

Appeal 6009720

Interested party comments

Appeal type	Planning
Appeal procedure	Written
Appeal site	Land Adjacent To 1 Ninesprings Cottage, Wymondley Road, Hitchin, SG4 9QL
Agent contact details	Tom Donovan [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Local planning authority	North Hertfordshire
Application number	26/00361/PIP

Interested party 1

Comments

We object to the appeal against the refusal of Permission in Principle (PiP) for the erection of a detached dwelling at the above location. We have already submitted an objection to the original application that goes in detail and is still relevant, but there are assertions in the appellant's "Statement of Case" that we would like to directly address.

The appellant's assertion that the site is "Grey Belt" is fundamentally flawed. The Council's evidence base (Green Belt Review 2016) concludes that this parcel makes a strong contribution to purposes A and B. No substantive evidence has been provided to justify departing from this adopted assessment.

Under the NPPF, Green Belt purpose A, is "to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas," and a "strong" contribution is defined in the GBR if the parcel meets the following criteria, all of which unquestionably apply to this site:

- Adjacency to a "Large Built-Up Area"
- Acting as a Primary Barrier to Sprawl
- Maintaining a Defensible Boundary
- Lack of Existing "Urbanising" Features

The developer argues that because the site is a small component part of a wider land parcel, a single dwelling would not diminish the wider parcel's function in preventing sprawl. This argument completely ignores the reality of how settlement boundaries are eroded. The site forms part of the last defensible boundary to Hitchin along this stretch of Wymondley Road. Development would not infill a gap but would extend the established edge of Hitchin eastwards into open countryside.

The site's contribution to purpose B (preventing merger of settlements) is also understated. The site forms a vital spatial boundary between the town of Hitchin and the village of Great Wymondley, deliberately overlooked by the appellant's statement, instead focusing on the town of Stevenage far beyond. This is only

around 800m, so the encroachment would be significant. While they try to minimize the site's role in separating 'towns', the purpose of the Green Belt includes preventing the coalescence of distinct settlements. Development on this site would erode the visual and physical separation that keeps the distinct individual identities of Hitchin and Great Wymondley.

While the developer characterises the site as “self-contained”, that is not how the gap is perceived in practice, as when observed from Wymondley Road the hedgerow is well set back from the road. Visually it is open countryside from Ninesprings Cottages onwards. A hedgerow boundary also does not provide a durable or defensible limit to development in Green Belt terms.

Furthermore, the parcel of land under the developer's ownership extends 200m along the Wymondley Road beyond the specific boundaries of the site of this proposed development. Allowing a dwelling here would not be isolated; rather, it establishes a dangerous foothold. Approving this application opens the door for subsequent, incremental developments across the remainder of the landholding. This would lead to the piece-by-piece erosion of the Green Belt until the distinct separation between Hitchin and Great Wymondley is lost.

Regarding the site's contribution to Purpose D (protection of historic towns), the undeveloped nature of this site provides an essential rural backdrop that protects the historic market town of Hitchin from unrestricted modern sprawl. This also ignores the impact on Great Wymondley, which has direct views onto the site. Great Wymondley is a highly historic village. It contains a designated Conservation Area, a Norman church, and the remains of a motte-and-bailey castle. NPPF Chapter 16 states that great weight should be given to preserving the setting of heritage assets and Conservation Areas. To justify the "Grey Belt" label, the appellant's Statement of Case attempts to downplay the site's environmental value, describing it merely as "largely scrubland". On the contrary, this is high-value, completely undeveloped agricultural land. Historically used for animal grazing, it has been “rewilded” since 2015, resulting in a highly diverse ecology. Furthermore, the land sits adjacent to the Wildlife Trust's Purwell Ninesprings nature reserve. This proximity adds to its ecological significance and contribution to the local wildlife corridor, contrary to the claim that it lacks environmental value.

The appellant states in §2.4 that this site is within Flood Zone 1. This is only partially correct: according to the Environment Agency map, Zone 2 overlaps the Western boundary of the site, it lies within 15m of a high-risk zone (Zone 3) along the River Purwell (which has flooded in the past year), and the “plus climate change” zone covers almost the entire site. Even if the site were not considered to strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes, it is excluded from the of ‘grey belt’ definition in the NPPF as a footnote 7 “area at risk of flooding” where development would be restricted (as it would be under the NHLP policy NE7).

The appellant's case relies on the shortfall in the five-year housing land supply within North Hertfordshire to justify overriding standard planning constraints. However, the proposal is for a single, three-bedroom detached dwelling. The delivery of a single house would make a negligible contribution to the district's overall housing stock. This imperceptible benefit to the housing supply cannot be considered a special consideration or an overriding public benefit that justifies inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In no way does it outweigh the identified, permanent harm to the local ecology,

natural drainage, and the spatial integrity of the Hitchin boundary. In summary, it is our view that the proposed development is inappropriate development in valuable Green Belt land. The appellant's case depends on reclassifying the site as 'grey belt', yet this is directly contradicted by the Council's Green Belt Review and the site's clear function as an open, undeveloped and defensible edge to Hitchin. The site cannot reasonably be regarded as grey belt land. Furthermore, a single dwelling offers no meaningful public benefit to local housing targets that could justify the permanent loss of this land. We respectfully urge the Planning Inspector to dismiss this appeal and uphold North Hertfordshire Council's original decision to refuse permission.

Guy & Verity Cozon,
1 Ninesprings Cottages [Read more](#)

Supporting documents

[Site viewed from West \(along Wymondley Rd\).jpg \(/published-document/9b19fccd-c232-48bc-95d9-1cca497e24c1\)](#)
[flood-map-planning-2026-06-23T10_37_13.304Z.pdf \(/published-document/2d076a76-f13a-48e4-8539-3a300c595415\)](#)
[Site viewed from North.jpg \(/published-document/f9df6262-0726-4a61-933f-7ba942ee0a05\)](#)
