



PLANNING STATEMENT

*Land at New Pound Farm, East Side of Old Hale Way, Hitchin,
Hertfordshire*

Job Ref: 20/032

Date: January 2026



Prepared by Tom Donovan BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI on behalf of

PETER GEORGE TOWN PLANNING



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Appendix 1: Appeal Decision Letter Ref. APP/X1925/W/25/3362553



Section 1: Introduction & Background

Introduction

- 1.1 Peter George Town Planning has been instructed by Mr Parker (the Appellant) to make a planning application to North Hertfordshire Council for the erection of a detached dwelling at New Pound Farm, Old Hale Way, Hitchin.
- 1.2 The purpose of this statement is to set out the proposals, provide an analysis against relevant national and local planning policy and ultimately make the case as to why planning permission should be granted.

Relevant Planning History

Ref.	Site Address	Proposal	Decision
24/02009/FP	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin	Erection of one detached 2-bed farm workers dwelling.	Refused 28/11/2024 Appeal Dismissed 11/09/2025
24/01920/FP	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin	Altered vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated landscaping.	Refused 26/11/2024 Appeal Dismissed 11/09/2025



23/01652/FP	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin	Change of use of agricultural land to community car park together with road scalping tar macadam surfacing, new gates and associated tree planting and landscaping.	Withdrawn
22/02698AG	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Erection of 1no. Water Tank for Agricultural Purposes.	Granted 02/11/2022
22/02697/AG	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Erection of timber clad outbuilding.	Granted 02/11/2022
22/02694/AG	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Single storey side extension to existing agricultural barn	Granted 02/11/2022
22/02695/AG	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Erection of polytunnel	Granted 02/11/2022
22/02693/AG	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Erection of polytunnel	Granted 02/11/2022
21/03485/LDCP	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Continued use of existing agricultural land for use as private allotments	Granted 28/03/2022
21/01962/FP	Land to the East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Retention of new vehicular/pedestrian bridge over the River Hiz and new farm track (retrospective application)	Granted 17/03/2022
20/00617/AG	Land east of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire	Agricultural building to store machinery and other such equipment required to farm the land	Granted 24/03/2020



Section 2: Analysis of the Site and Surroundings

The Application Site

- 2.1 The application site is a small parcel of land forming part of an agricultural holding located to the east side of Old Hale Way and located in the Green Belt between Hitchin and Ickleford. The main part of the site lies in the south-western corner adjacent to an existing agricultural barn and the related farm yard. Other agricultural buildings are proposed to be and/or have been erected within this part of the site as permitted development including polytunnels and a storage building.
- 2.2 The front part of the site lies adjacent to Old Hale Way with an existing field access being located in the south-eastern corner of the field. The wider part of the holding extends as far east as the railway line and as far north as Icknield Way which is a Byway Open To All Traffic (BOAT, 018). Footpath 026 splinters from the BOAT and runs vertically through the site before crossing the railway and terminating at the industrial estate. Both of the PRow's are outside of the red line application site.



2.3 Residential properties fronting Old Hale Way are located to the south of the site along with NHDC allotments which extend to the rear of approximately 20 of the gardens belonging to the above referenced houses. The allotments are accessed by a vehicle track which is situated adjacent to the existing field access to the application site and runs parallel to its southern boundary.



Section 3: The Appeal Proposal

3.1 The proposed development can be described as follows:

“Erection of a detached dwelling.”

- 3.2 Proposed is a detached two-bedroom dwelling. The proposed dwelling would be situated in the south-western corner of the roughly rectangular shaped field adjacent to the south side of Arlesey Road/ Old Hale Way. The dwelling would be located immediately to the south of an existing agricultural barn within the main farmyard.
- 3.3 The proposed dwelling would have the scale of a small bungalow with a two-storey corrugated apple silo incorporated within the design to provide interest. The ground floor of the proposed dwelling would contain one bedroom, a bathroom/boot room with an open-plan dining and kitchen space. A second bedroom would be located within the upper storey of the apple silo. The proposed dwelling would have a small terrace to the side facing the river with a glazed roof canopy.



3.4 Proposed materials to include Arlesey white bricks, corrugated iron sheets, apple silo (all reclaimed) and re-used timber and double-glazed windows/doors. It is intended for the proposed dwelling to be built using 75% reused/re-purposed materials and components. The intention is for the proposed dwelling to be zero carbon.



Section 4: Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The Government policies on different aspects of planning are set out in the **National Planning Policy Framework** (December 2024).

4.2 The relevant sections of the Framework are as follows:

- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Section 5: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 11: Making effective use of land
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Section 13: Protecting Green Belt land
- Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Development Plan

4.3 Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that:

“If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.”



- 4.4 The development plan context for the planning application is provided by:
- **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022)**

- 4.5 The following policies are considered relevant to the consideration of this application:

Strategic Policies

- Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy
- Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport
- Policy SP9: Design & Sustainability
- Policy SP10: Healthy Communities
- Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity

Development Management Policies

- Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- Policy T2: Parking
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy D3: Protecting Living Conditions
- Policy NE2: Landscape
- Policy NE4: Biodiversity and Geological Sites

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD (September 2011)



Section 5: Planning Analysis

Background & Key Issues

- 5.1 The key issue in the determination of the planning application is whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, if so, whether very special circumstances could be demonstrated that would outweigh harm by way of inappropriateness and any other harm.
- 5.2 Other material considerations include the suitability of the design of the proposed dwelling and its effect on landscape character, the suitability and quality of the proposed residential accommodation, the impact on the living conditions of neighbouring properties, the ecological and environmental impacts, and the highway safety impacts.

Principle: Green Belt

Policy Background

- 5.3 Paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that, unless compliant with a series of stated exceptions,



development in the Green Belt should be regarded as being inappropriate in the Green Belt.

- 5.4 Paragraph 155 of the Framework states that, the development of homes in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate development on ‘grey belt’ land subject to compliance with a specific set of criteria.
- 5.5 Local Plan (LP) Policy SP5 largely defers to the Framework insofar that it relates to development in the Green Belt and countryside. The LP is silent in respect to ‘grey belt’.

Paragraph 155 - Grey Belt

- 5.6 The revised Framework introduces the concept of ‘grey belt’ This is defined in the Framework as follows:

“For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey belt’ excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.”



5.7 In considering this matter in the recent appeal for a farm worker's cottage, the inspector considered whether the appeal site strongly contributed to the three relevant Green Belt purposes. In her decision letter she noted her agreement with the main parties that the appeal site does not strongly contribute to purpose (b), which is to prevent neighbouring towns from merging together, or purpose (d) which seeks to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

5.8 With respect to the contribution to purpose (a), she agreed with the conclusions of the Council's Green Belt Review that the wider land parcel makes a significant contribution to preventing the sprawl of Hitchin northwards. However, crucially, she agreed with the appellants that, due to the context and the existing containing features on the ground, the site itself makes no more than a moderate contribution to purpose (a).

5.9 Accordingly, the inspector concluded that the site meets the definition of grey belt.

Compliance with Para.155

5.10 Paragraph 155 of the Framework states that:



“The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;***
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;***
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and***
- d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.”***

5.11 The appellant’s commentary in respect to each of the above is set out below:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;***

5.12 In terms of the first part of this criterion, the appeal site meets the definition of grey belt land for the reasons discussed above.



- 5.13 Regarding the second part of this criterion, the site is a small component part of a much wider area of strategic Green Belt between Hitchin and Ickleford, whilst the proposal is itself only for a single dwelling. Moreover, the site has a degree of self-containment due to existing landscape features and it is situated immediately adjacent to the settlement.
- 5.14 Accordingly, if developed as proposed, the effect on sector 13 or indeed on the wider strategic Green Belt within the district would be negligible at best. In those terms, the proposed would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the Plan.
- 5.15 These conclusions were largely shared by the appeal inspector who noted that: *“I do not consider that the site plays a strategic role in the functioning of the Green Belt, consequently the appeal proposal would not affect the ability of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way.”*
- 5.16 Accordingly, the proposed development would be compliant with paragraph 155 limb (a).



b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;

5.17 In considering this matter in relation to the appeal proposal, the inspector concluded that there was not a demonstrable unmet need for a farm worker's dwelling. Accordingly, she concluded that the proposal would not accord with limb (b) of paragraph 155.

5.18 However, this proposal is for a market dwelling, and it is currently the case that the Council are unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of land for housing. Indeed, the Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply Update (November 2025) sets out that the Council are currently only able to demonstrate a 2.6-year supply of land for housing.

5.19 Accordingly, there is a demonstrable unmet need for new housing development, and the proposed development would be compliant with limb (b) of paragraph 155.

c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and

5.20 The proposed development is located at the edge of an existing settlement and is situated near to local services, facilities and public transport options.



It is moreover possible to access most, if not all of these services by foot.

The site is therefore considered to be in a sustainable location with respect to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework.

5.21 This is a view shared by the appeal inspector who concluded that: *“The appeal site is within easy walking distance of services, facilities, schools and bus services, and reasonable opportunities would be available to maximise the use of sustainable transport modes. The scheme would therefore contribute to the Framework’s aim to actively manage patterns of growth in support of sustainable transport objectives.”*

5.22 Accordingly, the proposed development would be compliant with paragraph 155, limb (c).

d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.

5.23 Not applicable: Development is not major development.

5.24 As discussed above, and ascertained in the recent appeal, it is considered that the proposed development meets the definition of grey belt land and is in full accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 155 of the revised



Framework. Accordingly, it would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt in compliance with Section 13 of the Framework and LP Policy SP5.

Design and Visual Impact

- 5.25 LP Policies SP9 and D1 seek to ensure that new development is well designed, physically acceptable and appropriate in the context of the surrounding area/landscape. These policies are consistent with Section 12 of the Framework insofar that they seek to ensure the same objectives are met.
- 5.26 The proposed dwelling has been very carefully designed in order to ensure a suitable relationship with the immediate agrarian context. To that end, through the proposed use of reclaimed materials and components, including the reclaimed apple silo in particular, it would have a character and design that would be innovative and unique to the circumstances. Moreover, it would be tucked into the corner of the site adjacent to the modern barn adjacent to the northern side of the river. Accordingly, its wider visual impact would be limited, and it would appear within the wider landscape as a small, utilitarian agricultural building.



- 5.27 it is therefore considered that the proposed dwelling would have a design and character that is appropriate and thus compliant with LP Policies SP9, D1, NE2 and Section 12 of the Framework.

Quality of Living Accommodation

- 5.28 The proposed dwelling would have a generous internal area (GIA), with all rooms spacious in nature and suitable natural light and ventilation to all habitable spaces.
- 5.29 The proposed dwelling would have a private garden of a suitable size given its size and location. Accordingly, it would provide a suitable standard of residential accommodation for future occupants.

Impact on Neighbouring Properties

- 5.30 The proposed dwelling would be set in a relatively secluded location set significantly away from neighbouring properties. It is not considered that the proposals would cause any harm to the living conditions of neighbouring properties.

Highways Considerations



- 5.31 The proposed development would utilise the existing site access and track with no alterations necessary to ensure highways safety. Traffic movements associated with one dwelling of this size would be limited, whilst the site is located in a sustainable location with easy access to nearby services within Hitchin and Ickleford reducing reliance on the private car.
- 5.32 Sufficient space exists within the site for parking for at least two cars to ensure accordance with the Council's adopted standards. Cycle storage could be accommodated within a detached store, the details of which could be secured by condition if necessary. An electric vehicle charging point could also be provided.
- 5.33 Refuse would be dealt with by way of a private collection.

Environmental and Ecological Implications

Biodiversity: Protected Species

- 5.34 An Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) has been prepared and is submitted with the application. This demonstrates that the proposed development would not have a harmful impact on protected species.

Biodiversity: Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain



- 5.35 As advised by the applicant's ecologist, the proposed development would be exempt from the Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) condition on the basis that it would not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres of on-site habitat and 5 metres of on-site linear habitat.
- 5.36 Notwithstanding, a condition could be added to any planning consent ensuring that the completed development results in a net gain in biodiversity in accordance with LP Policy SP12 and NE4.

Flood Risk

- 5.37 The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is an area of low risk of surface water flooding. Accordingly, it is unlikely that the proposals would increase flood risk on the site or elsewhere. Further information regarding this is contained within the 'Flood Risk Assessment' that accompanies the application.

Energy Efficiency

- 5.38 The proposed dwelling is intended to achieve net zero CO₂ emissions through the following measures:
- Solar and ground source heat pump.
 - Wood burning appliance



- Passive ventilation
- Sewage treatment and grey water harvesting
- Dwelling to be built with 75% reused and repurposed materials and components.
- Site resources to be used to service the dwelling.

5.39 These measures would all be in excess of the minimum requirements set out in Part L of the building regulations.



Section 6: Summary & Conclusions

- 6.1 The main issue in the determination of the application is whether the erection of a proposed dwelling in this location would be inappropriate in the Green Belt and, if so, whether very special circumstances exist that clearly outweigh any harm that is identified.
- 6.2 As discussed in the foregoing, it is considered that the site meets the definition of ‘grey belt’, with the proposed development being fully compliant with the requirements of Paragraph 155 of the Framework. Accordingly, the proposed development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 6.3 Other matters material to the consideration of this application have been considered and discussed in the foregoing and it is considered that the proposals would be fully compliant with relevant national and local planning policy.
- 6.4 In light of the above, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted for the proposed development.



APPENDIX 1: Appeal Decision Letter Ref. APP/X1925/W/25/3362553



Appeal Decisions

Hearing held on 8 July 2025

Site visit made on 8 July 2025

by G Dring BA (Hons) MA MRTPI MAUDE

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/25/3362553

Land at New Pound Farm, East Side of Old Hale Way, Hitchin SG4 0SA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Bruce Parker against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/02009/FP.
 - The development proposed is erection of a detached farm workers dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. In the interests of clarity, I have taken the description of development above from the planning application form. This description of development along with the information submitted with the planning application and the further explanation provided at paragraph 3.2 of the Appellant's Statement of Case clearly identifies that the proposal is for a farm worker's dwelling to provide tied accommodation for an agricultural worker to reside on the site in association with the agricultural use of the site. The Council has clearly considered the proposal on this basis and as such so must I.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - whether the appeal site is grey belt land and whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework, and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt; and,
 - if the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, including whether there is an essential need for a dwelling to accommodate a rural worker, so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether it would be inappropriate development

4. There is no dispute between the parties that the appeal site is within the Green Belt. The Framework states at paragraph 153 that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. This approach is also identified through Policy SP5 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (LP) which states that development proposals will only be permitted in the Green Belt, where they would not result in inappropriate development or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated.
5. The appellant contends that whilst the proposal would not comprise of any of the exceptions set out under paragraph 154 of the Framework, the proposal would accord with the requirements of paragraph 155 and therefore would not be inappropriate development.
6. Paragraph 155 states that the development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where four criteria are complied with, including, that
 - a. the development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan, b. there is demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed, c. the development would be in a sustainable location and d. where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules'.
7. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposal would not represent major development and that as a result the Golden Rules requirement is not applicable in this case. I therefore must consider whether the appeal proposal would meet criteria a, b and c.

Grey belt

8. In order for the appeal proposal to be considered under paragraph 155, the appeal site must meet the definition of grey belt. The Framework defines grey belt as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to three of the five purposes of Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 143 of the Framework. That is (a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; (b) to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; and (d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
9. There is no dispute between the parties that the appeal site does not strongly contribute to the prevention of neighbouring towns from merging or the preservation of the setting and special character of an historic town. Based on the evidence before me and my site visit, I can see no reason to disagree. A key issue remaining in dispute is therefore whether the appeal site strongly contributes to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. The large built-up area in question is Hitchin.
10. The appeal site sits to the rear of an existing agricultural building, adjacent to the allotments and is situated only a short distance from dwellings that front on to Old Hale Way which forms a residential area on the edge of Hitchin. The appeal site is therefore near to the large built up area.

11. The Council refers to its North Hertfordshire Green Belt Review July 2016 (GBR) which identifies that parcel 13, in which the appeal site is located, plays a significant role in preventing sprawl northward of Hitchin. I agree with the conclusions of the GBR that the wider parcel does play a significant role in respect of purpose (a).
12. However, the appeal site is limited in size and only represents a very small part of the wider parcel. The proposed dwelling would be located to the rear of an existing building on an existing hard surfaced area. A low level earth bund separates the yard area from the more open agricultural land to the north. Mature trees and vegetation alongside the river bounds the site to the east and well-established vegetation separates the appeal site from the Buzzworks Discovery Centre and allotments to the south. The appeal site is therefore contained within these established boundary features. For the above reasons I find that the appeal site makes only a moderate contribution towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas.
13. I have not been referred to any policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 of the Framework (other than Green Belt) that would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. I therefore find that the appeal site would constitute grey belt in line with the definition provided in the Framework.

Purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt

14. The second requirement of paragraph 155 a. is that the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposal would not be at odds with paragraph 143 (e) which relates to assisting urban regeneration. Nevertheless, I find that the appeal proposal would run counter to the purpose set out in paragraph 143 (c) which is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
15. Whilst the appeal site is currently a hard surfaced area, it relates to an agricultural use and is currently devoid of built development, other than small scale structures such as an existing storage container and a water tank. The site is visually linked to the adjacent agricultural building and the agricultural land to the north and is more rural in character. I therefore find there would be some encroachment of built form into the countryside as a result of the appeal proposal.
16. However, the location of the site adjacent to the existing agricultural building, the limited size of the site and its containment, means that the effect would be localised and as such would be limited in the wider context. I do not consider that the site plays a strategic role in the functioning of the Green Belt, consequently the appeal proposal would not affect the ability of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way. Therefore, taking my conclusions on both grey belt and the remaining Green Belt purposes into account, the appeal proposal would comply with paragraph 155 a. of the Framework.

Unmet need

17. The Council has confirmed that the current housing land supply stands at 3.9 years, falling below the five year land supply requirement. As a result, there is no

dispute between the parties that there is an unmet need for housing in the Council's area.

18. However, the appeal proposal is for a farm worker's dwelling which is a specific type of development. It would provide a dwelling which would be extremely limited in terms of the occupants that could reside in it and it would not be available to the vast majority of the population.
19. I have not been provided with any evidence that there is a demonstrable unmet need for rural worker's dwellings across the Council area. Consequently, I find that the proposal would not accord with the requirements of 155 b. of the Framework.

Location

20. The appeal site is within easy walking distance of services, facilities, schools and bus services, and reasonable opportunities would be available to maximise the use of sustainable transport modes. The scheme would therefore contribute to the Framework's aim to actively manage patterns of growth in support of sustainable transport objectives. As such, the development would be locationally sustainable. Paragraph 155 c. of the Framework would therefore be complied with.

Conclusion on whether the proposal would be inappropriate development

21. Whilst I have found that the proposal would comply with criteria a and c set out under paragraph 155 of the Framework, I do not find that it would comply with criterion b. As such, I find that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. As a result, the proposal would be contrary to Policy SP5 of the LP, the aims of which are set out above, unless very special circumstances have been demonstrated. I will return to this matter later.

Effect on openness

22. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Openness is the absence of development, and it has both spatial and visual aspects.
23. The appeal proposal comprises a detached part single and part two storey dwelling which would be situated to the rear of an existing agricultural building within an existing yard area. The appeal site is situated to the north of the existing allotments, with agricultural land to the north and a woodland area to the east. To the west and south of the allotments is existing residential development. The appeal site is beyond but adjacent to the settlement of Hitchin. The village of Ickleford is also in close proximity to the appeal site.
24. Whilst the nearby residential development is visible from the appeal site, the separation between them and the existing characteristics of the site mean that it appears as being outside of the settlement and more visually connected to the countryside, particularly given its current agricultural use.
25. The introduction of a dwelling along with any associated domestic paraphernalia on an area which currently does not house any buildings, or domestic features would inevitably impact upon spatial openness.
26. The existing hardstanding that forms the existing yard area is at ground level and as such, it has very little effect upon the visual openness of the Green Belt in this

location. The proposal would result in development above ground level and as a result it would be visually more imposing than the current situation. The mass and scale of the development, being part two storey and part single storey, would be visible in localised public views from Old Hale Way, the network of public footpaths, the adjacent access road and from the allotments. Whilst some views would be more limited given the proposed positioning to the rear of the existing agricultural building and due to the presence of vegetation, the appeal proposal would nonetheless result in a noticeable reduction in visual openness. I consider the harm to openness would be moderate and localised.

27. In conclusion, I find that the proposal would result in permanent harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

Other considerations

28. Policy SP2 of the LP identifies where new homes will be supported, within the adjusted settlement boundaries of the towns, such as Hitchin, and a number of villages, including Ickleford, subject to certain criteria. The Council identify that the appeal site sits outside of the settlement boundaries for Hitchin and Ickleford. Therefore, there is no support under the Council's settlement hierarchy or approach to the spatial distribution of new homes for a dwelling on the appeal site.
29. Policy CGB3 of the LP, which relates to rural workers' dwellings is referred to by both parties. This policy sets out a number of different matters that need to be demonstrated to support the provision of isolated new homes in the countryside for rural workers, including that there is an existing functional need. This approach largely reflects paragraph 84 a) of the Framework which provides support for isolated homes in the countryside, where there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near to their place of work in the countryside.
30. Whilst the terms essential and functional need are referred to in the different national and local policies, the appellant refers to persistent need. To my mind, in the context of the various evidence before me, all wording appears to refer to a need for one or more workers to be available at all times in order to sustain the business, ensuring the effective operation of a rural based enterprise. In the interests of clarity and for consistency, I will refer to 'essential need'.
31. I agree with the appellant that whilst the appeal site is located in the countryside it is not isolated in terms of the Framework test, given its proximity to the edge of Hitchin and to other built form. Nevertheless, I do not find that the lack of isolation precludes the Council from applying a similar assessment in terms of demonstrating the need for a rural worker's dwelling, given the description of development provided on the application form and that the appeal site is located outside of a settlement boundary and within the countryside for the purposes of the development plan, where the delivery of new homes would not normally be supported.
32. The last section of Policy CGB3 of the LP states that 'where proposals are for development that would be inappropriate in the Green Belt, this policy will be used to help consider and assess any case of very special circumstances'. I therefore consider that the tests set out in Policy CGB3 are relevant as a guide in considering whether it has been demonstrated that there is an essential need for a rural worker's dwelling at the appeal site.

33. The appellant confirmed at the hearing that the land was purchased in 2018 and that up until that time it was not in active agricultural production. Since purchasing the land, the appellant has constructed an agricultural building on the site, along with siting a storage container and water tank to the rear within the yard area. The appellant has put part of the land to use as an orchard, some is in use for growing willow trees for the production of cricket bats and a small area is in use as allotments. Based on the evidence before me I do not find that any of the current uses of the land necessitates the essential need for someone to permanently reside on site to sustain or ensure the effective operation of the business.
34. From both the written evidence and the hearing, it is clear that the appellant wishes to provide the opportunity for someone else, a tenant, to come on to the land and to make use of it in terms of potentially farrowing a small number of pigs and keeping a limited number of chickens. However, I did not witness nor was it confirmed that there is currently any livestock on the site. I have not been provided with any information on the likely number of animals, where they would be housed, when they would be introduced on the site or the nature of any such agricultural business.
35. There is no business plan before me which sets out the aims of the enterprise, the intentions for agricultural production or diversification nor any financial projections and whether it would be viable in the longer term. I am not satisfied, based on the limited information provided, that there would be an essential need for someone to permanently reside on site to sustain or ensure the effective operation of the business in the future.
36. Whilst I accept that there is currently no existing dwelling at the holding, it was confirmed at the hearing that no other alternative options for accommodation within the local area have been considered. Although the appellant suggested that the likely rental figures of properties in Hitchin would be beyond the financial capabilities of a rural worker, there is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate this.
37. I acknowledge that the appellant has concerns about security, particularly since the outlet on the water tank was damaged in a recent incident. Nevertheless, it was confirmed at the hearing that other surveillance options, such as cameras had been considered but not yet installed. Given other measures to ensure security have not been tested yet, I do not find this consideration to be sufficient to justify a need for someone to live at the appeal site.
38. For the above reasons I find that it has not been demonstrated that there is an essential need for a dwelling at the appeal site to accommodate a rural worker.
39. The appeal proposal would provide a new dwelling on a small site. The appeal site is not isolated, and future occupants would have access to services, facilities, employment and public transport provision. The development would provide some economic benefits during the construction phase and after, in that future occupants would support the local economy. The intention to provide a zero-carbon dwelling that would result in a scheme with sustainability credentials that would be in excess of the minimum requirements would also be a benefit.
40. However, the proposal is for a farm worker's dwelling which would limit significantly who could reside within it. This restriction along with the scale of the

proposal, means that, any benefits would carry only limited weight in favour of the development.

41. The appellant asserts that there would be no detrimental effects on the living conditions of the occupants of neighbouring properties, that the design approach would be appropriate for the area, that sufficient parking, cycle storage and access would be provided, that protected species would not be harmed and that the appeal site would not be at risk of flooding. Even if I were to agree, a lack of harm or policy compliance in these respects are neutral considerations that weigh neither for nor against the proposal.

Green Belt Balance

42. The development would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is by definition, harmful. Furthermore, there would be moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.
43. I have found that it has not been demonstrated that there is an essential need for a dwelling at the appeal site to accommodate a rural worker. Taking into account all of the other considerations put forward in support of the proposal, I consider that these attract limited weight in favour of the proposal.
44. Therefore, in considering the substantial weight I must give to the harm to the Green Belt, I conclude that the very special circumstances needed to justify the development in the Green Belt have not been demonstrated. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policy SP5 of the LP and the Framework, which both seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Other Matter

45. The development would provide a dwelling in an area where the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. However, I have found that the proposal would harm the Green Belt. Therefore, this is a situation in terms of paragraph 11 (d) (i) of the Framework, where the presumption in favour of sustainable development is not engaged because the application of the policies in the Framework that protect land designated as Green Belt provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed.

Conclusion

46. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and the material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

G Dring
INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Fred Quartermain	Thrings Solicitors
Tom Donovan	Peter George Planning
Mr Parker	Appellant

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Thomas Howe	Planning Officer
Anne McDonald	Development Management Team Leader
Tom Rea	Senior Planning Officer

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Paul Dee	Chair of the Allotment Association
John Nelson	Representing residents of Old Hale Way
Mark Schilling	Representing residents of Bessemer Close