

Land East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton

Blakeney Homes Ltd

**Planning, Design and Access
Statement**

August 2025

Turley

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Client
Blakeney Homes Ltd

Our reference
BLAC3003

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1. Introduction

1.1 Turley have been instructed by Blakeney Homes (hereafter referred to as ‘the Applicant’), to prepare a Planning, Design and Access Statement (PDAS) in respect to development proposals for Land East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton, Hertfordshire (hereafter referred to as the ‘Site’).

1.2 The proposed development comprises:

“Outline planning application with all matters reserved except for vehicular access for a high quality, sustainable scheme comprising up to 50 new homes, including affordable housing, together with amenity space, landscaping and all associated infrastructure and works”.

1.3 The illustrative concept plan shown on drawing number 2213 (D) 015 Rev A demonstrates how the Site can provide a new high-quality residential scheme on the edge of Pirton, delivering a number of key public benefits which are given significant weight, including:

- Delivery of up to 50 new homes in Pirton, which is a category A village where growth is permitted in a district, where there is an acknowledged lack of a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS);
- Provision of a mix of homes for different tenures and households, including 40% affordable housing, in line with Local Planning Policy;
- Green infrastructure throughout the scheme in order to maintain green edge to the settlement and new connections to the existing footpath network;
- Provision of new open public space and a Local Area of Play;
- Delivery of additional ecological enhancements throughout the Site; and
- Convenient and easy access to the village of Pirton and services and facilities via existing connections including the existing footpath connections off Walnut Tree Road.

Summary & Purpose

1.4 North Hertfordshire District Council (‘NHDC’) are currently undertaking the preparation of a new Draft Local Plan.

1.5 In January 2024, Cabinet approved a full review and update of the North Herts Local Plan, and the Council are progressing with the update of their Local Plan evidence base.

- 1.6 Pursuant to this update, the Council are currently undertaking a Call for Sites, Expression of Interest, which closes on 15th September 2025. The Application Site at Pirton has been submitted as part of this process.
- 1.7 At present the NHDC are unable to demonstrate a 5YHLS with their latest position being a supply of **3.9** years. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged, given the Council's inability to demonstrate a 5YHLS, under Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.8 The application proposals have been the subject of formal pre-application engagement and discussions with NHDC. Formal written pre-application advice was received on 17th October 2024 (under LPA reference: 24/02103/PRE) which is attached at **Appendix 1**. This advice is considered in context at section 3 of this statement. In addition, external consultee responses have also been provided and, where appropriate, amendments have been made to the proposed scheme in response to the feedback received.
- 1.9 The Applicant undertook a virtual public consultation in June 2025, and a virtual meeting was held with local ward members in July 2025. Feedback from this consultation has been incorporated where appropriate and the application is supported by a Statement of Community Involvement.

The Applicant

- 1.10 The Applicant has an option agreement on the above Site and is looking to develop the land for high quality new residential development, including new market and affordable homes, associated parking, landscaping and access.
- 1.11 Blakeney Homes is a privately owned land and property development company based in Bedfordshire. Blakeney Homes specialises in the residential market and have been constructing new homes for over twenty years.
- 1.12 Blakeney have forged an excellent reputation for outstanding design and high-quality build throughout their exclusive developments, including an excellent new build scheme in Pirton, adjacent to the Application Site.

Application Content

- 1.13 This Statement should not be read in isolation, as it forms part of a comprehensive package of documents and drawings which, when considered together, collectively support the overall planning application.
- 1.14 The PDAS also contains the Draft Heads of Terms for the Section 106 Agreement.
- 1.15 In addition to this Statement, the following plans and reports are submitted in support of this outline planning application:

Plans for Determination

- Site Location Plan (Drawing reference: 22130(B) 010);
- Concept / Parameters Plan (Drawing reference: 2213 (D) 015 Rev A);
- Land Use Parameter Plan (Drawing reference: 22130 (D) 020); and
- Proposed Access Road Extension Site Access (Drawing reference: 2210-050 PL01).
- Proposed Hambridge Way Emergency Access (Drawing reference: 2210-050 PL02
- Proposed Hambridge Way Junction Improvements (Drawing reference: 2210-050 PL03 Rev A)

Statements and Reports

- Application form, including Ownership Certificates;
- Covering Letter produced by Turley
- Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment produced by Cotswold Archaeology
- Geophysical Survey produced by Sumo GeoSurveys
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal produced by MKA Ecology
- Great Crested Newt Environmental DNA Survey by MKA Ecology
- Preliminary Roost Assessment produced by MKA Ecology
- Design Stage Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, produced by MKA Ecology
- Appendix 2 Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain Metric, produced by MKA Ecology
- Reptile Report, produced by MKA Ecology
- Natural England District Level License Application
- Statement of Community Involvement, produced by Turley
- Sustainability, Energy and Waste Management Statement, produced by Turley
- Transport Assessment, produced by TPA
- Tree Survey and Constraints Plan produced by Haydens Arboricultural Consultants
- Topographical Survey produced by Chinery Land Surveys
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, produced by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy

- Landscape Strategy, produced by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy
- Pirton A3 Figure Volumes, produced by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy
- Planning, Design and Access Statement, including Affordable Housing Statement, produced by Turley
- Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment, produced by Stomer
- Noise Impact Assessment by Cass Allen

- 1.16 This PDAS provides an assessment of the Site and its surroundings, along with the design principles and concepts that have been developed to inform the scheme as proposed.
- 1.17 This statement also outlines the benefits of the proposed development and provides a rationale for the proposals, having regard to the adopted North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan and any other material considerations relevant to the planning balance, including the National Planning Policy Framework December 2025 (NPPF) and relevant Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 1.18 The conclusions of this PDAS demonstrate that there are no technical or environmental constraints that cannot be suitably addressed through sensitive design and mitigation, and that the Applicant is committed to progressing a high quality, sustainable, residential proposal as soon as possible.
- 1.19 North Hertfordshire District Council acknowledge that paragraph 11(d) is engaged as the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and therefore the presumption in favour of sustainable development (tilted balance) is also engaged.
- 1.20 Under the presumption in favour, planning permission should therefore be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole.
- 1.21 As set out within this PDAS, there are however no other material considerations which significantly and demonstrably indicate that planning permission should be withheld for the development proposed by this application.
- 1.22 The overall balance of policy compliance and other material considerations, having regard to the significant benefits of the proposals, therefore weighs strongly in favour of the grant of planning permission on this Site for the proposed development.
- 1.23 Accordingly, as early delivery is assured, these proposals are commended to the Council for approval.

- 2.5 Reference to the Council's Policies Map, confirms that the Site is located outside of the settlement envelope of Pirton, albeit directly adjacent, and is therefore designated as 'rural area beyond the Green Belt' in the adopted North Herts Local Plan, under Policies SP5 (Countryside and Greenbelt) and CGB1 (Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt).
- 2.6 Unlike other sites on the edge of Pirton, the Site lies outside of the Green Belt and any special landscape area policies, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Site abuts the defined settlement boundary of Pirton on both its northern and western boundaries and so falls strongly within the urban influence of this area of Pirton.

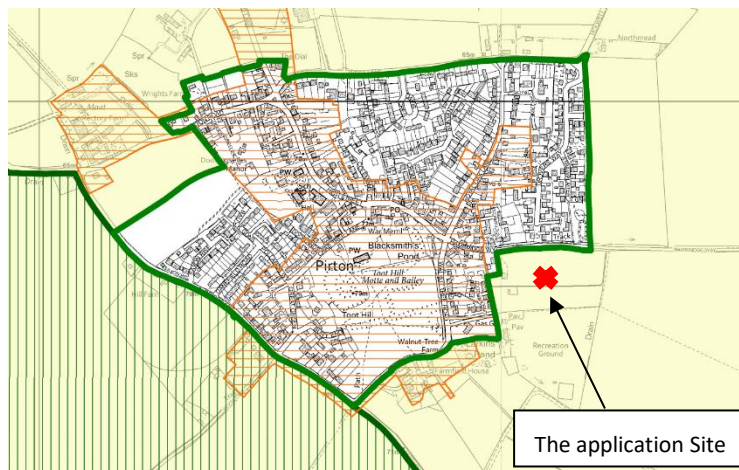


Figure 2: North Hertfordshire District Council's Policies Map Extract (2022)



- 2.7 The Site is not covered by any landscape related statutory designation or local landscape designations, but the nearby landscape includes the following:
- Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty (now National Landscape) lies on the opposite side of the village approximately 500m to the south-west of the Site; and
 - The Green Belt around Hitchin is located approximately 1.4km to the south-east of the Site.

- 2.8 The North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (2011) identifies that the Site lies wholly within the Pirton Lowlands Character Area (218) and is described as a *'large scale open, flat farming landscape given over predominantly to arable production'*.
- 2.9 In terms of built heritage, the Site itself does not contain any statutory or locally listed buildings, nor is it located within the Pirton Conservation Area. There are a number of heritage assets and Pirton Conservation Area (approximately 50m to the west) beyond the Site, but it is considered that these are sufficiently separated from the Site by other existing intervening development to ensure any new development on the Site would not adversely impact on the setting of any of these heritage assets.
- 2.10 Other designated heritage assets that lie in the vicinity of the proposed development, are located within the Conservation Area. These comprise:
- The Scheduled Monument at 'Toot Hill Motte and Bailey Castle and Shrunken Medieval Village', c.100m west of the Site;
 - The Grade I Listed 'Church of St Mary', c.270m west of the Site;
 - The Grade II Listed Buildings at 'Elm Tree Farmhouse', 'South-East Barn at No 1 (Elm Tree Farm)' and '7, Walnut Tree Road', c.70m north-west and 100m west of the Site respectively; and
 - The Grade II Listed Buildings at 'Walnut Tree Farmhouse', 'South-East Barn at Walnut Tree Farm', 'Farm Buildings fronting Road at Walnut Tree Farm', and '23-25, Walnut Tree Road', c.180m and 210m south-west of the Site respectively.
- 2.11 A large part of Pirton Village is covered by Archaeological Alert Areas and the western boundary of the Site is covered under this designation.
- 2.12 The Site is not covered by any Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's), however, there are several mature trees along the eastern, southern, and northern boundaries that are considered to contribute to the character and visual amenity of the Site. It is further considered that the field boundaries and hedgerow cutting across the Site are formed by a mix of fragmented hedgerows and scrub, which are in poor condition.
- 2.13 The Site is located within Flood Zone 1, as identified on the Government Flood Map for Planning Service, and therefore has a low risk of surface water flooding. There is an area of high-risk surface water flooding to the north-east of the site, which appears to be a low point in the topography.
- 2.14 Pirton is located on a relatively flat low-lying ground to the north-east of the Chilterns AONB (now National Landscape) at approximately 60-70m AOD. The Site itself lies on reasonably flat ground to the east of the existing edge of Pirton.

The Wider Surrounding Area

- 2.15 The Site is located off Walnut Tree Road, which is situated to the south-east of the village of Pirton. Pirton is identified as a 'Category A' village which is capable of supporting further sustainable residential growth, although the number of new homes required cannot currently be accommodated within the existing urban area.
- 2.16 No sites are allocated in Pirton in the Local Plan. However, around 139 homes have been built or granted planning permission in the village since 2011.
- 2.17 Pirton is a selected village beyond the Green Belt, with a population of around 1,274. Pirton is situated approximately 4.5km to the north-west of Hitchin, 7km west of Letchworth Garden City and 11km northeast of Luton.
- 2.18 Pirton supports a village shop/Post Office, a primary school, local pubs, village hall, sports and social club, tennis courts, and church. The village has an active and vibrant community, which all helps to increase the demand for properties in the area.
- 2.19 Pirton has good public transport links to larger employment centres, such as nearby Hitchin which contains several catchment schools and a good range of local amenities. The closest bus stop to the development Site lies approximately 150m to the northwest. The number 89 service travels from Henlow Camp to Hitchin. The bus service connects Pirton to Hitchin with services running just over hourly Monday to Friday.
- 2.20 The nearest railway station is located in Hitchin which has services to London Kings Cross running every half an hour. The journey time is approximately 35-45 minutes. Trains also run every 30 minutes to Cambridge, a journey which takes approximately 30 minutes.
- 2.21 It is clear that the surrounding area has organically developed over time when it comes to the mix and variety of residential units which characterise this part of the village. The adjoining residential properties to the north and west of the Site are a modern mix of red/grey brick two storey semi-detached, detached houses and bungalows.

Planning History

- 2.22 A review of North Hertfordshire District Council's 'Public Access' system was undertaken, which demonstrates that the Site has no relevant planning history.

3. Pre-Application Advice and Consultations

Pre-application Discussions and Engagement

- 3.1 Discussions relating to the Site have taken place with NHDC since 2024 relating to the high-level proposals and the site area. This resulted in a formal pre-application request being submitted to NHDC on 24th September 2024 (under LPA reference: 24/02103/PRE). A formal written response was provided on 17th October 2024. A copy of the advice is enclosed at **Appendix 1** to this statement.
- 3.2 Following the pre-application written advice, a revised concept plan was developed to respond to the advice received. In addition, a draft Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was also subsequently provided to the Council, where an external consultant, Plan Scope provided additional consultation comments on 28th May 2025.
- 3.3 A summary of the key points raised by the Council as part of the pre-application consultation are set out below. These are assessed and responded to in more detail later within this Statement.
- **Principle of Development** – the Site falls outside of the defined settlement boundary of Pirton and within the Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt. Policy CGB1 sets out several criteria that would support a planning application within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. In this case, the development would not fall within any of the criteria offered under Policy CGB1. Whilst the proposal would not be supported by the Council’s Local Plan policies, following the release of the 2024 version of the NPPF, NHDC can no longer demonstrate a 5YHLS and therefore limb (ii) of paragraph 11 d) of the NPPF would be engaged. The presumption in favour of sustainable development would be applied in this case, and an application on this Site could be supported subject to a planning balance assessment that results on any adverse impacts not significantly and demonstrably outweighing the benefits of the scheme.
 - **Layout and Design** – advice was provided in relation to the character of the development. The general view was the Applicant should re-design the western block to allow for edge lane permeability for pedestrians, which will avoid any dead ends. They also recommended that a scheme include a play area within the Site as per Policy EN6 of the Local Plan.
 - **Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain** – advice was received that all applications must achieve a net gain in biodiversity, whilst the provisions of the Environment Act require for a 10% BNG. The Council advises that there would likely be no ecological objection to the principle of development on this site and the retention of trees and boundary hedgerows is welcomed.

- **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** - with the application site being on the edge of the existing settlement with residential development bounding the site to the north and west, it could be considered that this edge of settlement location may be appropriate and not result in significant harm to the landscape character. However, sufficient information will need to be presented to the Local Planning Authority to avoid concerns being raised in relation to landscape harm.
- **Access and Transport** – advice was given on the relevant planning policy relating to transport matters. In transport terms this covered matters on access widths and sustainability.
- **Flood Risk and Drainage** – advice was given that the application site is situated in Flood Zone 1. Any future application would therefore need to be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and should incorporate appropriate SuDs within the site.
- **Sustainability** – advice was given that if the proposals were to proceed to the application stage, then mitigation should be considered to make a positive contribution to the mitigation of the declared climate emergency.

Hertfordshire County Council's Highway Authority Pre-Application Discussions

- 3.4 A Highways Pre-Application submission was made to Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) by TPA, on behalf of Blakeney Homes, in September 2024. Advice was received by HCC in November 2024 (under reference NH/22368/2024). HCC stated that in addition to the proposed access off Walnut Tree Road, consideration should be given for an emergency access of Hambridge Way and adequate viability at the junction of Walnut Tree Road and Cotman End should be provided as per HCC's P&MDPG.
- 3.5 Following the exchange of information with the Highways Authority, drawing the access arrangements from Cotman End (under drawing reference 2210-050 PL01) have been accepted to take forward to support the outline planning application and therefore will be submitted for formal approval, as part of this outline planning application.

Community Consultation and Engagement

- 3.6 All public consultation work undertaken by Blakeney Homes in June 2025 has also been shared with Councillors and Ward Members for the Parish and we will continue to maintain open communication with all relevant stakeholders for the purposes of this application.
- 3.7 The submitted outline planning application has been informed by formal feedback received, as well as through the public engagement and pre-application process in 2024. Full details of the public consultation are set out in the accompanying Statement of Community Involvement.

4. Proposed Development

Development Type and Form

- 4.1 For the purposes of this pre-application, the proposed development will comprise a high-quality residential development of up to 50 dwellings (Use Class C3), including a policy compliant (40%) level of new affordable housing, ancillary landscaping, car parking, circulation spaced and internal access ways and sustainable drainage. The description of development proposed is:

“Outline planning application with all matters reserved except for vehicular access for a high quality, sustainable scheme comprising up to 50 new homes, including affordable housing, together with amenity space, landscaping and all associated infrastructure and works”.

- 4.2 The proposals are supported by two parameter plans, which includes a concept plan and a land use parameter plan. These plans establish the position of the main access, the extent of built form and the green infrastructure, and building heights. The land use parameter plan identifies that the whole developable area of the site totals up to 3.06 hectares. The entirety of the developable area will be for residential use. The remaining area of the Site is allocated to open space and green infrastructure.



Figure 2: Land Use Parameter Plan (DCA Architects)

- 4.3 The proposed application will seek outline approval only, with all matters reserved except for access. The detailed design of the scheme will be determined at a later stage; however, the development has been master-planned as so to address a series of design principles. The proposed concept plan describes the form and layout of the development and how the scheme will integrate within its surrounding development context.

Concept Masterplan

- 4.4 As per the concept masterplan below, the proposed development incorporates parcels of land to accommodate approximately 50 dwellings, 40% of which (20 new homes) will be provided as affordable housing. The proposed building line of the residential development will follow the existing pattern of development and will be set back from the existing lane in order to offer passive surveillance.
- 4.5 The proposal will provide a net developable area of circa 2.07 hectares, including 0.99 hectares of open space. Residential blocks have been designed to enhance existing landscape features, including landscaped streets and to configure a green infrastructure network with new open space and attenuation features.
- 4.6 Development is envisaged to be predominately 2-storeys in height, with some areas of single storey and up to 2.5 storey new homes, at appropriate locations within the Site. The proposal will comprise a mixture of detached and semi-detached units.

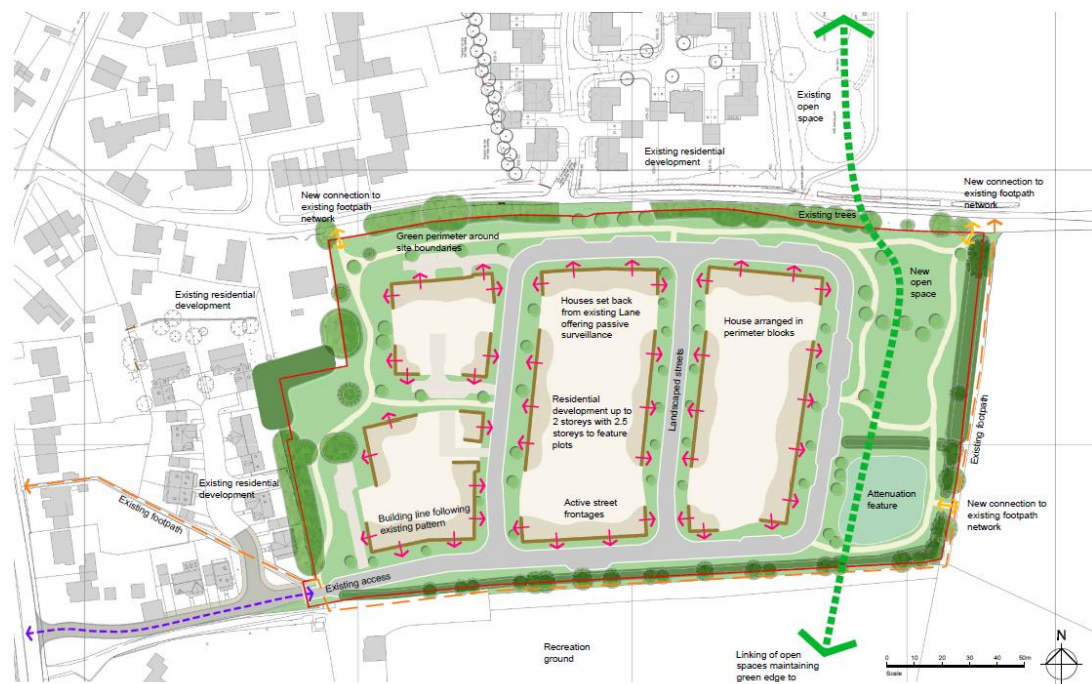


Figure 3: Concept Plan/ Parameter Plan (Source: DCA Architects)

Amount

- 4.7 The gross site area of the application site is 3.06 ha, of which 0.99 ha would comprise of amenity green/public open space and green corridors with the remaining 2.07 ha for residential development including private gardens.
- 4.8 The net residential area will accommodate up to 50 new dwellings at a gross density of 16.3 dwellings per hectare (dpa). The market housing component will comprise up to 30 new homes along with 20 affordable homes.

Scale

- 4.9 The homes shown have been designed to meet the Government's Nationally Described Space Standards (2015) and the required accessibility standards.
- 4.10 The Scheme will provide a broad variety in terms of accommodation options, roofline and massing. The new homes will comprise a mix of detached; semi-detached and terraced dwellings, reflective of the prevailing character in the surrounding area, with the final design details and housing mix to be agreed at Reserved Matters stage.

Layout/Design

- 4.11 A Concept Plan has been submitted for approval with this application, identifying the core design principles for the scheme including the locations for specific land uses within the Site, such as the open space and the new homes. As set out in Section 6 of this Statement and to reflect the landscape-led scheme envisaged for this Site, the existing tree groupings and the majority of the hedgerows have been retained and enhanced within the Site. This has provided the opportunity to create a network of connected green corridors through the Site and has influenced the Illustrative concept plan to ensure that these established natural features form an integral part of the scheme.
- 4.12 The Scheme provides connectivity with the main area of public open space that is located adjacent to Church Road with a secondary green corridor running north-south along the western boundary.
- 4.13 The siting of public open space in these locations provides an opportunity to create and maintain a green outlook for existing and future residents.



Figure 4: Illustrative Site Plan (Not to Scale).

Appearance

- 4.14 Whilst the final design and appearance of the new homes will be determined at the Reserved Matters stage, the overall scheme is intended to comprise a traditional design palette, reflecting and complementing the neighbouring built form of the existing settlement. There is ample opportunity within the Site parameters for a range of housing types and styles to be provided which will add interest to the Scheme.
- 4.15 A wide range of materials may be appropriate in this location and the final choice will be a matter for the architect and the developer to agree and submit to the Council for consideration and approval at the Reserved Matters stage.

Highways

- 4.16 The proposed site access will be via a 5m estate road, which will be formed by extending the existing carriageway off Cotman End located off Walnut Tree Road to the west.
- 4.17 The access road will be designed with a 5m carriageway and 1.8m pavement on one side of the road. It is noted that the extension of the proposed access road from the established development on Cotman End would initially remove the two existing visitor parking spaces. These spaces will be relocated as part of the proposed development, placed as close to this new access as is reasonably possible.
- 4.18 These visitor spaces will be in addition to the parking availability required as part of this proposed development. The design of the access road options is presented in drawing 221-050.PL01, which accompanies this planning application. Access leading onto Cotman End/ Walnut Tree Road will continue to maintain adequate visibility as per the previous neighbouring scheme on Cotman End, which received approval.
- 4.19 Secondary emergency vehicle access point will be located in the northeastern corner from Hambridge Way which utilises the established access to the existing agricultural field. This access will be reserved for emergency use only and will form part of the pedestrian and cyclists' access when not in use for emergencies. The design of this access can be viewed in drawing 2210-050.PL02. It is also anticipated that the speed limit within the estate will be limited to 30 mph and full street lighting will be provided.

Parking

- 4.20 Parking (for both cars and bicycles) is to be provided in accordance with the parking standards adopted by Hertfordshire County Council and Policy T2 in the Local Plan 2018. This includes appropriate levels of visitor parking.
- 4.21 Whilst parking details will be confirmed as part of a subsequent application for Reserved Matters approval, the Illustrative Concept Plan demonstrates that policy compliant vehicle parking can be satisfactorily provided, and space exists within private garden spaces for the incorporation of secure cycle storage.

Green Infrastructure

- 4.22 The proposal comprises 0.99 hectares of open space including formal/informal parcel of recreational public open space providing a focal point and a landscape buffer on the eastern side of the development. Within the areas of open space, attenuation features are also to be provided.
- 4.23 The proposed development will incorporate a sustainable drainage system which will sustainably discharge surface water in line with the SuDS hierarchy and national and local planning policy.
- 4.24 Existing trees will be retained and strengthened along the boundaries of the Site in order to maintain the green edge to the existing settlement. New footpath connections are also proposed to the existing footpath network that borders the Site. Full details of the proposals are shown on the supporting plans.

5. Relevant Planning Policy

- 5.1 This section sets out the relevant national and local planning policy applicable to the development proposal.
- 5.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.3 Paragraph 231 of the Framework establishes that its policies are a relevant material consideration which should be taken into account in dealing with applications from the day of publication. Plans may need to be revised in order to reflect policy changes in the Framework and this can be achieved through partial revision or preparation of a new Local Plan.
- 5.4 Paragraph 232 reiterates that due weight should be given to Plans according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. At the time of writing, the adopted Development Plan for North Hertfordshire District Council comprises the following:
- **The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 8th November 2022)**
 - **North Hertfordshire Policies Maps (adopted 8th November 2022)**
- 5.5 Material considerations also include national policy, which is primarily expressed through National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance, as well as additional guidance produced by the Council in the form of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and Neighbourhood Plans. These documents are also considered in this section.

The Adopted Development Plan

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

- 5.6 On 8th November 2022, North Hertfordshire District Council adopted the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, in accordance with Section 23 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Regulations 17 and 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The Plan comprises the Local Plan and Policy Maps. In that context, the following policies taken from the Local Plan (2011-2031) are of particular relevance to this planning application:
- Policy SP1 (Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire)
 - Policy SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution)
 - Policy SP5 (Countryside and Green Belt)
 - Policy SP6 (Sustainable Transport)
 - Policy SP7 (Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions)
 - Policy SP8 (Housing)

- Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability)
- Policy SP11 (Natural Resources and Sustainability)
- Policy SP12 (Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity)
- Policy SP13 (Historic Environment)
- Policy CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt)
- Policy T1 (Assessment of Transport Matters)
- Policy T2 (Parking)
- Policy HS2 (Affordable Housing)
- Policy HS3 (Housing Mix)
- Policy HS5 (Accessible and Adaptable Housing)
- Policy D1 (Sustainable Design)
- Policy D3 (Protecting Living Conditions)
- Policy NE1 (Strategic Green Infrastructure)
- Policy NE2 (Landscape)
- Policy NE4 (Biodiversity and Geological Sites)
- Policy NE6 (New and Improved Open Space)
- Policy NE7 (Reducing Flood Risk)
- Policy NE8 (Sustainable Drainage Systems)
- Policy NE10 (Water Conservation and Wastewater Infrastructure)
- Policy HE4 (Archaeology)

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy

- 5.7 At a national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies. This is a key material consideration. Guidance is also provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

National Policy Context:

National Planning Policy Framework and PPG

- 5.8 The most recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these policies are expected to be applied. The NPPF confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (Paragraph 7). Paragraph 8 states that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, and that these dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

'An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and fostering a well-designed and safe built environment with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities, health, social and cultural well-being; and

An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy’.

5.9 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

5.10 For **decision-taking** this means:

‘c) Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies for the supply of land 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 clear 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’*

5.11 The ‘protected areas or assets’ referred to above are listed at footnote 7 of the NPPF. The only relevant consideration here is ‘areas at risk of flooding’ and in this case, the Site is in Flood Zone 1 and has no risk of surface water flooding. As noted later in Section 6, this is not a reason for refusing the proposed development

5.12 Paragraph 40 recognises that early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussions enable better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

- 5.13 The Statement of Community Engagement sets out the detailed pre-application discussions that have been undertaken with the Council and other local stakeholders, holding the local community. This has informed the evolution of the proposals, as demonstrated by this PDAS.
- 5.14 Similarly to the original NPPF, the new NPPF (December 2024) continues its support for significantly boosting the supply of homes (paragraph 61). 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.
- 5.15 Paragraph 61 of the NPPF also highlights the need for Councils to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting housing supply. Paragraph 62 explains that strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance.
- 5.16 Paragraph 66 requires that where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed, planning decisions should expect that the mix of affordable housing required meets identified local needs, across both affordable housing for rent and affordable home ownership tenures.
- 5.17 Paragraph 78 requires local planning authorities to maintain a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their requirement set out in adopted policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old. As a minimum, a 5% buffer should be provided to ensure choice and completion in the market for land. A 20% buffer will be applied where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the past three years to improve the prospects of achieving the planned supply. Five-year supply for NHDC is considered at Section 6.
- 5.18 Section 8 of the NPPF encourages policies and decisions to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places through promoting social interaction, creating safe and accessible spaces, and enabling and supporting healthy lifestyles. This is considered further at Section 6 of this Planning Statement.
- 5.19 Section 9 of the NPPF promotes sustainable Transport and identifying and taking into account the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure, including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse impacts. This is also considered further at Section 6.
- 5.20 Paragraphs 129 and 130 support the efficient development of land through the use of appropriate densities.
- 5.21 Section 12 seeks for new development to create well designed places. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, it creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

- 5.22 Section 14 is clear that new development should avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future).
- 5.23 Section 15 seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment through protecting and enhancing valued landscapers. Development should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the country and minimise impacts and provide net gains for biodiversity.
- 5.24 Section 16 is clear that Local Planning Authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred.

North Hertfordshire District Council's Emerging Local Plan

- 5.25 In January 2024, North Hertfordshire District Council agreed to the preparation of a full review and update of the North Herts Local Plan (2025 – 2045) which will set out a plan for how the district will grow over future decades.
- 5.26 The Council are currently undertaking a Call for Sites: Expression of Interest consultation, which will close on 15th September 2025.
- 5.27 The Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) sets out the following anticipated timescales for advancing the new Local Plan:
- **Gateway 1:** Independent, specialist support to ensure Plan sets off in the right direction, supporting early diagnosis of any potential issues including legal, procedural requirements and soundness - September 2025.
 - Public Consultation (Regulation 18 of the T&CP (LP) (England_ Regulations 2012): October – November 2025.
 - Evidence gathering: This will include a Call for Sites – 2024 – 2026.
 - **Gateway 2:** Plan Inspector supports early resolution of potential soundness issues, ensuring legal and procedural compliance and monitoring and tracking progress – September 2026.
 - Public Consultation (Regulation 19 and 20 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012: October – November 2026.
 - **Gateway 3:** Planning Inspectorate checked the Plan is ready to proceed to Examination having ensured legal and procedural compliance and monitoring and tracking progress – February 2027.
 - Submission to the Secretary of State (Regulation 23 and 24 of the T&CP (LP_ (England) Regulations 2012) – March – November 2027
 - Publication of Inspectors Report (Regulation 25 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012) – November 2027.
 - Adoption (Regulation 26 of the of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012) – December 2027.

- 5.28 The Site is being promoted in the emerging Local Plan and a submission will be made to the Call for Sites: Evidence Gathering consultation. The Site can also make a meaningful contribution to the District's Housing needs in a sustainable location, through the provision of high-quality market and affordable homes.

The National Design Guide (2021)

- 5.29 The National Design Guide which was published on the 1st October 2019 and updated on 20th January 2021 should be read alongside the Government's Planning Practice Guidance. The document has been written to set out the characteristics of a well-designed place and demonstrate what government means by good design in practice.

- 5.30 The Design Guide sets out ten characteristics which result in a 'well-designed place' as follows:

- Context
- Identity
- Built Form
- Movement
- Nature
- Public Spaces
- Uses
- Homes and Buildings
- Resources
- Lifespan

- 5.31 In relation to homes and buildings the design guide advises that:

"well-designed homes and buildings:

- *provide good quality internal and external environments for their users, promoting health and well-being;*
- *relate positively to the private, shared and public spaces around them contributing to social interaction and inclusion; and,*
- *resolve the details of operation and servicing so that they are unobtrusive and well-integrated into their neighbourhoods".*

- 5.32 The guide also advises that good design promotes quality of life, a safe environment and places that are efficient and cost effective to run.

Pirton Neighbourhood Plan

- 5.33 Pirton Neighbourhood Plan (PNP) was adopted on 27th April 2018 and sets out the vision for the Parish until 2031. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development and has a particular focus on protecting the quality of the village and its environment. The PNP states that it does accommodate housing growth in a sensitive way by limiting the size of new development to a maximum of 30 homes per site at any one time within the developable area in accordance with historic development rates.

- 5.34 The PNP is however now more than 7 years old and predates the adoption of the NHDC Local Plan. The PNP also does not contain any housing allocations of its own. Notwithstanding, this proposal can meet the PNP's requirement to accommodate new housing growth. The Site is located within a Visual Character Area (V1) set out in the Character Assessment that formed part of the Evidence Base for the PNP.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 5.35 The following Supplementary Planning Guidance is also relevant to this application

- Design SPD (July 2011)
- Vehicle Parking Standards at New Development (2011)
- Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (September 2024)
- Pirton Village Design Statement (2003)

6. Planning Assessment

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004, requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF has a presumption in favour of sustainable development whereby Paragraph 11(d) states that where the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, the tilted balance applies. Given the position set out below, this is the case here.

Principle of Development

- 6.2 There is an acute need both nationally and within the District to increase the supply of housing. Paragraph 61 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) highlights the need for Councils to help support the Government's objective of significantly boosting housing supply. Paragraph 73 also recognises that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area due to their ability to be built-out relatively quickly.
- 6.3 Annex 2 of the NPPF states that to be considered deliverable: *'sites for housing should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years'*.
- 6.4 At a local level, policy SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution) recognises that the regeneration and sustainable growth of Pirton will be achieved by focusing new residential development within the village's settlement envelope. This includes new residential development within walking distance of the village centre to create more vibrant communities. The proposal Site is located within walking distance to several local amenities within Pirton, including the Pirton Sports and Social Club and Pirton Tennis Club located approximately 25m to the south, and Pirton Post Office and village shop located approximately 150m to the northwest along the High Street.
- 6.5 Furthermore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is set out in policy SP1 (Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire) of the Development Plan and seeks to replicate the terms of the presumption as found within paragraph 11 of the NPPF. It is clear, therefore, that the presumption is set out within the Development Plan and, as such, the application of the presumption is not simply weighed as a material consideration within the NPPF but is a consideration against which all proposals must be determined at the Plan level.
- 6.6 Pirton is designated as a Category A village in the Local Plan, where general development will be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries. The village has a reasonable range of facilities, including a shop, public houses, village hall, pubs, church. Policy SP2 seeks to direct development towards the most sustainable areas, including within Category A villages, to which the proposal Site is closely related too.

- 6.7 The Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply Update (which was published May 2024) demonstrates under paragraph 4.5 that the Council can only demonstrate a total housing land supply position of **3.9** years against their adopted housing requirement. North Hertfordshire District Council has an updated indicative housing need figure of 1,018 additional dwellings per year following the publication of the new standard method, alongside the updated NPPF in December 2024.
- 6.8 Notwithstanding this, the Council considers that their housing completions have not surpassed the annual requirement since 2020/21, and their housing undersupply has continued to grow since the beginning of the Plan Period.
- 6.9 The Council are currently left with an undersupply of 540 dwellings as of March 2024. In line with the Liverpool approach, historic undersupply should be delivered evenly by the end of their Plan period in 2031, and this Site can help to meet the shortfall in the Council's 5YHLS.
- 6.10 It is acknowledged that whilst the Scheme does not accord with the Development Plan, taken as a whole, there are nonetheless, major acknowledged shortfalls in housing land supply, both in terms of overall market housing and in affordable housing in particular, which are unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is engaged (the tilted balance).
- 6.11 It is further noted that the Council were also obliged to imbed Policy IMR2 into their current adopted plan, which requires a full or partial review by the end of 2023. This work has commenced, however the identified lack of a 5YHLS and the increased annual housing requirement for North Hertfordshire, are both material considerations of **very substantial weight** in the planning balance.
- 6.12 The proposal Site in Pirton would help to meet some of the shortfall within the next two years, given that the Site is available for development in the immediate term.
- 6.13 Paragraph 60 is a clear mark of Government's drive to provide new housing;
- "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".*
- 6.14 Paragraph 69 sets out that small and medium sized sites can also make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area and give great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within and close to existing settlements.
- 6.15 Land to the East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton is available for early development and early delivery and can contribute to consolidating the Council's five-year housing land supply.

- 6.16 Notwithstanding that the Site is currently identified as being within the countryside defined on the Policies Map. Policy CGB1 (Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt), states that planning permission will be granted provided that the development:

“a) Is infilling development which does not extend the built core of a Category B village; b) Meets a proven local need for community facilities, services or affordable housing in an appropriate location; c) Is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture or forestry; d) Relates to an existing rural building; e) Is a modest proposal for rural economic development or diversification; or f) Would provide land or facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and cemeteries that respect the generally open nature of the rural area”.

- 6.17 In this case, the Site will extend beyond the built core of Pirton, and it would therefore conflict with part a) of Policy CGB1; however, it clearly acknowledged to be well related to the settlement envelope of Pirton. Once built, the Scheme will read, logically, as part of the broader settlement form and its development would not result in encroachment into the open countryside. The Site also sits within a largely residential context of Pirton, which is classified as a Category A village, and it would provide appropriate provision of affordable housing where there is a proven need in North Hertfordshire.
- 6.18 The Site is sustainably located within walking distance to key services within Pirton, which provides a good range of services and facilities. Therefore, the residents have the opportunity to access services and facilities without reliance on the private car. In this context, the principle of residential development in this location is considered to be appropriate and so is partially in accordance with the sustainability requirements of Policy CGB1.
- 6.19 The public benefits of the development also include: the **social benefits** of the provision of market housing and affordable housing in circumstances where there is a national shortage against assessed needs; the **economic** and **employment** benefits associated with the construction and subsequent occupation of the housing, including local spending in shops and services; benefits to bio-diversity of flora and the provision of on-site public open space in full accordance with local policy requirements.
- 6.20 The Applicant, Blakeney Homes, has also previously developed an exemplar housing scheme at Cotman End in Pirton, providing 10 luxury detached homes which were built in 2021. The Applicant is a reputable developer who provide high-quality homes in sustainable locations. The Scheme would further complement the excellent placemaking already undertaken by the Applicant on their adjacent site.
- 6.21 The NPPF encourages new housing developments to make the best use of land. It is considered that the proposal would make efficient use of the land at a sustainable density, which is appropriate given the Site’s location on the southern edge of Pirton. The proposed development therefore performs a positive economic, social, and environmental role and comprises sustainable development.

- 6.22 The Site is therefore a suitable and highly sustainable location in principle, and this attracts **significant positive weight** in the planning balance.

Affordable Housing Assessment

- 6.23 There is a wealth of evidence from figures at the highest levels of the Government, the Bank of England and internationally with the European Commission and International Monetary Fund which demonstrate that there is a consistent and pressing requirement to build more homes to meet the significant level of unmet need, particularly for homes that are affordable.

- 6.24 A letter to all Local Authority Leaders on 30th July 2024, by the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner confirms that the new Labour Government's commitment to:

*"making sure that **the right kind of homes are delivered through our planning system as quickly as possible**. That is why we are proposing to remove the prescriptive approach to affordable home ownership products, which can squeeze out Social and Affordable rent homes despite acute need. This will free authorities to secure more Social Rent homes, ensuring you get the homes you need in your local areas. We also want to promote the delivery of mixed-use sites which can include a variety of ownership and rental tenures, including rented affordable housing and build to rent, and which provide a range of benefits – including creating diverse communities and supporting timely build out rates".*

- 6.25 In addition to a pressing need for new market homes in the District, there is a need for affordable housing, as outlined within the latest Annual Monitoring Report (2023-2024) for North Hertfordshire District Council, which states that *"overall, we are below the plan's target of delivering affordable housing"*. They fell below the target of 33% this monitoring year, achieving only 19% affordable housing completions.

- 6.26 The UK has a secular problem with inadequate housing supply, which has led to low income and middle-income families being priced out of the housing market. National Government recognises that house price inflation is getting to dangerous levels and that building new homes is necessary in order to address this issue.

- 6.27 The proposed development will deliver 40% of the total number of the proposed new homes as affordable housing and an indicative residential tenure distribution has been provided as part of this outline application. This is based on the Council's Local Plan Policy HS2 (Affordable housing), which determines the most appropriate type, size and mix for each development.

- 6.28 The proposals will provide up to 20 new affordable homes and a range of homes to suit the variety of household sizes and tenures whilst meeting local housing needs. The socio-economic benefits of up to 50 new market and affordable homes on this sustainable site are therefore afforded **very substantial weight** in the planning balance.

Design

- 6.29 The proposed development will be designed to deliver an accessible and inclusive environment for all. The specific design of the residential development will be determined at reserved matters stage, however there is a commitment by Blakeney Estates Ltd to ensure that the philosophy of inclusive design and consideration of all user needs now and in the future will be included within the project.
- 6.30 The dwellings will be designed to reflect the character and aesthetic qualities of the wider area. High quality, vernacular materials for homes will aid in the integration of this development within the settlement. These proposals also comprise a landscape led approach, which will create a high-quality development. It will bring a strong sense of place and offer distinctive green spaces and green infrastructure. It will complement its location adjacent to the settlement of Pirton.
- 6.31 It is therefore considered that the proposed development will achieve the requirements of the relevant standards under Building Regulations Part M4 (2), paragraphs 113 and 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plan policies SP9 and D1.

Ecology Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.32 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the Site was undertaken by MKA Ecology to ascertain the existing baseline situation, both in terms of the habitats present and the potential opportunities that they provide for faunal species.
- 6.33 The Site comprises of two agricultural fields, separated by an existing hedgerow along its centre. It is considered that the grazed agricultural fields are of little ecological interest. However, habitats of relatively greater value are the trees and scrub along the boundaries of the Site, and within the existing central hedgerow. There are no statutory or non-statutory designated sites of nature conservation interest within, adjacent or in close proximity to the Site.
- 6.34 A preliminary roost assessment was undertaken by MKA to support the application, and no direct evidence of bats was recorded during the survey, with all buildings assessed as having negligible potential to support roosting bats. Survey work also confirmed the presence of Great Crested Newt within two off-site ponds. As such, this species will be mitigated for through participation in Natural England's District Level Licensing scheme, whereby a conservation payment will be used to create, restore and manage habitats as well as monitor Great Crested Newt populations. This has been submitted in support of the planning application.
- 6.35 Appropriate mitigation measures will be implemented at the Site to ensure protected species are fully safeguarded, whilst habitats that utilised by these species will be retained and enhanced where possible. The Site offers limited opportunities for protected species, with the majority of suitable habitats limited to the Site peripheries, many of which will be retained and subject to enhanced planting under the proposals.

- 6.36 In developing the proposals, early consideration will be afforded to opportunities to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain at the Site, with the objective of ensuring that the new development would not only offset any unavoidable biodiversity losses, but deliver long-term enhancements compared to the existing situation.
- 6.37 The use of the Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric to calculate measures of biodiversity for the existing and proposed habitats confirm that the proposed development is likely to lead to a net loss of 2.15 habitat units and a gain of 2.73 hedgerow units. This constitutes a net loss of -19.32% in habitat units and a net gain of 23.41% in hedgerow units.
- 6.38 The Environment Act (2021) includes a mandatory requirement for development sites to deliver at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity. There is currently a predicted net loss of 2.15 habitat units on site. In order to offset this loss and achieve the necessary 10% net gain in biodiversity and meet the metric trading rules 3.26 habitat units of any low distinctiveness or a higher distinctiveness habitat type, will be procured from a habitat bank.
- 6.39 This matter is therefore afforded **significant positive weight** in the planning balance.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- 6.40 A landscape and visual impact appraisal (LVIA) has been prepared by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy to support the outline planning application. Early baseline analysis has been carried out to feed into the design process and establish the baseline situation of the Site.
- 6.41 The Site is not covered by any landscape related statutory designation or local landscape designations. The North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (2011) identifies that the Site lies wholly within the Pirton Lowlands Character Area (218) and is described as a *'large scale open, flat farming landscape given over predominantly to arable production'*. It is considered that the landscape designations outlined above neither poses a potential concern for the emerging proposals at this Site.
- 6.42 The Site comprises of two agricultural fields that are sub-divided by an existing hedgerow. It is considered intermittent mature trees along the eastern boundary and on the southern boundary are features of higher landscape sensitivity and contribute more positively to visual amenity. The Site and adjacent landscape along the settlement edge has an urban fringe character that is influenced by adjacent residential properties to the north and west, formal recreational uses from the recreation ground and tennis courts to the south. These uses detract from the tranquillity and rural character of the area.
- 6.43 The visibility of the Site is restricted by its boundary vegetation and surrounding built form. The Site is relatively well contained and has similar topography to other parts of the settlement. The Site is not crossed by any formal public rights of way.

- 6.44 However, informal walking routes that follow the boundaries of the Site appear well used by local residents and are accessible from Cotman End located off Walnut Tree Road to the west, and Hambridge Way to the north.
- 6.45 The LVIA concludes that for the site itself, the landscape effects of the introduction of residential development is **slight/moderate** due to the **low** to sensitivity of landscape elements. However, the magnitude of change is considered **medium**, the development will not be uncharacteristic of the settlement edge. Important landscape elements such as the tree and hedge lines on the site boundaries will be preserved.
- 6.46 The assessment of the effects of the proposals on the local landscape character found that there would be a **slight/moderate** to **moderate** effect on the district landscape and a **slight** effect on the wider landscape, however the magnitude of change is **negligible**.
- 6.47 The proposed concept and parameter plans have been designed and mitigation measures incorporated into the proposals. These include retaining or enhancing the existing boundary vegetation where possible to preserve the historic field pattern and strengthen the existing landscape structure in accordance with the landscape character guidelines. This lack of local visual harm reinforces the suitability of the scheme location and is therefore afforded **neutral** weight in the planning balance.

Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy

- 6.48 Stomer Ltd was commissioned to prepare a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy (DS) to support the residential development at the Site. According to the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning, the Site is entirely located in Flood Zone 1. It is therefore not susceptible to flooding from rivers or the sea.
- 6.49 The extent of surface water flood risk is low, with isolated areas of risk around the northeastern corner of the site. These areas of low risk are likely associated with local topographical depressions, which are likely to be resolved and mitigated as part of initial groundworks during construction. This area is also outside of the developable area as shown on the parameter plan.
- 6.50 The nearest watercourse to the site is an Ordinary Watercourse that runs along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site. The nearest EA Designated Main River is the River Purwell located 3.25km east of the site. It is considered that the site would be at low risk of flooding from fluvial, sewers and artificial sources. The site is shown to be at medium risk of groundwater flooding.
- 6.51 The majority of the site is shown to be a very low risk from surface water flooding with a small area at high risk during the climate change event. The proposed surface water drainage strategy demonstrates SuDS features to provide sufficient storage to avoid flooding within the site during the 1 in 100-year storm event + 40% allowance for climate change. Overland flow paths and exceedance routes will be taken into account in design of levels for the proposed development to direct overland flows away from buildings.

- 6.52 Surface water runoff from the development will also be managed using Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). These measures will ensure no increase in runoff rates or risk of flooding elsewhere, but will also provide water quality, amenity, and biodiversity benefits. As such, this lack of material harm in terms of flood risk and drainage is afforded **neutral weight** in the planning balance.

Access and Transport Assessment

- 6.53 The Transport Assessment submitted in support of the application provides an assessment of the transport and highways implications associated with the proposed development. It demonstrates that the Site is located in an accessible location within close proximity of a number of key facilities and services in Pirton.
- 6.54 As noted from the submitted concept masterplan, vehicular access will be taken off Walnut Tree Road, and will contain a 5m estate road, which will be formed by extending the existing carriageway of Walnut Tree Road to the west.
- 6.55 The access will be designed with a 5m carriageway with 1.8m pavements on the side of the road. The design of the access options is presented in drawing 221-050.PL01. It would be anticipated that the speed limit within the estate would be limited to 30 mph and full street lighting will be provided.
- 6.56 Pedestrian access will be provided from the footway on the side of the access road and from the existing pedestrian access into the Site located off Walnut Tree Road. Additional pedestrian access will be obtained from the informal pedestrian routes which provide links to the west and north of the Site providing additional pedestrian routes to the Public Rights of Way which run to the north of Hambridge Way.
- 6.57 The Site is well served by public transport services, with the bus service 89 providing an hourly service frequency located on the High Street. These bus stops are located within the maximum walk distance of 400m from all parts of the Site.
- 6.58 Sufficient car parking and cycle parking would be provided within the Site to satisfy the Council's standards. Spaces will be provided assigned to each plot and comprise a mix of allocated private drives and garages. It is considered that the proposals accord with Local Plan Policy T2 Parking.

Historic Environment Desk Base Assessment

- 6.59 An Historic Environment Desk Base Assessment has been undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology to support the outline planning application. This report has been informed by the results of a Geophysical Survey within the Site and previous archaeological investigations in the study area. The analysis of available sources indicates a low to moderate potential to encounter buried archaeological remains dating back to the prehistoric and the Roman periods, during groundworks associated with the proposed development.

- 6.60 The settlement of Pirton was well established by the medieval period, focused principally around The Motte and Bailey Castle at Toot Hill, with the associated shrunken village to the south-east and the Grade I Listed Church of St Mary to the north. Other moated settlements were located around Rectory Farm and, possibly, around Wrights Farm, both to the north-west of the Site.
- 6.61 During the post-medieval and modern periods the Site remained part of the agricultural hinterland surrounding the village. As such, there is moderate potential for the presence within the Site of buried remains associated with agricultural and horticultural (allotment) activity dating to these periods. Any such remains, comprising evidence of ploughing and infilled field boundaries is considered to be of negligible significance.
- 6.62 The assessment has also considered the potential impact of the proposed development on assets within a 1km of the Site. It has assessed the potential effects of the development upon the significance of designated heritage assets and Locally Listed Buildings, through the alteration of their settings, in accordance with accepted Historic England guidance. Following a scoping exercise, detailed assessment was carried out for Pirton Conservation Area, whose closest point lies at c.20m from the southwest corner of the Site.
- 6.63 The assessment has identified that the development will introduce a small measure of change in the specific use of a portion of the present agricultural landscape at the modern residential eastern edge of Pirton. It concluded that there will therefore be no change to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, resulting in no harm to the significance of the Conservation Area or to the significance of any of the designated and non-designated heritage assets that lie within it.
- 6.64 As such, it is considered that the Site does not contribute to their heritage significance and, as such, it is concluded that there would be **no harm** to the significance of these assets as a result of the proposed development and it is in accordance with policies HE1 – HE4 of the Local Plan and Chapter 5 of the Pirton Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan.

Geophysical Survey

- 6.65 A Geo-physical survey was commissioned and undertaken by Sumo GeoSurveys. The conclusions of the report highlighted that a magnetometer survey of the site did not record any magnetic responses that could be interpreted as being of definite archaeological interest, except for ridge and furrow cultivation that is visible in both survey areas. A number of uncertain responses were detected in the data, however they have probably been caused by past land uses or underlying natural variations.

Overall, it is suggested that there is moderate potential for the presence within the proposed development area of remains of late Saxon and medieval origin within the area of the proposed development. This would comprise evidence of ploughing and infilled field boundaries, but the report considers it to be of negligible significance and therefore affords neutral weight in the planning balance.

Agricultural Land Classification

- 6.66 The Site comprises of subgrade 3 “good quality agricultural land”. Subgrade 3 falls within the definition of “best and most versatile agricultural land” within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 6.67 Almost all the agricultural land within the North Hertfordshire District Council area is provisionally mapped as Grade 2 (BMV) (very good). In the case of development of Grade 2 and 3a it should be shown that development could not take place on poorer quality land that is suitable and available. As such, this lack of material harm to the agricultural land is afforded **neutral weight** in the planning balance.

Arboricultural Impact Assessment

- 6.68 A full tree survey has been undertaken, in accordance with the BS5837:2012 ‘Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction’, to inform the development of the masterplan and the preparation of the outline planning application. The concept plan has been designed to avoid/minimise losses to the existing trees wherever possible, with particular regard to any high/moderate quality items. New tree planting will also be provided through the development.
- 6.69 A detailed tree survey has been submitted to support the planning application, and new tree planting is also be provided throughout the development. These vegetated boundaries will be enhanced where gaps occur with native species planting to maximise biodiversity value of the Site and the local green infrastructure network. We therefore consider that the proposals accord with Local Plan Policy NE2 (Landscape).

Noise

- 6.70 It is considered that the layout design of the Site follows good acoustic design principles, whereby external living areas are screened from noise emanating from road traffic using Walnut Tree Road and operations associated with the recreation field to the south.
- 6.71 Mitigation measures will also be provided and include standard thermal double glazing and standard direct airpath window mounted trickle vents. These details will be finalised at the detailed design and Reserved Matters stage. In summary, the Site is suitable for residential development provided the mitigation measures are followed and therefore the proposals are consistent with Local Plan Policy.

Sustainability

- 6.72 New residential developments will be required to meet a high standard of environmental sustainability. A sustainability assessment has been produced by Turley and is submitted in support of this application. It is considered that the proposed development incorporates sustainable drainage and water efficiency measures as required by policies SP9 (Design and Sustainability) and D1 (Sustainable Design).

6.73 To enhance the sustainability of the new homes further the detailed design of the development will aim to use a range of sustainable materials and design features. These will include:

- The provision of sustainable materials, taking into account the embodied carbon of production and transport of materials, further reducing emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Consideration of Modern Methods of Construction to reduce resource use and energy in the construction of homes

6.74 The final design and specification of new homes will be determined during the detailed design of the development and during the reserved matters stage. This assessment of sustainability is afforded **neutral weight** in the planning balance.

Residential Amenity

6.75 Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability) requires that planning permission for any development proposals will not be permitted where it would likely cause material nuisance. This is a matter to be dealt with through reserved matters. However, as shown on the concept plan, it is considered that there would be no direct overlooking as a result of the proposal, given the spatial clearance between curtilages found within the area.

6.76 A good level of amenity can also be provided at this quantum of development, as well as between the proposed housing and neighbouring uses.

6.77 In any event, mitigation could be applied. The proposals will also be in compliance with the Space and Design Guidelines and would not result in any adverse residential amenity impacts upon existing neighbours.

7. S106 Contributions and Heads of Terms

7.1 The following S106 obligations are anticipated as part of the proposed development, with confirmation sought from the Council as part of the planning application discussions:

- The proportion of affordable housing to be delivered as part of the development will be **40%** (up to 20 dwellings) details of which, will be secured as part of the S106 agreement.
- On Site public Open Space and play provision will be provided directly on Site and managed.
- Where required, financial contributions will be made towards education, as agreed with North Hertfordshire County Council, as the relevant Education Authority.
- Where required, financial contributions towards health care provision will be agreed with the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Where required, and justified, financial contributions towards new or existing community facilities in the local area will be agreed with North Hertfordshire District Council.
- An increase in Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will be secured across the Site and some off-site mitigation will be provided. All new public open space areas will be suitably managed in terms of long-term stewardship.
- Monitoring fee for obligations.

8. The Planning Balance and Conclusions

- 8.1 This Statement has been prepared in support of an outline planning application for the erection of up to 50 new homes, including 40% new affordable homes, with new public open space, at Land East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton.
- 8.2 We have carefully adapted the scheme in accordance with feedback received from local stakeholders. The proposals, as submitted, fulfil the Applicant's aims to deliver affordable, quality homes in well-designed places. This is key to improving people's lives and accelerating the pace of house building across the country, as we seek to deliver homes and places people are proud to live in – for generations to come.
- 8.3 The delivery of high-quality homes in this part of North Hertfordshire is in alignment with the Government's stated objectives to tackle the housing crisis and accelerate the delivery of new homes – as emphasised in the Deputy Prime Minister's Written Ministerial Statement (Playing your part in building the homes we need 30/07/2024).
- 8.4 The Site is clearly well related to the settlement envelope of Pirton. It reads, logically, as part of the broader settlement form and its sustainable development would not result in encroachment into the open countryside. The Site sits within a largely residential context of Pirton and provides a logical extension to the village. The proposal will provide a number of key benefits including a net gain in affordable homes, improved amenity and provision of open space.
- 8.5 The proposals will deliver a number of key benefits to the local area and wider county including:
- Boosting the supply of housing to meet identified need;
 - High quality family housing which will support the delivery of sustainable communities, meeting the needs of North Hertfordshire's residents;
 - Policy compliant 40% affordable housing contribution;
 - The creation of direct jobs during construction which will support the supply chain, as well as additional expenditure for the local area once the proposed dwellings are occupied;
 - A broad range of house types to meet varies housing needs and demands in the area;
 - Provision of public open space;

- The development will be subject to financial contributions towards education, public rights of way, public open space, local community facilities and highway improvements if necessary; and
- The retention and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows, the provision of additional green infrastructure, and the creation of new and improved wildlife habitats.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

- 8.6 As outlined in Section 6, It is acknowledged that whilst the scheme would conflict with Local Plan policies CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt), the Council's lack of a 5 year housing land supply is a material consideration of very substantial weight.
- 8.7 Policy SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution) sets out a spatial strategy to deliver this lower housing need, including limitations on delivering housing elsewhere for reasons including to 'protect the character of existing settlements and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the surrounding countryside'. The NPPF provides no blanket protection of the countryside in principle and has a requirement to significantly boost the supply of housing. The Site itself is also not a valued landscape.
- 8.8 The Site is located within a sustainable location on the edge of the village of Pirton and so reads, logically, as part of the broader settlement form and its development would not result in encroachment into the open countryside. The Site sits within a largely residential context of Pirton and provides a logical extension to the village. The Site is also accessible by foot to the nearby key services and facilities in Pirton and is therefore highly sustainable.
- 8.9 The proposal will also make effective use of land by delivery an appropriate density of residential development. Despite the application being in outline, an illustrative masterplan has also been submitted to demonstrate how a well-designed scheme can be delivered in line with the limits set by the parameter plans, including public open space, drainage and landscape mitigation. It will also deliver 40% affordable housing in line with Policy HS2.
- 8.10 The Site does not represent a protected area or asset of particular importance, which provides a clear reason for refusing development. The proposals should therefore be granted planning permission unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole. We consider this further below.
- 8.11 It has been demonstrated that the proposals represent sustainable development which will deliver significant benefits. It is also clear that there will not be any adverse impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

- 8.12 The Applicant is committed to progressing a very high-quality, sustainable, residential proposal as soon as possible. Therefore, given there are no technical or environmental constraints that cannot be suitably addressed through sensitive design and mitigation, and that the Applicant is an experienced house builder, with a clear vision and build strategy for this Site, early housing delivery is assured.
- 8.13 The benefits of the scheme are set out in the statement and in the table below. There is clearly both an immediate need and demand for residential development at this location.

Material Consideration	Harm/Benefit/Neutral	Weight	Policy/Reason
Sustainable Development	Benefit	Significant positive weight	NPPF Paragraph 8 and 11(d)(ii)
Market Housing	Benefit	Substantial positive weight	NPPF Paragraph 8 and 11(d)(ii)
Affordable Housing	Benefit	Substantial positive weight	Local Plan Policy HS2 and NPPF Paragraphs 11, 61, 64 and 66 The latest AMR suggests that: <i>‘the availability of housing that is affordable is a major issue in the District, with a growing gap between average earnings and housing costs’¹</i>
Biodiversity Net Gain and ecological enhancements	Benefit	Significant positive weight	NPPF Paragraph 182 and Local Plan Policy NE4.

¹ North Hertfordshire District Council 2023 – 2024 Annual Monitoring Report 2024

Landscape	Neutral	Neutral	No significant effects as per the conclusion of the LVIA.
Flood risk	Harm	Neutral	Site is in flood zone 1 and has limited risk of surface water flooding
Transport	Neutral	Neutral	No significant effects and no severe impacts.
Agricultural	Neutral	Neutral	Loss of grade 3 agricultural land, however no significant effects
Trees	Neutral	Neutral	The loss of small number of trees and hedgerows outweighed by significant landscape planting.
Noise	Neutral	Neutral	No significant effects.

8.14 The Council have indicated that an application on this Site could be supported subject to a planning balance assessment that results on any adverse impacts not significantly and demonstrably outweighing the benefits of the Scheme. This Statement demonstrates that there are no significant or demonstrable reasons why planning permission should be withheld on this Site.

8.15 North Hertfordshire District Council is therefore requested to exercise the statutory duties set out in section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and relevant policy guidance contained within the NPPF (notably Paragraph 11(d) in the determination of this application. The balance of material considerations and public benefits in favour of the Scheme outweigh any conflict with the Development Plan in this instance and so the Scheme proposals are commended to the Council for the grant of outline planning permission.

Appendix 1: Pre-application Written Response



www.north-herts.gov.uk

Turley

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Stow-Cum-Quay
Cambridge
CB25 9AU

Our Ref : 24/02103/PRE

Contact : Ben Glover
Direct Line : 01462 474248
Email : ben.glover@north-herts.gov.uk
Date : 17th October 2024

FAO: Charlotte Bailey

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Pre Application Advice : Residential development of up to 50 new dwellings
Land Adjacent To 10, Hambridge Way, Pirton, Hertfordshire,**

I refer to your request for pre-application advice regarding the above site and the proposed development.

For your information, the relevant national and local planning policies that would relate to the potential future planning application are as follows:

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development
Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
Section 6 – Building a strong and competitive economy
Section 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
Section 11 – Making effective use of land
Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

North Hertfordshire Draft Local Plan (2011-2031)

Strategic Policies:

SP1 - Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
SP2 – Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt
SP6 – Sustainable transport

North Herts Council, PO Box 10613, Nottingham, NG6 6DW



SP7 – Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions
SP8 – Housing
SP9 – Design and sustainability
SP10 – Healthy communities
SP11 – Natural resources and sustainability
SP12 – Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity
SP13 – Historic environment

Development Management Policies:

CGB1 – Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt
CGB2b – Community facilities, services and affordable housing in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt
T1 – Assessment of transport matters
T2 – Parking
HS2 – Affordable housing
HS3 – Housing mix
HS5 – Accessible and adaptable housing
D1 – Sustainable design
D3 – Protecting living conditions
D4 – Air quality
ETC2 – Employment development outside Employment Areas
NE1 – Strategic green infrastructure
NE2 – Landscape
NE3 – The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB)
NE4 – Biodiversity and geological sites
NE6 – New and improved open space
NE7 – Reducing flood risk
NE8 – Sustainable drainage systems
NE9 – Water quality and environment
NE10 – Water conservation and wastewater infrastructure
NE11 – Contaminated land
HE1 – Designated Heritage Assets
HE4 – Archaeology

Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan (2011-2031)

PNP 1 – Meeting Local and Wider Needs
PNP 2 – Design and Character
PNP 4 – Hedgerows, Trees and Verges
PNP 5 – Wildlife
PNP 6 – Local Green Spaces
PNP 7 – Key Views and Vistas
PNP 8 – Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage
PNP 11 – Safety of Pedestrians, Cyclists, Equestrians and Motorists
PNP 12 – Connectivity
PNP 13 – Car Parking

Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD - November 2011

Design SPD - July 2011

Assessment:

The Site

The application site consists of two agricultural fields that sit outside of the Pirton Village Boundary and is also situated within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The site is bound by mature vegetation consisting of trees and hedgerows. The site is in Flood Zone 1, an area with the lowest probability of flooding from rivers.

The site is neighboured to the north and west by existing residential development, and to the south by the Pirton Recreation Ground. To the east is open arable countryside.

The Proposal

Pre-application advice is sought for the residential development of up to 50 new dwellings and the creation of an access off Cotman End.

The proposed layout would consist of five housing blocks that would follow the existing building line from Cotman End and from the development to the north. The east of the site would contain new open space and an attenuation feature. Several new connections are offered around the perimeter of the site onto existing footpaths.

Assessment

The applicant seeks the Council's comments on the following issues:

- Principal of development;
- Landscape;
- Design;
- Access;
- Ecology; and
- Drainage

Principle of Development:

The application site comprises agricultural fields situated on the urban edge of Pirton and outside of the defined village boundary. The site is within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt.

Policy SP2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan identifies Pirton as a Category A village. Policy SP2 sets out that general development is supported within the defined settlement boundaries of a Category A village.

However, with the application site falling outside of the defined settlement boundary and within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt, Policies SP5 and CGB1 apply in this case.

Policy SP5 sets out that the Council will operate a general policy of restraint in Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt through the application of detailed policies.

Policy CGB1 sets out several criteria that would support a planning application within the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. In this case, the proposed development would not fall within any of the criteria offered under Policy CGB1.

Whilst the proposed development would not be supported by the Councils local plan policies, following the release of the 2024 version of the NPPF, the Local Planning Authority can no longer demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and therefore limb (ii) of Paragraph 11 d) of the NPPF would apply in the event of an application being submitted for consideration. Paragraph 11 d) (ii) is as follows:

“11. Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development... for decision making this means:

d) 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:

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”

The Councils published five-year housing land supply figure is 3.9 years. With the proposed development consisting of the provision of housing, including affordable, positive weight would be given in favour of the proposed development on this site.

However, whilst the presumption in favour of sustainable development would be applied in this case, it is not a guarantee of planning approval. The submitted pre-application is not accompanied by sufficient information to allow for a fully informed assessment of the proposal, with particular regard to the landscape impacts of the proposed development.

In summary, the site, whilst outside of the village boundary, could be considered to be in a sustainable location with adequate access to nearby services within the Category A village. The sustainability of the site would however likely be subject to appropriate sustainable transport mitigations being identified to promote alternative modes of transport to private motorised vehicles.

The presumption in favour of sustainable development would be applied in this case given the Councils inability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. An application on this site could be supported subject to a planning balance assessment that results in any adverse impacts not significantly and demonstrably outweighing benefits of the scheme, which are acknowledged.

Layout and Design:

Local Plan Policies SP9 and D1 seek to ensure that new development will respond positively to a site's local context. Whilst applying the tilted balance set out in paragraph 11(d)(ii) particular regard to these local plan policies, as well as the paragraphs 135 and 139 of the NPPF which in-of-themselves draw in the national model design code and national design guide.

The pre-application has been accompanied by a concept site layout plan. The Council's Urban Design Officer has been consulted on the proposed layout however, no written comments have been provided at the time of writing this report. An informal meeting with the Urban Design Officer has taken place and several issues have been raised with regards to the proposed layout of the site. It is however felt that these design issues could be overcome should the applicant choose to further collaborate with the Council prior to submitting an application.

It is recommended that the applicant enter into further engagement with the Local Planning Authority. This would allow for proactive engagement with the aim of delivering a high-quality development on the application site. Said engagement could be in the form of workshop sessions in which the applicant's team could meet with the Council and discuss issues relating to the layout and design of the scheme to minimise the risk of a design reason for refusal at the application stage.

The concerns relating to the layout and design of the site are summarised below:

- The concerns raised principally relate to the block layout of the site. The Council would not be supportive of the cul-de-sac / close layout proposed on the eastern side of the site. It is recommended that a new north / south route with perimeter blocks be explored that resembles the central block proposed.
- The applicant should also redesign the western block to allow for edge lane permeability for pedestrians avoiding dead ends and roads to nowhere.
- Whilst the Council would be supportive of the location of the green space and the properties fronting onto that space, no play provision has been shown on plan. It is recommended that the scheme include a play area within the site as per Policy NE6 of the Local Plan. Open space provision should also take into account the guidance and standards provided by Fields in Trust.
- Rationale for the hard surfacing should be set out in any future submission.

In conclusion of the above, there are concerns relating to the current layout and design proposed within the site. It is recommended that the applicant engage with the Local Planning Authority to devise an appropriately designed scheme through a workshop that could be held at the Council offices with the relevant officers.

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain:

Local Plan Policy NE4 requires for all applications to achieve a net gain in bio-diversity, whilst the provisions of the Environment Act require for a 10% BNG. Please ensure that the appropriate matrix and all measures are clearly set out in any application.

The Council's Ecologist has raised the following points that should be considered:

- There would likely be no ecological objection to the principle of development on this site and the intention to undertake ecological surveys and provide a BNG assessment is welcomed.

- Hertfordshire Ecological Network mapping is used to determine strategic significance. The application site identifies the site as lying partially within a strategic zone. As such it should be recorded in the Statutory Metric as 'formally identified in local strategy'. In addition, any future application for a major development should also be supported by a draft Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP).
- The retention of trees and boundary hedgerows on the concept plan is welcomed, NE4 of the North Herts Local Plan requires a 12m buffer to such features.
- Consideration of Best and Most Versatile land is also necessary where loss of grades 3a and above should be avoided. The Magic map would infer this site lies in grade 3 but the applicant may wish to address this in their application.
- The applicant is also advised that Natural England now operate a District Level Licensing (DLL) scheme in Hertfordshire, the site lies within an amber zone. The DLL scheme is an option open to developers ensuring compliance with the legal duty to protect great crested newts but without the restriction of time constraints associated with surveys or mitigation measures.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment:

The pre-application has not been accompanied by any Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Any future application would need to clearly set out that the proposed development would not result in any unacceptable visual harm that would weigh against the proposed development.

With the application site being on the edge of the existing settlement with residential development bounding the site to the north and west, it could be considered that this edge of settlement location may be appropriate and not result in significant harm to the landscape character. However, sufficient information would need to be presented to the Local Planning Authority to avoid concerns being raised in relation to landscape harm.

Policy NE2 of the Local Plan and Policy PNP2 of the Neighbourhood Plan should be taken into consideration when designing the scheme further.

The site is not within the Chilterns AONB. The applicant should however be aware that the site is situated close to the Chilterns AONB. Public consultation is expected to take place in spring 2025 to review the boundaries of the AONB. The applications site could fall within the AONB should the boundaries be extended. This extension of the AONB should be considered. In the event the AONB boundaries extend, this would apply limb (i) of paragraph 11(d) and dependent on the impact, this could result in a strong reason for refusal.

Access and Transport:

Policy T1 of the Local Plan sets out the relevant planning policy relating to transport matters.

The Council's Transport Officer has raised the following points for consideration:

- Whilst a raised table will calm traffic, at a pinch point it may encourage vehicles to overrun the footway: $3.7\text{m} + 1.8\text{m} = 5.5\text{m}$, which is wider than the rest of the carriageway. A shorter raised table is less likely to be misused.
- The root protection zone for the tree to the north of the pinch point should be shown. That may alter the preferred alignment of the road and footway.
- 3.7m for a single lane is wider than necessary for a single vehicle and too narrow for a single vehicle to safely pass an oncoming cycle. 2.75m should suffice.
- 5m may be too narrow for the access road. 5.5m may be more appropriate up to the first junction within the site: $0.15\text{m from kerb} + 2.5\text{m refuse collection vehicle} + 0.5\text{m separation} + 2.0\text{m SUV} + 0.15\text{m to kerb} = 5.3\text{m}$.

As part of the response, a draft document titled 'General guidance on transport in masterplans' will be attached. This document includes informal advice on parking, garages, cycle parking, EV charge points, and other details of relevance.

Drainage and Flooding:

The application site is situated in Flood Zone 1. Any future application would need to be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and should incorporate appropriate SuDs within the site.

Please note that the LLFA offer their own chargeable pre-application service. It is advised that the applicant consider seeking advice from the LLFA to avoid any unnecessary delays at the application stage.

Sustainability:

On 21 May 2019, the Council passed a Climate Emergency motion which pledged to do everything within the Council's power to achieve zero carbon emissions in North

Hertfordshire by 2030. This declaration asserted the Council's commitment toward Climate Action beyond current government targets and international agreements.

Climate action has been a long term corporate priority area for the Council, and has been pursued through our objective to Prosper and Protect North Hertfordshire. This objective informs our commitments to:

- Green space provision.
- Representing the Climate Change interests of North Hertfordshire residents on county and regional plans, policies and aspirations.
- Supporting initiatives that increase the energy efficiency of residents' homes, reduce resource waste, and increase our sustainability for the longer term.
- Protecting our physical heritage.

- Finding environmentally sustainable solutions to the challenges.

If this proposal were to proceed to the application stage, mitigation should be considered to make a positive contribution to the mitigation of the climate emergency. We would wish to see a commitment to the provision of EV parking, solar panels, high levels of insulation and double glazing, low flow water fittings, energy efficient boilers and / or heat pumps.

I advise that the applicants refer to the requirements of the Sustainability SPD. Positive weight will be attributed to sustainability measures dependent on compliance with any level of compliance, scaled from bronze, to silver, to gold.

Other Considerations:

The below are general comments for information only:

- It is recommended that the Rights of Way team at HCC are contacted to see if they have any comments regarding the public rights of way crossing the site. Mitigation will be required to be agreed for impacts both during and post construction.
- Please ensure that any application complies with the requirements of Local Plan Policy HS2 (Affordable housing), Policy HS3 (Housing mix) and HS5 (Accessible and adaptable housing).
- The application will, in accordance with current circumstances, need to be determined by Planning Control Committee as per the Council's Constitution given that the site has an area larger than 0.5ha. There are generally three meetings every two months with no meetings in August or during election periods. There is also a limit on the number of applications that can be presented at each meeting. Therefore, there may be a delay waiting for a committee meeting. An extension of time will likely be required to cover the date of the committee meeting.
- S106 contributions would be sought for open space provision, waste services, education, library services, youth services, sports places, highways, NHS, and S106 monitoring fees.

Conclusion:

As set out in the report above, the proposed development, by reason of its siting in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt, would conflict with several Local Plan policies. However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development would be applied through Paragraph 11 d) of the NPPF by reason of the Council being unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Therefore, in any future application, any negative impact of a proposal would need to be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by harm to justify a refusal.

The pre-application has been submitted without a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Given the current open status of the site, landscape impact is considered to be a key factor in the likely acceptability of residential development on this site.

There are also several design and layout concerns that would need to be addressed prior to the submission of an application.

It should be noted that the Council's position on amendments is that we do not seek or accept any significant amendments after validation. However, we will accept amendments that have

been subject to pre-application advice where applicants have considered and addressed the advice given.

If the applicant is confident that there would be minimal landscape harm arising from the proposed development, it is advised that further engagement is entered into, with potential for workshops with relevant officers take place to address key issues and streamline the application process. I would recommend a baseline workshop with a focus on landscape visual impact assessment to firm up the principal of the development, moving into landscape-led design workshop and discussion on parameter and framework plan requirements. Further information on this can be given upon request.

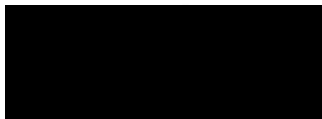
Any advice given by Council Officers for pre-application enquiries does not constitute a formal response or decision of the council with regards to future planning permission or other consents. You should also be aware that the information provided within this document gives no guarantees about the final formal decision made on any planning application.

Submitted Documents If this proposal were to proceed to the application stage, please ensure that you have referred to our validation check list to ensure that all the needed information and documents are submitted for consideration.

Our validation checklist can be found on this link:

[Submit a planning application | North Herts Council](#)

Yours sincerely,



Ben Glover
Senior Planning Officer

The Council's Privacy Notice is available on our website: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-data-and-performance/data-protection/information-management-gdpr>

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