

Statement of Community Engagement

Walnut Tree Road, Pirton

August 2025

Turley

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Introduction

1. This Statement of Community Engagement (SCE) has been prepared by Turley on behalf of Blakeney Homes.
2. This SCE forms part of the outline planning application for a residential development of up to 50 new homes on land East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton.
3. Further details are provided in the accompanying technical reports submitted as part of the planning application. This SCE should be read alongside these other technical documents.
4. The SCE provides a detailed record of the engagement activities that have taken place, the questions received during the pre-application period and how this has been considered as part of the preparation of the final planning application.

Engagement overview

5. The project team delivered a comprehensive pre-application engagement programme which included engagement with:
 - North Hertfordshire District Council
 - Pirton Parish Council
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Site ward members
 - Local residents
6. To promote the consultation and encourage the community to view and comment on the proposals, a range of engagement methods were deployed as part of a two-week consultation period, which ran from 27 June to 11 July 2025, including:
 - Offering briefings to local councillors.
 - Delivering 630 leaflets informing near neighbours of the public consultation, the proposals and ways to provide feedback.
 - A social media campaign alongside promotion in various local newspapers.
 - Hosting a dedicated project website at <https://www.walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk> to provide information on the proposals and encouraging visitors to submit feedback via the various contact methods outlined below.

Recorded responses

7. During the engagement period the website generated a total of 1.3k website visitors, including 1.1k unique visitors.
8. 477 of visitors accessed the website directly (typing in the web address or scanning a QR code), with 760 visitors arriving via Facebook, 1 via referral and 33 via a search engine.
9. 23 individual submissions of feedback were received through the website and 7 through the project email.
10. Questions and comments received during the pre-application engagement period were considered carefully by the project team. They are summarised by theme with the applicant's response in **Chapter 3** of this report.
11. In summary, the applicant considers that the multichannel engagement undertaken with the local community and other key stakeholders has been proactive, accessible, meaningful and effective.

1. Policy Context

- 1.1 The Applicant recognises that the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') places an emphasis on community involvement as an important part of the planning application process. To ensure the approach taken in the pre-application stages of this application is consistent with national and local guidelines, relevant policy was reviewed in full.
- 1.2 The Government's policy on community involvement is set out in a number of statutory and non-statutory documents, including the NPPF (2024) and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). Guidance is also provided in North Hertfordshire District Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2023).

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- 1.3 The Framework (December 2024) sets out that the planning system should be a collective enterprise with the purpose of helping to deliver sustainable development.
- 1.4 Paragraph 40 of the Framework recognises early engagement as having the "significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application for all parties." Further, paragraph 40 notes that conducting high-quality engagement is conducive to improved community outcomes and streamlined, cohesive coordination between public and private resources. This also has wider benefits for the process; paragraph 41 notes that proactive engagement throughout delivers additional benefit in supporting the wider planning system to function more effectively and efficiently.
- 1.5 As set out in this statement, comprehensive community engagement has taken place, in full accordance with guidance set out within the Framework.

North Hertfordshire District Council Statement of Community Involvement (2023)

- 1.6 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires Local Planning Authorities to produce policy documents, called Statements of Community Involvement.
- 1.7 North Hertfordshire District Council sets out its expectations for engagement in [their Statement of Community Involvement \(2023\)](#) document.
- 1.8 The SCI states that "The council cannot insist on pre-application discussions with applicants but they are recommended. Where major schemes are proposed, the council will encourage developers to engage with the local interest groups and residents."
- 1.9 The project team has fully reviewed both national and local guidelines on engagement before creating a bespoke programme as detailed in the following sections of this statement.

2. Pre-Application Consultation Activity

- 2.1 An engagement strategy was prepared in line with local and national policies on delivering meaningful and proportionate engagement with the community, as detailed in **Chapter 1**.
- 2.2 The strategy identified key stakeholders, outlined the engagement methods and proposed pre-application public consultation timelines.
- 2.3 Details of this pre-application consultation and engagement is included under the sub-headings below.

Engaging with stakeholders

- 2.4 Politicians and other stakeholders were informed of the proposals and the public consultation which included:
 - North Hertfordshire District Council - Councillor Daniel Allen (Leader)
 - North Hertfordshire District Council - Councillor Val Bryant (Deputy Leader)
 - North Hertfordshire District Council - Councillor Ruth Brown (Lib Dem Leader)
 - North Hertfordshire District Council - Offa Ward - Councillor Clare Strong
 - Pirton Parish Council - Jilly Rogers (Chairperson)
 - Pirton Parish Council - Diane Burleigh (Vice-Chair)
 - Pirton Parish Council – Nick Rowe
- 2.5 Councillors were contacted by the project team on the 18 June 2025, then again on 26 June 2025.
- 2.6 No briefing was accepted by any members of North Hertfordshire Council.
- 2.7 Pirton Parish Councillors Diane Burleigh and Nick Rowe confirmed interest in a meeting and this was held online on 30 July 2025.
- 2.8 Topics discussed at this meeting included: presenting the site context and its constraints, access and connectivity, flooding and drainage, and stakeholder engagement.
- 2.9 Parish Councillors also asked for more information from the project team regarding visitor car parking on Cotman Lane. This was provided to the councillors on 31 July.

Engaging with the community

- 2.10 The public consultation took place between 27 June and 11 July 2025.

- 2.11 Engagement with the community focused on spreading awareness of the proposals through a leaflet drop to near neighbours. A dedicated project website was created for people to view the proposals in further detail and provide feedback via the website, through a project email address or by contacting a project phone number.
- 2.12 These activities are summarised below.

Publicity activities

- 2.13 To promote the public consultation, a double-sided A5 leaflet was posted to 630 local addresses in close proximity to the site.
- 2.14 The leaflet provided a summary of the proposals and promoted the various ways for residents to provide feedback or contact the project team.
- 2.15 The distribution area can be seen in **Figure 1** below.

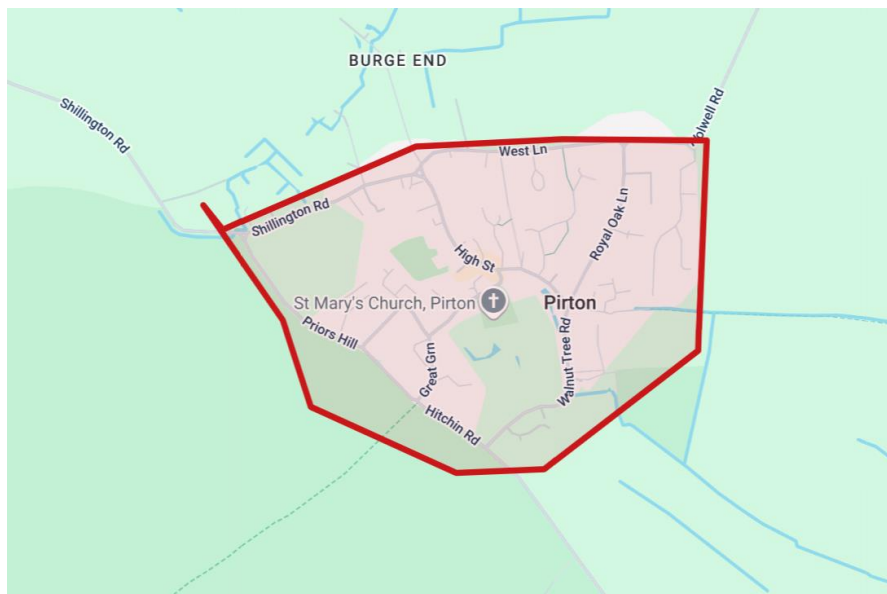


Figure 1: Leaflet Distribution

- 2.16 A copy of the leaflet is included in **Appendix 1**.

Project website

- 2.17 A dedicated project website was created and hosted at <https://www.walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk> to provide further details on the proposals and an estimated timeline for the application.
- 2.18 The website also provided methods of contact with the project team, including an email address contact@walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk and a freephone telephone number 0808 168 8296.
- 2.1 During the consultation period the website generated a total of 1.3k views from 1.1k unique visitors.

2.2 477 of visitors accessed the website directly (typing in the web address or scanning a QR code), with 760 visitors arriving via Facebook, 1 via referral and 33 via a search engine.

2.3 The website also included a feedback section where visitors were encouraged to submit feedback for the consideration of the project team.

These comments are detailed in **Chapter 3**.

2.4 Screenshots of the website are included in **Appendix 2** and the website itself remains live and accessible.

3. Feedback and Applicant's Response

- 3.1 Feedback was received via the project website feedback form and project email, with a total of 30 individual submissions:
 - 27 responses submitted through the project website
 - 3 responses submitted via the project email address
- 3.2 All feedback received during the pre-application period has been carefully considered by the project team.

Thematic analysis of responses

Theme	Summary of feedback	Example Quotes	Applicant's Response
Affordable Housing	Opinions on affordable housing were divided. Some respondents welcomed a mixed-income community, suggesting that affordable housing could contribute to inclusivity. Others were strongly opposed, believing Pirton is not the appropriate place for such provision and expressing concern that it could alter the village's social fabric. Clarification was also sought on what constituted "affordable" housing.	<i>"Pirton is a vibrant and inclusive community that would welcome and benefit from a mix of social economic backgrounds."</i> <i>"The level of affordable housing should be 0% – there are plenty of places to build affordable housing and Pirton should not be one."</i> <i>"When you say 40% affordable housing, what specifically does this mean – is that council housing, Help to Buy, or just cheaper private homes?"</i>	We understand that housing affordability is a sensitive issue in Pirton. In line with North Hertfordshire District Council policy, we are proposing that 40% of the new homes will be provided as affordable housing. This is likely to include a mix of affordable rent and shared ownership options, helping local people who are priced out of the market. Affordable housing is defined in national planning policy as homes provided at below-market cost for eligible households. The final mix will be agreed at a later stage through a Reserved Matters application, and shaped by local need.

Character and Identity of Pirton	Several respondents expressed concern that continued development is threatening the rural and historic character of Pirton. They feel the village has already undergone too much change, losing its traditional charm, and that further development risks turning it into a town.	• <i>“Totally disagree with further development in Pirton. The essential village nature is being swallowed up.”</i> • <i>“It is practically turning into a town... the village has already lost its character.”</i> • <i>“How will this honour Pirton’s rich history and quaint appeal?”</i>	• We appreciate the strength of feeling about protecting Pirton’s character. Our proposals are landscape-led and have been designed to respect the rural edge of the village. We are seeking outline planning permission only, which will establish the principle of development, with detailed design matters to follow. At the detailed stage, we will ensure that the design, layout, materials and landscaping reflect the local character and respond sensitively to the site’s setting. Our aim is to deliver a high-quality, small-scale development that integrates well with the village and supports its long-term vitality.
Community Engagement and Communication	Respondents questioned how well the community would be kept informed throughout the planning process. There were calls for clearer communication about outcomes, timelines, and how local voices would be taken into account.	• “Will this be communicated to the community? If so, when?” • “Obviously this is pointless in my opinion... we have opposed many builds and it continues to go ahead.” • “How will you inform residents about what happens at the recreation ground?”	• We are committed to open and ongoing engagement. During the consultation, we launched a project website, offered a dedicated email and freephone number, and delivered information leaflets to 630 nearby homes. We carefully reviewed all feedback submitted and have summarised and responded to the key themes in this Statement. We will continue to share updates as the application progresses, including

			through the website and local representatives. It is important to us that the community is able to contact the project team when and how they choose.
Design and Materials	There was a clear desire for any new development to reflect the existing character of Pirton through thoughtful architectural design and the use of sympathetic materials. Concerns were raised about generic 'new build' aesthetics.	• <i>"Will there be anything put in place in terms of materials used/look and feel/approaches that's unique to Pirton?"</i> • <i>"This isn't just a typical new-build plot that could be anywhere, is it?"</i>	• We agree that any new homes in Pirton should reflect the local character and distinctiveness of the area. While specific designs will be set out at the Reserved Matters stage, our intention is to deliver homes using high-quality materials, traditional detailing, and varied building forms. Our design approach will reflect the village's built form and rural setting, ensuring the development feels like a natural extension to Pirton, rather than a standalone estate.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The applicant has undertaken a proportionate, transparent and accessible programme of community engagement to support the preparation of an outline planning application for residential development at Land East of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton.
- 4.2 The consultation was shaped by national and local policy guidance and designed to encourage early and meaningful public involvement. A range of engagement methods were employed to ensure that local residents and stakeholders were made aware of the proposals and had adequate opportunity to provide feedback.
- 4.3 Engagement activities included:
- A leaflet drop to 630 neighbouring households;
 - A dedicated project website offering further details and a direct means to submit feedback;
 - Direct correspondence with elected representatives and local interest groups.
- 4.4 The consultation generated a range of comments and questions from the local community. Common themes included the provision of affordable housing, the impact on the village's character, concerns regarding communication and transparency, and the importance of sympathetic design. This feedback has been carefully considered and is summarised in **Chapter 3** of this report.
- 4.5 The applicant acknowledges the concerns raised and is committed to ongoing dialogue as the planning process continues. Where possible, these comments have informed the preparation of the submitted proposals or will be addressed at later stages of design development and delivery.
- 4.6 In summary, the applicant considers that the pre-application consultation has been undertaken in a timely and inclusive manner, reflecting best practice in community engagement and fulfilling the relevant expectations of both the National Planning Policy Framework and the North Hertfordshire District Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

Appendix 1: Leaflet



BLAKENEY HOMES

Public consultation on proposed residential development on land east of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton

Blakeney Homes is bringing forward proposals for a high-quality new residential neighbourhood on land east of Walnut Tree Road, Pirton. The scheme would provide up to 50 new homes, including 40% affordable housing, to help meet local needs. Key benefits of the scheme include:



Up to 50 much-needed homes in a variety of types to meet local needs and fit in with the character of the area.



A green and attractive place to live – designed around public open spaces, a play area and new planting to support wildlife.



Energy efficient homes with features including solar panels and air source heat pumps.



Improved pedestrian and cycle links to local amenities and the existing public right of way network.



www.walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk



0808 1699 296

How can I find out more and share my feedback?



We are now inviting the local community to have their say on the plans.

You can find out more about the proposals and share your feedback by:



Visiting our website

www.walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk
or scanning the QR code above



Emailing us at

contact@walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk

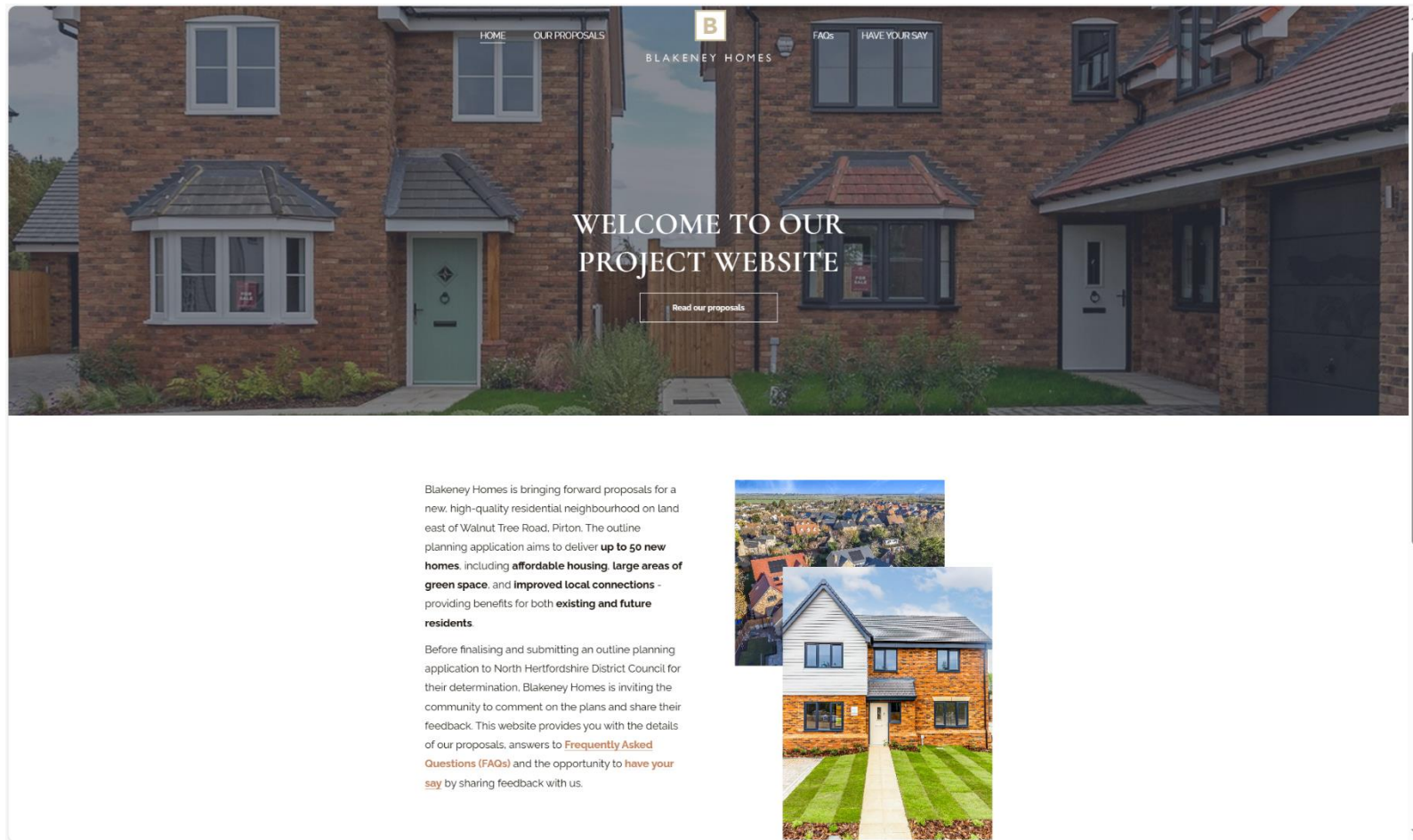


Calling our Freephone consultation number

on **0808 1688 296** and a member of the team will call you back at a time that is convenient for you.

We would be grateful for your feedback by **Friday 11 July 2025**.

Appendix 2: Website



The site

The site is located on land east of Walnut Tree Road in Pirton, on the edge of the village. Bounded by Hambridge Way to the north and a recent residential development to the west, the site lies close to key community amenities including Pirton Recreation Ground, village shops, a primary school, and social venues.

While outside the village boundary, the site is well connected to nearby towns such as Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, and Luton, making it a sustainable location for new homes.

Planning context

The site is not currently allocated for development and is located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, outside Pirton's village boundary. However, there is a clear local need for new homes, particularly affordable housing, as North Hertfordshire District Council is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, with only a 3.9-year supply available at present.

The proposals will be submitted as an outline planning application to establish the principle of development, with all detailed matters reserved except for access. This approach supports the delivery of sustainable housing to help meet local demand while respecting the character of the area.

What is outline planning permission?

An outline planning application seeks to agree the principle of development on a site. Detailed plans will be submitted for the means of access into the site and all other matters of detail, including appearance, landscaping, layout and the scale of development will need to be approved separately through the submission of a 'reserved matters' application. If the outline application is granted permission, no development can begin on site until Blakeney Homes has a reserved matters approved, which will agree the detail of the proposals, and will be subject to the same process of public consultation by the Council.

The outline planning application will be supported by a range of plans, including an illustrative concept plan, which will help to demonstrate how the proposals can be accommodated on the site. In addition, the outline planning application would be subject to other conditions dealing with matters including drainage and landscape management.



Site location plan (click to enlarge)

Benefits

The proposals would deliver a sustainable, accessible and well-connected new development featuring up to 50 new homes and providing the following benefits:



A range of housing types including 40% affordable to meet a variety of local needs



Energy efficient homes including integrated sustainable features such as air source heat pumps and solar panels



Enhancement of existing landscape features including significant areas of green open space, play area and biodiversity improvements



Integration with the character of the local area, preserving the distinct identity



New pedestrian and cycle routes, connecting to the existing public rights of way network and the wider area



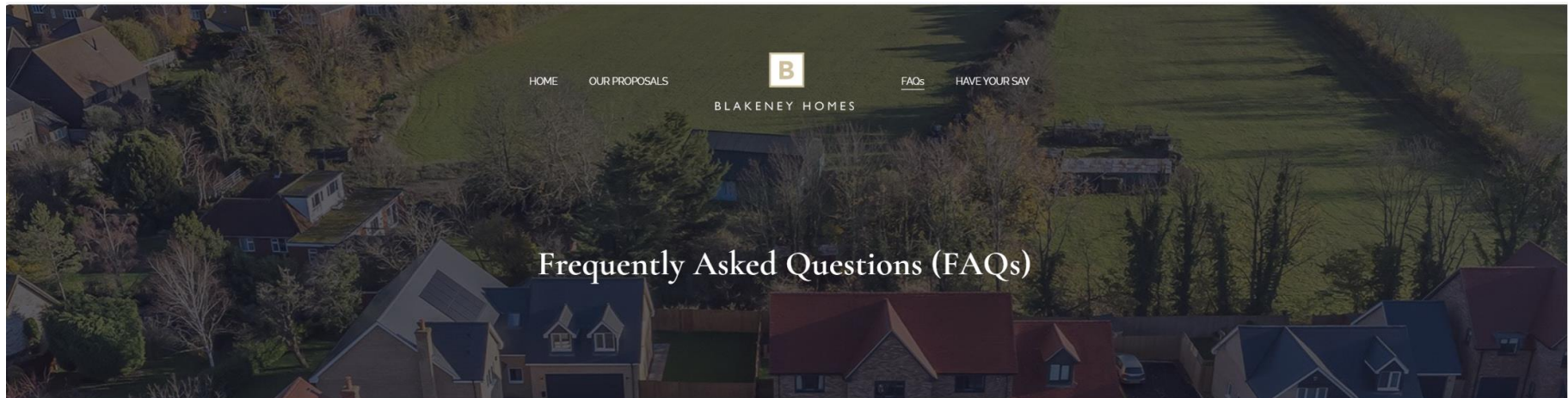
Financial contributions towards local community infrastructure through S106 funding

The Proposals

We are seeking outline planning permission for the delivery of up to 50 new homes. The scheme focuses on creating a high-quality, sustainable community with a strong emphasis on green spaces, ecological enhancements, and improved connectivity to local amenities.

The illustrative masterplan shows how the proposals could look.





[HOME](#)

[OUR PROPOSALS](#)



BLAKENEY HOMES

[FAQs](#)

[HAVE YOUR SAY](#)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The site

What is the site currently used for?



The site is currently used for agricultural purposes.

How large is the site?



The proposals

What type of planning application is being submitted?



Will you be providing affordable housing?



The proposals will deliver 40% affordable housing in compliance with council policy.

Does the site fall within the Neighbourhood Plan Area?



Housing

What type of housing will be delivered? ✓

Environment and landscape

Will you be removing any trees? ✓

Flooding and drainage

What is being done to minimise flood risk? ✓

Impact on neighbouring area

How will you protect the privacy of neighbours? ✓

Have you considered the potential impact on the sports club and recreation ground? ✓

Highways and transport

What mitigation will be put in place to minimise impact on the highway network? ✓

Will there be enough parking? ✓

Programme

When are you looking to submit an application? ✓

When will you start building work and how long will this take? ✓

How will construction vehicles, construction dirt and noise be managed? ✓



Have Your Say

We'd love to hear from you

We are keen to hear your feedback on our proposals and any comments received will be considered before we finalise our application. We would be grateful if you could provide any comments you have in the box below.

Name (required)

First Name

Last Name

Email

Comments:

Register to keep me updated on the project

☐ Tick here

Submit

**Please ensure that all comments reach us by
Friday 11 July 2025**

The information you provide will be used only for the purposes of keeping you informed about the proposals for Walnut Tree Road and for understanding public opinion on the project. It will be stored securely until completion of the project, after which this information will be deleted. Your information will only be shared with third parties for the express purpose of keeping you informed of the proposals, and with Blakeney Homes and/or the relevant local authority where there is a legal obligation to do so. It will not be forwarded on to any other third parties. You can contact us at any time to request the deletion of your information. Please contact us at contact@walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk

Alternatively you can contact us using the details below:



Freephone: 0808 1688 296



Email: contact@walnuttreeroadconsultation.co.uk

What happens next?

Following the consultation deadline, we will collate all feedback received. Once we have finalised our plans, we will submit a full planning application to North Herts Council. The council will undertake their own consultation prior to determining the application.