commissioned an expert ecology report but again it can't be produced by the Aug 17th deadline.

5 Housing Supply, Local Plan and Covenants

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

We would also like to make you aware of restrictive covenants which are in place in Echo Hill and which I, as a resident of Echo Hill, have the benefit of, **and I, and other residents, will take enforcement action if these covenants are breached.** The covenants were wrongly dismissed by NHDC planning during the previous determination of planning application 20/00744/OP.

The enforcement of the covenants would be a lengthy legal process possibly taking several years to be resolved. A tribunal action would therefore significantly delay the deliverability of the development. This factor therefore means that the possibility of a lengthy delay to implementation *becomes a material planning consideration* in the decision-making process.

You are aware, from the previously refused applications for this site, the strength of feeling against this development from the community of Royston and the significant impact this development will have directly to the residents of Echo Hill. A letter from an Appointed Solicitor, regarding the breach of the covenants and the intention for enforcement action, was issued to both Gladman and Number 24 Echo Hill during the previous application of 20/00744/OP. This remains the case for this latest application and Echo Hill residents will pursue this going forward for this latest application.

In addition, if the community is successful with enforcing the covenants and preventing the demolition of Number 24, both the construction traffic and main site access would not be able to enter the site via Echo Hill, the alternative would be to use the bridleway and therefore the reasons for refusal in the 2018 application associated with the negative impact to the neighbouring SSSI would still stand. Therefore, due to the protective covenants in place, which residents of Echo Hill will enforce, it cannot be guaranteed that Gladman will be able to deliver this site and therefore this site *cannot contribute towards the 5-year NHDC housing supply.*

6 Landscape and Visual Impact

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

The proposals conflict with **the NPPF and Policy CGB1, SP5, SP12, NE1 and NE6 of the NHDC Local Plan.** There has not been any consideration to the direct effects of the access proposals on the character of Echo Hill which would be harmed by the proposed access arrangements. The proposals would therefore be contrary to the general landscape protection policies of the **NPPF (including Paragraph 135), Policies NE1 of the adopted Local Plan.**

There are also justified objections on Flood Risk and Water Quality and the lack of EIA screening but other objectors have fully covered this.

Summary

This application fails to meet adequate standards in so many ways. There are many errors and misleading statements which paint many things in a more favourable light than is the case. In addition to the visual impact, there are many major issues. In particular the immediate access road is totally unacceptable in terms of gradient, narrowness, swept path analysis and proximity to residential houses. The general access is also totally unsuited to increased traffic. But additionally, there are many issues that might only be considered as guidelines on their own, but their cumulative effect is to make this application totally inadequate. Therefore this application should be refused.

Yours Sincerely

Dr R P Munden