



North Hertfordshire District Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

04/02/2025

Dear Naomi Reynard,

Ref: 24/02889/FP - Land At Roundwood, Back Lane, Graveley, Hertfordshire.

Thank you for consulting us on the Full Planning Permission: Residential development of 281 dwellings and associated roads, parking, realignment of Back Lane, drainage, landscaping, open space, servicing facilities and associated works.

This review is based on a desktop study and site visit (30/01/2025) of the above-named application.

Site Context

The application site is located to the north of Stevenage, bound on two sides by Back Lane which runs along the southern and eastern boundaries. Open countryside is located to the north and west of the site, predominantly arable and grassland fields. All boundaries of the site are defined by established hedgerows, although the northern and western boundaries comprise woodland tree blocks which screen the site from the surrounding area. The site itself comprises one singular arable field.

Policy Context

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (Adopted 2022)

Policy GA1 allocated the Land at Roundwood (Graveley Parish) for 330 homes. The requirements under this policy include [inter alia]:

- *“Sensitive integration into existing settlement in terms of development layout and building orientation;*
- *Principal vehicular access taken from existing residential streets within Great Ashby;*
- *Provision for sustainable modes of transport having regard to the Stevenage Mobility Strategy;*
- *Maintain general integrity of Weston Road, including as a through route for pedestrians and cyclists;*
- *Retention and sensitive treatment of priority woodland habitats surrounding site to north and west;*
- *Consider and mitigate against any adverse impacts upon adjacent local wildlife site at Parsonsgreen Wood;*
- *Integration of Footpath Graveley 010 as a perimeter feature around the north of the site; and*
- *Sensitive design and landscaping around northern and western peripheries to minimise impacts upon wider landscape and heritage assets, including the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Chesfield Church.”*

Other policies to be considered relevant to landscape include Policy ENV3, ENV5, NE1, NE2, NE6, NE7, NE8, SP9 and SP12.



Review of Submitted Information

The application has been supported by the submission of a Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVA) produced by Nicholas Pearson Associates Ltd. The assessment broadly follows the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) and assesses sensitivity (value and susceptibility), magnitude of change and overall effects. Viewpoint photography was undertaken in March 2022 and February 2023 when there was a reduced leaf cover, therefore representing the worst-case scenario.

Landscape Character

Section 4.0 of the LVA references the National Character Areas (NCA) (2014), North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity) (2011) and the Site and Context. The LVA also identifies surrounding landscape receptors which could be affected by the proposed development.

The North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (2011) identifies the site as being located within Landscape Character Area 220 '[Weldon Plateau Parklands](#)'. The site conforms to the key characteristics, including, plateau landform, arable land use, extensive mature woodland cover, interlocking pattern of fields and lanes and curvilinear boundaries. It also has "*a mixture of smaller more intimate enclosures defined by woodland cover with open areas affording views over the plateau*".

We agree with the LVA (Para 4.1.12) that the LCA has **moderate** landscape value. However, the LVA does not assess LCA 220 any further. We would have expected LCA 220 to be assessed as a separate landscape receptor to those identified as LR1 (The Site and associated woodland), LR2 (Existing urban edge), LR3 (Boundary hedgerows/tree belt) and LR4 (Hertfordshire Way and planting) (Page 28/29).

Whilst the inclusion of LR1-LR4 is important, assessing these landscape receptors separately does not consider the cumulative character formed by combination of these features, as is usually represented by the relevant landscape character assessments, in this instance LCA 220 'Weston Plateau Parklands'. Since the LCA refers to a number of relevant features which are not covered by LR1-LR4, such as the arable land use, the interlocking pattern of fields and a network of winding lanes, the inclusion of this LCA 220 would have been important for understanding the impact on the wider character.

Notwithstanding this, combined with a **moderate value** (LVA, Para 4.1.12), we judge that the site has an **medium susceptibility**, resulting in an **medium sensitivity**. This accords with the level of sensitivity identified within LR1-LR4 (LVA, Page 28/29). We judge that the proposed development would cause an **medium-low magnitude of change** on completion, resulting in an overall **moderate-slight adverse effect**.

Therefore, this accords with the conclusion within Para 7.1.3 of the LVA and we agree that the proposals can be accommodated within this location.

Visual Amenity

Figure 7.09 Representative Viewpoint Locations identify the visual receptors assessed within the LVA. Overall, we judge that the 14no. viewpoint receptors identified are representative of potential views into the application site, particularly noting the views from the Hertfordshire Way which runs along the northern site boundary.

Whilst an established hedgerow largely separates the site from Back Lane, views are still obtained into the site where the hedgerow is maintained low (Viewpoint 4) or where vegetation and trees are thin (Viewpoint 9).

The submitted viewpoint photography demonstrates that the site is only visually perceptible from the immediate site boundaries on Back Lane and from the Hertfordshire Way, and from other mid-distance locations. There are no long-distance views of the application site, which has been represented within the judgements provided within the submitted LVA.

VR1 (Viewpoints 1, 2, 3 & 10) represents views from the Hertfordshire Way. Page 30 assesses the site as having **medium sensitivity** and a **low-medium magnitude of change**, resulting in a **slight to moderate adverse** overall level of effect.

We would however judge considering the importance of the long-distance walking route (Hertfordshire Way) and the recreational nature of the users, that these visual receptors would have a **high sensitivity**.

We also judge that these visual receptors would experience at least a **medium magnitude of change** considering that built development is brought up to the edge of the long-distance route and is visually perceptible, as per Figure 1 below. We acknowledge that some existing development is perceptible from the PRoW, however it is currently separated from this section of the route by rural arable countryside. The rural countryside view from the Hertfordshire Way would be replaced by close-distance urban frontage associated with the proposed development, and therefore we disagree with the low-medium magnitude of change. We judge that the overall effect would be at least moderate adverse at Year 0, if not higher. We therefore judge that the effects for the Hertfordshire Way have been underassessed within the submitted assessment.



Figure 1: View from the Hertfordshire Way

We do however judge that viewpoints on the south and east of Back Lane (VR2 and VR3) have been appropriately assessed.

We agree that (Para 9.1.2) the extent of vegetation associated with the site provides considerable visual containment and enclosure, which reduces longer distance views and impacts. The influence of the surrounding development does also reduce the visual impact.

Notwithstanding our concerns that the visual assessment of the Hertfordshire Way has been underassessed within the LVA, we judge that mitigation measures have been proposed to help reduce the impacts of the proposals (12m offset, tree and hedgerow planting) and therefore the proposed development could be successfully accommodated within this landscape.

Review of Masterplan Proposals

Following the previous application, the number of proposed dwellings has been reduced from 292 to 281 dwellings. Both of these are less than the 330 dwellings outlined in Policy GA1, which positively effects the available open space and offset distances from perimeter vegetation.

Para 9.1.3 of the LVA refers to the provision of a 7-15m wide landscape buffer around the perimeter of the application Site, providing separation to the surrounding tree belt. We agree this contributes well to reducing the physical impact on the retained landscape features and also reduces the visual impact on Back Lane and the Hertfordshire Way. This also considers the *“retention and sensitive treatment of priority woodland habitats surrounding site to north and west”* and *“consider and mitigate against any adverse impacts upon adjacent local wildlife site at Parsonsgreen Wood”* (Policy GA1).

Proposed houses are predominantly 2-storey, with the proposed 3-storey buildings largely located along the south-eastern corner of the site, closest to the existing built edge. We judge that this arrangement successfully accords with the Policy GA1 requirement to consider *“sensitive integration into existing settlement in terms of development layout and building orientation”*.

Para 4.4.2 of the Planning Statement states; *“The existing Back Lane will be stopped up for motor vehicle traffic. It will be narrowed to allow a 2m tarmac strip with a 1m verge for horse use and will also cater for pedestrian and cycle use”*. Utilising Back Lane for pedestrian/cycle routes is preferable than the previous layout under 23/02492/FP which used this road as the primary access to the development.

Public Open Spaces (POS) on all boundaries are overlooked by a frontage which is orientated to provide passive surveillance of the public areas, contributing to the principle of Designing Out Crime.

We noted the wet ground along the eastern and northern site boundaries, within the grass track. We are therefore pleased to see the inclusion of swales along the eastern boundary.

Recommendations

We advise the following recommendations are considered:

- We advise garden layouts are rearranged to avoid angular corners, such as that indicated for Plots 172 and 173. The rear corners of the garden for these plots will be difficult to maintain and is an impractical shape.
- All basins to the south are surrounded by a 1.2m post and rail (cleft chestnut). We question whether a lower-level knee rail could be proposed instead, or some of these fences are removed entirely and a low gradient edge (less than 1:4) is proposed to ensure the safety of users. Marginal planting/shrub planting could be proposed to act as a soft safety barrier for pedestrians surrounding the basins.
- Page 59 of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) identifies ‘Play on the Way’ primarily within Character Area 4 ‘Green Spine’, within the Linear Park. Whilst this is welcomed, we question whether some elements of the Linear Park could also be integrated into other POS areas of the site, such as the northern greenway, which are not parallel to roads.
- The Design Objectives for the Linear Park state that the play areas are ‘subtly zoned’. We are pleased to see that the Enclosures Plan does not physically separate these areas through hard barriers. Further information within the Design Objectives should describe what measures are included with the ‘subtle zoning’.

- Specifications for hoggins, patio and all hard surfaces should be included on the submitted Surface Materials Plan.
- Details of proposed tree pits should be submitted for review considering trees are proposed in close proximity of hard surfaces.
- We would expect the submitted Planting Plans to be accompanied by a Planting Schedule and Specifications.

Overall, we welcome the submitted proposals and judge that most of the required information is included within the Planting Plans and Surface Materials Plan, negating the need for conditions. However, we advise that the following planning condition is considered:

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN

No development above ground level shall take place until a landscape management plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules and periods for all soft landscape areas (other than small privately owned domestic gardens) together with a timetable for the implementation of the landscape management plan, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The landscape management plan shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and timetable.

Reason: To ensure the longevity of the landscaping scheme and protect the visual amenity and character of the area, in accordance with Policy SP12 and Policy GA1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

If you have any queries relating to the above, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Yours sincerely,

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Landscape Consultant