



# Planning, Design and Access Statement

Application on behalf of Watford Community Housing

Erection of 26 Affordable Dwellings and Associated Access Road  
Land to the East of Firs Wood Close, Northaw

**DLA Ref: 19/095**  
**May 2019**

## CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION .....	3
2.0	SITE & CONTEXT ANALYSIS.....	6
3.0	RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY .....	12
4.0	POLICY CONTEXT .....	14
5.0	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT.....	17
6.0	CONSULTATIONS.....	19
7.0	PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS.....	21
7.1.0	Issue No 1: Principle .....	22
7.2.0	Issue No 2: Quality of Design, Character and Appearance.....	29
7.3.0	Issue No 3: Affordable Housing Statement & Dwelling Mix.....	31
7.4.0	Issue No 4: Transport, Highway Safety & Accessibility .....	34
7.5.0	Issue No 5: Other Considerations.....	35
7.6.0	Issue No 6: Sustainable Development.....	38
8.0	CONCLUSIONS .....	41

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1.0 Background

1.1.1 This report relates to a planning application for the erection of 26 affordable units and associated access road at Land to the East of Firs Wood Close, Northaw.

### 1.2.0 Scope

1.2.1 This document comprises an overarching Planning Report incorporating a Design and Access Statement. Sections 2 to 4 consider the physical, economic, social and historical context of the site, identifying the relevant local, regional and national planning policy framework; Section 5 sets out the details of the proposal; and Section 6 details the consultations undertaken prior to the submission of the application. All these sections inform the evaluation of the proposal in Section 7 against the identified planning policy framework. The overall conclusions are set out in Section 8 and which are summarised below at paragraph 1.3.0.

### 1.3.0 Summary

1) The development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would comprise a limited affordable housing scheme. Policy RA14 is considered to be mostly out-of-

date because small-scale affordable housing schemes are unlikely to satisfy the acute need for affordable homes in the locality.

- 2) There is a dire need for affordable housing in the Borough, especially in Northaw and Cuffley. As such, a 100% affordable scheme for 26 units would make a considerable contribution to meeting local affordable housing need and should therefore carry significant weight in the balance.
- 3) The Council lacks a 5-year housing land supply and so permission should be granted unless there are clear adverse impacts in accordance with NPPF Paragraph 11.
- 4) The proposed scheme cannot be considered as an unsustainable/isolated development based solely on its proximity to local services and facilities. There is no national policy against residential development in settlements without facilities and services. The Court of Appeal envisaged a more flexible approach to development outside designated settlement boundaries in the pursuit of sustainable development in rural areas.
- 5) The layout and design would be of high quality and would respect and relate to the semi-rural character and context of

the area in accordance with saved policies D1, D2 and Supplementary Design Guidance.

- 6) The LVIA concludes that the proposed development can be integrated without any significant detriment to the localised and wider character of the landscape setting and can be accommodated within the receiving visual element.
- 7) Proposed landscaping would create a layered landscape effect, which would help soften the built form and set it within the semi-rural context.
- 8) The location of the site and the mix of affordable dwellings were tested with Welwyn Hatfield Housing Team to ensure that the proposal satisfies local needs and market requirements. As such, the proposal would make a valuable contribution to the future affordable housing supply in Northaw and Cuffley in line with Policies H7 and H8 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.
- 9) The Transport statement states that there is potential for future households in the development to utilise environmentally sustainable modes of transport. In addition, there are no highways or transportation reasons why the proposal should not be granted planning permission.
- 10) The Ecology Appraisal identified that some protected species could be present but given the site's size and other factors these are unlikely to be significant populations and mitigation is readily available on the adjacent site if required site. A Great Crested Newt survey has been commissioned and will be submitted in due course.
- 11) Low quality trees would be removed; however, the retention and protection of the TPO's woodland to the south and the presence of adjacent woodland and trees to the north and west of the site (also TPO's) along Firs Wood Close and Hook Lane would provide immediate mitigation for the loss of trees.
- 12) The energy assessment identified how 12.88 % of regulated carbon emissions for which this development is responsible, are proposed to be off-set by various energy efficiency measures compared to a Building Regulations 2013 Part L compliant scheme.
- 13) No suspected contaminated ground conditions or elevated concentrations of contaminants were found. Furthermore, piled foundations would likely be required to for the support of most/all buildings in the development with suspended slabs.
- 14) The drainage assessment identifies a low risk of flooding and recommends a drainage strategy.

- 15) The economic, social and environmental benefits are considered to weigh in favour of the proposal.
- 16) As the Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply and its housing policies are out-of-date, the tilted balance is engaged, and the application should be granted unless *“any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”*. It is considered that there are no adverse impacts which would outweigh the benefits of providing affordable housing in this location.

## 2.0 SITE & CONTEXT ANALYSIS

### 2.1.0 Location

2.1.1 The site is located to the east of Potters Bar and to the south of Northaw Village. Coopers Lane Road (directly to the south of the site) and Coopers Lane are the connecting routes, which link the site to Potters Bar and Northaw.



Figure 1: Location of the site

### 2.2.0 Application Site

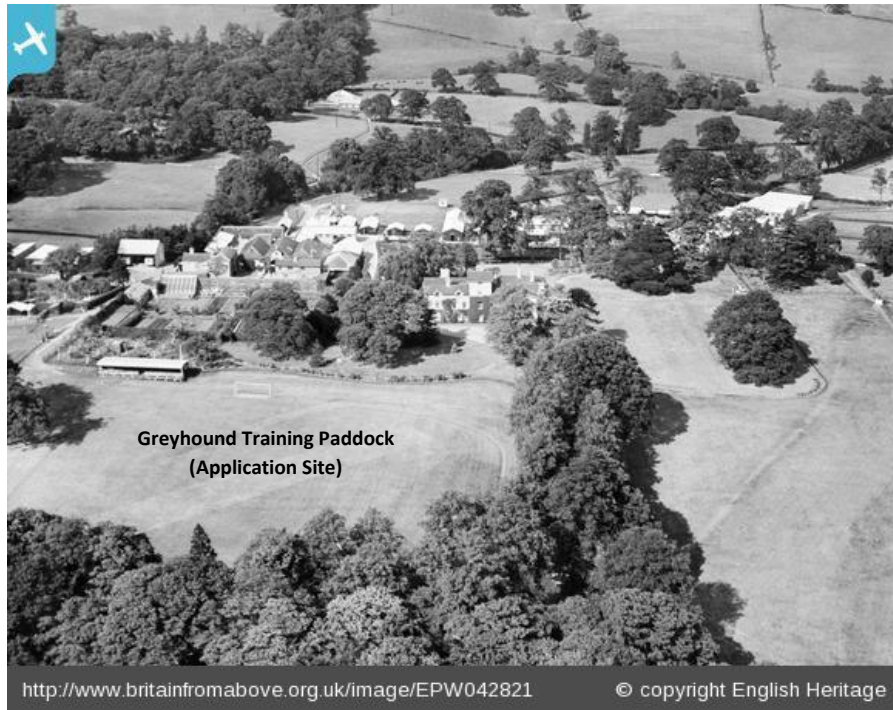
2.2.1 The application site is a small area of approximately 0.7 hectares, situated between the Oshwal Centre to east and housing to the north/west. The site is predominantly flat, open scrubland with existing hedgerows and trees bordering the site to the south, east and north. Firs Wood Close runs parallel along the western boundary of the site.

### 2.3.0 Context

2.3.1 The application site previously formed part of a larger established site known as 'Hook Kennels' (Figure 3). This was occupied by the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA), which at the time was the largest training centre in England and employed over 400 people. A residential block was built in 1957, providing living quarters for staff members and was eventually supplemented by twenty-four houses on Hook Lane, including further accommodation in Northaw.

2.3.2 The Hook Kennels site was comprehensively redeveloped for a change of use from the Greyhound Racing Association headquarters to residential use following permission granted by application S6/1987/0171/FP. The redeveloped site comprises 38 dwellings, which are predominantly small terraced properties arranged around a landscaped courtyard. Four large detached

properties were included within the permission. Existing dwellings on Hook Lane were retained and are located to west.



Greyhound Training Paddock  
(Application Site)

Figure 2: Aerial photo of Hook Kennels in the 1930s

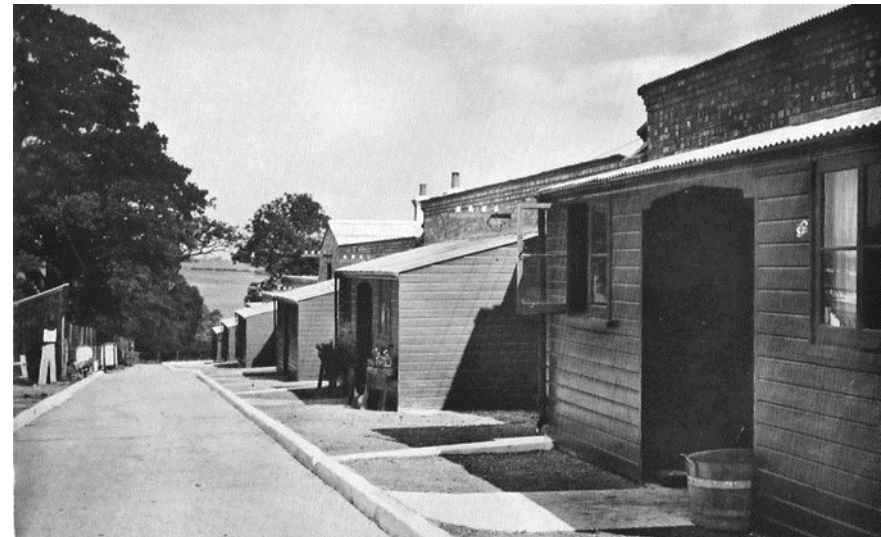


Figure 3: Hook Kennels (Wikipedia, 2019)

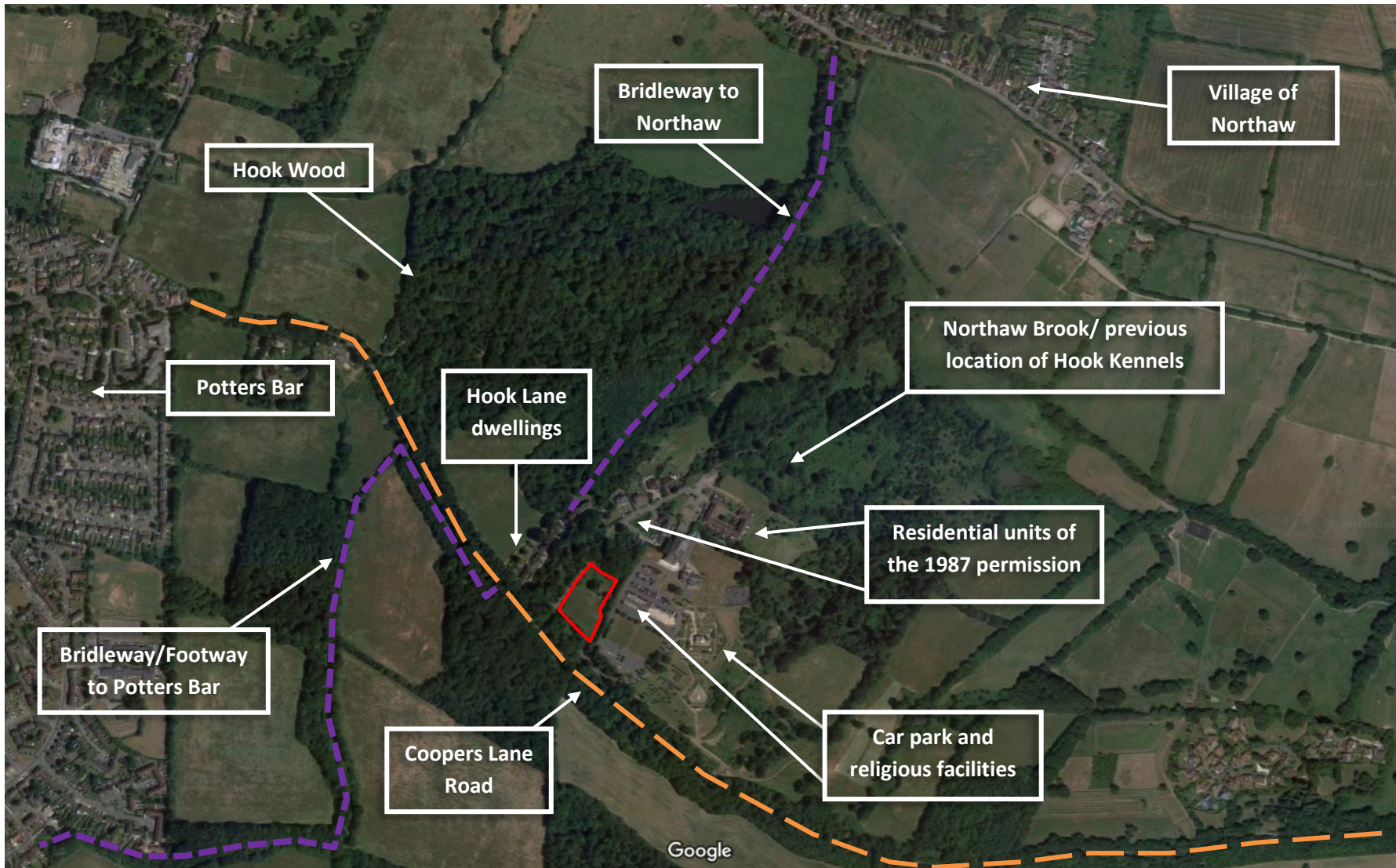
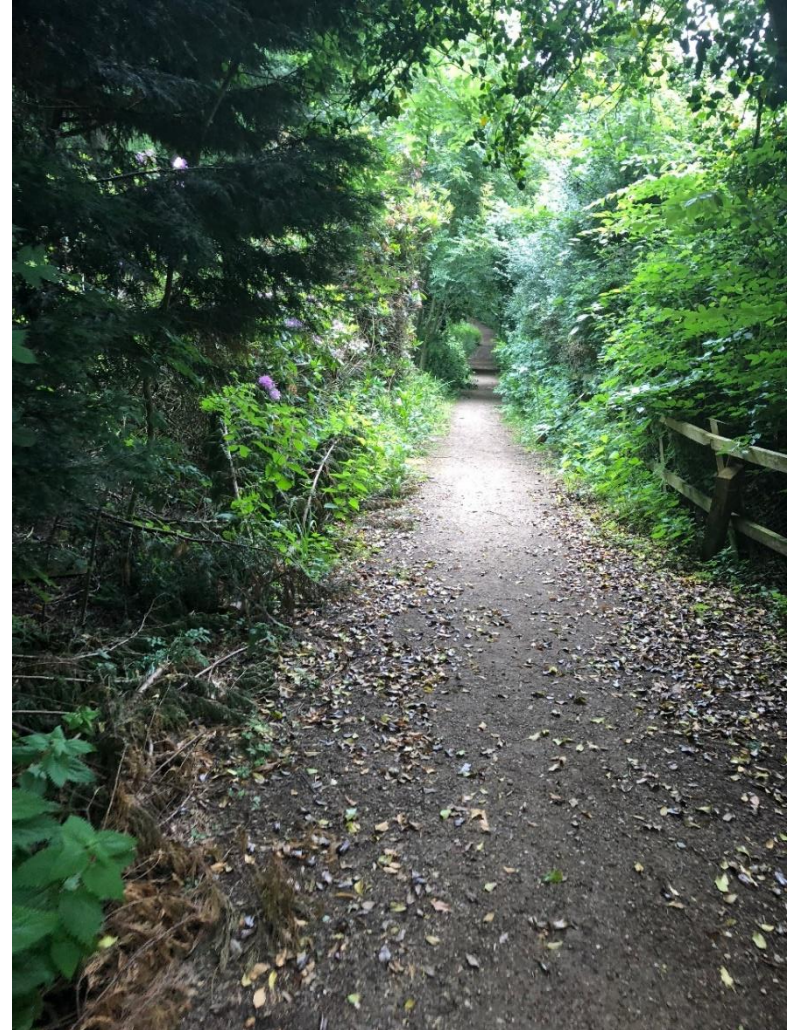


Figure 2: The site and surrounding area





*Figure 3: Land to the East of Firs Wood Close*



*Figure 4: Bridleway to Northaw*

2.4.0 **Surrounding Development and Character**

2.4.1 Adjacent to the site is a large car park and various buildings associated with the Oshwal community and religious centre used by the Jain Community. Directly to the south of the site across Coopers Lane Road is a large area of woodland belonging to Herts and Middlesex Woodland Trust, which stretches southwards until it abuts the M25.

2.4.2 The surrounding character is rural and consists predominantly of large areas of woodland, pastoral farmland and scrub, which is contained by established hedgerows. The Village of Northaw is some 1km to the north and the large built-up settlement of Potters Bar is some 0.65km to the west.

2.5.0 **Local Services and Accessibility**

2.5.1 The proposed site would benefit from reasonable access to local services and facilities in Northaw (from the bridleway) and to the built-up area of Potters Bar.

Type	Local Provision	Distance from site (km)	Approx. journey time (mins)	
			Car	Cycling /Walking
Retail	Potters Bar Town Centre	2.0km	3 mins	7 mins (cycling)

	Tesco Superstore	2.9km	7 mins	11 mins (cycling)
	Co-op Food	2.2km	4 mins	8 mins (cycling)
<b>Education</b>	Northaw Church of England Primary School	1.6km (Bridleway)	4 mins	6 mins / 19 mins
	Squiggles Pre-school	1.3km (Bridleway)	4 mins	5 mins / 16 mins
	Stormont School	1.4km	2 mins	5 mins (cycling)
	Mount Grace School	2.6km	5 mins	9 mins (Cycling)
	Oakmere Primary School	2.8 km or 2.3km	6 mins	7 mins / 26 mins
<b>Leisure &amp; Community Facilities</b>	St Thomas a Becket Church	1.4km (Bridleway)	5 mins	5 mins / 17 mins
	Northaw Village Hall	1.3km (Bridleway)	4 mins	5 mins / 16 mins

	Two Brewers	1.3km (Bridleway)	5 mins	6 mins / 17 mins
	Northaw Scout Hut	1.4km (Bridleway)	5 mins	6 mins / 17 mins

2.6.0 **Proposals Map Notation**

2.6.1 The Proposals map of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 shows the site is within the Green Belt and forms part of the Northaw Common Parkland Landscape Character Area.

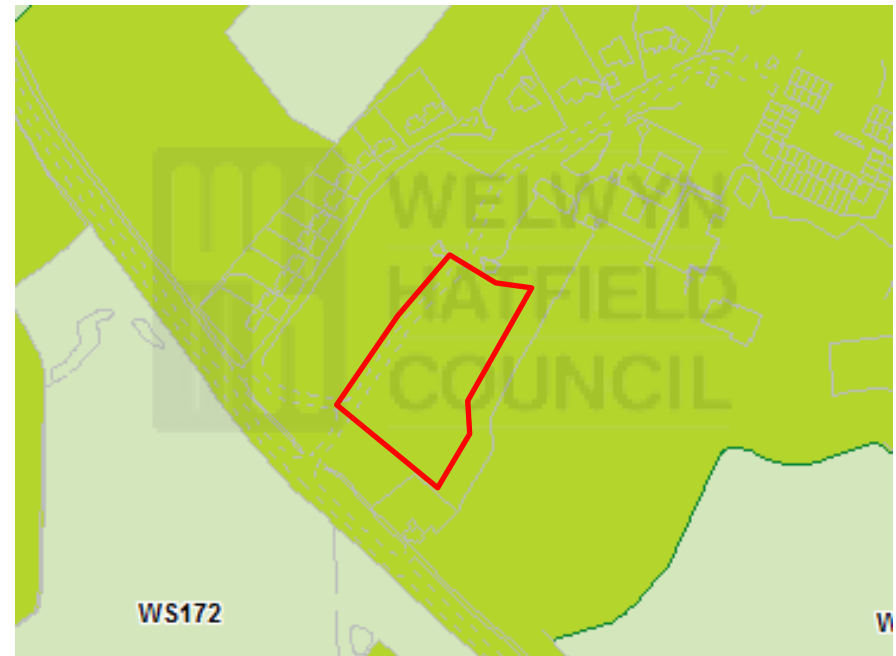


Figure 5: Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Proposals Map

### 3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

#### 3.1.0 Application Site

3.1.1 The relevant history of the application site is summarised in Figure 3.1.0 below.

LPA Ref	Proposal	Outcome
<b>S6/1974/0205/</b>	Site for terrace of three houses and garages	Granted- 28/03/74
<b>S6/1974/0404/</b>	Demolition of 3 cottages and erection of a terrace of 3 bedroomed houses	Granted- 09/08/74
<b>S6/1975/0006/</b>	Site for public golf centre incorporating Club House, driving range two nine hole golf courses and car park for 200 cars	Refused- 07/05/75
<b>S6/1984/0624/</b>	Site for 220 accommodation units and use of property as an institution for the boarding, care and	Refused- 18/01/85

	maintenance of old people	
<b>S6/1985/0710/OP</b>	Site for 220 accommodation units with landscaping, footpaths and parking and use of property as institution for boarding + maintenance of old people	Appeal dismissed- 18/01/86
<b>S6/1987/0171/FP</b>	Change of use of existing racing association headquarters to residential comprising conversion and extensions to form 38 dwellings with associated car parking and access, and erection of one detached house with garage	Granted- 31/10/87
<b>S6/1988/1165/FP</b>	Erection of two semi-detached dwellings,	Granted- 13/01/89

	with detached double garages after demolition of existing building	
<b>S6/1988/0855/FP</b>	Rebuilding of four residential units	Granted- 21/10/88
<b>6/2019/0415/LAWP</b>	Certificate of lawfulness for the continuation of development of three dwellings with associated garages	Ongoing

## 4.0 POLICY CONTEXT

### 4.1.0 National Planning Policy Framework

4.1.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018, which was updated on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019 and sets out the government’s planning policies for England. Paragraphs 11 to 14 ‘The presumption in favour of sustainable development’- and Section 2: ‘Achieving Sustainable Development’ are directly relevant to this application. Particular account is also taken of:

- Decision-making (Section 4);
- Delivering a sufficient supply of homes (Section 5);
- Promoting healthy and safe communities (Section 8);
- Promoting sustainable transport (Section 9);
- Making effective use of land (Section 11);
- Achieving well designed places (Section 12);
- Protecting Green Belt Land (Section 13); and
- Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change (Section 14).

4.1.2 The revised NPPF has broadened the traditional definition of affordable housing in Annex 2 to include starter homes, discounted market sales housing and other affordable routes to

home ownership. These innovations have been integrated in an attempt to boost the countries much-needed provision of affordable homes and to tackle chronic undersupply.

4.1.3 The National Planning Policy Guidance contains detailed guidance on the application of the NPPF and is a material consideration in the decision-making process.

### 4.2.0 Development Plan

4.2.1 The current planning policies for Welwyn Hatfield are set out in the statutory development plan which comprises: the saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan adopted 2005, the Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan adopted 2012-2014 and the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan adopted 2007.

4.2.2 The Welwyn and Hatfield District Plan was formally adopted in 2005. The Secretary of State’s Direction in 2008 saved certain policies that were considered still relevant in decision-making. However, as the saved Policies pre-date the publication of the NPPF many carry limited weight.

Policy No.	Title
Policy SD1	Sustainable Development
Policy GBSP1	Definition of Green Belt
Policy GBSP2	Towns and Specified Settlements

<b>Policy D1</b>	Quality of Design
<b>Policy D2</b>	Character and Context
<b>Policy D5</b>	Design for Movement
<b>Policy D7</b>	Safety by Design
<b>Policy D8</b>	Landscaping
<b>Policy D9</b>	Access and Design for People with Disabilities
<b>Policy R3</b>	Energy Efficiency
<b>Policy R4</b>	Renewable Energy Sources
<b>Policy R5</b>	Waste Management
<b>Policy R7</b>	Protection of Ground and Service Water
<b>Policy R10</b>	Water Conservation Measures
<b>Policy R11</b>	Biodiversity and Development
<b>Policy R17</b>	Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
<b>Policy H2</b>	Location of Windfall Residential Development
<b>Policy H6</b>	Densities
<b>Policy H7</b>	Affordable Housing
<b>Policy H10</b>	Accessible Housing
<b>Policy RA1</b>	Development in the Green Belt
<b>Policy RA10</b>	Landscape Regions and Character Areas
<b>Policy RA14</b>	Rural Exception Sites
<b>Policy M1</b>	Integrating Transport and Land Use
<b>Policy M5</b>	Pedestrian Facilities
<b>Policy M6</b>	Cycle Routes and Facilities
<b>Policy M14</b>	Parking Standards for New Development

#### 4.3.0 **Emerging Development Plan & Evidence Base**

4.3.1 The draft Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan was submitted for examination on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2017. Once the Emerging Local Plan has been formally adopted it will cover the period to at least 2031 and will eventually replace the saved policies in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

4.3.2 There is an evident need for additional housing provision in the draft Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan, as confirmed by the Inspector who is currently examining the Plan. There is insufficient land outside of the Green Belt to meet the housing shortfall, such that additional land now needs to be removed from the Green Belt. As such, a “Call for Sites” exercise is currently being undertaken by Welwyn and Hatfield in order to identify suitable land.

4.3.3 A recent letter to the Colin Haigh (Head of Planning) from the Planning Inspector highlighted that *“...in the current circumstances of the plan’s Examination, a further call for sites is unavoidable and that additional consultation will be necessary as a result of this exercise, I remain to be convinced that a timetable that prolongs this examination until the spring of 2020 is absolutely necessary”*.

4.3.4 In addition to this, an Inspector in a recent appeal decision (Appeal ref: APP/C1950/W/319164) stated that *“taking all the*

*stages that the eLP has yet to pass, including possible intervention by the Secretary of State and the Courts, I consider that adoption of the eLP towards the back end of 2019 or early 2020 is a more realistic conclusion. For these reasons, I conclude that the eLP is not in an advanced stage”.*

4.3.4 With these reasons in mind and as stipulated in paragraph 48 of the NPPF, the emerging Local Plan is not considered to be in an advanced stage and, therefore, should be given limited weight in the decision of this application.

4.4.0 **Supplementary Planning Guidance / Documents:**

- Supplementary Design Guidance (2005);
- Parking Standards (2004); and
- Interim Policy for Car Parking Standards and Garage Sizes (2014)

4.5.0 **Other Relevant Guidance:**

- Welwyn Hatfield Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update (May 2017);
- Annual Monitoring Report (2017/18); and
- Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment



## 5.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

### 5.1.0 Use

5.1.1 This proposal is for the erection of 26 affordable units, associated access road and three shared spurs.

### 5.2.0 Layout

5.2.1 The proposal would provide a new access point off the south-east side of Firs Wood Close, extending in a simple curvilinear manner through the centre of the site. The new road terminates in a turning area, which enables service and emergency vehicles to safely manoeuvre when exiting the development.

5.2.2 The scheme is relatively low in density and the proposed dwellings are generally spread out to reflect the site's semi-rural location. The dwellings would consist of mainly two and three-bedroom semi-detached dwellings of varying size with larger plots offered to the south-western dwellings. Upon entering the development, plots 24, 25 and 26 would be the only terrace of three, whilst plot 5 would be the only detached dwelling.

5.2.3 Each dwelling has its own front garden and allocated parking spaces close by. Visitor parking to serve the whole development is conveniently provided in two areas, each having an electronic charging station, so as to be quite close to all of the new houses.

### 5.3.0 Appearance & Scale

5.3.1 The development will be traditional in appearance to reflect the vernacular architecture of residential buildings on Hook Lane and in Northaw. The choice of materials including brickwork, plain roof tiles, painted render and stained timber will follow the established pattern of traditional buildings in the area. Extracts from the street scene are exhibited below:



Figure 6: Extract of the Street Scene (not to scale)



Figure 7: Extract of the Street Scene (not to scale)



Figure 8: Extract of the Street Scene (not to scale)

#### 5.4.0 **Landscaping**

5.4.1 A scattering of existing trees would be removed from the site to facilitate the proposed development. However, the wooded area and existing trees along the boundary would be retained to ensure the site remains well-screened and contained from existing developments on all perimeters. Car parking would be kept within screening provided by the proposed site layout and landscaping.

5.4.2 In addition, new 4.0m depth native planting would be introduced along the western boundary to ensure that the proposed dwellings are screened from Firs Wood Close and the existing dwellings on Hook Lane. The introduction of planting within the proposed development would create a layered landscape effect, which would help soften the built form and set it within the semi-rural context.

#### 5.5.0 **Access**

5.5.1 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site would be provided via a new 6.0m wide access road to the east of Firs Wood Close with 2m wide footways leading to shared surface circulation on the frontage of plots 14 -21. The 2m wide footpath is provided on each side of the access road for good pedestrian permeability through the site and there are three shared surface spurs to serve

dwellings located in three of the four corners of the development.

## 6.0 CONSULTATIONS

6.1.1 A pre-application enquiry for the erection of 26 affordable units (6/2018/2233/PA) was made ahead of the submission of this application. An informal meeting occurred on the 11<sup>th</sup> October with the Case Officer, which was followed by a written response on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and has been summarised below:

### 6.1.2 Principle of development (Sustainability)

- The site has not been allocated in the District Plan for additional housing supply and as such would come forward as a windfall residential site of which Policy H2 would apply.
- The site is located approximately 2.5km from the shops and services within the nearest settlement of Potters Bar, with none of these being within reasonable walking distance.
- There are no footpaths on either side of Coopers Lane Road for a considerable distance and the site is poorly connected to alternative modes of transport due to its rural location.
- Future occupants would be heavily reliant on private modes of transport.

- The site comprises open and undeveloped land and given the site's location in the Green Belt, this is a constraint on development of this site.
- This development would encourage an unsustainable pattern of development within the Green Belt.

### 6.1.3 Principle of Development (Green Belt)

- It is judged that the proposed development does not fall within exception (f) of paragraph 145 or any other exceptions listed within this paragraph and, as such, the proposal represents inappropriate development.
- The proposal satisfies three out of the five Green Belt purposes. These being purposes 1, 2 and 4.
- Whilst it is acknowledged that a significant amount of development has taken place within Firs Wood Close. It is also relevant this permission pre-dates the current development plan, as well as national policy.
- Although visual impact of the existing historical development is softened to a degree by existing planting, it is nevertheless a significantly intrusive feature in the landscape.
- Development has already caused harm to the landscape in this vicinity, this harm does not justify development which would add significantly to that harm.

- The development represents a substantial intrusion of built form and physical permanence over a wide area of previously undeveloped land.
- The proposals do not demonstrate that the landscape character would be conserved, maintained or enhanced.

#### 6.1.4 Very Special Circumstances

- Housing Land Supply position is a material consideration which is needed to boost the supply of housing. However, when considered alone, this is not sufficient to amount to very special circumstances.
- The area around the application site has a very low level of affordable housing at present and this would increase the supply.
- Unmet need for affordable housing carries moderate weight in favour of the proposal.
- Very Special Circumstances advanced are not considered to outweigh the harm. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.

## 7.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

Based on the analysis set out in Sections 2 to 5, I consider that the application proposal raises the following issues, which I will consider in turn below:

1. Principle
2. Quality of Design, Character and Appearance
3. Affordable Housing Statement & Dwelling Mix
4. Highway Safety & Accessibility
5. Other Considerations
6. Sustainable Development

## 7.1.0 **Issue No 1: Principle**

### 7.1.1 **Green Belt**

7.1.2 Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that the fundamental aim of the Government's Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and it identifies the essential characteristics of Green Belts as being their openness and their permanence. To this end paragraph 143 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

7.1.3 Notwithstanding this, paragraph 145 confirms that whilst the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, there are number exceptions to this, and which includes the following:

*"f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and..."*

7.1.4 It is considered that the proposed development of the site would not be inappropriate development in this context. Policy RA14 is considered to be mostly out-of-date because small-scale affordable housing schemes are unlikely to satisfy the acute need for affordable homes in the locality. Equally, there needs to be more flexibility in where these affordable schemes are located if

the backlog of affordable housing is to be cleared. It should be noted that the time and financial costs of developing brownfield land has a direct impact on the viability of residential schemes, which tends to result in lower than average levels of affordable housing.

7.1.5 As such, 'Limited' affordable housing should apply, replacing what would have previously constituted small-scale rural exception sites in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan. An Inspector concluded in a recent appeal that *"...in the absence of a definition of 'limited' for the purposes of the Framework that it could mean either a small area in terms of land take, or the delivery of only the amount of units required"* (Appeal ref: APP/R3705/W/16/3144450).

7.1.6 With regards to land take of the proposed development, it would cover a small area of approximately 0.7 hectares and the delivery of 26 affordable units would reflect the required need in the Borough. The 2017 Welwyn Hatfield SHMA suggested that 818 affordable homes per annum would be needed until 2022, with 602 affordable units needed annually thereafter. This scheme would equate to 3% of the annual need and, which is considered to deliver the number of units required in one of the most unaffordable areas of the Borough.

7.1.7 For the purposes of this application, both in terms of land take and the number of dwellings proposed, the scheme is measured as

*'limited'*. These considerations would support the conclusion that the proposal would represent *'limited'* affordable housing.

7.1.8 Moreover, Policy H2 (Location of Windfall Residential Development) seeks to guide non-allocated residential development against a set criteria. However, when residential development coming forward in the Borough is largely windfall, there needs to greater flexibility in the assessing sites given the limited supply of available land.

7.1.9 Policy H2 also refers to resisting development that would lead to a significant over-supply of housing. When there is in fact a clear undersupply of housing and insufficient land to support the Borough's Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) (of which circa 80% is Green Belt land), it is considered that this aspect of the Policy should be afforded limited weight.

#### 7.1.10 **Local Affordable Housing Need**

7.1.11 Persistent housing under-delivery has exacerbated affordability issues across the Borough. It is well known that house prices in Welwyn Hatfield are well above National and East of England regional averages. This has coincided with affordability concerns relating to a growing divergence between income and house prices.

7.1.12 The AMR identifies that the lower quartile house prices are now 12.22 times the average lower quartile income in Welwyn Hatfield, which means those earning lower incomes (including even those on higher incomes) will find it increasingly difficult to buy a home.

7.1.13 According to statistics produced in the AMR there has been 44 affordable housing completions in 2017/18, equivalent to 18.5% of total new C3 dwelling completions. Although, the Welwyn Hatfield SHMA suggests that meeting the affordable housing need in full would require an overall level of housing provision in excess of that needed to accommodate demographic growth in population. This cannot be achieved if on average, only 20% of newly built homes are expected to be affordable.

7.1.14 Merely increasing housing delivery with an average percentage of 20% affordable housing provision, is not a sufficient or sustainable means of effectively improving affordability. Affordable housing Policy needs to be supplemented with genuinely affordable housing schemes, if current and undesirable trends - nationally and locally - have any reasonable chance of being fixed.

7.1.15 NPPF paragraph 77 states that decisions in rural areas should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs. In particular, LPA's should support rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs. In this circumstance, a 100% affordable scheme for 26 units would make a considerable

contribution to meeting local affordable housing need and should therefore carry significant weight in the balance.

#### 7.1.16 Housing Land Supply

7.1.17 Chapter 5 of the revised NPPF maintains the objective of ‘significantly boosting the supply of homes’ to meet local housing needs and its requirement for LPAs to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply position. In addition, there is greater emphasis the revised framework on the delivery of new homes and it formalises the introduction of a new standardised methodology for calculating housing need and the Housing Delivery Test.

7.1.18 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had previously identified a 5.85-year housing land supply based on the emerging Local Plan. However, NPPF paragraph 73 states that *“local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years’ worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old”*.

7.1.19 The emerging Local Plan is not adopted strategic policy and, therefore is not considered to be a robust basis for land supply calculations, as the starting point for a five-year requirement is the adopted Local Plan. Considering the adopted Local Plan is over five years old and the 2017 SHMA does not represent adopted strategic

policies, the newly formed standardised methodology should be applied.

7.1.20 At a recent appeal in Welwyn Hatfield Borough (Appeal ref: APP/C1950/W/319164), the Inspector stated that the most appropriate basis for the five-year supply calculations was the standardised methodology and not, as the Council sought to defend, the emerging Local Plan based on a recent SHMA.

7.1.21 As such, the Inspector concluded that Welwyn Hatfield Council *“cannot show a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites and that the scale of its supply falls considerably well short of 5 years”*.

7.1.22 However, at the time of Appeal decision, the July 2018 version of the NPPF was applicable. This required use of the standard method to calculate local housing need, based on the latest household projections, which at that stage were the 2016-based projections. Nevertheless, National policy now comprises the February 2019 version of the NPPF, which requires use of the 2014-based household projections as the starting point for local housing need.

7.1.23 Under the 2014-household projections, the February 2019 AMR indicates that there is a minimum annual housing need of 867 dwellings per annum. From these projections, the Council have identified 3.1-year housing land supply.



7.1.24 Moreover, the MHCLG have recently published housing delivery test figures for 2018. It identified that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council built 1,493 homes in the period 2015/16 - 2017/18 against a target of 1,701 homes, which equates to 88%. As the Council's housing delivery has fallen below 95%, the authority is required to prepare an action plan in line with national planning guidance, to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years.

7.1.25 If Welwyn Hatfield delivery falls 4% more (less than 85%), then they would be required to add a 20% buffer to their five-year housing land supply rather than the current 5% buffer. This would worsen the Borough's current land supply position.

7.1.26 The presence or absence of a five-year housing land supply is critical to the determination of the application since it affects the weight that can be attributed to key development plan policies that affect the supply of housing. As such, the absence of a five-year land supply means paragraph 11 is engaged.

7.1.27 Paragraph 11 sets out what is commonly known as the 'tilted balance' in favour of granting planning permission. Specifically, planning permission should be granted unless "any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole".

#### 7.1.28 **An Isolated Development?**

7.1.29 In the pre-application response, the Council stated that the development would encourage an unsustainable pattern of development within the Green Belt in respect of Policy H2 due to its isolated location.

7.1.30 However, in the case of **Braintree BC v SSCLG [2018] EWCA Civ. 610** at the Court of Appeal, Lindblom LJ held that:

*Paragraph 55 is expressed in general and un-prescriptive terms. It does not dictate a particular outcome for an application for planning permission. It identifies broad principles and indicates a broad approach. LPAs are advised what "should" be done. The policy is not expressed as containing a "presumption", and the paragraph should not be read as creating one. Rather, it indicates to authorities, in very broad terms, how they ought to go about achieving the aim stated at the beginning of paragraph 55: "[to] promote sustainable development in rural areas. It does not apply specific tests or criteria by which to judge the acceptability of a proposal. It does not identify particular questions for a local planning authority to ask itself when determining an application for planning permission. Its tenor is quite different, for example, from the policies governing the protection of the Green Belt, in paragraphs 87 to 92 of the NPPF. The use of the verb "avoid" in paragraph 55 indicates a general principle, not a hard edged assumption.*

7.1.31 *Secondly, the policy explicitly concerns the location of new housing development. The first sentence of paragraph 55 tells authorities where housing should be “located”. The location is “where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities”. The concept of the “vitality” of such a community is wide, and undefined. The example given in the second sentence of paragraph 55 – “development in one village” that “may support services in a village nearby” – does not limit the notion of “vitality” to a consideration of “services” alone. But it does show that the policy sees a possible benefit of developing housing in a rural settlement with no, or relatively few, services of its own. The third sentence of the paragraph enjoins authorities to avoid “new isolated homes in the countryside”. This is a distinction between places. The contrast is explicitly and simply a geographical one. Taken in the context of the preceding two sentences, it simply differentiates between the development of housing within a settlement – or “village” – and new dwellings that would be “isolated” in the sense of being separate or remote from a settlement. Under the policy, as a general principle, the aim of promoting “sustainable development in rural areas” will be achieved by locating new dwellings within settlements and by avoiding “new isolated homes in the countryside”... But what is perfectly plain is that, under this policy, the concept of concentrating additional housing within settlements is seen as generally more likely to be consistent with the promotion of “sustainable development in rural areas” than building isolated*

*dwellings elsewhere in the countryside. In short, settlements are the preferred location for new housing development in rural areas. That, in effect, is what the policy says.*

7.1.32 *Thirdly, the adjective “isolated”, which was the focus of argument before us, is itself generally used to describe a location. It is not an unfamiliar word. It is commonly used in everyday English. Derived originally from the Latin word “insula”, meaning an “island”, it carries the ordinary sense of something that is “... [placed] or standing apart or alone; detached or separate from other things or persons; unconnected with anything else; solitary” (The Oxford English Dictionary, second edition). This was the meaning favoured by the judge (in paragraph 24 of her judgment), and there is no dispute that in this respect she was right.*

7.1.33 *In my view, in its particular context in paragraph 55 of the NPPF, the word “isolated” in the phrase “isolated homes in the countryside” simply connotes a dwelling that is physically separate or remote from a settlement. Whether a proposed new dwelling is, or is not, “isolated” in this sense will be a matter of fact and planning judgment for the decision-maker in the particular circumstances of the case in hand. Judgment Approved by the court for handing down (subject to editorial corrections) Braintree DC v SSCLG 32.*

7.1.34 *What constitutes a settlement for these purposes is also left undefined in the NPPF. The NPPF contains no definitions of a*

*“community”, a “settlement”, or a “village”. There is no specified minimum number of dwellings, or population. It is not said that a settlement or development boundary must have been fixed in an adopted or emerging local plan, or that only the land and buildings within that settlement or development boundary will constitute the settlement. In my view a settlement would not necessarily exclude a hamlet or a cluster of dwellings, without, for example, a shop or post office of its own, or a school or community hall or a public house nearby, or public transport within easy reach. Whether, in a particular case, a group of dwellings constitutes a settlement, or a “village”, for the purposes of the policy will again be a matter of fact and planning judgment for the decisionmaker. In the second sentence of paragraph 55 the policy acknowledges that development in one village may “support services” in another. It does not stipulate that, to be a “village”, a settlement must have any “services” of its own, let alone “services” of any specified kind.*

7.1.35 Conclusions drawn from the Court’s decision are also relevant in relation to the application site. The proposed development would be in the immediate vicinity of a well-established settlement off Firs Wood Close and Hook Lane. It cannot be argued that just because the application site is outside a designated settlement boundary of the adopted plan, it is therefore not deemed a settlement or a village. Equally, to suggest the application site is physically separate or remote in this context would be an unjust conclusion. The Courts concluded that ‘functional isolation’ does

not fall within the previous paragraph 55 of the NPPF (now paragraph 79).

7.1.36 Moreover, the notion of ‘vitality’ is not solely related to a developments proximity to services and there is no national policy against residential development in settlements without facilities and services. As such, the scheme can still contribute to the social and economic sustainability of the rural community through the provision of 100% affordable housing in an unaffordable location.

7.1.37 It is quite clear that from this judgement, a more flexible approach to development outside designated settlement boundaries is required in the pursuit of sustainable development in rural areas. Sustainable transport needs to be sufficiently flexible to take account the differences between urban and rural areas This position in respect residential development in rural areas is needed, given Welwyn Hatfield’s insufficient supply of available land.

7.1.39 In conclusion, the proposal is not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt because of its provision of *limited* affordable housing in line with National Policy. It would make a valuable contribution to the acute need for affordable housing in a Borough, where a five-year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated. In addition, the scheme is not regarded as an isolated developed based on its proximity to local services and facilities. The principal of the proposed development is therefore

considered acceptable, and all the above points weigh in favour of the application.

7.2.0 **Issue No 2: Quality of Design, Character and Appearance**

7.2.1 Saved policies D1 requires high quality development and policy D2 requires development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area.

7.2.2 The proposal would provide a new access point off the south-east side of Firs Wood Close and would extend southwards. Long, straight incongruous roads are avoided with the introduction of a gently curving vehicle and pedestrian route through the development.

7.2.3 The scheme is relatively low in density, with dwellings being generally spread out to reflect the site's semi-rural location. The northern section of the site would be of higher density, comprising predominantly of the 2-bedroom affordable units. Whilst the southern section of the site is characterised by a less dense arrangement of dwellings to accommodate 3-bedroom affordable units with relatively bigger plots and private amenity spaces for larger families.

7.2.4 The development will be traditional in appearance to reflect the vernacular architecture of residential buildings on Hook Lane and in Northaw. Small gable features, as seen on the Judges Restaurant on Judges Hill (in Northaw), and window head and cill

details seen throughout the village, would be included within the scheme in response to the site's semi-rural surroundings.

7.2.5 All of the houses are two-storey in scale and simple in building form with pitched roofs which sometimes have hipped ends to bring variety to the street scene. Quite large gable features as seen at The Two Brewers public house, and smaller ones as at Judges restaurant, are introduced to provide focal points in key parts of the scheme and for visual interest when moving around the scheme.

7.2.6 One such focal point is provided with the gable feature on plot 18 where it joins with plot 19 close to the view looking south along the access road.

7.2.7 It is essential that attention is paid to the architectural detailing of the proposed dwellings in order to create the impact and quality demanded by the site's location. Architectural details including simple porches to front doors, repetition of window and door details and variation in external materials as seen around Northaw, will strengthen the link with the local building vernacular.

7.2.8 Simple building forms and traditional architectural features and detailing, materials most commonly found throughout Northaw

including brickwork, plain roof tiles, painted render and stained timber boarding will be employed for continuity with local residential development.

7.2.9 Soft landscape along the new access road and around the boundaries of the site is fundamental to the appearance and character of the overall development. Front gardens to all houses will be softened with landscape to enhance the access road and break up areas of allocated and visitor parking.

7.2.10 The above demonstrates that the design would be of high quality and would respect and relate to the character and context of the area in accordance with saved policies D1, D2 and the Supplementary Design Guidance.

#### 7.2.11 **Landscape Character**

7.2.12 A landscape Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared by David Clarke in support of this application. The main conclusions of the report have been considered below.

7.2.13 The assessment demonstrated that the proposed scheme can be integrated without any significant detriment to the localised and wider character of the landscape setting and can be accommodated within the receiving visual element. It is

therefore considered that the proposed development can be accommodated and, as such is supportable from a landscape and visual perspective.

7.2.14 Both the landscape proposal and existing vegetation within the wider landscape will assist in assimilating the buildings satisfactorily into the landscape, especially as the proposed vegetation develops further. Overall, it is concluded that there are no landscape, character or visual impact reasons to prevent the proposed development in line with Policy RA10 and Policy D8 of the Local Plan.

7.3.0 **Issue No 3: Affordable Housing Statement & Dwelling Mix**

7.3.1 **Affordable Housing Statement**

7.3.2 Watford Community Housing (WCH) is an established charitable community benefit society registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. They are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing, which sets the standards and ensures that they are properly governed, financially viable and deliver value for money across all areas of their work.

7.3.3 They currently own in excess of 5,000 homes in South West Hertfordshire and is committed to serving the communities in which it works in partnership with all local stakeholders. The provider's primary purpose is the provision of social housing, whether for social rent, affordable rent or shared ownership, to meet an identified local housing need

7.3.4 WCH have been holding ongoing discussions with Welwyn Hatfield District Council's Housing Team, with a view to develop in the District and has been encouraged to find opportunities to increase the supply of social housing. As part of these discussions, they have explored with the Council the possibility of utilising its ability to support the scheme with grants derived from right-to-

buy receipts. Whilst this cannot be guaranteed, it has been indicated that it would meet current criteria for support.

7.3.5 The location of the site and the mix of dwellings in the proposal were tested with Welwyn Hatfield Housing Team to ensure that they would positively meet the Council's need profile, subject to the development being acceptable in planning terms. The Council has 753 families on its housing needs register, which is the target demographic for this scheme.

7.3.6 WHT have been given the valuable opportunity to influence the project and its design. It is comparatively rare for a housing association to be able to develop a site for family homes which are solely for social purposes.

7.3.7 In a traditional location, the Section 106 planning obligation requirement would be for 35% only to be for social housing – in this case nine homes. However, WCH has entered into an agreement with the landowner that, subject to meeting certain criteria, they will acquire the site and develop out all of the homes for social housing, which will nearly treble the social output.

7.3.8 Another difference between this and other S106 offerings is WCH are providing well designed and generously proportioned houses

for families, not the small apartments which comprise most standard schemes.

7.3.8 WCH would be responsible for the delivery of the homes, once the site is acquired, thereby ensuring that they will be built to a high quality for the incoming residents. WCH is leading a consortium of developing local authorities and housing associations which, in partnership with the Herts Local Enterprise Partnership, is seeking to attract manufacturers of off-site construction components into Hertfordshire. This is intended to secure a supply chain to assure future housing delivery, as well as encouraging inward investment, employment and training. It also supports a green agenda of cleaner, more efficient, less wasteful construction methods. This scheme would have the added benefit of being built in this way.

7.3.9 In conclusion, it is believed that this scheme offers a great opportunity to deliver social homes for those in need, hence why WCH have supported it both in principle and financially, jointly funding the planning application.

#### 7.3.10 Dwelling & Tenure Mix

7.3.11 The 2017 SHMA highlights that there is a need for 1, 2 and 3-bedroom affordable homes in the Borough. The table below shows the desired proportion of dwelling mix:

Bedrooms	1	2	3	4
%	39%	24%	28%	9%

7.3.12 As a direct response to the SHMA's required dwelling mix, the scheme would provide 15x three-bedroom and 11x two-bedroom units. The provision of just 2 and 3-bedroom affordable units reflects the sites location and its suitability for family housing.

7.3.13 The tenure breakdown is as follows and has been agreed by the Welwyn Hatfield Housing Team as an appropriate mix:

- 5 dwellings provided as Social Rent
- 21 dwellings provided as Affordable Rent

7.3.14 The table below shows that there is limited provision of social rented households in Northaw and Cuffley, which is significantly below the National and Welwyn Hatfield averages.



	<b>Private Ownership</b>	<b>Social Rented</b>	<b>Private Rented</b>
<b>National (England and Wales)</b>	63.7%	17.6%	16.7%
<b>Welwyn Hatfield</b>	57.3%	26.9%	13.6%
<b>Northaw &amp; Cuffley</b>	86.9%	3.9%	7.8%

7.3.15 It should be noted that Northaw and Cuffley Parish Council have found in recent research that there is demand in the community for more of a choice in housing, particularly smaller and more affordable housing, which would allow younger residents to stay in the area and has the potential to attract new economically active residents.

7.3.16 It is considered that the scheme has been specifically tailored to suit local market requirements in terms of the dwelling and tenure mix and would therefore make a valuable contribution to the future affordable housing supply in Northaw and Cuffley in line with Policies H7 and H8 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

7.4.0 **Issue No 4: Transport, Highway Safety & Accessibility**

7.4.1 A transport statement has been prepared by Milestone Transport Planning in support of this application. The main conclusions from the report have been extracted and listed below.

7.4.2 In terms of Road Safety Analysis, the review shows that collisions can generally be attributed to driver/pedestrian error. The Personal Injury Accident (PIA) are spread across the study area and have a range of causal factors. There are no apparent trends that would raise concern in context of the proposed development.

7.4.3 All local amenities within Northaw can be accessed directly using a bridleway via Hook Lane with further amenities within Potters Bar, Cuffley, and Cheshunt via Bus Service 24. Potters Bar town centre is within a 2km cycle of the site via an on-carriageway route along Coopers Lane Road and the A1000. Overall, there is potential for future households in the development to utilise environmentally sustainable modes of transport.

7.4.4 The existing arrangements of Firs Wood Close and Coopers Lane Road would remain unchanged and therefore would not result in there being any significant changes to the operational and safety characteristics of Firs Wood Close.

7.4.5 The proposed level of on-site car and cycle parking accords with the adopted standards set out in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Supplementary Planning Guidance Parking Standards.

7.4.6 The proposed delivery and servicing arrangements would occur on-street and there is sufficient space within the access to enable a large refuse vehicle to enter and egress the site in a forward gear.

7.4.7 There would be low trip generation, producing up to approximately 28 two-way people trips in the AM peak and 33 in the PM peak. Of this, 14 would be vehicles during the AM Peak and 13 in the PM peak. This equates to one trip every four minutes on average.

7.4.8 Measures to control access to the site, vehicle movements and parking during the construction phase would be agreed with the highway authority prior to commencement and would be set out in a formal Construction Management Plan.

7.4.9 In conclusion, it is considered that the site is an appropriate location for the proposed residential development and there would be no residual cumulative impacts in terms of highway safety or the operational capacity of the surrounding transport network in line with paragraph 109 of the NPPF.

7.5.0 **Issue No 5: Other Considerations**

7.5.1 **Ecology**

7.5.2 A preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been prepared by Green Environmental Consultants in support of this application. The main conclusions are listed below, although further and more comprehensive detail can be seen in the report.

7.5.3 The site has habitat generally good for wildlife (such as rough grassland) but is negated by its small size and being surrounded by inhospitable habitats, in effect making it an island. Some protected species could be present but given the site's size and other factors these are unlikely to be significant populations and mitigation is readily available on the adjacent site if required. However, as the ponds to the north of the site achieved HSIs ranging from poor to good for Great Crested Newts, a further survey has been commissioned and will be submitted in due course.

7.5.4 The site falls within the Ecological Network (which has no statutory status) 'purple' zone (a desire to recreate habitats and linkages), which will be lost under the scheme. It was concluded that the application site is small and isolated and does not neatly fit in to the network's main aims of reconnecting habitats.

7.5.5 **Trees**

7.5.6 An Arboricultural Report has been prepared by Tim Moya Associates in support of this application. The main conclusions from the report have been considered below.

7.5.7 The proposal will require the loss of 41 trees, including 2x B-category trees and 39x C-category trees. In addition, the following tree groups will be removed: G58 Woodland, which consists of abundant aspen regeneration. The numerous C-category trees and one C-category woodland (comprising aspen natural regeneration) do not present constraints to the development, given most are semi-mature and all are individually non-prominent trees.

7.5.8 However, the retention and protection of the TPO's woodland (W50 and those individual trees within) to the south and the presence of adjacent woodland and trees to the north and west of the site (also TPO's) along Firs Wood Close and Hook Lane will provide immediate mitigation for the loss of trees within the application site.

7.5.9 Further details of tree impacts and mitigation are discussed in the report. However, the appropriate tree protection measures have

been recommended, in accordance with best-practice, to ensure that retained trees will be successfully protected during the proposed works.

7.5.10 In terms of landscaping, new planting will enhance the visual and ecological value of the site, and in turn have a positive impact on the character of the local area. Albeit, the retention of woodland to the south ensures that the development is screened from the public highway to the south-west.

7.5.11 It is concluded that the proposed development complies with the requirements of planning policies and that the development will be successfully achieved as outlined in the arboricultural report.

#### 7.5.12 **Energy Efficiency**

7.5.13 An Energy Statement prepared by Monitor in support of this application identifies how 12.88 % of regulated carbon emissions for which this development is responsible, are proposed to be off-set by various energy efficiency measures compared to a Building Regulations Part L 2013 compliant scheme.

7.5.14 The analysis has shown that by incorporating energy efficient construction and installations, there is a significant reduction in the development CO2 emissions based on the SAP calculation

method. The potential on-site low and zero carbon technologies have also been assessed taking into account the scale of this particular development and constraints such as location, visual impact, preventing additional vehicle movements and local pollution concerns.

#### 7.5.15 **Site Investigation**

7.5.16 JNP Group have determined through desk-based research, intrusive investigation, laboratory testing and assessment (amongst other conclusions) that:

- Geology is mainly clay, 2-3m of sandy and gravelly clay over London Clay.
- There are some bands of sands and gravel in the upper 2-3m, although these are water bearing.
- Excavations into the granular materials were not stable and subject to partial collapse.
- Shallow groundwater was encountered within the boreholes, with standing levels as shallow as 0.75m.

- Permeability characteristics of the soils underlying the site are indicated to be unsuitable for soakaway filtration.
- There is no suspected contaminated ground conditions or elevated concentrations of contaminants.
- Piled foundations will likely be required to for the support of most/all buildings in the development with suspended slabs.

7.5.17 In addition, it recommends that further ground investigation be undertaken in the form of cable percussion boreholes in order to obtain geotechnical data to sufficient depths relevant for the design of piled foundations.

7.5.18 **Drainage**

7.5.19 Gyoury Self Partnership have prepared a drainage strategy in support of this application, which summarises the constraints and proposes methods to drain surface water from the proposed development. The main conclusions are listed below:

- As infiltration is not feasible, it is proposed that the surface water will discharge into the Northaw Brook Ordinary Water Course.

- A pervious pavement will be provided to all vehicular areas and will be connected to the surface water drainage system.
- Discharge will be restricted from the site with a hydro-brake to a maximum rate of 5 l/s.
- The proposed drainage will be designed to accommodate all storm events up to the critical 100-year event including a 40% allowance for climate change.

7.5.20 A Maintenance Plan has been produced for the surface water drainage system, which will be retained by the company responsible for maintenance. Further information on the drainage strategy has been submitted alongside this application.

7.6.0 **Issue No 6: Sustainable Development**

7.6.1 The NPPF sets out at paragraph 8 that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are independent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The three overarching objectives are economic, social and environmental, the benefits of the proposal in relation to each of the objectives are summarised below.

7.6.2 **Economic**

7.6.3 The development will have economic benefits in the short to medium term through the provision of jobs and local purchasing during the construction period. The construction process has the potential to utilise the local labour pool, providing employment opportunities for younger people in the form of apprenticeships and training.

7.6.4 There will also be wider economic benefits during the construction. These include *indirect* impacts, which are those resulting from subsequent rounds of input of inter-industry purchases in sectors such as manufacturing, business services (planning, real estate, surveying, architects and estate agents

etc.) and logistics. The construction sector is considered to be the most effective in stimulating wider economic activity in sectors

7.6.5 In addition, there will *induced* impacts which result from spending of earnings of those employed via housing construction or its supply chain. These benefits are likely to result in a multiplier effect in the area.

7.6.6 Once complete, the development would increase the local working age population, thus providing a more balanced community, demand for education, recreation and retail facilities. It would also increase household spending levels in local businesses and services.

7.6.7 **Social**

7.6.8 Paragraph 59 of the NPPF is clear that it is the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes; this proposal would assist in this objective and has the added benefit of delivering 100% affordable housing.

7.6.9 It is clear from the table of local tenure statistics that a large proportion of existing homes in the Parish are owner occupied at 86.9% with the remainder being private and social rented at 7.8% and 3.9% respectively. A very small proportion of homes are

therefore affordable, which can have an adverse impact on economies and rural communities.

- 7.6.10 A lack of affordable housing is likely to be a barrier to younger people living in the area especially those of lower skilled and paid jobs. When house prices are high, the young working population and first-time buyers are faced with barriers, which can have a harmful effect on labour mobility and economic growth. Restricted labour mobility could result in skill shortages in some industries (such as retail), which comprise mainly younger, lower income workers.
- 7.6.11 Likewise, an ageing local population could result in higher levels of demand for health and social care related services. With a smaller labour pool, local employers in health and social care services may find it increasingly difficult to access a staff to match growing demand. It is key that employers can replace workers who leave the labour pool for retirement.
- 7.6.12 The provision of affordable housing can make a vital contribution to the viability of rural communities. It would give families an opportunity to move to an unaffordable location, as well as providing local residents with a greater choice of homes, especially for those looking to downsize and remain in the village.

7.6.13 Newly built homes tend to attract younger households who are economically active. Thus, a scheme of 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom units would make an important contribution in attracting new working age and skilled residents, ensuring the long-term sustainability Northaw and other nearby settlements such as Cuffley and Potters Bar.

7.6.14 Overall, the housing provision weighs heavily in favour of the scheme given the lack of 5-year housing land supply and affordable housing.

7.6.15 **Environmental**

7.6.16 The development would deliver a high quality, well landscaped housing site contained on three sides by existing built development. The containment of the site lessens visual encroachment into the open countryside, more so than what would result from development on entirely open land with no immediate development.

7.6.17 Furthermore, both the landscape proposal and existing vegetation within the wider landscape will assist in assimilating the buildings satisfactorily into the landscape, especially as the proposed vegetation develops further. As such, the character and appearance of the area would be protected.

7.6.18 The development would make efficient use of land, providing housing at an appropriate density for the semi-rural location. Energy efficiency measures are included within in the proposed development; the scheme would gain a Building Regulation pass with approximately 12.88% improvement over 2013 Building Regulations.

7.6.19 It is accepted that there would be a level of reliance on the private car by future residents of the development. Albeit, this does not automatically render a site unsustainable as determined by the Court of Appeal. Northaw has a moderate level of services in the form of a lower school and nursery, public houses, church, some employment opportunities, village hall and recreational grounds. It is also located close to a major service centre, Potters Bar, which provides a full range of facilities.

7.6.20 The facilities and services within Northaw can be easily accessed on foot or by cycle. Likewise, the services and facilities in Potters Bar can be accessed by cycle and bus. There is also a railway station in Potters Bar providing links into London.

#### 7.6.21 **Planning Balance**

7.6.22 The economic benefits of the scheme have been demonstrated above and it is considered that they weigh heavily in favour of the

proposal. The social benefits of the scheme include the provision of 100% affordable housing where there is a need and a lack of a 5-year housing land supply. Northaw and Cuffley have limited affordable housing provision at present and the proposed provision would assist people looking for such housing in an area where the average house price is significantly higher than the level for England. It is considered that the social benefits also weigh heavily in favour of the proposals

7.6.23 The proposal would not extend significantly into open countryside and would not cause harm to the character or appearance of the area. Northaw has a moderate level of services and facilities but is located close to a major service centre which can be reached by cycle or bus. The environmental benefits are also considered to weigh in favour of the scheme.

7.6.24 As the Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply and its housing policies are out-of-date, the tilted balance is engaged, and the application should be granted unless *“any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”*. It is considered that there are no adverse impacts which would outweigh the benefits of providing affordable housing in this location.



## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1.0 Background

8.1.1 This report relates to a planning application for the erection of 26 affordable units with associated access road at Land to the East of Firs Wood Close. The proposal is promoted in the following circumstances:

- 1) The development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would comprise a limited affordable housing scheme. Policy RA14 is considered to be mostly out-of-date because small-scale affordable housing schemes are unlikely to satisfy the acute need for affordable homes in the locality.
- 2) There is an acute need for affordable housing in the Borough, especially in Northaw and Cuffley. As such, a 100% affordable scheme for 26 units would make a considerable contribution to meeting local affordable housing need and should therefore carry significant weight in the balance.
- 3) The Council lacks a 5-year housing land supply and so permission should be granted unless there are clear adverse impacts in accordance with NPPF Paragraph 11.
- 4) The proposed scheme cannot be considered as an unsustainable/isolated development based solely on its proximity to local services and facilities. There is no national policy against residential development in settlements without facilities and services. The Court of Appeal envisaged a more flexible approach to development outside designated settlement boundaries in the pursuit of sustainable development in rural areas.
- 5) The layout and design would be of high quality and would respect and relate to the semi-rural character and context of the area in accordance with saved policies D1, D2 and Supplementary Design Guidance.
- 6) The LVIA concludes that the proposed development can be integrated without any significant detriment to the localised and wider character of the landscape setting and can be accommodated within the receiving visual element.
- 7) Proposed landscaping would create a layered landscape effect, which would help soften the built form and set it within the semi-rural context.
- 8) The location of the site and the mix of affordable dwellings were tested with Welwyn Hatfield Housing Team to ensure that

the proposal satisfies local needs and market requirements. As such, the proposal would make a valuable contribution to the future affordable housing supply in Northaw and Cuffley in line with Policies H7 and H8 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

- 9) The Transport statement states that there is potential for future households in the development to utilise environmentally sustainable modes of transport. In addition, there are no highways or transportation reasons why the proposal should not be granted planning permission.
- 17) The Ecology Appraisal identified that some protected species could be present but given the site's size and other factors these are unlikely to be significant populations and mitigation is readily available on the adjacent site if required site. A Great Crested Newt survey has been commissioned and will be submitted in due course.
- 10) Low quality trees would be removed; however, the retention and protection of the TPO's woodland to the south and the presence of adjacent woodland and trees to the north and west of the site (also TPO's) along Firs Wood Close and Hook Lane will provide immediate mitigation for the loss of trees.

- 11) The energy assessment identified how 12.88 % of regulated carbon emissions for which this development is responsible, are proposed to be off-set by various energy efficiency measures compared to a Building Regulations Part L 2013 compliant scheme.
- 12) No suspected contaminated ground conditions or elevated concentrations of contaminants were found. Furthermore, piled foundations will likely be required to for the support of most/all buildings in the development with suspended slabs.
- 13) The drainage assessment identifies a low risk of flooding and recommends a drainage strategy.
- 14) The economic, social and environmental benefits are considered to weigh in favour of the scheme.
- 15) As the Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply and its housing policies are out-of-date, the tilted balance is engaged, and the application should be granted unless *“any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”*. It is considered that there are no adverse impacts which would outweigh the benefits of providing affordable housing in this location.

