
PLANNING STATEMENT & SECTION 106 HEADS OF TERMS

Land off Echo Hill, Royston



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of the Statement

- 1.1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared to support an outline application made by Gladman Developments Ltd ('Gladman') for development at Land off Echo Hill, Royston (the site). The description of development is as follows:

'Outline application for the demolition of No. 24 Echo Hill and the erection of up to 84 dwellings with public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS), with all matters reserved save for access.'

- 1.1.2 The Planning Statement explains the policy context for the application and sets out how the proposed development is appropriate having regard to the statutory development plan and other material considerations, as well as National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF).
- 1.1.3 This Planning Statement explains why development is needed and appropriate in this location, and that the significant social, environmental and economic benefits will be delivered by the development that substantially outweigh any major residual impacts.
- 1.1.4 Through the suite of documents submitted alongside this statement, it can be confirmed that no adverse impacts would arise from the development that would 'significantly and demonstrably' outweigh the benefits, giving compelling grounds to grant planning permission.
- 1.1.5 The relevant policies are out-of-date and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, pursuant to Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, is engaged. This is by virtue of the Council being unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land and because the relevant policy for the location of housing in the Local Plan is out-of-date.

1.1.6 This Statement further explains the policy context and how the proposed development is appropriate, having regard to the statutory Development Plan and other material considerations including the Framework. It demonstrates how the proposed development complies with national policy set in the Framework and why it is appropriate to bring forward development on this site.

1.2 The Site

1.2.1 Royston is a historic market town located within North Hertfordshire and falls within the administrative area of North Hertfordshire District Council ('NHDC' or 'the Council'). The town is well connected by rail and road, particularly via the A505 and the mainline railway to London and Cambridge.

1.2.2 The Site itself comprises of two grassed fields and is approximately 8.9 hectares in size. It is located at the southern edge of the town and adjoins the rear gardens of the residential properties at Echo Hill, with Royse Grove and Layston Park to the east. Other built form in the vicinity of the site includes Wicker Hall and Heath Farm, which are located directly to the west of Briary Lane.

1.2.3 Therfield Heath is located to the west of the site and is a designated SSSI and Local Nature Reserve within which a number of Scheduled Monuments are located. The landscape to the south of the site between Royston and Therfield is primarily characterised by an open, with undulating and intensively managed agricultural landscape of medium to large scale fields which are predominantly in arable use.

1.2.4 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape or heritage quality or value. It comprises of two ordinary grassland

fields, adjoining modern housing, and predominantly bound by hedgerows with trees forming the boundary to the northeast of the site.

1.2.5 Royston offers a comprehensive range of facilities that support the creation sustainable residential development. There are several schools located within Royston, ranging from infant to secondary level. Medical facilities such as doctors' surgeries and Royston Hospital can be found within the town. Leisure and fitness facilities include gym, swimming pool, sports hall as well a several outdoor sports facilities and clubs.

1.2.6 Royston Library can be found within the retail centre, as well as a mix of independent shops, retail chains, cafes and restaurants. Additionally green spaces like Therfield Heath can offer residents outdoor recreational opportunities.

1.3 Relevant Planning History

1.3.1 The site has been subject to two previous applications, both submitted by Gladman.

1.3.2 The first application was submitted in March 2018 (reference: 18/00747/OP) for outline planning permission for the erection of up to 120 dwellings with public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS) and vehicular access point from Briary Lane.

1.3.3 Through the planning process, the addition of structural planting, landscape buffers and a reduction in the scale and density of the development meant that a reduction to the number of units proposed, dropping to 107. These changes were included in the proposals to ensure that the landscaping and visual impacts of the scheme were largely mitigated along Briary Lane.

1.3.4 The application was refused at committee on 16 January 2019 with 4 reasons for refusal (RfR). The RfR are set out below:

- *RfR 1:* By reason of its prominent position and the topography of the site, the proposed development would be likely to result in significant localised adverse impacts on both the character of the area and visual receptors...development breaking the skyline, would act to occasion a marked and adverse change in the character of the immediate and intermediate locality and wider valued landscape.
- *RfR 2:* Natural England has advised that there is no acknowledgement of the impact on the SSSI within in [sic] the Ecological Appraisal and therefore consider this document to be incomplete...It is extremely important that the direct impacts upon the SSSI are accurately quantified and assessed...the potential for significant adverse effects has not been adequately evaluated.
- *RfR 3:* cites guidance of the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation on distances to bus stops in new developments, stating that a walking distance exceeding 400m is 'unsustainable'.
- *RfR 4:* relates to the lack of a signed legal agreement to secure affordable housing and other necessary obligations.

1.3.5 A second application (20/00744/OP) was submitted on 1st April 2020 for outline consent for up to 99 residential dwellings (including up to 40% affordable housing), introduction of structural planting and landscaping, informal public open space and children's play area, surface water flood mitigation, vehicular access point via the demolition of an existing property on Echo Hill (all matters to be reserved save access).

- 1.3.6 The application addressed the four reasons for refusal which were impact on landscape character, no acknowledgement of the impact on the SSSI, unsustainable location and lack of a signed legal agreement.
- 1.3.7 The number of dwellings decreased dramatically from the initial 120 proposed to 99 dwellings. Areas that were particularly landscape sensitive (boundary which faces onto Briary Lane) proposed 1 to 1½ dwellings, differing from the original 2 storey dwellings on the first application.
- 1.3.8 Relocating the access from Briary Lane to Echo Hill meant that engineering works on the road were not required. This in turn limited any direct impact of the proposed development on the SSSI was removed. Further scope was identified to enhance pedestrian links to the nearby bus stops, which would benefit existing and new residents.
- 1.3.9 The submission included revised documents which sought to address the previous reasons for refusal. However, the application was refused on 13th April 2021 stating the following two reasons:
- *RfR 1:* By reason of its prominent position and the topography of the site and location outside the settlement boundary of Royston, the proposed development would be likely to result in significant localised adverse impacts on both the character of the area and visual receptors, particularly when viewed from certain locations on Royston Heath. While these impacts could be mitigated to a limited extent, the combination of residential built form on high ground and the associated urbanising infrastructure, and development breaking the skyline, would act to occasion a marked and adverse change in the character of the immediate and intermediate locality and wider valued landscape.

- *RfR 2*: At the time of determination the planning application, the subject of this decision notice, has not been accompanied by a valid legal undertaking (in the form of a completed S106 Obligation) securing the provision of the requisite infrastructure and financial contributions towards off site infrastructure or on-site affordable housing. The secure delivery of these obligations is required to mitigate the impact of the development on the identified services in accordance with the adopted Planning Obligations SPD, Saved Policy 51 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 - with Alterations or proposed Local Plan Policy HS2 of the Submission Local Plan (2011-2031). Without this mechanism to secure these provisions the development scheme cannot be considered as a sustainable form of development contrary to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.3.10 As set out within this document, the planning context has changed materially since the two previous applications. This now supports the submission and determination of a new application on the site. Moreover, the significant change in context justifies a departure from previous decisions.

2 THE PROPOSALS

2.1 The Proposal

2.1.1 The drawings submitted as part of this Outline planning application for approval are:

- Site Location Plan (ref: 2019-112-100);
- Proposed Access Arrangements (ref: 13378/2100 P1);
- Development Framework Plan (ref: DL_101 rev D);
- Proving Layout (ref: G.EH.SK.01);

2.1.2 A suite of reports have been submitted to evidence the application and comprehensively demonstrate the suitability of the site for housing development. These reports are listed below:

- Planning Statement (this document);
- Design and Access Statement;
- Socio-economic Statement;
- Affordable Housing Statement;
- Energy, Sustainability and Waste Management Statement;
- Statement of Community Involvement;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal;
- Heritage Statement;

- Phase 1 Desk Study;
- Flood Risk Assessment;
- Noise Screening Report;
- Transport Assessment;
- Travel Plan.

2.1.3 The proposal is for an Outline planning application, with all matters reserved except for access. The application proposal includes the following:

- Up to 84 new homes, addressing the pressing need for new homes in the area;
- The provision of up to 35 (40%) much needed affordable homes to cater to the diverse housing needs of local residents, including those on lower incomes and key workers;
- Vehicular access through the demolition of No. 24 Echo Hill;
- An extensive network of proposed recreational routes around the site and connecting to wider footpaths to the south and linking to Therfield Heath;
- Proposed shared surfaces allowing character areas to be established through the development;
- Proposed native woodland, native thicket, trees and meadows to replicate development patterns neighbouring the site;
- Proposed children's play area and street furniture such as focal seating areas to create a sense of place;
- Opportunity to develop a community orchard;

- Biodiversity enhancements through blue and green infrastructure incorporating ecological mitigation and habitat creation across the site;
- Sustainable Drainage features which will be designed at Reserved Matters to be vegetated and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

2.1.4 A Development Framework Plan (DFP) is submitted with the application which is an illustrative summary of all the reports submitted with the application and proposals listed above.

2.1.5 As the relationship with the surrounding environment and character has been a reason for refusal on both previous applications, the indicative planning layout has been amended from previous versions to take consideration of the topography of the development, and to lessen any potential impacts its approval may have on neighbouring dwellings and also key views around the surrounding area.

2.1.6 Regarding the topography of the site, the proposed layout keeps development parcels located within the lower parts of the development, which slope down from the higher topographies in the central area. Green buffers are proposed to create natural stand-off distances from existing residential development along the northern and eastern boundary, creating further privacy for neighbours. Within the proposed residential areas where the topography of the site is at its highest, bungalows are proposed within this to ensure that views out of the site are not obstructed by development.

2.1.7 As per the second application, access to the development will be taken through No. 24 Echo Hill. There is a steep incline from Echo Hill into the site, which has meant that extensive desk-based work has been undertaken to ensure that the gradient can be safely achieved.

- 2.1.8 In order to safely achieve the required gradient the access road has been designed to curve back. This has been proposed to ensure the gradient is not excessively steep, and also to mitigate any potential glare from headlights when vehicles are leaving the development into properties that border the site on Echo Hill.
- 2.1.9 To ensure access into the site can be constructed through No. 24 Echo Hill, the junction layout into the site is different to previous submitted applications. Instead of providing a 'T Junction' at the access, it is proposed that Echo Hill will curve into the site, creating a junction to the properties to the west of the access and to The Dell. This has been created to lessen the gradient of the access into the site, and our Highways consultants have tracked the proposed access to ensure that all required vehicles are able to access the development.
- 2.1.10 The primary street leads to the southernmost parcel of development, with several secondary streets channelling off. This allows for character areas to be achieved within the proposed development, creating links to proposed recreational spaces and permitting shared pedestrian/vehicle surfaces to work in conjunction.
- 2.1.11 Proposed recreational routes weave through the site, linking key open spaces throughout the development which include a children's play area and orchard. These recreational routes link the development parcels to Briary Lane, where an easy pedestrian route can be followed to access Royston Town Centre. To the south, these recreational routes link to the bridleway, allowing for wider pedestrian connections to benefit from.
- 2.1.12 Aspects of the landscape proposals have been influenced by neighbouring characteristics. Within the north-western parcel, the proposed landscaping aligns with the existing green corridor, which provides screening to the higher areas on the development whilst enhancing the existing trees and hedgerow

which are currently within this location. The green corridor continues south within the proposed development, again acting as a method of screening for the higher development parcels and creates a buffer between the residential areas and proposed meadows and community areas.

2.2 Sustainable Location

- 2.2.1 The proposed development is located to the south of Royston and is accessed off Echo Hill. The NHLP describes Royston as the third largest town in the district by population, playing a significant role in serving surrounding villages in both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire due to its relative isolation from the district's other main towns. The Local Plan envisages Royston as a key hub for balanced growth, aiming to enhance its housing, economic and retail sectors whilst preserving its historical character and promoting sustainable development.
- 2.2.2 Manual for Streets (2007) defines walkable neighbourhoods as places where most daily needs and services—such as schools, shops, parks, and public transport—are within a ten-minute walk, or roughly 800 metres, from people's homes. This is not classed as an upper limit, and it is widely acknowledged that a walking distance of up to 2km is deemed acceptable to access local facilities. The guidance places strong emphasis on creating well-connected street networks that offer short, direct, and safe routes for pedestrians.
- 2.2.3 Pedestrians are placed at the top of the user hierarchy, above cyclists, public transport, and private vehicles. This means street design should prioritise pedestrian comfort and safety with features like safe road crossings, good lighting, and active frontages that make walking feel safer and more enjoyable.

- 2.2.4 The site access is situated within approximately 0.7km of the centre of Royston and it is therefore close to existing shops, services and employment opportunities in the town, allowing easy access by foot and bicycle.
- 2.2.5 The most direct walking route between the site and Royston Bus Station is along Sun Hill, which is conducive in encouraging walk trips between the site (and existing properties) to the bus station and town centre amenities.
- 2.2.6 Growth at Echo Hill will both support and be supported by a range of services and facilities that are within easy walking and cycling distance of the site. These include, but are not limited to nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools; restaurants and cafes; a post office; an industrial estate; shops; and a hospital.
- 2.2.7 The proposed development affords opportunity for development-generated public transport journeys to be made by bus and rail.
- 2.2.8 There are frequent bus services operating near to the site. There are 2 bus stops which would serve residents within 1km of the site, including the bus station at Barkway Street (750m) and the stop at Baldock Street (980m). The existing bus offer travel to a range of destinations including Buntingford, Letchworth and Trumpington/Cambridge. These services coincide with typical workplace start and finish times. This means that residents of the site will have genuine opportunity to complete commuting journeys to/from Buntingford, Letchworth and Trumpington/Cambridge by bus. The existing bus services operating in the vicinity of the site offer a good level of frequency and a range of destinations.
- 2.2.9 The nearest rail station is at Royston and is about 0.9km from the site; approximately a 20-minute walk or a 5-minute cycle. Services calling

at Royston Rail Station offer travel a range of destinations, including Cambridge, Stevenage, London Kings Cross and Welwyn Garden City.

2.2.10 The following is relevant in terms of the site's suitability and sustainability for development:

- The site is well contained within the landscape and important trees and other landscape features are retained;
- The local highway network has capacity to accommodate the additional traffic associated with the development, without adverse impact;
- The site comprises land in agricultural use, but its usefulness for agricultural purposes is limited and its loss would not be significant in Framework terms;
- Most of the site has a low ecological value. Any loss of habitat would therefore not be significant and mitigation and net biodiversity gains could be readily achieved;
- The application site falls within flood zone 1 (i.e. land assessed as having a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability, or <0.1% chance of flooding);
- There are no designated heritage assets within or immediately adjacent to the site, and the development is not considered to affect the setting of any listed buildings.

2.3 Landscape

2.3.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by Iceni and is submitted as part of this application.

- 2.3.2 The LVIA concludes that there will be limited effects on the landscape character south of the Site due to the intervening topography and limited intervisibility. The fact that the development will form a logical extension to the existing settlement, and as it will be well contained from the wider countryside by the boundary features as well as the adjoining bridleways. There will be no material effect on the townscape character of the immediate settlement adjoining the Site to the north and east.
- 2.3.3 There will be limited effect on the character of Therfield Heath, with the impacts limited to views of the new development from a small part of the Heath, with the new homes seen within the context of the existing settlement which is also visible from here. The development will not materially affect a valued landscape.
- 2.3.4 The proposed development, being well contained from the wider countryside, and well related to the existing settlement, will not have a material effect on the wider landscape character beyond the immediate setting, nor on the wider character of Royston. Overall, there is no landscape or visual reason why development at the Site would be unacceptable, and the Site is capable of being developed in line with the proposals.

2.4 Highways

- 2.4.1 The submission of this application is accompanied by a Transport Assessment, a Travel Plan, and Access Plans which demonstrate how the site can be safely accessed by all vehicles that maybe required.
- 2.4.2 The Transport Assessment demonstrates that the existing road network has sufficient capacity to comfortably accommodate the new dwellings. The access plan for the proposed development at Land off Echo Hill, Royston, illustrates the proposed vehicular access layout and vehicle tracking analysis. The main

access point is shown connecting to the existing highway off Echo Hill, through the demolition of plot 24. A swept path analysis demonstrates that large vehicles, including refuse and emergency vehicles, can safely enter and exit the site. The plan confirms adequate visibility splays and turning movements, supporting the technical suitability of the proposed access in accordance with highway design standards.

2.4.3 A Transport Assessment Scoping Note was prepared for the proposed development of 99 dwellings at Land off Echo Hill, Royston, to agree the assessment scope with Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority.

2.4.4 The site is sustainably located within walking distance of the town centre, bus station, and Royston railway station. Visibility splays of 2.4m x 43m meet Manual for Streets standards, and a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit will be submitted. The development is expected to generate 44 two-way trips during the morning peak and 45 during the evening peak. A traffic survey at the Echo Hill/Sun Hill junction is proposed to confirm network capacity and trip distribution. Parking provision and internal layout will be addressed at the reserved matters stage.

2.5 Other Findings

2.5.1 An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment has been submitted with this application and identified no World Heritage Sites, scheduled monuments, or registered heritage assets within the site. Localised prehistoric and Roman activity was recorded, indicating moderate to high archaeological potential for these periods, with low potential for Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval remains. The overall significance of any surviving archaeology is expected to range from negligible to regional. The impacts of the proposed development on heritage assets are not considered materially different from those assessed in a previous appeal decision, which found that any required archaeological

work could be secured by condition. As such, it is recommended that the same approach—securing any further archaeological investigation through a suitably worded planning condition—be applied to the current application.

- 2.5.2** A Phase 1 Desk Based Site Investigation Study has been submitted as part of the outline application submission. It states that the site has been used as farmland since 1877 and sits on chalk ground within a protected water zone (SPZ1). There may be a low to moderate risk from ground gas due to old landfill or quarry use nearby. The ground is generally stable but may have some unexpected changes due to natural features. Further investigation is recommended to check the ground conditions and confirm there are no harmful gases or pollutants present.
- 2.5.3** The weathered condition of the chalk, combined with silt/clay infill, limits the potential for effective shallow infiltration. As a result, shallow soakaways are considered unsuitable and therefore SuDS have been proposed for the development.
- 2.5.4** The Affordable Housing Statement confirms that up to 34 units (40%) of the new homes will be affordable, in accordance with Policy HS2 of the Local Plan and definitions with the NPPF. Affordable housing provisions will be secured through a Section 106 obligation as set out in the Heads of Terms. These homes would be pepper-potted throughout the site and made indistinguishable from open market properties. Approval of the housing mix is not sought as part of this outline application. However, the new homes will be provided in a mixture of sizes, styles and tenures to meet the diverse range of local needs, specific at the reserved matters stage of the development.
- 2.5.5** A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the site at Echo Hill, Royston, identified no statutory ecological constraints to development, though it lies approximately 650m from Therfield Heath SSSI and adjacent to a Local Wildlife

Site. Habitats on site are generally common, with native hedgerows offering the most ecological value and recommended for retention. Further botanical surveys are advised to assess grassland quality and determine Biodiversity Net Gain potential. Protected species such as bats, breeding birds, reptiles, badgers, and great crested newts may be present, and targeted surveys are recommended to support an Ecological Impact Assessment. Ecological enhancements and mitigation measures are proposed to support biodiversity and recreational impacts.

- 2.5.6 Several other reports have been submitted alongside this application to support the case. These reports are listed in Section 1 of this Planning Statement.

3 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT AND MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Planning Policy

- 3.1.1** This section sets out the planning policy relevant to the determination of this planning application.

3.2 The Development Plan: Weighting

- 3.2.1** Section 38(6) of the Town and Country Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 places a statutory duty on local planning authorities to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. Section 39 of the Act requires decision makers to exercise their functions with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 3.2.2** The Framework is a material planning consideration but it is confirmed in paragraphs 2 and 12 that this does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The planning application should be considered in this context.

3.3 National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.3.1** The most recent iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework' or 'NPPF') was published on 12th December 2024 (and was subject to minor amends on 7th February 2025).
- 3.3.2** At the heart of the Framework lies a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 sets out that, in order to achieve sustainable development, the planning system has three overarching objectives, an economic objective, a social objective, and an environmental objective.

- 3.3.3 Section 5 of the Framework focuses on delivering a sufficient supply of homes, with paragraph 61 stating that to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed.
- 3.3.4 Section 9 of the Framework addresses the promotion of sustainable transport. Paragraph 109 proposes that new development should apply a vision-led approach to identify transport solutions that deliver well-designed, sustainable and popular places.
- 3.3.5 Section 11, on making effective use of land, directs at paragraph 129 that development that makes efficient use of land should be supported, taking account of the identified need for different types of housing and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it. Section 12 provides guidance on achieving well designed places, with paragraph 131 stating that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, which can create better places in which to live and work.
- 3.3.6 When taken as a whole, proposals comply with the policies of the Framework, delivering much needed homes in a sustainable location, with high-quality design credentials.
- 3.3.7 Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework provides grounds for a 'tilted balance' towards approving new development by making clear that permission should be granted unless the harm of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or the application of specific policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusal. This is a stringent test.

3.3.8 The Consultation Statement published by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (as it is now called) alongside the draft Framework in July 2024 provides further evidence on the interpretation of paragraph 11(d). The Statement made clear that the Government is committed to strengthening the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out at paragraph 11(d), and that its primary purpose is to encourage planning permission for residential development to be granted where plan policies are not up-to-date, and where there is an insufficient supply of housing. One way that the presumption does this, it is explained, is by bringing unallocated sites into consideration for residential development.

3.4 Housing Land Supply

3.4.1 The supply of available and deliverable sites for housing in North Hertfordshire is an important material consideration in determining the weight to relevant policies for the supply of housing, which are some of the most important policies for the determination of the application.

3.4.2 In North Hertfordshire, the Inspector for the Local Plan Examination noted in their report that it is considered that the Council will be able to show a rolling five-year housing land supply on the Plan's adoption (December 2022) as such they were protected under the December 2023 NPPF. However, this has now been removed through the December 2024 revision of the NPPF, meaning that the Council will have to demonstrate the required five-year Housing Land Supply each year.

3.4.3 The Council published an updated housing land supply statement in May 2024 outlining that they could only demonstrate a supply of 3.9 years against a 5-year requirement. This figure uses their stepped trajectory housing requirement as set out in the adopted Local Plan of 1,198 dwellings per annum.

- 3.4.4 Through reviewing NHC's historic housing delivery figures across a 10-year period, it is evident that the council have struggled to deliver 300 dwellings per year. This emphasises increasing pressure the Council are under to deliver nearly four times that figure per annum.
- 3.4.5 Gladman consider that the Council's claimed housing land supply is significantly lower than stated when rigorously tested due to the lack of evidence demonstrating that sites are 'deliverable' in accordance with the tests set out in national planning policy. Notwithstanding this, NHC cannot demonstrate a supply, and therefore the tilted balance is engaged.
- 3.4.6 If a local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites, as per footnote 8 to paragraph 11d) of the NPPF (December 2024), the most important policies for determining the application (in this case, those including but not solely limited to the delivery, location and supply of housing), are considered to be 'out-of-date'.
- 3.4.7 With footnote 8 to paragraph 11(d) engaged, the presumption provides grounds for a 'tilted balance' towards approving new development by making clear that permission should be granted unless the harm of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework as a whole or application of policies in this Framework that protect areas of assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusal.
- 3.4.8 As the Council does not have a five-year supply and the tilted balance is engaged, where it is considered that the benefits of the delivery of housing (including affordable housing) on the Site outweigh the harms associated with the conflict with policy and other harms in changing the site from that of Greenfield to that of built development (principally landscape harm).

3.5 Local Policy

3.5.1 The Development Plan relevant to this application includes:

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan (NHLP) (2011-2031).

3.6 North Hertfordshire Local Plan (NHLP)

3.6.1 The NHLP 2011-2031 was adopted on 8th November 2022 and sets out the long-term vision and objectives for the whole of North Hertfordshire for the period up to 2031.

3.6.2 The table set out in Appendix 1 outlines relevant policies in the NHLP which relate to this submission. In respect of the development proposals, the following policies are considered to be the most important to its determination in relation to the supply of housing.

3.6.3 Policy SP1 sets out the district's overarching commitment to sustainable development, balancing social, economic, and environmental objectives. It states that towns such as Royston are expected to accommodate significant growth and development whilst ensuring the long-term needs of the smaller villages. The policy requires new developments to deliver an appropriate mix of housing, jobs and services, contribute to high-quality design and provide the necessary infrastructure. The policy emphasises the need to protect the environment, including biodiversity, landscape and heritage assets, and encourages mitigation against climate change.

3.6.4 Gladman acknowledges that proposals do not fully accord with every aspect of Policy SP1, as the proposed development of 84 dwellings is located outside Royston's defined settlement boundary. However, it can be supported under Policy SP1 if it demonstrably contributes to sustainable growth. The scheme provides a mix of housing types, including affordable homes, and is designed to integrate with the existing built environment while promoting high-quality,

healthy, and inclusive living. It will be supported by appropriate infrastructure and connectivity and seeks to minimise environmental impact through landscape-led design and mitigation measures. By addressing identified housing needs in a sustainable location adjacent to an established town, the proposal aligns with the key principles of Policy SP1 and supports the delivery of the Local Plan's strategic objectives.

- 3.6.5** Policy SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution) establishes the settlement hierarchy and spatial distribution of development across the district. It states that between 2011 and 2031, the plan should make provisions for at least 13,000 new homes.
- 3.6.6** The policy classifies Royston as a 'Town', which establishes Royston as a key location for sustainable growth and development due to their established infrastructure, services and accessibility. As a 'Town', Royston is expected to accommodate a significant share of new housing and employment development to meet the district needs. Development in towns should support walkability, public transport use, high quality design, and infrastructure provision, whilst also reflecting local environmental and landscape constraints. This classification positions Royston as a priority area for well-integrated growth.
- 3.6.7** Towns like Royston are expected to support smaller surrounding villages by serving as key hubs for services, employment, and transport. As many villages lack essential facilities such as secondary schools, healthcare, and supermarkets, towns provide access to these higher order services. They also offer employment opportunities, retail, leisure, and public transport connections that are not sustainable in smaller settlements.
- 3.6.8** The policy states that approximately 80% of the districts housing development should be located within the adjusted settlement boundaries. A further 13%

of the districts housing is to be located within 5 villages where boundaries have been adjusted. This leaves 7% of the districts housing requirement to be allowed within Category A villages where sites are within the settlement boundaries.

- 3.6.9** The proposal site is outside of Royston's settlement boundary, but the same will inevitably be true for many proposals brought forward given the sheer need for housing numbers in the district. Given the location of the development is directly adjacent to the settlement boundary, the site offers a location for much needed homes where they can benefit from services and transport links that a Town has to offer.
- 3.6.10** Policy SP5 (Countryside and Greenbelt) recognises the intrinsic value of the countryside and states that a general policy of restraint in rural areas beyond the Green Belt in regard to development will be operated through detailed policies.
- 3.6.11** Policy SP8 (Housing) sets out the housing growth required across the district. The policy acknowledges the requirement to release sufficient land to deliver at least 11,600 net new homes for North Hertfordshire's own needs and the provision of additional land within the Luton Housing Market Area (HMA) for a further 1,950 net new homes. Part D stated that the council aim to 'Maintain a five-year housing land supply and target the completion of 20% of new homes over the plan period on previously developed land'.
- 3.6.12** Policy NE2 (Landscape) states that permission will be granted for development proposals which 'do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located, taking account of any suitable mitigation measures necessary to achieve this.' Gladman acknowledged that the proposals will change the landscape of the site, however the wider landscape implications

have been assessed and the proposals have been designed in such way that they have limited impacts for key views from the site.

- 3.6.13** Policy CGB1 (Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt) sets out the broad typologies of development considered acceptable within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The policy states that planning permission will be granted provided that the development meets a proven local need for community facilities, services or affordable housing in an appropriate location.
- 3.6.14** Policy HS2 (Affordable Housing) states that planning permission for new homes will be granted where affordable housing is provided in accordance with the policy requirements. As the proposals provide more than 25 dwellings, the target percentage of dwellings to be offered as affordable is 40%.
- 3.6.15** Policy IMR1 establishes specific housing delivery targets to ensure the district meets its housing needs over the plan period. It outlines annual delivery rates that increase over time, reflecting the progression of housing developments. The policy outlines the district's strategy for housing delivery, aiming to meet a target of 13,000 net new dwellings over the plan period. The policy adopts a stepped approach to housing targets:
- 2011–March 2020: 350 dwellings per year
 - April 2020–March 2024: 500 dwellings per year
 - April 2024–2031: 1,120 dwellings per year
- 3.6.16** Any shortfall in housing delivery since the plan's start date is to be distributed evenly over the remaining plan period. Housing completions and permissions are to be monitored on an ongoing basis to maintain a robust and up-to-date housing trajectory.

- 3.6.17 As stated above, there is a significant shortfall against the adopted requirement of dwellings. Consequently, it is necessary to approve development on sites which are contrary to some of the local policies to help ensure the Local Plan housing requirement is met.
- 3.6.18 It is acknowledged that the proposed development of 84 dwellings on Land off Echo Hill, Royston does not strictly accord with policies SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy) and CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Greenbelt) of the NHLP, which both seek to restrict major development outside of the settlement boundary. However, NHC is currently unable to demonstrate a 5YHLS, as stated above, rendering the relevant housing policies out of date under paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, therefore permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Other Material Considerations

3.7 Written Ministerial Statement

- 3.7.1 The publication of the consultation draft of the revised Framework on 30th July 2024 coincided with a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS), made by Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner, titled Building the Homes We Need.
- 3.7.2 The WMS stresses the severity of the of the housing crisis facing the country which is remarked as being "the most acute housing crisis in living memory". The WMS also reinforces the Government's commitment to fixing the foundations of the housing and planning system to build 1.5 million homes over the next five years, and to strengthening the presumption in favour of sustainable development to ensure that planning permission is granted on suitable sites in sustainable locations.

- 3.7.3 Following the publication of the revised Framework on 12th December 2024, a further WMS was made by Minister of State for Housing and Planning Matthew Pennycook, also titled Building the Homes we Need.
- 3.7.4 The WMS emphasises the need for planning permissions to be secured outside of local plan allocations in the short-term in order to see the scale of delivery needed to work towards undoing the impacts of the housing crisis. It also reiterates the Government's commitment to strengthening the presumption in favour of sustainable development, stating that:
- "where it applies, the presumption in favour of sustainable development must have real teeth. The changes we make today ensure that the presumption carries real weight, acting as a significant adjustment to the decision-making balance in favour of approving development."*
- 3.7.5 It is well established that WMSs represent a firm statement of Government Policy. They make clear the commitment to the biggest growth in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. These are statements against which full weight should now be attached as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- 3.7.6 The Government's ambition to deliver 1.5 million homes within this parliamentary term is both a social necessity in order to address the housing crisis, and a key mechanism in facilitating economic growth. Forecasting produced by the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (the OBR) demonstrate that the recent planning reforms, including the delivery of 1.5 million homes could add £6.8 billion to GDP, and contribute £3.4 billion to UK public services¹

¹ HM Treasury, March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/obr-concludes-planning-reforms-will-bring-housebuilding-to-its-highest-level-in-40-years>

3.8 Conclusion

- 3.8.1 It is acknowledged that the proposed development up to 84 dwellings on Land off Echo Hill, Royston does not strictly accord with policies SP2 (Settlement Hierarchy) and CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Greenbelt) of the NHLP.
- 3.8.2 However, the proposal aligns with the principles of the NPPF, paragraph 11(d) of which where there are no relevant development plan policies, the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date. Relating further to footnote 8 of the NPPF, the proposals relate to the provision of housing where the LPA cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites.
- 3.8.3 NHC have demonstrated that paragraph 11(d) is engaged by virtue of the fact that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Consequently, the most relevant policies are to be considered 'out-of-date', and the 'tilted balance' is engaged.

4 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Summary

- 4.1.1 The proposed development for up to 84 dwellings on Land off Echo Hill, Royston requires careful assessment against the adopted development plan, the NPPF, and all other relevant material considerations. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory purchase act 2004, decisions must be made in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.1.2 It is acknowledged that the application site lies outside of the defined settlement boundary of Royston and this does not fully accord with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP2 and Policy CGB1 of the NHLP.
- 4.1.3 However, a critical material consideration is the Council's current inability to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. As a result, paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF applies, engaging the 'tilted balance'. Under this presumption in favour of sustainable development, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole.
- 4.1.4 In applying the tilted balance required by paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, it is clear that the identified adverse impacts, principally, limited harm to the landscape and a departure from the settlement boundary, do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the substantial social, economic, and environmental benefits of the proposal. The development would deliver sustainable growth in a suitable location, adjacent to an established community with existing facilities and services, consistent with the overarching principles of the NPPF.

4.1.5 It is important to note that settlement boundaries, whilst important, should have a level of flexibility, particularly in the context of addressing urgent housing needs. Flexibility must be applied to allow rural communities to evolve sustainably in response to challenging demographic and economic conditions.

4.2 Benefits of the Proposal

- Up to 84 new homes, addressing the pressing need for new homes in the area;
- The provision of up to 35 (40%) much needed affordable homes to cater to the diverse housing needs of local residents, including those on lower incomes and key workers;
- An extensive network of proposed recreational routes around the site and connecting to wider footpaths to the south and linking to Therfield Heath;
- Proposed shared surfaces allowing character areas to be established through the development;
- Proposed native woodland, native thicket, trees and meadows to replicate development patterns neighbouring the site;
- Proposed children's play area and street furniture such as focal seating areas to create a sense of place;
- Opportunity to develop a community orchard;
- Biodiversity enhancements through blue and green infrastructure incorporating ecological mitigation and habitat creation across the site;
- Sustainable Drainage features which will be designed at Reserved Matters to be vegetated and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

4.3 Conclusion

4.3.1 Taking all matters into consideration, it is concluded that the proposed development represents a sustainable form of growth that accords with the

objectives of the national planning policy and responds positively to the Council's housing needs. Although the proposal does not fully comply with all elements of the adopted development plan, the substantial benefits clearly and demonstrably outweigh the limited harms identified.

- 4.3.2 Accordingly, in line with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, the proposals should be approved without delay.

APPENDIX 1: RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Policy Reference	Policy Title
NHLP (2011-2031)	
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 SP10	Healthy Communities
Policy SP12	Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity
Policy SP13	Historic Environment
Policy SP14	Natural Environment
Policy CGB1	Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt
Policy CGB2b	Community facilities, services and affordable housing in the Rural Area 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 D4	Air Quality
Policy HC1	Community Facilities
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 HE1	Designated Heritage Assets
Policy HE3	Non-designated Heritage Assets
Policy HE4	Archaeology
Policy IMR1	Five Year Housing Land Supply

APPENDIX 2: SECTION 106 HEADS OF TERMS

DRAFT SECTION 106 HEADS OF TERMS

Gladman will seek to enter into constructive dialogue with North Hertfordshire Council to agree obligations which, are necessary, directly related to the development and fairly related in scale and kind to the development.

The following Heads of Terms are suggested:

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- i. The Agreement will provide for 40% affordable housing with a tenure split to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

OPEN SPACE

- i. The Agreement will require the Developer to provide on-site informal open space, equipped children's play areas and allotment space.
- ii. Appropriate phasing requirements will be specified together with the requirement to agree with the Council an appropriate scheme for the long term maintenance and management of these areas, including any off-site commuted sums as applicable.
- iii. The Agreement will require the Developer to provide, as necessary, an offsite sports provision.

HIGHWAYS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- i. The Agreement will require the Developer to provide, as necessary, the improvements identified to improve the public highway, sustainable and public transport provision within the vicinity of the site.

OTHER

- i. Other contributions may be identified through the planning consultation process, and subject to meeting the appropriate tests of necessity and reasonableness, consideration will be given to their inclusion.

