

# Green Belt Assessment relating to proposed development at former Hook Estate and Kennels, Firs Wood Close, Northaw Park

On behalf of Swing Limited

Date: 29 September 2023 | Pegasus Ref: P20-0497

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## Document Management.

Version	Date	Author	Checked/ Approved by:	Reason for revision
1	26.05.2023	AC	AC	Updated version
2	29.06.2023	AC	AC	Revised comments
3	29.09.2023	AC	AC	Edits



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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report has been prepared on behalf of the client, Swing Limited. The site relates to land within the Green Belt and as such, this report assesses how the proposed development would have a bearing upon both the openness and the purposes of the Green Belt in the locality.
- 1.2. In terms of context, the site is located within the district of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. This Local Authority has a District Plan dated 2005 which sets out several planning policies with respect to the Green Belt. Additionally, in August 2016 the Council issued a Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission which also addresses the Green Belt.
- 1.3. A Green Belt Review was prepared for the Borough Council together with Dacorum Borough Council and St Albans City and District Borough Council in a report dated 2013 prepared by SKM. This report identified a number of land parcels across the district. The site falls within land parcel reference GB52 entitled Green Belt 'Land West of Cuffley'. However, this land parcel is extensive covering a large area to the north of the M25 and countryside between Potters Bar and Cuffley. The findings in the report relate to this large swathe of land and inevitably is a broad-brush assessment given its larger scale. In contrast, the site at Firs Wood Close is a discreet small area of land which is specific to this particular parcel of land to provide a more forensic and informed analysis concerning how this land performs and how the specific proposed development would affect this designation in terms of its openness and its five purposes.

## Planning Context

- 1.4. Green Belt is addressed in the NPPF in section 13 of the document. This document notes that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Further guidance is provided as to what factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt which is documented in the NPPG at paragraph reference ID: 64-001-20190722. This paragraph notes that assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, requires a judgement based on the circumstances of the particular case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

***“Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume***

***The duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and***

***The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.”***  
(author’s emphasis)

- 1.5. Each of these aspects are considered in this report to provide a judgement to determine how the proposal would have a bearing upon openness of the Green Belt (see section 2).
- 1.6. Furthermore, the NPPF at paragraph 138 notes that Green Belt serves five purposes which are listed. This report considers how the proposed development would have a bearing upon each of these five purposes, (see section 3).

17. The last section of this report sets out overall conclusions concerning the proposal's effects upon Green Belt with regard to these two principal matters (see section 4) purposes and openness.

#### **Application Context**

18. A series of reports have been prepared with regard to this proposal including a Design and Access Statement explaining the design of the scheme together with a Land Use and Heights Parameter Plan which defines the proposed development envelope. Based on this information, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by RPS to determine how the proposal would have a bearing upon the landscape character and visual amenity of the area. This assessment report relies upon these documents and their information and does not therefore repeat information which is set out in these documents. The LVIA specifically identifies the proposed development would be perceived in visual terms from the countryside surrounding the site. This Green Belt Assessment relies upon the visual analysis documented in the LVIA.

## 2. Effect on the Openness of the Green Belt

### Introduction

- 2.1. This section of the report considers how the proposed development would have a bearing upon the openness of the Green Belt and as such, considers various factors including spatial and visual aspects, duration, remediability and the degree of activity likely to be generated by the proposal.

### Spatial Aspect of Openness

- 2.2. The spatial aspect as it relates to the sense of openness with regard to the site is informed by a number of factors. The proposed development envelope is located within the northern larger part of the red line which this report focusses upon, recognising that the red line is more extensive extending beyond the development area in all directions and include a large swathe of land which flanks either side of the access road to Northaw Park. The proposed development area is framed by a substantial amount of residential properties immediately to the south of the site which forms a local enclave of residential properties. The site is also framed to the south by a large religious premises, known as the Oshwal Centre. Woodland further frames the site immediately to the east. Further extensive woodland wraps around the northern and western sides of the site such that it is significantly framed by tree cover on three sides and built form on the fourth side.
- 2.3. The site itself topographically forms a north facing gentle slope associated with an east-west orientated valley and as such, has an open aspect northwards to this valley. Whilst the site itself has a moderate sense of openness, this is further tempered and curtailed by the presence of a multitude of built structures which are derelict and reflect the former use of the land as a dog training facility. Some small buildings, areas of hardstanding indicating the presence of former buildings and enclosures defined by concrete posts and chain link fencing form a network of derelict enclosures across the site. The introduction of the proposed development would introduce built form as defined by the Parameters Plan. The height and scale of the built form would be limited as the majority of the proposals would comprise between one and three storey height buildings and these would be disaggregated and positioned across the site with large spaces between the various buildings.
- 2.4. This proposal would have a moderate and limited effect on the spatial aspect of the site when assessed against the spatial aspect of Green Belt.

### Visual Aspect of Openness

- 2.5. In terms of the visual aspect (perception) of openness, there is already a strong sense of visual enclosure associated with the site. This is due to the substantial presence of mature tree cover and existing development which frames the site. Derelict structures on the site also curtail the visual aspect (sense) of openness. This aspect of strong enclosure would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed residential scheme in place, such that from the wider area and the countryside within the Green Belt beyond the site, there would be generally very little perception of the proposed residential area and as such, there would be little change to the perceived sense of openness within the locality and this particular part of the Green Belt.

- 2.6. The visual aspect and this perception of openness as it relates to the site can be most readily appreciated from public locations where members of the public have access to the landscape and are able to pass through this environment and therefore relates primarily to public rights of way and highways. Mindful of this, this report considers how the sense of openness is appreciated from both public highways and rights of way in the locality to provide further understanding as to how the scheme would affect the visual aspect of openness.

### **Visual Aspect of Openness as perceived from the East towards the Site**

- 2.7. The landscape and countryside located to the east of the site forms part of a narrow valley which is framed by local high ground to the south along the top of which runs Coopers Lane Road, whilst the ridge to the north is identified by a further highway known as the Northaw Road West and forms a very clear small narrow valley, accommodating Northaw Brook.
- 2.8. In terms of the southern part of this valley, Coopers Lane Road is a local highway orientated east-west and is flanked on both sides by mature tree cover forming tree belts. As this tree belt is mature it would significantly limit opportunities to gain views of the site and appreciate the sense of openness associated with it. The majority of the countryside which is located to the east of the site is subdivided into a series of mainly rectilinear medium to small size fields, many of which are framed by mature hedgerows and mature tree hedges together with isolated individual standard mature trees in the fields themselves which are managed as pasture. There is also a network and a patchwork quilt of smaller woodland blocks and woodlands. All of this mature vegetation would limit the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site. The introduction of the proposed scheme would not change the perception of openness as appreciated from this location to the east of the site.
- 2.9. In addition, remarkably there are no public rights of way located anywhere in the valley to the east of the site as can be seen from the Ordnance Survey Maps and Site Location Plan at appendix 1. As such, members of the public would not have any opportunity to observe the openness associated with the site from the countryside to the east of the site. In terms of existing residential properties, there are very few located to the east. There is a small enclave of residential properties located approximately 1km to the east of the site known as Northaw Valley. This development which is accessed by means of two residential roads known as Woodgate Avenue and Oakwell Drive are set within an environment which is heavily punctuated and framed by mature tree cover and as such, there is no opportunity to appreciate a sense of openness associated with the site. This very limited perception would not change with the proposed scheme in place.
- 2.10. Coopers Lane Road is orientated east-west. To the east of the site, this road is flanked by mature tree belts on either side of its route which would interrupt lines of sight towards the proposed development and as such, users of this section of the route would have little perception of the openness associated with the site and as such, with the proposed scheme in place, this would not materially change the perception of openness as appreciated from this highway.
- 2.11. Located some distance to the east of the site is a further highway which is orientated north to south which links Coopers Lane Road with the B156 and is known as Cattlegate Road. This cuts across the valley through a small woodland and is otherwise framed by mature hedgerow and tree cover along both sides of the highway. The woodland tree cover, adjacent hedgerows and existing built form would all interrupt lines of sight westward towards the



proposed scheme and as such, there would be little opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site. This situation would remain unchanged with the proposed scheme in place.

- 2.12. To the north-east of the site lies a further highway known as the B156 and is broadly orientated east-west linking Northaw to the west to Cuffley located to the east. This road broadly follows a ridge of local high ground and is therefore elevated locally. At its western end it passes through the settlement of Northaw and is flanked on either side by residential properties, many of which front onto this highway. In this locality due to the presence of built form and tree cover there would be limited line of sight towards the proposed development and as such, there would be limited perception of openness associated with the site. This would not materially change with the proposed scheme in place.
- 2.13. East of the point where a bridleway meets Northaw Road West, the highway east of this point is still located within the settlement of Northaw, but the residential properties primarily front onto only the north side of this highway with the southern side of the highway framed by agricultural fields. The boundaries running alongside this highway are defined by mature high hedgerows. As a result of this mature vegetation, users of this highway, motorists and pedestrians using the roadside pavement would have very limited opportunity to gain south-westward views across the countryside towards the proposed scheme. Consequently, there would be limited opportunity to appreciate a sense of openness associated with the site. With the proposed scheme in place, this would not materially change the sense of openness in this viewing context.
- 2.14. There are a few locations, one of which is located close to Park Farm, where there is the opportunity for pedestrians along this road to gain a southward view across the valley towards the site. From this location, the existing residential development of Northaw Park can be seen particularly due to the white render associated with the buildings. These existing properties can be seen set in and amongst mature tree cover. Below the woodland horizon the proposed scheme would be located at a lower level downslope. The sense of openness associated with the site is quite restricted due to the screening effect of surrounding vegetation. The proposed development would form a small element within the view with much of it screened and where seen, would be observed in the context of the existing Northaw Park housing. As a result, the proposed scheme would result in little change to the sense of openness as it relates to the site and immediate environs with regard to this particular viewing context.
- 2.15. Park Farm Road follows an east-west ridge and starts to descend in height in an eastward direction. It is also flanked by mature tree cover and hedgerows along its length until it meets with the settlement of Cuffley and as such, there would be no line of sight towards the proposed development and therefore the sense of openness associated with the site cannot be appreciated from this location. The proposed scheme would result in no appreciable difference with regard to the perception of openness in this viewing context. From the countryside to the east, it is apparent from this viewing analysis that there would be very few locations for members of the public to gain an appreciation of the site, its associated openness or the proposed development. With the scheme in place, there would be no material change to the perception of openness with regard to this viewing context.



### **Visual Aspect of Openness as perceived from the South towards the Site**

- 2.16. The wider extent of the site wraps in a northern arch around the Oshwal Centre complex which is comprised of buildings and landscaped grounds including tree cover. Beyond this and further south of the site lies farmland which is defined by a series of small to medium size fields. These are defined by mature hedgerows and tree hedges and the area is punctuated with a patchwork quilt of small woodlands together with a large wood known locally as Fir and Pond Woods which is managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. In terms of highways, the Coopers Lane Road lies a short distance to the south and is broadly orientated north-west, south-east linking Potters Bar to the west with Crews Hill to the east. This road is flanked on either side by a mature wide tree belt, which would limit the opportunity to gain views towards the proposed development, both summer and winter and as such, the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site is very limited. With the proposed development in place there would be no change to the perception of openness associated with the site with regard to this viewing context. The Coopers Lane Road follows a local high ridge, which has a similar orientation. South of this highway, the land falls in height in a southward direction and as a consequence there would be no lines of sight to the proposed development nor any change to the perception of openness from this area.
- 2.17. The countryside south of the site exhibits few public rights of way, however, there is one located to the south-west of the site and south of Northaw Valley residential complex in the vicinity of Barvin Hill and also there is a bridleway which extends from Coopers Lane Road and is orientated north-south to link Five Acre Wood with Foxhole Hill close to the M25 motorway further south. However, as topography is falling southward from Coopers Lane Road, any line of sight towards the site would be interrupted due to topography as well as mature tree cover and as such these public rights of way and users of these routes would have no perception of openness associated with the site. Furthermore, with the proposed development in place, the perception of openness would not change in this viewing context. Topography combined with mature tree cover across the rural landscape in the locality would prevent any opportunity to observe the proposed development with no change to the perception of openness.

### **Visual Aspect of Openness as perceived from the West towards the Site**

- 2.18. Countryside lies immediately to the west of the site with the vast majority of this area managed as woodland known locally as Hook Wood and is supported with some other areas of local woodland notably Five Acre Wood and Fir Wood which are also located to the west of the site. The fields located between these blocks of woodland are demarcated by mature tree hedges and as such, there is a very strong sense of physical and visual enclosure associated with the local landscape. Views are therefore short range and only tend to extend across one or two fields at most until they are interrupted by tree cover. Consequently, the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site is limited. Furthermore, with the proposed scheme in place any perceived reduction in the sense of openness as a consequence of the proposal would also be limited.
- 2.19. There are a few highways to the west of the site including Coopers Lane Road which leads into Potters Bar and west of the site and Hook Wood is the B156 which links Potters Bar to the south with Northaw to the north. Due to the topography and mature tree cover flanking this highway together with the tree cover in the intervening landscape, there would be no line of sight to the proposed development from this highway and as such no perception of openness associated with the site. This would also be the case with respect to Coopers Lane

Road, which is flanked by mature tree cover, prohibiting any views of the proposed residential scheme or associated perception of openness.

- 2.20. There are two bridleways located immediately to the west of the site. The nearest one being broadly orientated north–east, south–west which runs along the eastern side of Hook Wood linking with Northaw Road West and the settlement of Northaw to the north with Coopers Lane Road and Fir Wood to the south. This bridleway is generally slightly set down in the landscape due to the age of the route and adopts a sunken lane profile in places with the adjacent landscape rising either side of the route. It is also framed along its length by mature tree cover and understorey canopies primarily associated with Hook Wood and as such, the opportunity to observe the proposed development from this route would be very limited to only a few glimpses and heavily filtered views through the tree cover.
- 2.21. Consequently, the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site in this viewing context would be equally very limited. Where elements of built form proposed would be seen in this context, such development would mainly be observed in the context of existing residential development associated with Northaw Park. As such, the general composition of the view would not materially change nor would the associated sense of openness. This situation would be the case with regard to winter views with foliage absent on shrubs and trees. However, with foliage present throughout most of the year there would be reduced line of sight due to vegetation in the intervening distance and as such, users of this route would be less aware of the openness associated with the site and any change to the perception of openness in the locality in this viewing context.
- 2.22. There is a further bridleway which lies to the south of Coopers Lane Road and links with this highway and extends southward and is broadly orientated north–south running along the eastern side of Five Acre Wood cutting across farmed landscape. Due to the topography and mature tree cover in the intervening distance, there would be no opportunity for users of this route to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site nor any change that would come about with the proposed scheme in place. In overall terms, given the significant amount of tree cover and the undulating topography, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme from views from the west associated with the countryside and the townscape of Potters Bar beyond. Similarly, the perception of openness would not change with the proposed scheme in place.

#### **Visual Aspect of Openness as perceived from the Landscape to the North towards the Site**

- 2.23. In terms of views from the north, the land lying immediately to the north of the site is primarily countryside, until at a distance of 0.5km to the north of the site lies the village of Northaw. There are a number of highways located to the north of the site. In particular, Judges Hill which lies north–west and to the west of the settlement of Northaw. However, due to topography, built form and vegetation in the intervening landscape, there would be no line of sight from this highway towards the site and therefore no perception of openness associated with this land.
- 2.24. There is a further highway to the north side of the settlement, which is known as Vineyards Road. This is flanked on its southern side by existing residential properties, which face onto this highway. Due to the presence of these properties together with mature vegetation tree cover and shrubs associated with their gardens, there would be little opportunity to observe the site and its associated openness from the length of highway, which sits within the

framework of this settlement. North of this, the same highway is flanked by mature tree cover as it skirts the eastern side of a wood and again there would be no line of sight towards the proposed development due to this vegetation and therefore no perception of openness associated with this land.

- 2.25. The B156 which forms Northaw Road West is broadly orientated east-west and runs through the southern part of the settlement. Where properties are located on the southern side of this highway to the west of the bridleway there would be no opportunity to observe the site nor gain any appreciation of openness associated with it. East of the point where the bridleway meets this highway, the southern side of the road is free of built form, but the road is flanked by mature high hedgerow which prohibits views from this highway southward towards the site, both during summer and winter with views channelled as a consequence along the alignment of this road rather than in a southward direction and therefore no change to the perception of openness. Further east of this point is a farm complex known as Park Farm which forms a local riding school and has a complex of buildings and built infrastructure associated with it, which further limits the opportunity to observe the site with little perception of openness associated with the site in this viewing context. With the proposal in place, the perception of reduced openness would be limited in this viewing context.
- 2.26. There is one location where a more open view for pedestrians walking along this route would have the opportunity to gain a southward view across the riding school and its riding menage towards the site. The existing residential development of Northaw Park can be seen nestled in and framed by surrounding mature tree cover situated below the horizon. In this viewing context there is some appreciation of openness associated with the site. The proposed development would be located downslope of this existing built form and due to the presence of topography and mature tree cover in the intervening distance, there would be little to observe of the proposed development and as a consequence the degree of change and perceived reduction in the sense of openness would be limited in this viewing context. East of Park Farm Riding School, the highway continues to be flanked by tall mature hedgerows and tree cover and as the highway descends downslope along a ridge and as such most users of this route would have no (or severely limited) views of the site, with very little effect on any associated sense of openness with the site. The appreciation of openness would not change with the proposed scheme in place.
- 2.27. There is one public right of way, a bridleway which lies to the north of the site, which links Northaw Road West to the north with Coopers Lane Road to the south and flanks the eastern side of Hook Wood. This bridleway is set down in the landscape and appears as a sunken lane and is flanked on its banks by mature tree cover and shrubbery and understorey canopies. Even in the winter months without foliage, the dense branch network of canopies significantly limits the opportunity to gain views southward towards the site and as a consequence the perception of openness associated with the site is currently very limited. As a result, with the proposal in place the perception of any reduction in openness associated with the site would be limited. During the majority of the year with foliage present the viewing opportunities from this lane would be channelled solely along its route given the tree cover either side of the route would channel views and frame views along its route. In overall terms, then there would be very little opportunity to perceive any sense of reduced openness associated with the site in this viewing context with the scheme in place.

## **Summary of Visual Aspects of Openness as it relates to the Proposed Scheme**

- 2.28. The opportunity to appreciate the visual aspects of openness associated with the site is very limited. The visual aspect of openness can be appreciated as it relates to a limited number of public locations. However, even from these few locations, the sense of openness associated with the site is tempered and somewhat reduced by the presence of the existing built form of Northaw Park, tree cover and derelict built form. In overall terms, the visual aspect of openness associated with site is geographically limited and is highly localised in terms of appreciation of openness, which is somewhat curtailed by the site's context. The introduction of the proposed scheme would inevitably introduce additional built form together with associated footprint and volume and there would be a clear sense of loss associated with the openness of the land, but this perception of reduced openness would be limited and highly localised with respect to the site.
- 2.29. The site exhibits gentle slopes across much of the area, which provides the opportunity to provide interest to the arrangement of residential properties and disaggregate the built form. Furthermore, the site benefits from a considerable degree of physical and visual containment due to the surrounding mature tree cover and existing residential area and as such, development of the site is only likely to have a bearing upon views in the locality, and not beyond in the wider surrounding countryside. As a consequence, the sense of openness associated with the wider landscape as it forms Green Belt would remain unchanged with the development in place on site. With respect to openness and from a Green Belt perspective, the proposal would be effectively assimilated into the surrounding existing green infrastructure and wider environment without materially reducing the perception of openness associated with the site and surrounding area.

## **Duration of the Development and Remediability**

- 2.30. The proposed scheme is designed to be permanent and not a time-limited development. Whilst technically it may be possible to remove the scheme in the future, this is highly unlikely to occur in terms of the possibility of the site returning to its original state in terms of openness. With regard to these matters, technically the scheme would cause harm to the Green Belt, however, this should be considered against the baseline, which includes various infrastructure and built form on the site and the high degree to which it is characterised and framed by urbanising influences of built form.

## **Conclusions**

- 2.31. The site is currently substantially framed by extensive woodland together with a residential neighbourhood, Northaw Park and adjacent Oshwal Temple complex. Whilst much of the site is open in terms of its character, this is somewhat tempered and curtailed by the presence of various built infrastructure including enclosures constructed of concrete posts and chain link fencing. Areas of hardstanding are also evident indicating the presence of former buildings. The surrounding existing built form and mature trees further physically and visually frame the site limiting its sense of openness. The site is surrounded by countryside where members of the public in various public locations can gain an appreciation of the visual aspect of openness of the local countryside. In this context in most locations and viewing context, there is limited opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site due to the significant screening effect of built form and tree cover surrounding the site and in the wider environs. As a consequence of this with the proposed scheme in place, whilst clearly it would introduce a quantum of built form in the countryside, the perception



of openness as appreciated in visual aspect terms would not materially change with the scheme in place. It is recognised that the proposed scheme would be permanent and not time limited which has also been factored into this analysis, whilst also recognising that there would be some degree of activity with a residential neighbourhood as proposed, principally around the comings and goings of people living their lives in this small residential community. In overall terms, the proposed scheme would have some effect upon the sense of openness of the Green Belt, but this would be localised and limited and at the lower end of the scale and cause limited harm to the appreciation of openness in this part of the Green Belt.

### 3. Effect on the Purposes of the Green Belt

#### Introduction

- 3.1. This section of the report examines how the proposed development would have a bearing upon each of the five purposes of Green Belt.

#### **Purpose (a): To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas**

- 3.2. It is first worthwhile noting what is meant by 'unrestricted sprawl'. The term 'urban sprawl' refers to the spreading of the town or city and its suburbs over previously undeveloped land. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the word urbanisation, but urban sprawl more precisely implies an uncontrolled, unplanned or unrestricted spreading of an urban environment. The site is not located on the edge of any settlement or large built up area and therefore the site does not fulfill any role with regard to this purpose.
- 3.3. The site was previously a greyhound racing training facility but subsequently closed and the buildings and enclosures fell into a state of disrepair. Some of the buildings were retained and continued to remain such as the semi-detached houses fronting Hook Lane whereas other buildings were removed and replaced with dwellings which now front onto Firs Wood Close as well as the quadrangle of terraced houses slightly further to the north. These houses collectively formed an enclave of residential development known as Northaw Park which is now located immediately to the south of the red line area, but these properties like the site form part of the wider original development platform which previously accommodated a wide range of built form and infrastructure. There is further evidence of this with building footprints. The existing development of Northaw Park accommodates a range of houses together with road set within a broad, large, wooded infrastructure which wraps around this neighbourhood, all of which have been carefully designed previously.
- 3.4. The site and adjoining Northaw Park form part of the former greyhound racing facility, which was initially partially redeveloped for housing in the late 1980s. The proposed development is located on the remainder of the greyhound site, which has not yet been redeveloped. Adjacent to the site and Northaw Park is the Oshwal Centre. The proposed development is illustrated in the Design and Access Statement, though recognising that this is illustrative material. This report has nonetheless taken this information into account to gain an appreciation and understanding of what is envisaged in terms of redevelopment of the site. This analysis is further informed by the Parameters Plan that indicates clearly the geographical extent of potential built form as well as the overall vertical profile of the proposal with regard to building heights as this relates to storeys concerning residential units.
- 3.5. The application proposal, like the existing housing at Northaw Park, would involve residential development being located within a strong woodland framework. As such, this scheme (like that which currently exists), would not form sprawl and would not be unrestricted or be unplanned in nature. Indeed, the layout and positioning does reflect very careful design and control and responds to various arboricultural and landscape factors whilst mindful of the curtilage of the former dog kennels and paddocks. This is further demonstrated in the Design and Access Statement and Previously Developed Land Statement. Furthermore, beyond the site itself there would be no 'unrestricted sprawl'.
- 3.6. With regard to the purpose concerning unrestricted sprawl, I would note the following. The proposed development would be geographically restricted to the curtilage associated with

the former dog training facility in terms of development footprint and associated enclosures. The development would also be tightly framed by extensive mature woodland and built form associated with the existing residential neighbourhood of Northaw Park and the religious Oshwal Centre and as such, would not conflict with this Green Belt purpose.

**Purpose (b): To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another**

- 3.7. The NPPF is quite specific in its terminology with regard to this purpose, citing towns specifically rather than types of settlement such as villages and hamlets. With regard to this point, I note that the only town in the locality of the site is Potters Bar. This can be seen at appendix 11. This plan also shows the status of other settlements in the locality. There is a cluster of small settlements located some distance to the north of the site as well as further clusters of small settlements, again, located to the east and south at some distance from the site. The largest settlement in the locality besides Potters Bar is located over 1km to the north-east of the site and is known as Cuffley. However, this settlement which is inset within the Green Belt is categorised as a village and not a town. In light of this information, it is self-evident that the proposal would not cause any coalescence with the neighbouring town of Potters Bar as clear physical separation would remain between the site and the town with the proposed scheme in place. Furthermore, the proposal would not cause any other neighbouring towns to merge with Potters Bar as a consequence of the proposed scheme being in place.
- 3.8. The proposed scheme would not physically change the actual geographical or sense of visual separation between Potters Bar and Cuffley and as such, would not cause any actual or perceived sense of separation between these settlements.
- 3.9. Potters Bar is the largest settlement and town which is located approximately 1km to the west of the site. To the north of this town and north-west of the site lies a smaller settlement known as Brookmans Park. To the north-east of the site, approximately 2km in distance lies the settlement of Cuffley (identified as a village) and further east of this, the settlement of Goff's Oak. South of these two settlements and south-east of the site at approximately 3km distance, lies a hamlet known as Crews Hill. Further to the south of which at approximately 4km south-east of the site lies the start of Enfield.
- 3.10. Due south of the site at 2km distance is the settlement of Hadley Wood. All of these settlements are located outside and are surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt. The proposed development would not cause any material change with regard to these neighbouring settlements from merging into one another. The countryside that separates Potters Bar from Brookmans Park lies to the west of the site and as such, any development as proposed would leave this area of countryside physically unchanged and would therefore leave the physical separation between these two settlements unaltered.
- 3.11. The physical separation between Cuffley and Goff's Oak again would remain physically unchanged with the proposed scheme in place. This would also be the case for other Green Belt areas between the local neighbouring settlements. The countryside between Cuffley to the north and Crews Hill to the south would remain unaltered as would the Green Belt designated land between Crews Hill and Enfield to the south as well as the countryside lying between Potters Bar, Hadley Wood and Enfield. The site itself lies in the Green Belt between two settlements with Cuffley to the north-east and Potters Bar to the south-west. Northaw as a village is disregarded as the Green Belt designation washes over this settlement. The physical distance between Potters Bar and Cuffley is approximately 3km. On the north-



eastern edge of Potters Bar looking north-eastwards, it is not possible to observe Cuffley due to undulating topography and tree cover. Similarly, from the southwest side of Cuffley, it is not possible to observe Potters Bar. In both of these circumstances the site and the proposed development would also not be visible. However, Northaw as a village can be observed as a settlement but lies within the Green Belt designation and can be observed from the edge of both Cuffley and Potters Bar.

- 3.12. With the proposed development in place, there would be no change to the physical separation between Cuffley and Potters Bar, nor would the scheme change the current sense of visual separation that is appreciated lying between these two settlements. The visibility of Northaw lying in this gap between the settlements would not change, either in terms of its physical position in the Green Belt, nor in terms of its visual perception. The proposed scheme would not physically change the actual geographical or sense of visual separation between Potters Bar and Cuffley and as such, would not cause any actual or perceived sense of separation between these settlements.
- 3.13. The proposed development would not conflict with this Green Belt purpose, particularly as it seeks to focus attention on settlements defined as towns.
- 3.14. With regard to the prevention of neighbouring towns merging, I would note the following. The only town in the immediate and indeed wider locality is Potters Bar. Even with regard to this town, the proposed development would be separate and distinct from this town. The site itself currently makes little contribution and has no significant role in maintaining separation between towns or in the prevention of towns merging together and as such, the proposed scheme would not conflict with this purpose.

**Purpose (c): To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

- 3.15. The proposals are to be located in the curtilage of the former training centre where buildings and dog enclosures were located, which is best identified by reference to the historic maps as shown in the Design and Access Statement and Previously Developed Land Report.
- 3.16. Whilst technically this land is classed as countryside as it lies outside a defined settlement boundary, it is previously developed land from evidence on the ground and does not form farmed land or woodland in the same way that the village of Northaw or the nearby enclave and residential area of Northaw Valley similarly do not form part of the local agricultural landscape. The proposed scheme would be restricted to the location of the dog training facility and compounds and enclosures. The proposed scheme would not affect the countryside beyond the former dog training facility and as such, the countryside beyond the training centre would be effectively safeguarded from any encroachment in terms of development.
- 3.17. The greyhound training centre was operational for some length of time before its closure and whilst operational, had a clear development envelope associated with it in terms of built form
- 3.18. and enclosures. This essentially related to the wider Northaw Park area. Since the closure of the training facility, significant areas of the facility have been redeveloped into the current residential neighbourhood of Northaw Park. The Oshwal Centre has also been built on adjacent land.
- 3.19. The residential neighbourhood of Northaw to the north of the site would remain physically unchanged with the proposed scheme in place, as would the small residential enclave of



Northaw Valley located a short distance to the east of the site. In summary, the proposed scheme would ensure that the surrounding countryside would be safeguarded from encroachment.

- 3.20. The proposal would introduce some development that technically lies within the countryside and as such, would result in a limited degree of encroachment. However, this would be mitigated to a significant degree by the surrounding mature woodlands and existing residential enclave of Northaw Park effectively screening the proposed scheme and as such, the perception of encroachment would be low and limited and not significant.

**Purpose (d): To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

- 3.21. The site is not within the setting of any historic town and therefore this purpose is not relevant with regard to the site given its location.
- 3.22. The proposed scheme would be entirely located within the curtilage of the former dog training facility and contiguous with existing residential properties which collectively define the enclave of Northaw Park. The proposed development would be set within a heavily tree-framed context given the tree cover not only around the perimeter of the site, but also the countryside beyond. For instance, an extensive woodland known as Hook Wood lies to the northwest of the site in the countryside located between Northaw village and Northaw Park. Due to this woodland and other tree cover in the countryside, there is no line of sight between Northaw village to the north and Northaw Park to the south from publicly accessible parts of the settlement. This would continue to be the case with the proposed scheme in place.
- 3.23. The special character of this historic settlement would remain unchanged with the proposed scheme in place as would its setting. As far as the setting is concerned with regard to heritage assets, it has to be capable of being experienced and appreciated and therefore requires a line of sight and visibility. As there is no line of sight between the proposed scheme and the historic part of Northaw from publicly accessible areas and very limited intervisibility with it from other parts of the conservation area, both the setting and the special character of this historic settlement would be preserved with the proposed scheme in place even when the whole of Northaw is taken into account which includes the more modern areas. Again, there is extremely limited intervisibility between this settlement and the proposed development.
- 3.24. The visual and physical 'setting' of the historic settlement of Northaw would continue to be capable of being appreciated. The overall appreciation of both the setting and the special character of this historic settlement would remain unchanged with the proposed scheme in place.
- 3.25. As confirmed in the Heritage Assessment, the proposal would not have any effect upon the setting of the nearest historic settlements. There are two historic Conservation Areas associated with Potters Bar. This proposal would not affect the setting or the special character of this historic town. Indeed, given the site's remoteness and distance from Potters Bar and Northaw, it is considered that this purpose is not relevant in consideration of the proposed scheme.
- 3.26. In summary, with regard to preserving the setting and historic character of towns, the following is noted. The scheme would lie some distance from the Conservation Area associated with the village of Northaw to the north. Both the site and the proposed scheme would have no effect upon this purpose, indeed, arguably this particular purpose is not relevant given the location of the proposed scheme.

**Purpose (e): To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**

- 3.27. The Local Planning Authority has previously seen the benefit of ‘recycling’ the former dog training centre through the grant of permissions for residential development which now defines Northaw Park set within a wooded landscape. The present proposed scheme would be consistent with this previous strategy and like the previous planning permissions for residential use, would facilitate the reuse of what appears as previously developed land.
- 3.28. The proposed scheme would assist in the recycling of previously developed land as evident on the ground and therefore would be consistent with this objective (purpose) and would assist in the further efficient use of this land. Notably, this is currently the only significant previously developed land that remains derelict within the environs of Northaw whilst there are very few previously developed sites across the wider Borough which has resulted in a number of Green Belt sites coming forward for development.
- 3.29. It is self-evident that when examining historic maps of the area, that the site previously accommodated a greyhound training facility. Known as Hook Kennels this has been substantially documented with the photographic records of the facility that show the large complex of buildings together with associated dog compounds and enclosures. Whilst part of the former facility has been redeveloped and now accommodates the residential hamlet of Northaw Park, it is clearly evident particularly when seen on the ground, that there are still extensive areas of the facility which remain in place abandoned and derelict, see appendix 7. The principal features that are self-evident on site, primarily comprise of fencing and gates associated with compounds and enclosures along with drainage infrastructure and building foundations. There is no doubt that this is land that has been previously developed. Following the closure of the training facility, this is also redundant use of land.
- 3.30. With regard to the purpose of regeneration and recycling of derelict land, it can be summarised. It is self-evident upon examination of the site that this land has been previously developed given the presence of various forms of built infrastructure. This proposal would facilitate the opportunity to comprehensively reuse what is now currently derelict land and could be categorised as either ‘recycling derelict land’ or ‘regeneration’. Either way, the proposal would accord with this particular purpose of Green Belt.

**Opportunities to Enhance Landscape**

- 3.31. In the first instance it should be noted that a comprehensive landscape design to create a naturalistic landscape would be implemented as part of the proposed scheme. The area proposed to be developed i.e. its footprint closely reflects the area of land that currently accommodates a range of derelict structures. The remaining extensive areas of the landscape within the redline would form a strong landscape framework for the development. This would be equally the case with regard to the northern site completely surrounded by a substantial landscape comprising of retained trees and scrub together with the existing pond retained as part of this area. The proposed scheme would facilitate substantial new additional tree planting to establish a parkland setting. New tree and shrub planting between it and Northaw Park would reinstate the vegetative screen partly removed to accommodate the proposed scheme.
- 3.32. All of the landscape within the red line would be subject to appropriate landscape management and maintenance over the short, medium and longer term to ensure that it ultimately forms an attractive landscape which enhances the immediate and wider area. This



landscape strategy would ensure opportunities would be realised to enhance both the landscape and visual amenity and also the biodiversity over and above what currently exists in terms of ecological interest as designated.

## 4. Conclusions

### Effect on Openness

- 4.1. As far as the site is concerned, it benefits from a high degree of visual containment evidenced by the fact that it is difficult to appreciate this area of land in terms of views from the surrounding countryside and as such, any associated perception of visual openness related to this land is very limited. The perception of openness is most readily appreciated from the site and its immediate environs, but even from these locations, the perception of openness is reduced and limited due to the presence of built form associated with the site and its surroundings as a backdrop and context to the site as it still feels very much part of the Northaw Park rather than the wider countryside.
- 4.2. The introduction of the proposed residential neighbourhood would undoubtedly introduce built form where it is limited currently to derelict structures. The aspect of openness is derived in part with regard to two aspects, the visual component and a spatial component.
- 4.3. With regard to the visual component, it is evident that the perception of openness as it relates to the site is only readily appreciated from the site and not from the wider countryside beyond the site due to the substantial physical and visual containment of the land from woodland and buildings.
- 4.4. In terms of openness as it relates to the spatial aspect, whilst the site has an 'open' character, this is limited due to the physical enclosing elements that frame the site including existing built form, houses and tree cover. The site itself accommodates a number of structures and other artifacts such as fencing. In light of these aspects, I consider that in terms of the proposed residential scheme, the level of harm on the openness of the Green Belt would be moderate but when considered in the round from the wider countryside, I consider that the level of harm to openness would be reduced to the lower end of the scale and thus the range would be low to moderate in terms of harm which reflects the fact that the site is so well contained.
- 4.5. The site is currently substantially framed by extensive woodland together with a residential neighbourhood, Northaw Park and adjacent Oshwal Temple complex. Whilst much of the site is open in terms of its character, this is somewhat tempered and curtailed by the presence of various built infrastructure including enclosures constructed of concrete posts and chain link fencing. Areas of hardstanding are also evident indicating the presence of former buildings. The surrounding existing built form and mature trees further physically and visually frame the site limiting its sense of openness. The site is surrounded by countryside where members of the public in various public locations can gain an appreciation of the visual aspect of openness of the local countryside. In this context in most locations and viewing context, there is limited opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness associated with the site due to the significant screening effect of built form and tree cover surrounding the site and in the wider environs. As a consequence of this with the proposed scheme in place, whilst clearly it would introduce a quantum of built form in the countryside, the perception of openness as appreciated in visual aspect terms would not materially change with the scheme in place. It is recognised that the proposed scheme would be permanent and not time limited which has also been factored into this analysis, whilst also recognising that there would be some degree of activity with a residential neighbourhood as proposed, principally around the comings and goings of people living their lives in this small residential community. In overall terms, the proposed scheme would have some effect upon the sense of openness

of the Green Belt but this would be localised and limited and at the lower end of the scale and not cause material harm to the appreciation of openness in this part of the Green Belt.

### **Effect on Purposes**

- 4.6. With regard to the purpose concerning unrestricted sprawl, I would note the following. The proposed development would be geographically restricted to the curtilage associated with the former dog training facility in terms of development footprint and associated enclosures. The development would also be tightly framed by extensive mature woodland and built form associated with the existing residential neighbourhood of Northaw Park and the religious Oshwal Centre and as such, would not conflict with this Green Belt purpose.
- 4.7. With regard to the prevention of neighbouring towns merging, I would note the following. The only town in the immediate and indeed wider locality is Potters Bar. Even with regard to this town, the proposed development would be separate and distinct from this town. The site itself currently makes little contribution and has no significant role in maintaining separation between towns or in the prevention of towns merged in together and as such, the proposed scheme would not conflict with this purpose.
- 4.8. With regard to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, I would note the following. The proposal would introduce some development that technically lies within the countryside and as such, would result in a limited degree of encroachment. However, this would be mitigated to a significant degree by the surrounding mature woodlands and existing residential enclave of Northaw Park effectively screening the proposed scheme and as such, the perception of encroachment would be low and limited and not significant.
- 4.9. With regard to preserving the setting and historic character of towns, I would note the following. The proposed development would be located some considerable distance from the nearest town Potters Bar and its historic core and Conservation Area. The scheme would also lie some distance from the Conservation Area associated with the village of Northaw to the north. Both the site and the proposed scheme would have no effect upon this purpose, indeed, arguably this particular purpose is not relevant given the proposal's location.
- 4.10. With regard to regeneration and recycling of derelict land, I would note the following. It is self-evident upon examination of the site that this land has been previously developed given the presence of various forms of built infrastructure. This proposal would facilitate the opportunity to comprehensively reuse what is now currently derelict land and could be categorised as either recycling derelict land or regeneration. Either way, the proposal would comply with this particular purpose of Green Belt.

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 4.11. In light of the foregoing analysis with regard to effects on both the openness and the five purposes of Green Belt, it is considered that there would be no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed residential scheme, as far as Green Belt matters are concerned.



# Appendix

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)  
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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