

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Screening Opinion Statement

Land at Claybush Road, Ashwell, North Herts

April 2026

Carter Jonas

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared on behalf of Hill Group Ltd and is being submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority. It requests the formal screening opinion of the Council as the 'competent authority' under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the 'Regulations').
- 1.2 More specifically the request is for the Council to adopt a Screening Opinion under Part 2 of the Regulations for the proposed development of Land at Claybush Road, Ashwell, North Hertfordshire. For the purpose of this request for a screening opinion the proposed scheme will include the following principal elements: 57 dwellings, green infrastructure, access and associated works.
- 1.3 In accordance with Regulation 6(2) this request includes the following:
- (a) a plan sufficient to identify the land;*
 - (b) a description of the development, including in particular—*
 - (i) a description of the physical characteristics of the development and, where relevant, of demolition works;*
 - (ii) a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;*
 - (c) a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;*
 - (d) to the extent the information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from—*
 - (i) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and*
 - (ii) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and*
 - (e) such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including any features of the proposed development or any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.*
- 1.4 Following consideration of the proposed scheme within the context of the Regulations, it is judged that, whilst Schedule 2 Development, the proposed scheme is not within a 'sensitive area' and, for the reasons set out within this report, it is unlikely to give rise to any significant or complex environmental effects. Hence, it is concluded that the scheme is not EIA development, and an Environmental Statement is not, therefore, required to support any future planning application.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Basic Characteristics of the Site

- 2.1 The site that is the subject of this request comprises approximately 6.75 hectares. It is located to the south of the village on land between Claybush Road and Kingsland Way. Currently the site comprises an agricultural field.

- 2.2 The proposal site is located approximately 500m from the village centre where the majority of services are located, walkable in around 10 minutes. Ashwell and Morden Train Station is located out of the village 2.5-3km to the southeast.

Planning History

- 2.3 There is no relevant planning history for the site, but the site on the opposing side (west) of Claybush Road has been developed for residential development as per the permission below:
- Ref: 16/01797/1: 30 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space. Land rear of nos.4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. Application approved 25th September 2019.

3. PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

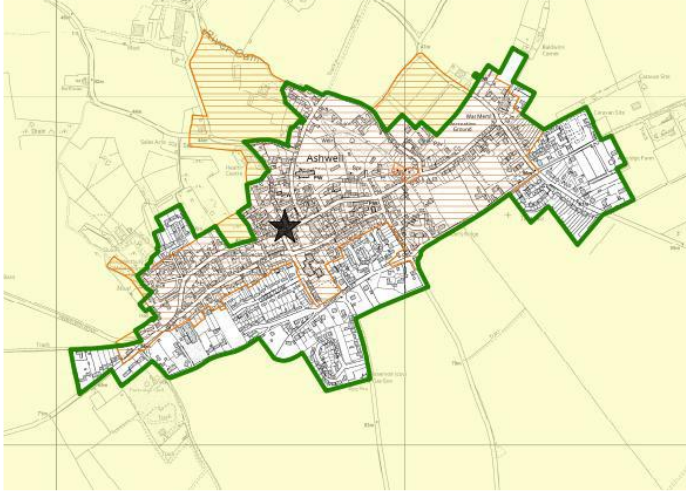
National Policy: National Planning Policy Framework NPPF (December 2024)

- 3.1 The revised NPPF reaffirms (paragraph 11) the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Importantly in this context, text at paragraph d makes clear that any adverse impacts of development would need to demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 3.2 Section 5 of the NPPF considers 'Delivering a sufficient supply of homes. Paragraphs 60 and 61 make clear the need to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes through the provision of land for housing and addressing the needs of different groups with specific housing requirements. Guidance is clear that the onus is on the delivery of new homes.
- 3.3 The NPPF makes clear (footnote 8) that where there is a lack of five-year supply the Local Plan is to be considered out of date. As made clear at paragraph 11 (d) where policies for determining an application are out of date permission should be granted, unless adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of doing so, known generally as the 'tilted balance'. This element of policy will be critical in the consideration of proposals for this site given its location beyond the settlement boundary (see below).

Local Planning Policy: North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031

- 3.4 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted on 08 November 2022.
- 3.5 The settlement hierarchy for North Hertfordshire (Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution) is made up of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock, five villages that have been identified as having capacity to support higher levels of new housing allocations i.e. +200 houses (Knebworth, Codicote, Ickleford, Little Wymondley and Barkway, then Category A Villages (normally containing primary schools) and then Category B villages, considered to have lower levels of facilities.
- 3.6 Ashwell is identified as a Category A village. Typically, within such settlements general development will be allowed within the defined settlement boundary.
- 3.7 The site falls beyond the settlement boundary of Ashwell, within the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt'.

- 3.8 The proposals map for Ashwell is shown below. The site is located outside of the settlement boundary within the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt' i.e. within the yellow shading:



Emerging Local Plan

- 3.9 The Council are at the very initial stages of reviewing their Local Plan. Expression of interest i.e. pre call for sites, closed September 2025 (Stage 1). The second stage (Stage 2) of this call for sites process is now underway and is expected to end in May 2026. This process involves requesting further information for sites from the landowners, which will be used to help with detailed site assessments to underpin the emerging plan when it comes forward.

Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan 2021

- 3.10 The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan seeks to complement the aims and objectives of the policies of the Local Plan and has been produced to reflect the collective views of local residents on how Ashwell should develop.
- 3.11 The vision for Ashwell is stated as:
- “Our vision is to ensure Ashwell continues to thrive and grow as a community, whilst safeguarding the village’s character. We want to ensure that growth is sustainable and the village continues to meet the needs of its people.*
- We want to enhance the facilities of the village to meet the challenges and changing needs of the community, to ensure that the parish remains sustainable and cohesive. Our village also needs a strong local economy and well-maintained infrastructure that supports its needs and connects the parish to the wider community”.*
- 3.12 Policy ASH 1 states that development outside the settlement boundary will not be supported unless the proposal represents appropriate uses in the countryside, brings historic buildings back into re-use, relate to utilities infrastructure or the site is allocated in the North Herts Local Plan.

Other Considerations

- 3.13 The following should also be noted:
- The site lies within Flood Zone 1, although there is a very small area that is subject to surface water flooding to the northeast of the site.
 - There is the potential for archaeology on the site.
 - There are off-site listed buildings, not directly adjacent to the site.
 - Ashwell Conservation Area is located to the north albeit not directly adjacent to the site.
 - There are off-site Scheduled Ancient Monuments within proximity of the site.
 - An underground gas main has been identified along the site boundary.
- 3.14 For the purpose of the Regulations, it should be noted that the site itself does not fall within any sensitive areas as defined by Regulation 2(1).

4. THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHEME

- 4.1 As previously set out for the purpose of this request for a screening opinion the proposed development will include the following principal elements: 57 dwellings, green infrastructure, access and associated works.
- 4.2 It is proposed that any future planning application would be supported by the following standalone technical reports, as may be agreed with the local planning authority:
- Planning Statement (including affordable housing statement)
 - Design and Access Statement
 - Transport Assessment/Statement
 - Preliminary Ecological Assessment (plus any protected species reports if relevant)
 - Biodiversity Net Gain Metric and Impact Assessment
 - Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)
 - Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and Landscape Strategy
 - Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy
 - Heritage Assessment – Archaeology Report
 - Lighting Assessment
 - Tree Survey/Arboricultural Impact Assessment
 - Noise Impact Assessment
 - Phase 1 Land Contamination Assessment
 - Energy and Sustainability Statement
 - Utilities Assessment
 - Statement of Community Involvement

5. THE EIA REGULATIONS AND NATIONAL PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The EIA Regulations

- 5.1 Certain types of development are required to be subject to the Regulations. The Regulations describe those development types (Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 development) that automatically require EIA or consideration of whether an EIA is required.
- 5.2 For developments described in Schedule 1 of the Regulations, EIA is mandatory. The proposed scheme at the site does not fall within any categories of development within Schedule 1 and thus an EIA is not automatically required under these provisions.
- 5.3 Schedule 2 of the Regulations describes certain types of development where EIA may be required if the development has the potential (likelihood) to give rise to 'significant' environmental effects and the thresholds in Schedule 2 are met.
- 5.4 The proposed scheme falls within Schedule 2, Class 10(b) 'Urban development projects'. Under this description of development, the applicable thresholds and criteria contained within Schedule 2 of the Regulations are as follows:
- (i) The development includes more than 1 hectare of urban development which is not dwellinghouse development; or*
 - (ii) the development includes more than 150 dwellings; or*
 - (iii) the overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares.*
- 5.5 In this case although the proposed number of dwellings is significantly below the 150 threshold the proposed overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares. Accordingly, the scheme proposals are above the exclusion threshold set out in Schedule 2 of the Regulations, and it is therefore necessary to screen the development proposal.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- 5.6 In addition to the Regulations, the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides advice on EIA procedures that should be taken into account.
- 5.7 Paragraph: 018, Reference ID: 4-018-20170728 (Revision date: 28 07 2017) states that "Only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment." Paragraph: 058, Reference ID: 4-058-20150326 (Revision date: 26 03 2015) goes on to provide indicative screening thresholds. For 'Urban development projects' the indicative criteria and threshold is as below:
- Environmental Impact Assessment is unlikely to be required for the redevelopment of land unless the new development is on a significantly greater scale than the previous use, or the types of impact are of a markedly different nature or there is a high level of contamination.*
- Sites which have not previously been intensively developed:*
- (i) area of the scheme is more than 5 hectares; or*
 - (ii) it would provide a total of more than 10,000 m² of new commercial floorspace; or*

(iii) the development would have significant urbanising effects in a previously non-urbanised area (e.g. a new development of more than 1,000 dwellings).

5.8 The PPG goes onto set out that the key issues to consider in such cases are:

- Physical scale of such developments
- Potential noise in traffic
- Emissions and noise

6. ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 6.1 Schedule 3 of the Regulations outlines the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 developments. This is broken down into three subcategories: Characteristics of development; Location of development; and Types and characteristics of potential impact. Each is addressed in the table below:

Table 1: Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Development

Characteristics of Development	
1. The Characteristics of the development must be considered with particular regard to:	
a) The size and design of the whole development	The development site comprises 6.75ha. The principal elements of the proposed scheme would include 57 dwellings, green infrastructure, access and associated works. Building heights across the site will not principally be 2 storeys and not exceed 3 storeys. The size and design of the proposed development is commensurate with the scale of the existing development in the vicinity, particularly with the most recent development on the other side of Claybush Road.
b) Cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development	The cumulative impacts of the proposed scheme with other existing development and/or approved development will be considered as part of standalone technical reports that would be submitted as part of any planning application. Developments which have been considered alongside the proposed development include: Ref: 16/01797/1 – 30 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space. Land rear of nos. 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. Application approved 25th September 2019. The scheme has been built out on site. The impacts of the development described above are localised and, following the usual form of mitigation for residential development (i.e. landscaping, site specific ecology etc) the impacts are likely to be fully mitigated and, in any event, are unlikely to be cumulatively significant.
c) The use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity	The proposed development as a whole will deliver a sustainable form of development that minimises the use of natural resources during its construction. Landscape constraints and opportunities will be prepared in order to inform the design of the

	proposals as they develop. As such, the proposal will come forward in a way which ensure the site will be able to successfully integrate new development without harm, to the key characteristics of the surrounding built environment and landscape character area. A Site Investigation Report will be prepared in order to assess environmental and geotechnical issues on the site. A Flood Risk and Drainage Statement will also be prepared to support the application, and any appropriate mitigation will be included. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal will be undertaken and submitted as part of the application. This will also highlight if any further technical reports will be required and necessary mitigation measures required to reduce the harm on the biodiversity of the site.
d) The protection of waste	Waste would be collected at appropriate locations that may be agreed through condition and recycling could be encouraged through the/ provision of recycling facilities in the usual manner. The proposed provision of new homes will not generate unusually high volumes or hazardous type of waste and therefore this is unlikely to result in any significant effects.
e) Pollution and noise	The scheme itself will not generate significant levels of pollution or noise. Trip generations for the development will be detailed in a supporting Transport Assessment which will consider access by walking, cycling and public transport in addition to private vehicles. Ashwell has a limited range of facilities including a primary school, pre-school, pubs, and other local services along the High Street, which are accessible by foot or cycle. Ashwell and Morden Train Station is located outside of the main settlement but could be accessed by cycle or bus. Noise arising from local traffic entering and departing the proposed development, once occupied, is likely to be very low and not significant. Construction noise during works is likely to be low and can be controlled by condition.
f) The risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge	No unusual or complex substances or technologies are to be used within the proposed development, and the risk of accidents is therefore negligible.

g) The risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution)	Due to the residential nature of the proposed development, and the comments above confirming that there will be no unusual or complex-substances or technologies used within the proposed scheme, the proposals will have no unacceptable risk to human health.
Location of Development	
2. The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, with particular regard to:	
a) The existing and approved land use	The site is currently in agricultural use. The site is not allocated in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan for development.
b) The relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground	There are no significant issues regarding natural resources raised by the proposed development. As set out above, landscape constraints and opportunities will be prepared in order to inform the design of the proposals as they develop. A Site investigation Report will be prepared and submitted with any planning application to ensure that the site and its underground will not be harmed by the proposed development. A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy for the site will be prepared and will accompany the application and will include any necessary mitigation measures. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal will be undertaken and submitted as part of the application. This will also highlight if any further technical reports will be required and necessary mitigation measures required to reduce the harm on the biodiversity of the site.
c) The absorption capacity of the natural environment, playing particular attention to the following areas: I. Wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths II. Coastal zones and the marine environment III. Mountain and forest areas IV. Nature reserves and parks V. European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation	The site is not within an area where it will have any significant effect on i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths ii) coastal zones and the marine environment; iii) mountain and forest areas; iv) nature reserves and parks; v) European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation; vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure, or vii) densely populated areas. It is considered that any archaeological effects resulting from the proposed development can be addressed through a programme of archaeological mitigation. It is not considered that the impact of the

VI.	Areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure	proposed development on below ground archaeology warrants consideration within an EIA.
VII.	Densely populated areas	
VIII.	Landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance	
Types and Characteristics of the Potential Impact		
3. The likely significant effects of the development on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 above, with regard to the impact of the development on the factors specified in Regulation 4(2) taking into account:		
a)	The magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The potential magnitude of the impact is small and no greater than local level within the area surrounding the site.
b)	The nature of the impact	The technical work undertaken to date and referred to throughout this Statement confirms that the impact of the proposed development will not result in any significant impacts. It is therefore considered that the precise impacts of the development proposals can be suitably addressed via standalone technical reports that would be submitted with any future planning application.
c)	The transboundary nature of the impact	Not applicable.
d)	The intensity and complexity of the impact	The nature of the potential impact associated with the proposed development are all modest and it is not the case that any large, unusual or complex impacts are associated with a scheme of this scale on this site.
e)	The probability of the impact	The probability of impacts associated with the proposed development are reasonably certain and well understood.
f)	The expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact	In practice, once the site is developed the impacts associated with the operational phase will be permanent and largely consistent on an annual basis.
g)	The cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development	The cumulative impacts of the proposed scheme with other existing development and/or approved development will be considered as part of standalone technical reports that would be submitted as part of any planning application.

	Developments which have been considered alongside the proposed development include: Ref: 16/01797/1 – 30 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space. Land rear of nos. 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. Application approved 25th September 2019. The scheme has been built out on site. The impacts of the development described above are localised and, following the usual form of mitigation for residential development (i.e. landscaping, site specific ecology etc) the impacts are likely to be fully mitigated and, in any event, are unlikely to be cumulatively significant.
h) The possibility of effectively reducing the impact	It is proposed that standalone technical reports will be submitted with any future planning application. Where necessary, these will provide full details of proposed mitigation measures. Given the nature of the proposal, it is unlikely that any mitigation would be novel, rather, these would represent industry standard methods that are regularly adopted on schemes of this nature. The delivery of such measures could be secured through planning conditions and/or obligations in the usual way.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 As previously set out, Paragraph 18 of the PPG states that “only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment”.
- 7.2 Paragraph 58 of the PPG seeks to provide indicative screening thresholds for determining if impacts of development will potentially have a significant impact requirement a Environmental Impact Assessment. For ‘Urban development projects’ such as this the indicative criteria and threshold is as below:

Environmental Impact Assessment is unlikely to be required for the redevelopment of land unless the new development is on a significantly greater scale than the previous use, or the types of impact are of a markedly different nature or there is a high level of contamination.

Sites which have not previously been intensively developed:

- (i) area of the scheme is more than 5 hectares; or*
- (ii) it would provide a total of more than 10,000 m² of new commercial floorspace; or*
- (iii) the development would have significant urbanising effects in a previously non-urbanised area (e.g. a new development of more than 1,000 dwellings).*

- 7.3 Whilst the site area exceeds the threshold of 5ha it is clear that in terms of number of new houses 'significant' impacts are only considered to arise from developments of circa 1,000 dwellings. A level of development therefore significantly larger than the 57 dwellings currently proposed on this site. Equally, when applying the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 developments as set out within Schedule 3 of the regulations, it is clear that the site's location is not sensitive and that the potential impacts of the scheme are not of significant magnitude or complexity.
- 7.4 It is judged that the proposals are not EIA development as it is clear that they will not lead to any significant environmental effects. Therefore, no Environmental Statement should be required to support any future planning application for the proposed development, and the planning authority is requested to issue a negative screening opinion confirming this in the usual way.

APPENDIX A – Site Location Plan

