

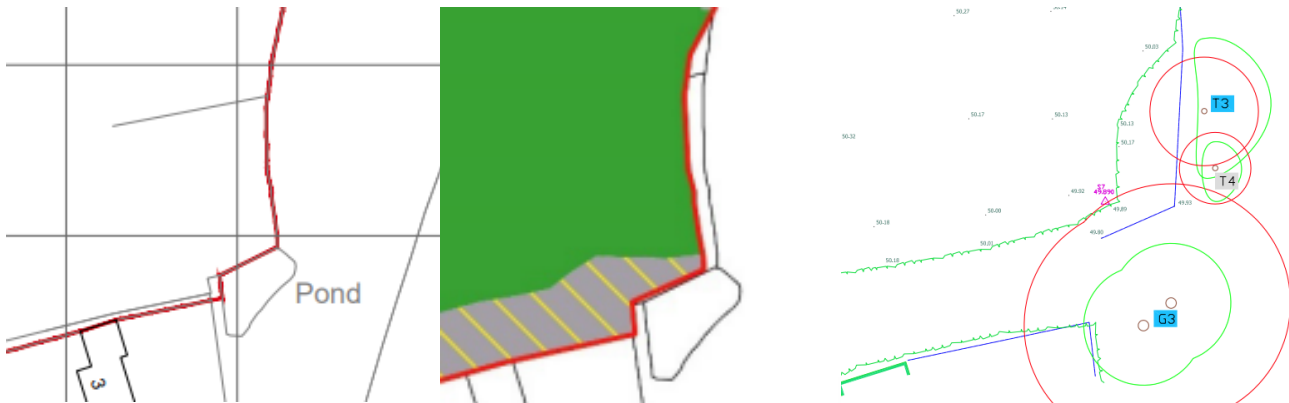
Officer Liz Anderson – Ecologist
Date 28/05/25

Ref: 25/01094/FP
Att: Thomas Howe

Land To The Rear 34, Arlesey Road, Ickleford, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3UU
Erection of nine dwellings including access, parking and landscaping.

Consultee comments;

Thank you for consulting me, having looked at the submitted documents there seems to be some discrepancy over the red line boundary of the site and the habitat assessment and more information is required.



The site location plan shows the red line joining the northeastern tip of the pond and yet the habitat plan joins on the western edge of the ditch. The tree survey identifies trees T3 and T4 which are on the eastern side of the ditch so it would seem that the red line boundary shown on the location plan should include the western ditch bank. Hence the habitat baseline has not sufficiently accounted for the removal of a veteran poplar with a basal diameter of $\geq 1.5\text{m}$ which would equate to a rough DBH of at least 1m (see images at the end of response). The Biodiversity Metric tree helper would determine this to be a very large tree and give it an area value of 764sqm. A veteran tree would be classed as irreplaceable habitat and, as such, a bespoke approach would be required to mitigate for its loss.

It is noted that the application states the veteran tree is outside of the application area but even if the main stem is just outside the red line the tree roots would be well into the development site. Any development within the RPA of the tree would likely cause it damage, let alone felling it. Were the tree to have remained, if it was not being effectively protected (i.e. RPA remaining development free) as part of the development then it should count this as an impact i.e. a reduction in condition.

No on-site hedge baseline is recorded in the metric. Site photos show boundary vegetation and yet none has been included in the metric. 3.3 of the DAS refers to the Local Plan site selection and notes '*The eastern boundary is defined by a well established tree line.*'. This was clearly a key feature when considering the impacts of the proposal on the neighbouring meadow and Hyde Mill heritage area as the Local Plan allocation states the IC1 allocation should '*Retain and reinforce planting along site*'

boundaries'. 5.55 of the DAS states that new hedgerow planting will deliver 100% BNG but the baseline value has not been accurately accounted for.

3.4 of the DAS addressing heritage states *'Subject to the preservation and enhancement of planting and screening, including ensuring the north east corner of the proposal site stays free of development..... The development of this site in a way which preserves and adds to existing greenery would not impact upon the setting of this listed building.'*

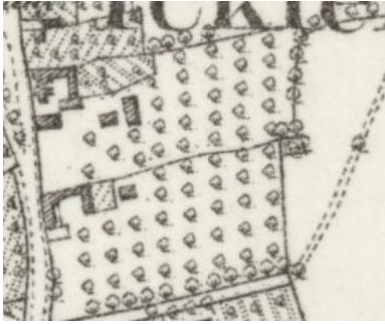
The site proposal has considered keeping the north east corner free from development but has failed to consider the value of the existing vegetation / greenery. Image below from site photos on case file.



Initial pre-app advice in 2023 advised on the importance of retained and strengthened boundaries with a layout showing a greater offset from trees and hedgerow. The Ickleford Design Code produced to support the Neighbourhood Plan advises that 'new development will need to take a proactive approach to mitigate their impact and to adapt to the specific landscape within and surrounding the area.'

The loss of the poplar is deeply regrettable but even with the absence of the veteran tree this proposal fails to give sufficient buffering to the site boundaries and shows no intention to retain existing vegetation on the eastern edge. The felled poplar shows good signs of regeneration and could potentially come back as a coppiced feature were sufficient space provided for a functioning corridor and not the minimal 1m shown on the landscape masterplan. Beyond this, a 1m wide planted native hedgerow will not have sufficient space to grow when located 1m from the new homes in plots 7 and 8.

The existing fruit trees on site are all shown to be removed, so losing any nod to the heritage of the area. Old maps indicate the site was previously part of an orchard so it would have been positive to see this reflected in the planting.



1884 map showing orchard covering the IC1 area.

The applicant needs to revisit the layout, as it is currently laid out it will not be able to achieve the suggested enhancements as proposed.



Image showing size of veteran tree stump over 1.5m in diameter. Yellow circle indicates location of tree stump and yellow arrow shows location of T3.