



North Herts Council
Development and Conservation
North Hertfordshire District Council
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Our ref: 16819
Date: 05 May 2026

For the attention of: Paul Chaston

Application ref: 26/00558/HYA
Location: Land At Pound Farm Bedford Road Ickleford Hertfordshire SG5 3RS
Proposal/Description: Hybrid application for a mixed-use development to provide a total of up to 230 dwellings, a residential care home (Use Class C2), an Independent Special School (ISS) and new sports pitch, with access from Bedford Road, landscaping, parking and SuDS comprising: Phase 1 Application for full planning permission for the erection of 100 dwellings, an ISS, new sports pitch and associated parking, landscaping, open space and SuDS; Phase 2 An outline application on the remaining part of the site for the erection of up to 130 dwellings, a residential care home (Use Class C2) and associated works with access from Bedford Road (all matters reserved apart from access).

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above application. This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

This review is based on a desktop study with a previous site visit undertaken on 31/01/2025, of the above-referenced application and its submitted documents. Our Landscape comments are as follows:

1.0. Site Context

- 1.1. The site is located to the north of Ickleford village on the northern outskirts of Hitchin. The site comprises several arable fields to the west of the A600 Bedford Road, and to the south of Pound Farm. Residential dwellings on Ryder Way and Ryder Avenue form the southern boundary of the site. The arable fields are separated by a ditch and the Hertfordshire Way.

- 1.2. The Full Application for Phase 1 comprises the eastern half of the site, located adjacent to the A600 Bedford Road. The Outline Application for Phase 2 comprises the western half of the site, utilising access from Phase 1.

2.0. Planning Policy Context

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

- 2.1. Policies to be considered that are relevant to landscape include Policy ENV3, ENV5, NE1, NE2, NE6, NE7, NE8, SP9 and SP12.

Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan (Made 2024)

- 2.2. Policies considered relevant to this application include:
- Policy E2: Protecting the Landscape
 - Policy E3: Rural Character
 - Policy MTT1: Provision for Pedestrians, Cyclists and Horse-riders

Ickleford Design Code

- 2.3. Within the Design Code, the following should be considered:
- Views 6 and 17 (Figure 16) provide potential views of the application site and should be considered within the design and LVA submission.
 - The site is located within Area Type C: Rural countryside and Area Type D: Green Belt which are the more sensitive area types.
 - The Design Code Guidance should be applied to the design and layout of the proposals.

3.0. Review of the LVIA:

- 3.1. A Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) undertaken by Enplan in February 2026 has been submitted for review.
- 3.2. The Methodology has broadly been produced in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3).

Landscape Character

- 3.3. Within the North Herts and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment, the site is located within Landscape Character Area 218 Pirton Lowlands. Key characteristics of this LCA that are relevant to the site include large scale open flat farming landscape, predominantly arable land, remnant hedges, gappy and predominantly hawthorn but occasional mature trees, minimal woodland, A600 prominent. The landscape is assessed as having poor condition and weak robustness.
- 3.4. Whilst Appendix B provides a good summary table of the assessed Visual Effects, this process has not been replicated for the effects on landscape character. We would have expected a similar method to have been provided for each of the identified landscape

receptors.

- 3.5. The assessment of landscape character only assessed two receptors; the topography and the local landscape context around the site. As identified within our Screening Opinion response (Dated: 16th December 2025), an assessment of other relevant receptors, such as LCA 218, hedgerows and trees, the wider landscape and The Chilterns National Landscape, would also have been useful in providing a more robust assessment of the landscape character effects.
 - 3.6. Table 1 Landscape Value Assessment assesses the *Immediate Landscape Context including the Application Site* broadly utilising the factors set out in TGN 02/21 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations'; in this assessment, criteria 'Heritage Interests' has been judged to have **Low Value**, with "*no heritage assets in the local landscape*". We consider that this undervalues the importance of the Icknield Way which is a non-designated heritage asset and considered the oldest trackway in England with significant archaeological and national importance.
 - 3.7. Para 6.26 concludes, the *Immediate Landscape Context including the Application Site* is assessed as having **Local Value** and **moderate susceptibility**, with an overall **moderate sensitivity**. This results in a **moderate landscape effect** (Para 6.33). As above, we judge that this understates that **National Value** associated with the Icknield Way which runs through the development site. As stated within TGN 02/21, "*The relative importance to be attached to each indicator is likely to vary across different landscapes. Once evidence for each factor has been collated and assessed, it is important to step back and judge the overall 'weight of evidence' in coming to an overall judgement on landscape value.*" We consider Heritage Interest an important factor alongside Recreational Value.
- Visual Amenity
- 3.8. The locations of viewpoint receptors have been included in Figure 7: Location of Viewpoints and Site Appraisal Views, following a ZTV (Figure 4). It would have been useful for the selected viewpoint receptors to be overlaid on the ZTV figure to show how selected locations respond. We do however judge that an appropriate selection of viewpoints has been included within the LVIA.
 - 3.9. Appendix B includes the Visual Impact Assessment Table, with an overview of the judgements provided for all visual receptors.
 - 3.10. For pedestrian receptors in close proximity or within the site, the LVIA assesses that **major significant** effects will be experienced at Year 1 (Viewpoints 1-7 and 9-12). This includes PRoW 14, PRoW 16 Icknield Way, Bedford Road footpath, PRoW 16 and PRoW 21. Based on the assessment of Year 1 effects to these high sensitivity receptors, we agree

with these judgements.

- 3.11. We do however judge that the assessment of Year 15 magnitude of change for most of these receptors has been underassessed. With the exception of Viewpoints 4 and 7, all of the above viewpoints are assessed to experience **negligible** magnitude of change at Year 15.
- 3.12. Table 4 within the methodology defines negligible magnitude of change as *“Where the proposed development would be almost entirely screened, the development may contrast with the landscape context and may be perceived to be in the far distance, or at closer distances and substantially screened such that it would be a barely discernible adverse/beneficial feature in the scene.”*
- 3.13. Viewpoint 11, for example, presents a recreational view along PRow 16 Icknield Way which is currently an open countryside view with no surrounding development, with views of Ickleford village in the distance. We disagree that the magnitude of change on this receptor will be reduced from **substantial** at Year 1 to **negligible** at Year 15, with the introduction of residential development with woodland planting screening in the foreground.
- 3.14. Para 4(3) of LITGN-2024-01-GLVIA3-N&C states that *“it does not necessarily follow that screening a development from view would reduce its landscape effects, such as those on landscape character”*. Large-scale open farmlands are characteristic of the 218 Pirton Lowlands, where some open views should be retained within areas of the proposed development.
- 3.15. The reduced effects are reliant on the proposed woodland edge buffer which is proposed around the edge of the scheme. Whilst this will contribute to filtering views of the proposed development, it will not provide complete screening to make it ‘barely discernible’ in the first instance. Further to this, the proposed buildings and the woodland planting would also restrict the open views currently available on either side of the Icknield Way. We therefore judge that the effects on several visual receptors have been largely underassessed within the LVIA.
- 3.16. Based on these judgements, the overall effects for many of these Year 15 receptors have been reduced to **moderate/minor**. We judge that this is an underassessment of the effects associated with the proposals.
- 3.17. We request that Type 4 Photomontages are produced to demonstrate the LVIA’s assessed magnitude of change to negligible at Year 15. For example, Visualisations from Viewpoints 4, 10 and 12 would be useful for both Year 1 and Year 15, to demonstrate the maturation of mitigation planting. These should be produced in accordance with LI TGN 06/19 ‘Visual

Representation of Development Proposals’.

4.0. Review of Full Application (Phase 1):

Application for full planning permission for the erection of 100 dwellings, an ISS, new sports pitch and associated parking, landscaping, open space and SuDS

- 4.1. North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022) allocated site Policy IC3 ‘Land at Bedford Road’ for 150 homes is located adjacent to the site on the opposite side of Bedford Road, to the east. The application boundary mirrors the furthest northern extent of built development along Bedford Road. From a landscape perspective, the proposed development relates well to the existing edge of Ickleford and can be accommodated on this site, with appropriate mitigation.
- 4.2. The boundary vegetation along Bedford Road is more substantial to the east, adjacent to the IC3 allocation. To the west of Bedford Road, the boundary vegetation is often gappy and non-existent, particularly towards the north. Enhancement of the boundary vegetation along Bedford Road is important for mitigating the visual effects of development along this road, and in accordance with the LCA Guidelines. Proposed Bedford Road Park provides a buffer, as indicated on Page 17 of the Landscape Design Report (Ref: MTC142R02, Rev. 03). Further details of this planting should be included within a Soft Landscape Plan.
- 4.3. The Icknield Way is a non-designated heritage asset and is widely recognised as one of the oldest routeways in England. The retained pedestrianisation of the Icknield Way is positive, ensuring that the route remains free from vehicular traffic and retains a degree of physical continuity. However, whilst the scheme functionally acknowledges the retention of the route, there is limited evidence that its historic and cultural significance has meaningfully informed the design approach. As such, opportunities to reinforce and express the heritage value of the Icknield Way through the delivery of this connection have not been fully realised.
- 4.4. The submitted Green Link Typical Vignette 1 (Page 12, Landscape Design Report) illustrates a conventional 3m-wide pedestrian route that is generic in appearance and ambiguous in its setting, offering little indication of its association with a historically significant routeway. While the submitted CGI suggests a degree of separation between a rougher trackway and adjacent newly formed hard-surfaced pedestrian route with acknowledgement of the historic alignment, this intent is not clearly translated or secured through the wider design information.
- 4.5. A coherent and site-wide strategy is therefore required to appropriately acknowledge, interpret and celebrate the Icknield Way. Based on the submitted proposals, the significance of this ancient routeway could be diluted by the surrounding new development.

- 4.6. The proposed separated pedestrian link through the site is welcomed, providing a direct connection to PRow 015 and reducing pedestrian movement alongside Bedford Road.
- 4.7. Additional landscape information is required to accompany the Phase 1 application. Hard and Soft Landscape Plans should be submitted for review, with detailed information on the landscaping proposals.

Recommendations

- 4.8. Based on the submitted information, we have the following additional recommendations.
- 4.9. Where the Icknield Way crosses the primary street through the scheme, pedestrian prioritisation is an important feature. Road surfacing and a raised table should be incorporated into the proposals to ensure that pedestrians and cyclists have priority along this route.
- 4.10. The western end of the Icknield Way within the site does not align with the route towards Pirton, based on the Illustrative Plan (Dwg no. MTC142P13 Rev. 01). The route should remain continuous and avoid a double dogleg.
- 4.11. The play area to the centre of the scheme should not be fenced. The play space benefits by being surrounded by Icknield Way, an enclosed PRow and a pond on all sides, therefore limiting the need for a hard enclosure.
- 4.12. Sambucus nigra should not be proposed as part of the soft landscape strategy. This species can suppress the growth of other species.

5.0. Review of Outline Application (Phase 2):

An outline application on the remaining part of the site for the erection of up to 130 dwellings, a residential care home (Use Class C2) and associated works with access from Bedford Road (all matters reserved apart from access)

- 5.1. The proposed application develops from the edge of Phase 1, extending further into the countryside to the north and the west. Extending further north than the adjacent Allocated Site IC3, the application is far more visually prominent. The Phase 2 site also extends further west beyond the edge of the built edge of Ryder Way, up to the edge of PRow 016. The Outline Phase 2 scheme therefore has a much higher magnitude of change on the landscape than the Phase 1 Scheme.
- 5.2. We do however consider that the LVIA is reflective of the effects associated with the Phase 2 scheme which extends much further into the countryside and in closer proximity to other visual receptors. This is notwithstanding the Year 15 visual effects concerns raised above,

where we judge that the LVIA underplays the residual effects and places heavy reliance on the mitigation planting.

- 5.3. Based on a review of the LVIA, we judge that the Phase 2 scheme will result in residual Year 15 **potentially significant effects**, unlike the effects on most receptors to the development within Phase 1. The LVIA judges that all effects on visual receptors will be reduced to **not significant** at Year 15, which we disagree with.
 - 5.4. We therefore request that Visualisations are produced to illustrate the anticipated Year 1 and Year 15 effects of the proposed development. These visualisations are necessary to enable an informed assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects arising from the Parameter Plans and to test whether these parameters deliver acceptable outcomes.
 - 5.5. If minded for approval, we advise that the following comments are considered through to the Reserved Matters stage.
 - 5.6. The proposals included within the Illustrative Masterplan are reliant on the proposed woodland planting on all boundaries to reduce the visual effects. The character across much of this landscape is open with wide views across the arable countryside landscape. We therefore consider that some open views should be preserved to reflect the current character of the Icknield Way, across the proposed pitches and POS, for example.
 - 5.7. Several belts of planting are proposed to the north-west of the scheme, designed to soften the proposals and provide visual mitigation. We consider that there is opportunity to reduce/provide gaps in the planting in some locations to retain some open views across the pitches/POS of open arable countryside. Whilst this solid belt of planting around the scheme reduces the visual effects associated with the proposals, we judge that other attributes including views across the undulating arable countryside, are not being integrated into the proposals.
 - 5.8. Very limited public open space comprising open mown grassland for public use is provided. Proposed POS within the scheme is identified as potential pitch expansion (Number 14 on the Landscape Strategy). Considering no other mown grassland open space provision is included within the scheme, we do not consider it appropriate to give over all POS to pitches, when all other POS is proposed as woodland, meadow, SuDS or ponds.
- 6.0. Summary:**
- 6.1. Based on the submitted LVIA, we judge that the visual effects for a number of receptors have been underassessed for Year 15. The assessment is heavily reliant on the planted mitigation to reduce the visual effects associated with the development on a number of surrounding receptors, neglecting the effect of restricting the current open countryside

views available, particularly along the Icknield Way.

- 6.2. Generally, we accept the proposals within the Full application (Phase 1) and expect amendments in line with our recommendations; however, additional information is required of the Outline application (Phase 2) to reduce our concerns.
- 6.3. We request that Visualisations are produced for Phase 2 (Outline) to demonstrate how a negligible magnitude of change at Year 15 is possible from a number of surrounding viewpoints.
- 6.4. We request that the Hard and Soft Landscape Plans are submitted. We advise that the recommendations provided for Phase 1 (Full) are considered within the submitted proposals.
- 7.0. Recommended Submission Document(s) for Outline Application:**
- 7.1. If minded for approval, we advise the following documents are submitted:
- Hard Landscape Plan
 - Soft Landscape Plan
 - Landscape Strategy
 - SuDS Strategy
 - Landscape Management Plan

Please contact us if you have any queries in relation to this advice.

Place Services – Landscape Team

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Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of North Herts Council

Please note:

This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.

We are unable to respond directly to applicants/agents or other interested parties. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant/agent or other interested parties may have, must be directed to the Planning Officer at the relevant LPA, who will seek further advice from us where appropriate.