

ITEM NO:	<u>Location:</u>	Land Adjacent To Elm Tree Farm, Hambridge Way, Pirton
	<u>Applicant:</u>	Cala Homes
	<u>Proposal:</u>	Reserved matters application for approval of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale to serve a residential development of 78 dwellings (31 affordable and 47 private), pursuant to outline planning application 15/01618/1 granted 27.5.16 (as amended).
	<u>Ref. No:</u>	16/02256/ 1
	<u>Officer:</u>	James Gran

Date of expiry of statutory period: 02 January 2017

Reason for Delay

Negotiations seeking amendments to the scheme and subsequent public consultation period. Statutory period of the application agreed by applicant to 21st March 2017.

Reason for Referral to Committee

The site area for this application for residential development exceeds 0.5ha and therefore under the Council's scheme of delegation, this application for the approval of reserved matters must be determined by the Council's Planning Control Committee.

1.0 Relevant History

- 1.1 Applications for the development of the northern part of the site for 8 social rented dwellings were refused in January and September 2012 (app nos 11/00413/1 and 12/00694/1).
- 1.2 Subsequent appeals against these decisions were dismissed in 2013 the Inspector concluding that "the proposal would meet rural needs in terms of affordable housing and.....there would be significant associated benefits supported by the Government's support for economic growth and the provisions of housing as expressed in the Framework. On balance, there would be no detriment to highway safety, although there would be some harm to the character and appearance of the area and conflict with the development plan in this respect". Nevertheless he concluded that it was the unmitigated harm to transport and community facilities, which undermined the strategy of policy 51 of the Local Plan that warranted the dismissal of the appeals.
- 1.3 The field in the northern part of the application site was identified as site 214 in the draft North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Preferred Options paper; and covered an area of 2.4 hectares with a dwelling estimate of 47.
- 1.4 15/01618/1 – Members resolved to grant outline planning permission (all matters reserved) for residential development of up to 82 dwellings with associated infrastructure, public open space and planting (amended description) at the meeting of the Planning Control Committee held on 17 December 2015. Following the resolution of flood risk issues with the Lead Local Flood Authority and completion of the requisite S106 Obligation, outline planning permission was

granted on 27 May 2016.

- 1.5 16/01500/1PRE – Pre-application advice given on a site layout only for 82 dwellings. Concerns raised regarding how this would successfully integrate with this side of the village, concerns with some relationships between dwellings and with apartments design at the frontage of the site. Parking provision would be acceptable if the minimum standards are met of the Council's Parking SPD and affordable housing would need to be provided at 40% as per the Section 106 agreement from the outline planning permission.

2.0 Policies

2.1 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No.2 with Alterations (Saved Policies)

Policy 6 - Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt.
Policy 26 - Housing proposals.
Policy 29A - Affordable Housing for Urban Housing Needs
Policy 51 - Development Effects and Planning Gain.
Policy 55 - Car Parking Standards.
Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards.

Supplementary Planning Documents.

Design SPD
Planning Obligations SPD
Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development SPD.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 14 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'
Paragraph 17 'Core Planning Principles'
Section 1 - Building a strong, competitive economy.
Section 3 - Supporting a prosperous rural economy.
Section 4 - Promoting sustainable transport.
Section 6 - Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes.
Section 7 - Requiring good design.
Section 11 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
Section 12 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

2.3 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 Proposed Submission

Policy SD1 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'
Policy T1 'Sustainable Transport'
Policy T2 'Parking'
Policy HDS1 'Housing Targets 2011-2031'
Policy HDS2 'Settlement Hierarchy'
Policy HDS3 'Affordable Housing'
Policy D1 'Design and Sustainability'
Policy D3 'Protecting Living Conditions'
Policy NE6 'Reducing Flood Risk'
Policy NE7 'Water Quality and Environment'
Policy NE9 'Contaminated Land'
Policy ID1 'Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions'
Chapter 12 'Part 1': Development for North Hertfordshire's Own Needs' - Pirton

The Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan was considered and approved by the Council's Cabinet on 26th September 2016 and consultation on the Plan has now been carried out. The previous version of the draft Local Plan included part of the application site as a proposed allocation site for housing development. Since planning permission has since been granted for up to 82 dwellings on this site, the Local Plan now considers this development as a commitment. As such, the settlement boundary for Pirton has been revised to include the whole of the application site, with the proposed allocation deleted as this is no longer necessary to include.

Footnote 147 of the draft Local Plan includes the following wording:

“Outline planning permission has been granted for up to 82 new homes at Holwell Turn. The precise number of homes to be built will be determined by a detailed ‘reserved matters’ application. An estimate of 70 homes has been used for the purposes of calculating overall housing numbers in this Plan. This figure is without prejudice to the determination of any future planning applications for this site”.

2.4 **Emerging Pirton Neighbourhood Plan**

The Pirton Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in line with the emerging Local Plan. The policies in the submission draft of the neighbourhood plan focus on the design of development and how development will integrate into the village whilst respecting the character, biodiversity and heritage assets of the village.

Planning Practice Guidance makes it clear that an emerging neighbourhood plan may be a material consideration – alongside paragraph 216 of the NPPF. A neighbourhood plan is being prepared for Pirton but is still not at an advanced stage. The Pirton Neighbourhood Plan has been subject to one period of pre-submission consultation (April 2016) and has subsequently been amended to reflect the responses. The Pirton Neighbourhood Plan has now been submitted to the local planning authority for formal consultation. It is anticipated that this will take place soon and it will be at that point that it will be possible to see the extent of the unresolved objections to the neighbourhood plan.

2.5 **National Planning Practice Guidance**

3.0 Representations

3.1 **Pirton Parish Council** – Objection – Detailed letter with summary as follows:

- The Pirton Parish Council is not against appropriate development on this site
- Broadly support the proposals for environment and biodiversity, construction management, lighting, and the addition of parking spaces for residents of the terrace houses on Holwell Road
- Object to:
 - The adverse impact on the character of Pirton and the surrounding landscape
 - Layout issues including green and open space and plot size
 - Proposed density is too high
 - The proposed housing designs do not reflect the local vernacular architecture as to design, materials or height
 - The highways layout and associated traffic and safety concerns
 - The scheme is contrary to local and national planning policy and to emerging local and neighbourhood plan policies
 - The mix of housing does not reflect the evidenced needs of Pirton
 - There are serious inaccuracies and discrepancies within the documentation submitted

3.2 **Holwell Parish Council** – Object to scale and density of the development but primary focus of comments is regarding the proposed construction vehicles route which is proposed to be through Holwell. Comments regarding through Holwell route of: *“The route through Holwell contains numerous road safety hazards. There are approx. 90 residential properties in the village along the single narrow road through the village, plus, as the sketch map shows, 4 chicanes, 3 sleeping policemen, numerous parked cars in Holwell Road and road widths in Pirton Road and Waterloo Lane that vary mostly from 3.0 metres to 4.0 metres, with steep road side banks and a total of 5 blind bends. The 89 bus (roughly one per hour) uses*

this single road and it is a long and wide low-loader, not to mention large agricultural vehicles regularly using this route from the 3 village farms situated along this long (1.5 miles) section of road". Alternative routes suggested of through Pirton to link to Hitchin Road, or option of using Hambridge Way and a temporary track across the southern fields to link to Hitchin Road.

- 3.3 **Shillington Parish Council** - The Construction Management Plan does not take into account the narrow roads of Shillington or the impact of the residential development proposed for Shillington, in regard to other construction vehicles and general traffic. The application should be refused on highway grounds.
- 3.4 Please note, the proposed construction vehicles route is not a reserved matter and is not to be considered as part of this planning application. It is part of details required by condition 6 of the outline planning permission for a Construction Management Plan, which is subject of a separate Committee item.
- 3.5 **Pirton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**
- Application does not conform to the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan in that it does not provide sufficient homes for sale of smaller family homes or for those wishing to downsize.
 - It does however meet the policy requirements for affordable housing.
 - The scale of the development on the periphery of the village, fails to recognise, respect and reinforce the distinct local and rural character of Pirton in respect of height, scale, spacing, layout, design and design detail.
 - The density is too high and is visible from the Chilterns AONB.
 - The roundabout would be an urbanising feature. The proposals conform more closely on the matter of biodiversity although more emphasis is needed on native trees and shrubs.
 - There is insufficient green and open space. Key view 8 of the Neighbourhood Plan has not been considered to maintain this view.
 - Concern remains as to the extent of action needed to secure the safety of those using Holwell Road on a daily basis.
 - Critical over the development not being a result of the consultation with the community.
 - The Steering Group is fully aware that the Neighbourhood Plan has not yet undergone the Regulation 16 consultation and examination, but feels it appropriate to inform NHDC of the carefully evidenced views of the community.
- 3.6 **Highway Authority** - does not wish to restrict the grant of permission, subject to the imposition of conditions including site access geometry details, a stage 2 safety audit, a delivery and servicing plan, a revised construction management plan, swept path plan, parking areas to be set out prior to occupation and a car parking management plan regarding the allocated spaces for the frontage cottages, together with Informatives.
- 3.7 **Conservation Officer** – Comments including the following: *"In addition, to the consideration of the setting of the conservation area, there is also the setting of 5no. listed buildings to the west of the application site to consider: Elm Tree Farmhouse, a barn to the south-east of the farmhouse together with nos.10, 12 and 14 Royal Oak Lane. In my opinion, these Designated Heritage Assets are located a sufficient distance away from the application site that their setting would not be harmed by the proposed development.*

I am concerned that the almost 40m long ridge to the main building will close off any potential for the rear of nos.18 & 20 Royal Oak Lane to be able to retain a degree of transitional quality beyond the conservation area boundary. In my view, the length and form of this part of the affordable housing allocation as illustrated on

drawing no. SK-004/16/008, fails to respond positively to the context of the adjacent conservation area. A greater degree of openness would ensure that more of a transitional quality is retained beyond this part of the conservation area boundary. This could be achieved a number of ways but key to this would be omitting or significantly altering the form of the aforementioned affordable housing”.

The officer also suggested a higher proportion of semi-detached dwellings to increase openness and to set plots around the village green back by deleting two plots, would be positive enhancements of the scheme. The Officer is now supportive of the scheme further to amendments addressing most of these concerns.

- 3.8 **Herts Ecology** – Advises that the submitted Biodiversity and Habitat Management Plan is acceptable and that this be carried out in full.
- 3.9 **Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)** – Initial objection as the information submitted in support of this condition in relation to management of the drainage scheme, did not demonstrate the proposed development site can be adequately drained. This is now subject of separate application for the details of this condition and is not part of this reserved matters application.
- 3.10 **Landscape and Urban Design Officer** – No objection, with further comments throughout the process in response to the amended plans – the reduction in units is welcomed as it provides for an additional open space to the northern end of the development. Detail improvements made in response to comments, to the footpaths to serve the apartments, rail fencing around the applicable open areas to be plain timber instead of white painted and, landscaping improvements with additional tree planting to various parts of the development.
- 3.11 **Housing Supply Officer** – No objection, with the quantity and mix of affordable housing meeting the requirements of the associated Section 106 agreement for 40% affordable housing, consisting of 65% affordable rented units and 35% shared ownership units, which is proposed in this scheme.
- 3.12 **Environmental protection** – No further comments to make from the initially submitted Phase 1 environmental survey on the outline application.
- 3.13 **Environmental Health** - Recommend approval of the "Construction Management Plan (and Traffic Management Plan)" Holwell Road, Pirton by Cala Homes (undated) in so far as it relates to noise control, hours of working, screening of site, dust suppression and wheel washing.
- 3.14 **Waste Manager** – No objection, subject to tracking plan for refuse collection vehicle.
- 3.15 **Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service** – “Access for firefighting vehicles should meet the Building Regulations, with access routes to have a minimum carrying capacity of 19 tonnes, turning provided in dead end areas of more than 20 metres long”.
- 3.16 **Herts County Council (Panning Obligations)** - HCC Property do not have any further comments to make at this time. The obligations for this development will be calculated in line with the requirements of the S106 agreement, once they are triggered.
- 3.17 **Herts County Council (Archaeology)** – Advise that the submitted Written Scheme of Investigation is acceptable to commence archaeological investigation of the site.
- 3.18 **North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society** – Comments as follows:
“If planning permission is granted, there should be attached a condition for archaeological observation and recording (watching brief) by a qualified

archaeological body during all groundworks. Although there has been geophysical survey and trial trenching already, there is a known Iron Age ditched enclosure which requires further recording and the potential for the uncovering of further remains anywhere on the site (NPPF and NDP Policy 8)".

3.19 Pirton School, Chair of Governors – Conclusions of the following:

- A large-scale development of the size proposed will have a significant impact on school numbers.
- We believe that if the Elm Tree Farm application is granted, the school will be unable to cope with the increase in the numbers and therefore will not be able to accommodate all the children who live in Pirton who want to attend their village school.
- We believe the escalation in traffic caused by the development, in particular the introduction of construction traffic, combined with the narrow layout of the road and footpath adjacent to the school presents a danger to pupils.
- We understand that Section 106 monies are available for education to offset the impact of any development. It is essential that these funds are directed to Pirton School to prepare the school building to accommodate the additional pupils this proposed development will generate.

3.20 Local residents – A total of 169 representations have been received at the time of writing:

In favour: 2
Objections: 159
Comments: 8

Objections have been received from residents of predominantly Pirton, Holwell, Shillington and Hitchin. A summary of the objections includes the following:

- The density is too high with adverse impact on village character, appearance, sense of community and surrounding landscape. Density is above the average throughout the village.
- Scale of development is out of proportion to size of village, equating to a 13% increase in the built area of the village, a likely 17% increase in the number of dwellings and a likely 20% increase in population).
- It would increase car usage, rather than encouraging development accessible by means other than the car, due to lack of adequate shops and the poor bus service, exacerbated by the local roads not being conducive for walking/cycling.
- Access to site would be dangerous and traffic would cause congestion along nearby narrow village roads.
- Development would create pressure on existing shop, school and village hall facilities.
- Too many 4 and 5 bedroom houses, not enough of 2 and 3 bedroom homes.
- Proposed roundabout is inappropriate to the edge of village location, would be dangerous and create an urbanising feature and incongruous to this edge of village rural location.
- The amount of one bedroom units is not needed in the village and the affordable housing does not take account of the local housing needs survey
- The design of the development fails to address the requirements in the adopted and proposed Local Plan for the sensitive transition from the open countryside to the built up area. The aspect when approached from the Holwell direction will be a very urbanised scene.
- The highway assessment is flawed because it does not take account of real traffic movement at what is a dangerous location for all road users, particularly pedestrians and cyclists. It also fails to assess current traffic condition

- together with those that would be produced by building of the proposed development.
- The lack of footpaths along Holwell Road and Royal Oak Lane means the dwellings should be concentrated towards the Hambridge Way end of the site with the footpaths feeding into Hambridge Way to encourage pedestrian footfall to go in that direction into the village to use its facilities. This would also help to reduce the visual impact from the Holwell Road end of the site.
- The architectural design of the houses is of poor quality and dressed up versions of the standard house types.
- The 'green' or 'soft' footpaths site along the roads should be replaced with conventional paved footpaths as they will not be of practical use for users of push chairs, mobility scooters or those wary of uneven, muddy or soft surfaces, such as the elderly or disabled.
- 2.5 storey heights are totally out of keeping and appear as town houses. Overlooking and feeling of encroachment would be inevitable from these.
- The height of the proposed houses is excessive and higher than the clear majority of properties in this location and in fact in Pirton generally. This will have a damaging visual impact and damage the character of Pirton. The height of the houses should not exceed the maximum of neighbouring houses which is 8.8m and the majority should reflect the majority in the neighbouring area and therefore should be much less.
- The balancing pond next to a childrens play area is a health and safety risk
- The eastern footpath to nowhere is in the wrong place
- The road traffic projection is flawed as this does not take into account the gridlock experienced every day on the Pirton Road into Hitchin, which villagers avoid by travelling through Holwell instead, so this road has far heavier traffic movements than the desktop assessment predicts.
- There are deficiencies in the sewerage system, demonstrated by the periodic foul water flooding near the pumping station in Burge End Lane.
- There is no footpath with Royal Oak Lane and the development. Over half the pedestrians will be coming out along Holwell Road which has no footpath. The development would be isolated and removed from the rest of the village by the lack of a connection to the centre of the village.
- The design does not take account of the view of the Chiltern ridge as seen from approaching the village from Holwell. This view places the village in its setting at the foot of the Chilterns and should be preserved. For that reason the height and density of the development should be limited and screening should be in place.
- This development is a thin end of the wedge for further development in the village, with the Council not having a 5 year supply of land for housing
- The development is unsustainable and will have an adverse impact on local infrastructure and amenities, e.g. increase in traffic (100 plus vehicles) on narrow village (Pirton and Holwell) and approach roads; lack of health facilities; only one small shop; small village school; loss of visual amenity and pressure on existing open space, footpaths, bridlepaths.

3.21 Comments of support have been received including the following points:

- Pirton is a Category A village and as such can justify the building of houses to cater for both current and future demands. Growth in a rural community is very important and government have come forward with a 10 point announcement which is to encourage the building of houses in rural areas to enhance economic growth and prosperity but also to provide acceptable living space and quality of life to current and future residents.

- Where a LPA does not have a recognisable 5 year house / land supply the NPPF is clear that the Local Plan, in respect of the provision of houses, is out of date. This is a recognised fact. NHDC does not have a 5 year h/l supply strategy and therefore the Local Plan is out of date. Equally NHDC only has a draft new Local Plan that has yet to be Examined but even then its h/l supply of houses will not initially comply with NPPF policy.

- In Pirton a Neighbourhood Development Plan is in draft form but it has yet to be sent out for Regulation 16 consultation prior to being examined by an Inspector and anyway with NHDC Local Plan being out of date so too is the NDP, even if it was made immediately, which is unlikely as there are policy inaccuracies involved.
- We hear comment [used as an objection to approving this development] that only 2 and 3 bedroom houses should be built, not 4 and 5 bedrooms. Why is this? Is the argument that those living in 2 and 3 bedroom houses can never advance themselves to live in bigger houses and remain in the village. Yet this is disproved by the number of planning applications to extend the current housing stock from 3 to 4 bedrooms. The problem is that there is a shortage of 4 / 5 bedroom houses. That is what economic progress provides but there is a limit to how far houses can be extended on small plots where off road parking cannot take place.
- The vista on entering the village will not be impeded since there is only a small width of the site that can be seen from Holwell Road. The site cannot be seen on approach roads from Hitchin and Shillington.
- The suggestion that the views to and from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – AONB – will be destroyed are scaremongering. The view of the AONB is looking at it not from it.
- The access to the ETF site with a new round about at Holwell Road will assist the current flow of traffic and will be quite acceptable and I see this as an advantage to all users on Holwell Road. In fact Pirton residents complaints about exit from the village will be eased. For some using the argument that a round about is not in character with village life demonstrates their inability to move on into a safer environment. Within a short period of time this change to the road layout will be simply absorbed.
- The layout of the site demonstrates a care with attention approach to development of 82 houses in Pirton. A mix of houses to cater for all market demands.
- The design of the houses in this development appears to be in keeping generally with the character of the village. Having said that the current housing stock has a variety of designs and there is no common design or character.

3.22 Amended plans were submitted to address concerns with the dwelling number and scale of house types, which included the following changes to the scheme:

- Reduction of dwelling number from 82 to 78, by omission of 4 x 3 bedroom units
- Creation of open space to northern end of the site
- Reduction in ridge heights to 43 of the houses across the site

A full formal consultation was carried out and a summary of the additional comments received is as follows:

- The reduction of four units and reduction of ridge heights is only a gesture from the developer and does not sufficiently address the overall objections regarding density, scale and building heights
- The omitted houses were 3 bedroom units which worsens the housing mix in terms of providing more larger houses overall and not enough 2 and 3 bedroom dwellings as desired by the Neighbourhood Plan.
- New open space to northern end of the site is a positive and also better spacing of the units adjacent
- Previous objections as outlined above are reiterated in comments received

3.23 Following the above amendments, in response to comments from the Conservation Officer, amended plans were submitted which included the following changes to the scheme:

- Split of the long apartment block into two blocks, with one unit relocated to be a flat over garage building at the northern end of the site, adjacent the open space created by the previous amended plans
- Parking spaces around these apartment blocks relocated to provide increased green frontage to the apartments, with four spaces set between the split of longest

block.

- Visualisations produced of key parts of the development

A full formal consultation was carried out and a summary of the additional comments received is as follows:

- The new “Visualisation” of the approach to the site demonstrates the extraordinary urbanising of the approach to the village.

- The response of Cala Homes to the concerns of the Conservation Officer is welcomed regarding the apartment blocks and open view from the conservation area.

- Increase in the number of dwellings near the proposed entrance, once again encourages more pedestrian access into Pirton via the unlit and unpaved Holwell road.

- Previous objections as outlined above are reiterated in comments received

4.0 Planning Considerations

4.1 Site & Surroundings

4.1.1 The application site is located to the east of Royal Oak Lane, south of Holwell Road and north of Hambridge Way. It has a frontage onto Holwell Road of approximately 65 metres and approximately 140 metres along Hambridge Way. The depth of the site is approximately 400 metres. The area of the site totals approximately 4.4 hectares and consists of an open field area for the majority of the northern part of the site bounded by landscaping along its eastern boundary and an area of agricultural buildings to the south of the site with a paddock area to the rear of these buildings. Part of the western boundary of the site is located adjacent to the Pirton Conservation Area. Three new detached properties are now located adjacent the site, to the rear of 40 Royal Oak Lane.

4.2 Proposal

4.2.1 This application seeks approval of reserved matters consisting of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale pursuant to outline planning permission no. 15/01618/1 for 78 dwellings with associated infrastructure, public open space, childrens play area and planting. Following outline planning permission for this site for up to 82 dwellings.

4.2.2 Initially included as part of the application were details regarding conditions from the outline permission, including archaeology, flood risk and drainage, construction management plan and ecology. However, these are now the subject of their own individual applications under the Approval of Details Reserved by Condition process. Due to the public interest of the construction vehicles route, as proposed in the submitted Construction Management Plan, this condition is being reported to Members as a separate item and is therefore completely separate from this reserved matters application.

4.2.3 Vehicular access to the development would be via a new mini roundabout on Holwell Road. An emergency only vehicular access is proposed to the south west corner of the site to Hambridge Way and would be gated shut with grasscrete surface only and would not be used by normal vehicles.

4.2.4 The overall dwelling mix would be as follows:

13 x 1 bed flats

12 x 2 bed houses

10 x 3 bed houses

15 x 4 bed houses

28 x 5 bed houses

78 units total

Affordable

40% of the dwellings would be affordable units with the following provided:

13 x 1 bed flats

12 x 2 bed houses

6 x 3 bed houses

31 units total

Private

4 x 3 bed houses

15 x 4 bed houses

28 x 5 bed houses

47 units total

4.2.5 The overall density of the site would be 17.7 dwellings to the hectare. A terrace of six houses is proposed to front Holwell Road. Behind these would be a parking area for the existing cottages along Holwell Road, which currently have no off street parking provision, as a small access separate from the main access.

4.2.6 A childrens play space with various play equipment is proposed to the south-east corner of the site, adjacent a sustainable urban drainage pond. A mixture of design of house types is proposed, providing a variety of appearance for the houses, drawing from the local vernacular of the village. Precise materials for the dwellings have not been specified but the type of materials would include a varied colour palette of facing brickwork, painted render, dark stained cladding, with a variety of roof tile types and some natural slate roofs.

4.2.7 A footpath would be included at the edge of the development along the eastern boundary, providing a link between Holwell Road and Hambridge Way. Pedestrian access is also proposed to link to Hambridge Way from the development itself.

4.3 **Key Issues**

4.3.1 I consider the key issues in this case to be the following:

Access and highway matters

Layout

Density

Housing mix

Scale

Design and appearance

Car and cycle parking provision

Impact upon living conditions of neighbouring property

Impact upon Heritage Assets

Landscaping

Waste and recycling

4.3.2 These issues are addressed in turn as follows. The issues of archaeology, biodiversity, construction management plan (including route for construction vehicles), flood risk and drainage, internal highway matters and waste management plan, are all subject to separate approval of details reserved by condition, from the outline planning permission. They are not 'reserved matters' and are not to be considered as part of this planning application.

4.3.3 **Access and highway matters**

Access is proposed via a mini roundabout on Holwell Road, as the single vehicular access for the main development. This would be located on the turn in the road and would be visible from both directions. The other option of access would have been a T junction turn into the development.

4.3.4 The Highway Authority have no objection to the proposed roundabout and it is considered that this would create a safer situation than the existing. This would be due to drivers seeing warning signage for the roundabout in both directions, which will slow vehicles as they approach from either Pirton or Holwell. I understand that vehicles often speed around this corner due to there being no traffic calming or no other access points to consider on an approach to the turn.

4.3.5 The disadvantage to the roundabout access solution though is that this would have an increased visual impact of access to the development, in this edge of village location. I note the comments made in this regard in that this would alter the rural character of the approach into the village and I agree would be a feature more found in an urban environment. I note the comments made proposing the access to be via a triangular green ('Y junction') instead of the mini roundabout. I have sought further comment from the Highway Authority on this and they state the following:

"With regards to the roundabout we do not believe it is a budget or urban solution. With the provision of a roundabout, all roads are assigned equal priority, giving way to traffic on the right. The roundabout option is considered to be safer and more suitable in this location than a T-Junction.

With regards to a Y-junction this option was not offered and therefore not discussed. On this basis, it is not currently possible to comment whether it would a viable alternative.

The roundabout is a feasible solution and has undergone a Road Safety Audit Stage 1 which demonstrates that in principle it is a workable solution. As mentioned in our previous response we would request that a Stage 2 be conditioned prior to the commencement of the development".

4.3.6 I therefore consider that due to the roundabout being the safer of the two main options, as confirmed by the Highway Authority, the advantage of this increased safety outweighs the harm to the character of the approach to the village in my view.

4.3.7 A footpath is proposed to be installed along the part frontage of the existing terrace, and continue across the frontage of the proposed terrace of 6 houses, turning into the development. This would then fork left as its primary route along the eastern boundary of the development and linking up to Hambridge Way, and it would fork right to serve the first section of the development. The part of the footpath to extend beyond the bounds of the site, would be subject of a Section 278 Agreement between the applicant and the Highway Authority. The details of this are still being determined.

4.3.8 The design of the internal road system reflects the existing serpentine character of the village and the more rural approach to the design has been favoured to avoid over engineered estate type roads. The formal primary vehicle route merges into a less formal route, with green verges either side of a shared surface. This rural approach is continued through into the secondary off shoot roads of the development, serving smaller clusters of houses. Therefore, the informality of the spine road and secondary roads, together with the pedestrian and cycle routes through and alongside the development, would provide a highly permeable layout to enable users to transit through the development with ease and choice of travel modes, to and from the village and further afield.

4.3.9 Overall, I consider the means of access via the proposed mini roundabout would, on balance, be the best solution for the development. The benefits of highway safety improvements and for the flow of vehicles on Holwell Road and to access and exit the development, outweighs the limited harm of the roundabout design in my view. The rural approach to the meandering layout of the main spine road, with smaller secondary roads serving the overall development, together with new access

points for pedestrians to Hambridge Way and the eastern edge footpath, would create a highly permeable scheme, for occupiers and visitors of the development.

4.3.10 Layout

The layout of the development would include 6 dwellings to the frontage facing onto Holwell Road, with the provision of 10 parking spaces for the existing dwellings on Holwell Road. These spaces would be gifted by the developer to those existing properties as they have no off-street parking provision at present. This would improve the current situation of a line of parked cars outside this terrace. I note the comment made that removing these cars would mean a more unsafe situation from occupiers walking straight out into traffic, but I consider the likely vehicle safety improvement of less vehicles on the highway, to be the primary benefit of the proposal here.

- 4.3.11 An L shape barn style car port building is proposed to provide one space to each of the proposed terrace block. This building would face inwards to the terrace, hiding this area of parking in the street scene of the development on this corner. The proposed terrace would have a second space each by way of a smaller car port building and further external spaces. A flat over garage (referred to as 'FOG' in documentation), would be located above this car port building, with a central projecting feature to rear elevation, overlooking the open space to rear.
- 4.3.12 The first detached house would be set back by some 50 metres from the roundabout access on Holwell Road and a green space has been introduced from amended plans to this northern part of the site, adjacent the rear of the parking area for the frontage terrace. With this main green space, the single storey car port building set on a spacious green corner, together with a footpath leading in from Holwell Road, would give an attractive, spacious and green character to the entrance to the development in my view.
- 4.3.13 The layout has been improved from pre-application advice scheme, whereby a single block of flats was proposed to this frontage corner of the site, with parking in open view creating a far more urbanising character to the development. The now proposed layout to the first section of the site is vastly improved in my view, especially with the additional green space introduced through deletion of two dwellings. A flat over garage building is proposed from amended plans from the relocation of one apartment here, from the split of the initially proposed long apartment block. This building would screen and house parking spaces to this part of the development and would provide surveillance of the new green space.
- 4.3.14 As one travels through the development, the road meanders with mainly detached and two pairs of semi-detached houses set to either side, with a cul-de-sac area on the left. The central section of the site is of a larger open green space, labelled 'village green', which links to the green space on the opposite side of the road next to the apartment blocks. To the left of the main green space would be a cul-de-sac of detached houses. The apartment blocks would be set to the right hand side, with cycle store, bin store and parking area behind, abutting the boundary of one of the new dwellings in the former garden of 40 Royal Oak Lane. With green spaces to front and sides would give good spacing around these larger buildings of the site.
- 4.3.15 Continuing on through the development would be detached houses set either side of the road, with an enclave of a terrace of four houses set into the western corner of the site, with front gardens, parking and a shared turning area. The spine road terminates at the southern boundary with a turning head, then a footpath and pedestrian access gate linking to Hambridge Way. The emergency vehicle access is also located here. As a gated cul-de-sac to the left of the final part of the spine road is access to four detached houses which are of the largest in footprint and plot size.

- 4.3.16 The final area of the development is the open area to the south east corner consisting of a locally equipped area of play (LEAP), with fence and gate access and a sustainable urban drainage system (SUDS) balancing pond. This would link to a proposed new drainage ditch to be made alongside the proposed footpath along the eastern boundary.
- 4.3.17 Single and double garages are proposed, together with parking spaces for all dwellings, consisting of one space for one bedroom dwellings and at least two spaces provided for all two or more bedroom dwellings, together with visitor parking. Parking areas are predominantly set to the sides of detached houses or to the rear of plots in the small cul-de-sac off shoots from the main spine road. This allows for full front gardens and reduces dedicated parking areas in the main street scene to a minimum.
- 4.3.18 Back to back elevations and back to side elevation distances for dwellings of the development are generally good, with minimums of 11 and 24 metres respectively. Internal room sizes for both living areas and bedrooms are all acceptable with adequate outlook and natural lighting. Many house types would have the desired modern living spaces of open plan kitchens with breakfast and family spaces, separate utility rooms, storage areas, spacious living rooms and bedrooms, with many en-suites to master and some second bedrooms.
- 4.3.19 With regard to amenity space of the development, rear garden sizes are of a good standard with all but the front terrace gardens and plots exceeding the 75sqm guideline for amenity space in Policy 57 of the current Local Plan. This would provide adequate private outdoor space for the dwellinghouses of the development. Communal amenity space for the apartments part of the development would be approximately 365 sqm, which exceeds the guideline requirement of the Local Plan for this combination of flatted development at 216 sqm (at 12 units x 18 sqm of amenity space per apartment with the thirteenth apartment 'flat over garage' using the open space to the northern end of the site). This would provide a good standard of living conditions for occupiers of the development in my view.
- 4.3.20 Overall, the layout of the proposed development would result in an attractive development, providing a range in size of modern homes, with ample living spaces and good internal layouts with storage areas included. The design and appearance, parking provision and landscaping are all discussed later in this report.

4.3.21 **Density**

The density of the site is one of the primary key issues with this development, being an edge of village location. I understand the average density of the village to be approximately 17 dwellings per hectare (dph) and the highest density of the village is 22dph. The proposed density for the site is 17.7 dph. The density along the current eastern boundary of the village (to which the development would lie adjacent to), is approximately 11dph, which is considerably lower density than the average for the village as a whole. I note the objections made in this regard in that the comments state the density should be equal to or lower than this eastern edge of the village. I also note that a proposed policy of the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan is for a maximum of 30 dwellings on any one development site (Policy PNP 1.2).

- 4.3.22 The proposed development is contrary the general policies of the proposed Pirton Neighbourhood Plan (i.e. the policy which seeks to restrict developments to no more than 30 dwellings on each site). However, the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan is still not at an advanced stage in terms of becoming adopted planning policy, pertaining to this site. The Neighbourhood Plan therefore carries very limited weight at the current time and the overarching planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the current District Local Plan.

4.3.23 The NPPF states at Paragraph 14 that:

“At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

For plan-making this means that:

- local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area;*
- Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, 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; or*
- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.*

For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out- of- date, granting permission 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; or*
- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted”.*

4.3.24 The current Local Plan is considered out of date and there is therefore a balanced judgement to be made between the harm incurred for the character of the village and the wider countryside, against the benefits of the development. Any harm identified must be significant and demonstrable, in order to refuse planning permission.

4.3.25 The density is only marginally higher than the average for the village and I consider this to be a positive for the judgement of harm. There are clear benefits of providing a higher amount of much needed homes on this site, with the facilities and amenities of the village more likely to continue and even grow in number or expand, with a higher number of dwellings for the village, compared to a far lower dwelling number. The Council do not currently have a 5 year housing supply of land and diminishing the number of dwellings on this site to a figure to meet the density of this side of the village, would be further damaging to this situation and likely unrealistic in viability terms, given the size of the site and the outline planning permission being for up to 82 dwellings.

4.3.26 The density of the site has been well mitigated in my view in terms of actual harm upon the open countryside setting (being rural area beyond the green belt) and of views of the development from both Hambridge Way and Holwell Road. As outlined above, the layout to the entrance of the development is such that it would provide a spacious and open feel, with an angled barn style corner building of single storey, sweeping round to a dedicated open space (which replaces two dwellings as part of an overall reduction of four dwellings from 82 to 78 dwellings via amended plans), with a larger area of green open space to the middle of the development (‘village green’), and the open area and character of the south-east corner of the site providing the SUDs balancing pond and childrens play space. There are also only two dwellings close to the Hambridge Way boundary of the site, thereby retaining a more open feel to the edge of the site here and within the site.

4.3.27 The views from the open field side of the site from the east has been well mitigated by utilising the existing 6.5 metre hedgerow of trees to the eastern boundary. These would be retained as shown on plan and would provide excellent screening of the development, just as they screen this side of the village as existing. In addition to this naturally screened boundary, the development is designed in such a

way as to provide only 6 houses along this edge of the site, with many large gaps between the roofscapes. This is through placement of these dwellings side on to the boundary in order that the majority of the edge is of garden areas rather than a continuous row of dwellings to this site edge.

4.3.28 Where the hedgerow of trees ends, there is just one dwelling beyond this, with the childrens play area and SUDs attenuation pond set to the open corner of the site. This therefore does not result in a hard urban edge of closely situated detached houses in a long row, but rather a very dispersed and low density edge to the site. The houses beyond these 6 'edge' dwellings would be located in line with four of the six of the edge houses, with ones not in line being at least 28 metres from the site boundary, thereby minimising the visual impact of the development set in from the edge with open countryside.

4.3.29 The applicant has submitted a contextual analysis plan of the character areas of the village and how these are broadly comparable with certain character areas of the proposed development. The analysis demonstrates how the proposed design would integrate into the existing village grain. An aerial map with the layout superimposed illustrates the proposed density including garden sizes and public green space is less dense than much of the existing village. Further drawings show several fringe areas of the current village as a comparison to the proposed edge of the proposed development to its eastern boundary. These fringe areas are noted as the dwellings along West Lane to the northern edge of the village, the terraces along Danefield Road to the western edge, and properties along Hitchin Road too the southern edge of the village. In my view, the submitted analysis does demonstrate that the proposal would favourably relate to the existing grain of Pirton and would be a successful expansion of this sustainable village.

4.3.30 Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards of the current Local Plan states

"..new residential areas adjacent to open agricultural land require careful consideration to ensure that the layout and design minimise any potential urban fringe problems and lessen any detrimental effects on adjacent open countryside and its land uses".

I consider the layout has minimised the impact of the density of the development. I note all the comments made on this issue and do agree that a degree of harm is inevitable from development of this site for housing. This degree would be lessened with the fewer the number of dwellings but, as stated above, a balanced judgement of harm must be made. In my opinion, through the mitigation of harm from the use of natural screening (which can be conditioned to be retained and maintained at the current height), together with the low density eastern and southern edges of the site, the density of the development from the 78 dwellings proposed is acceptable as this harm is outweighed by the benefits of providing a higher number of homes as part of this Category A village, as defined in the proposed new Local Plan.

4.3.31 Overall, I consider the density of the proposal to be in accordance with the guidelines of Policy 57 and provisions of Section 7 – Requiring good design of the NPPF.

4.3.32 **Housing mix**

Policy 57 of the Local Plan states the following for Guideline 4 - Mix of Dwelling Sizes:

"The character of attractive towns and villages is determined particularly by the variations in the built environment. New development should seek to enhance the character of existing settlements through skilful design. Partly to help this process and partly to fulfil the housing needs of the local area, a mixture of dwelling sizes should be proposed, particularly on larger sites".

4.3.33 Although a mixture of dwelling size is proposed across the development, the development would have a large proportion of 4 and 5 bedroom homes and this is a major concern from the comments received on the application. Particularly for those available to buy as market homes, as opposed to the affordable housing mix, which is for the smaller housing sizes of 1-3 bedroom dwellings. The current Local Plan is not prescriptive for any particular site or area for dwelling mix and the proposed policy of the Neighbourhood Plan is not yet adopted to be able to require a different mix from the applicant. The applicant has had a report commissioned by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners named 'Getting the right mix – Dwelling Size and Type in New Residential Development' (July 2015). In summary, the report states that:

- In the open market, households are free to occupy housing in accordance with what they can afford; in many cases this means housing which is in excess of their need. The flip-side of this is that households who *need* larger housing potentially are unable to meet their needs as they are competing for supply with smaller households. The analysis strongly suggests that there is not enough large housing to meet the full need and demand of the population.
- Smaller households in some of the largest housing are amongst the least likely to move and cannot be relied upon to release larger housing stock back into the market.
- It is beyond the control of any authority to dictate how housing is allocated in the open market, and as such new housing should be seen in the context of how households actually occupy.

4.3.34 This report is not part of either local or national planning policy, but it is useful in understanding the actual higher demand for larger housing and that many households are overcrowded in terms of how occupants actually occupy dwellings. I note the aims of the Neighbourhood Plan to retain its villagers in the settlement by providing more affordable smaller housing stock in new development, whether for first or second time buyers or those wishing to down size and remain in the village. However, without an actual adopted prescriptive policy in this regard, I do not consider the application can be refused for the housing mix as proposed. The benefit of larger housing stock across the development to buy, is that it would likely release smaller housing stock in the village or the surrounding area to be available for those wanting smaller housing stock. The other benefit is that the provision of four and five bedroom homes means they are established in a planned fashion, as opposed to more two and three bedroom homes being extended in the future on plots perhaps not suitable for the bedroom number and in a more unplanned way.

4.3.35 The affordable housing proposed is in line with the 40% requirement as per the Section 106 agreement and the mix is also acceptable to the Housing Officer, of 65% affordable rented and 35% as shared ownership. The apartment blocks would partly be a mix of affordable rented and shared ownership. Due to having individual entrances, this is acceptable to the intended affordable housing provider in terms of management of the units. Overall, I consider the housing mix of the whole development to be acceptable as proposed.

4.3.36 **Scale**

This is a key consideration of the application. The original submission was for seven of the houses to be 2.5 storey with ridge heights of 9.7 metres. Due to concerns expressed to the scale and form of these dwellings and the amount of similar height dwellings across the development, amended plans were submitted to address these concerns. There are now no 2.5 storey houses proposed, with 43 houses reduced in ridge height of varying amounts between 0.5 and 1.25 metres. A summary table has been provided by the applicant as part of the revised plans. Dwelling heights are now proposed to range between 7.3 and 9.3 metres.

- 4.3.37 With regard to the frontage terrace compared to the adjacent 'Twelve Apostle' terrace dwellings, these have been reduced in height by 0.85 metres to 7.3 metres, being far more sympathetic to the character of the existing terrace. The existing terrace should not be replicated in my view as they are modest in size and would unlikely provide modern living accommodation requirements. I now consider the scale of the frontage terrace to be acceptable in relation to the existing terrace and would be set back from the site frontage with front gardens, footpath and grass verge.
- 4.3.38 The dwellings are all now two storey with a maximum ridge height of 9.3 metres for house type E and this is for five plots only. The majority of dwellings are significantly lower than this maximum ridge height now, with 27% lower than 8 metres, 40% are between 8 - 8.5 metres, 27% are between 8.5 – 9 metres.
- 4.3.39 Ridge heights cannot be reduced further than the proposed in my view, in order to keep roof pitches to an attractive appearance in the street scene. In order to achieve further reduction, the house footprints would all require alterations to reduce their span, in turn lower their roof pitch.
- 4.3.40 The scale of the larger apartment block on the original plans was considered excessive in continuous building mass at 40 metres in length. This has now been amended to be split into two smaller blocks, totalling three blocks with the other being at right angles to the boundary. This split and spacing out of these blocks has broken up this excessive building mass and allowed views through the site from the perspective of the adjacent conservation area. The scale of this part of the development has been reduced in terms of cumulative massing and results in a more attractive arrangement of buildings in this central area of the site. The amended proposal to relocate the displaced dwelling from this split of apartment block has meant the built form has increased towards the northern end of the site, via a flat over garage building to provide the relocated single unit. This does however have the benefit of screening more of the parking area to rear of the frontage terrace, with a car port building and accommodation above. The height of this building is 7.7 metres, and so is lower in scale than its surrounding buildings and would have outlook over the newly created green space to this part of the development.
- 4.3.41 I note the site is close to the Chilterns AONB. The Pirton Neighbourhood Plan details View 8 – view on entry to Pirton village at Holwell Turn across Elm Tree Farm field towards the Chiltern ridge, stating "This view places Pirton in its setting at the foot of the Chiltern Hills AONB". Any development of housing on this site will alter the view towards the Chilterns AONB, especially when viewed from Holwell Road. It is appreciated that this is an entry point to the village with the context of the Chilterns Ridge in the background but, to retain a clear view from Holwell Road through the site to the ridge beyond is likely unrealistic whilst making efficient use of the site for housing. I do not consider that the scale of the dwellings proposed as part of this development, would be materially harmful to the setting of the AONB.
- 4.3.42 As stated above, the retention of the eastern boundary line of trees would provide a natural screen to the open field side of the site, with just six houses being located close to the site edge. This would aid in minimising the visual impact of the development and a condition is recommended for this hedgerow to be retained.
- 4.3.43 I note the significant and numerous comments made to the scale of the development and the density when considering the visual impact of the development. The amended plans have reduced ridge heights across the scheme whilst retaining an attractive design and variety of roofscapes of appropriate pitch. I consider the scale of the development to now be acceptable and would integrate well with the scale of existing buildings of the village and would have no material harm upon the setting of the village in the context of the wider Chilterns AONB. There would be an inevitable degree of harm from the development of the site for housing. This has been accepted with the grant of outline planning permission. I

consider the scale reduction of the scheme and the mitigation of visual impact through the proposed layout, has reduced this harm to an acceptable degree.

4.3.44 **Design and appearance**

With regard to the design and appearance of the development, Section 7 – Requiring Good Design of the NPPF states the following:

“Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics.

Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
- optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping”.

4.3.45 The application states that the nature of the architecture in terms of appearance, references the main characteristics of the village. Pirton contains a mixture of buildings and various materials and styles. The village centre is characterised by cottages, 19th Century brick buildings as well as modern housing and St Mary’s church is at its centre. There are a number of listed buildings within the village. The built form of the village has a mixed palette of materials, with barns clad in dark stained timber, colour pastel rendered houses and thatched cottages. The 19th century houses are built of red brick mostly with slate tiled roofs.

4.3.46 The proposed development would consist of 1.5 and 2 storey dwellings. The previously proposed seven 2.5 storey houses have been omitted from the scheme. The dwelling styles are heavily influenced by the local vernacular of the village in my view. This includes a variety of traditional forms and external treatments. Examples of these include traditional fenestration, variation of traditional canopy styles, stained horizontal timber cladding, selective use of white, cream and coloured render, traditional roof forms and pitches, gable ends with some hipped roofs, occasional use of slate tiling, traditional facing brickwork colours with contrasting brick detailing. Examples of these architectural features of the village and coloured proposed elevations are detailed in the submitted Design and Access Statement, demonstrating the proposal to be in accordance with the character of the village for elevational design.

4.3.47 The apartment buildings take particular reference to the buildings of Elm Tree Farm Close, which lies adjacent the site. The barn style form and ‘through eaves’ dormer details are present on these buildings, with gable projections and traditional timber boarding. The now submitted ‘Visualisations’ are useful in illustrating key areas of the site, of the entrance from Holwell Road showing the roundabout and frontage terrace. Secondly the view across the central area of open space showing the village green area, mix of house types including the gap between the apartment blocks. Thirdly, a visualisation of the three apartment blocks and finally,

the open area of the site to the south-east to provide the SUDs attenuation area and the childrens play area have been provided. The street scene elevation views demonstrate the variety of house types and the mix of detailing, which would result in an attractive and interesting development in my opinion. I consider the above provisions of Section 7 of the NPPF would be met by the proposal. Subject to submission of full details of materials and samples via condition, I consider the design and appearance of the development to be acceptable.

4.3.48 Car and cycle parking provision

With regard to car parking, one space for one bedroom dwellings and at least two spaces provided for all two or more bedroom dwellings, together with visitor parking, is proposed. All spaces are of the required dimensions of 2.4 x 4.8 metres. The total number of visitor spaces is labelled on the Parking Allocation Plan and this is a total of 20 spaces. Many plots have their provision for visitor parking on plot, by providing more than two spaces via driveways, with up to 4 spaces, including the garages, which are of internal dimensions of 3 x 7 metres to allow for vehicle parking and storage / cycle spaces. Taking these plots out of the calculation as they provide their own visitor parking on plot, the number of dwellings requiring unallocated visitor parking is 38. With 20 spaces provided on the development, this exceeds the 0.25 space per dwelling requirement (10 in this case) of the SPD and is therefore acceptable in this case.

4.3.49 Cycle parking would be provided by way of garaging for those plots that have them, as part of the larger internal dimensions of garaging to conform to the Parking SPD. For those houses without garages, the semi-detached and terrace units, cycle sheds are proposed to the rear gardens for cycle parking. Dedicated cycle stores are proposed for the apartments providing one cycle space per dwelling. In my opinion, the proposed scheme satisfies the parking and cycle space requirements set out in the Supplementary Planning Document.

4.3.50 Impact upon living conditions of neighbouring property

With regard to the newly constructed three detached houses to rear garden of 40 Royal Oak Lane, the rear elevations of proposed plots of 8 to 18, would face these recent houses. The distance to the primary garden areas of these houses would be some 20 - 25 metres, with back to back distances of some 23 – 30 metres. This is an acceptable relationship in my view, with mature hedging to be retained on the boundary. There would be no adverse impact of dominance or material loss of light to these dwellings.

4.3.51 For the apartments blocks, these would be located 3 - 6 metres from the western boundary of the site and would have a ridge height of 7.7 metres. There is a recently approved single dwelling to rear of 18 and 20 Royal Oak Lane, which would be located 2 metres from the boundary. One of the apartment blocks would be to the other side of this boundary at just 3 metres away. Although close to this potential dwelling, I do not consider that a material adverse impact would result for the living conditions of occupiers here, with the rear elevation first floor windows facing this permitted dwelling, being high level rooflights, with only one full elevation bedroom window to the block which is set further away. The existing and proposed boundary planting would mature to a higher level for screening, which would be managed by the appointed management company for the development. This planning permission for a single dwelling is also I believe not built and so this reduces the weight to be afforded to the impact upon this potential dwelling.

4.3.52 All other back to back distances of plots in relation to existing surrounding development would be acceptable in my view, with long rear gardens of the existing dwellings along Royal Oak Lane of at least 60 metres back to back distance here. The back to back distance to the barn style development of Elm Tree Farm Close would be some 42 metres, which is again of an ample distance from the existing properties bounding the site. The frontage terrace in relation to the existing terrace

would be acceptable in my view, with views down the rear of their own gardens only as a regular side by side relationship.

- 4.3.53 Overall the layout and detail of the dwellings proposed in terms of their impact upon the living conditions of surrounding occupiers, is considered acceptable and in accordance with the general provisions of Policy 57 of the Local Plan and of Section 7 – Requiring good design of the NPPF.

4.3.54 **Impact upon Heritage Assets**

Part of the western boundary of the application site borders the Pirton Conservation Area, a recognised heritage asset. Comments received from the Conservation Officer included the following:

“In addition, to the consideration of the setting of the conservation area, there is also the setting of 5no. listed buildings to the west of the application site to consider: Elm Tree Farmhouse, a barn to the south-east of the farmhouse together with nos.10, 12 and 14 Royal Oak Lane. In my opinion, these Designated Heritage Assets are located a sufficient distance away from the application site that their setting would not be harmed by the proposed development”.

“I am concerned that the almost 40m long ridge to the main building will close off any potential for the rear of nos.18 & 20 Royal Oak Lane to be able to retain a degree of transitional quality beyond the conservation area boundary. In my view, the length and form of this part of the affordable housing allocation as illustrated on drawing no. SK-004/16/008, fails to respond positively to the context of the adjacent conservation area. A greater degree of openness would ensure that more of a transitional quality is retained beyond this part of the conservation area boundary. This could be achieved a number of ways but key to this would be omitting or significantly altering the form of the aforementioned affordable housing”.

- 4.3.55 The officer also suggested a higher proportion of semi-detached dwellings to increase openness and to set plots around the village green back by deleting two plots, would be positive enhancements of the scheme.
- 4.3.56 The initially submitted layout of this application detailed the main apartment block to be one main continuous block of a 40 metre long ridge, facing the conservation area. This would have blocked views from the conservation area across the site to the open countryside and would not have been fully sensitive to the setting of the conservation area.
- 4.3.57 The application was requested to be amended to take account of these comments. Amended plans have been received to improve this central area of the site. The apartment main block is now proposed as two divided blocks allowing open views through this part of the site. In addition, the relocation of some parking spaces to between two of the apartment blocks, has allowed for increased green space to the front of these apartment buildings. This combined with the main village green space across the spine road, would result in an open view from the conservation area side of the site, reducing any harm of the development overall. Chimneys have also been confirmed to be included to several house types across the development, as per Conservation Officer suggestion, from the previous optional annotation of chimneys on plans.
- 4.3.58 In my opinion, although not all suggestions of the Conservation Officer have been incorporated, the scheme has been improved by the amendments made to the scheme. The amended scheme is supported by the Conservation Officer. Overall, I now consider the scheme would have less than substantial harm upon the setting of the designated heritage asset of Pirton Conservation Area. In such circumstances paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that: *“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal”.*

Such public benefits include the provision of much needed new homes including, as in this case, 40% affordable housing.

4.3.59 With regard to the historic environment for archaeology, this is considered as a separate matter as it is the subject of a condition on the outline planning permission. The submitted Written Scheme of Investigation has been approved by the County Council. The results of the subsequent site investigations are currently being analysed and will be reported to the County Council for further comment, under the separate application for this condition.

4.3.60 **Landscaping**

A full landscaping plan has been submitted with the application and has been altered to reflect the two sets of amendments to the overall scheme. The proposed landscaping within the site would be designed into character areas of:

- Avenue planting including hedgerows and columnar street tree planting
- Natural open space designed to The Green, attenuation feature and Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)
- Decorative shrub and tree planting associated with private front gardens to housing.

4.3.61 Structural specimens would be specifically selected for their shape, colour and seasonal interest. Species are to include snowy mespilus, judas tree, smoke bush, ornamental pear, fastigiated hornbeam and maple varieties. Feature shrub planting is proposed along avenues of the site and at key locations to provide focal points and aid navigation. A mix of grasses, shrubs and herbaceous planting is proposed to include lavender, shrubby veronica, rock rose, Californian lilac African fountain grass and coral bells.

4.3.62 For the boundaries of the site, the use of locally distinctive and native shrubs are proposed to aid the blending of the site into the existing landscape and help soften views from the surrounding area. Existing shrub and tree planting will be retained and protected during construction, to provide existing mature landscape character within the site. Of the long hedgerow that divides the current site into the two fields, only a short section to the central area would require removal to allow the spine road to flow through this space with the village green area.

4.3.63 The childrens play area would be accessed from the development and comprise of wooden play equipment appropriate to the existing landscape setting. Native tree planting of Birch, Maple, Whitebeam and Oak are proposed to enhance the open spaces and play area, whilst providing additional biodiversity and wildlife habitats set within a landscape framework. The play area is proposed to be located here for two main reasons. Firstly, that the connection footpaths would enable the existing community to use the play area with it being on the edge of the development, close to the links to Hambridge Way and the new footpath to be to the eastern edge. Secondly, this more open boundary where there is no mature hedgerow is best suited to an open area of the site instead of built form, in order to minimise the visual impact of the development.

4.3.64 The attenuation SUDS feature (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) is proposed to the south east and is proposed to increase the biodiversity of the site. Marginal aquatic planting would soften the edges whilst providing year round interest, in addition to being a sustainable urban drainage solution.

4.3.65 In terms of hard landscaping, a hierarchy of materials is proposed to differentiate between public, semi-private and private areas, through a combination of bitmac (commonly known as tarmac) and block paving laid in different colours and formations.

4.3.66 The Landscape and Urban Design Officer comments as follows:

“The reduction in dwelling numbers from 82 to 78 is welcomed as it allows for the creation of an amenity open space in the northern space of the scheme near to the entrance. This results in a hierarchy of spaces throughout the development ranging from the play space and SuDS in the south to the central location of the village green to the informal open space on the corner of the access road”.

4.3.67 The hierarchy of open spaces would give an attractive open character to several parts of the site, as one travels through it, as either an occupier, visitor or walker in the area, with good access to the play area for both occupiers of the development and the existing community. Overall, I consider the landscaping scheme submitted is acceptable and works well with the proposed layout of the houses, apartments and spine roads of the development. With regard to biodiversity of the site, this is the subject of separate condition from the outline planning permission but Herts Ecology are satisfied with the report submitted with this application.

4.3.68 **Waste and recycling**

The refuse strategy plan shows bins and boxes to be stored at the rear of houses. Occupiers would present these to the frontage on collection day. For the apartment blocks, a management company would be responsible for bringing bins from the dedicated bin store areas, to the kerbside on collection day. These arrangements would minimise the presence of waste and recycling receptacles in the street scene of the development, retaining an attractive appearance to the development. Indeed, there are no objections to the layout from the Council’s waste collection and recycling manager.

4.4 **Conclusion**

4.4.1 The absence of a five year land supply means that the presumption in favour of sustainable development must be applied to applications for housing development. The presumption in favour of sustainable development as explained in paragraph 14 of the NPPF states that planning permission should be granted for housing development unless identified harm significantly and demonstrably outweighs the benefits of delivering new homes.

4.4.2 I have identified that limited harm would result from the development in the general sense of there being residential development on currently an open field and at the density and scale of the proposal. This harm has been reduced as part of the application process and would be well mitigated with retention of high level natural screening to the eastern edge, the lower density of built form closest to this edge, with good areas of open space, giving a hierarchy of green areas through the development. Harm to the setting of the Conservation Area would be less than substantial, of which has been reduced in the application process by the split of the long ridge apartment block into two, allowing open aspect through the buildings from the perspective of the Conservation Area. In accordance with paragraph 134 of the NPPF, this less than substantial harm must be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal.

4.4.3 The primary benefits of providing these homes include the following, which have predominantly been secured via Section 106 agreement through the outline planning permission process:

- Delivery of 40% affordable housing
- Public open spaces in the form of the village green and other green spaces throughout the development
- Provision of a local equipped area of play (LEAP), located at the development edge to be accessible for the whole community, not just the occupiers of the development

- Financial contributions towards local community services and facilities including education, libraries, youth provision, sustainable transport and Pirton Recreation Ground pavilion and play space equipment
- The provision of ten parking spaces for the existing terrace dwellings on Holwell Road who currently have no off street parking
- The wider benefit of providing this number of dwellings towards the District's housing need figure.

4.3.4 To conclude, I consider that the harm identified from the proposed development, would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the clear benefits of delivering much needed new homes on this site. On this basis in compliance with the requirements of paragraph 14 of the NPPF, I conclude that conditional planning permission should be granted for the development.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 In making decisions on applications submitted under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the Council is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

2. **Details and samples of materials to be used on all external elevations, the roofs and hardsurfaced areas of the development hereby permitted, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, before the development is commenced and the approved details shall be implemented on site.**

Reason: To ensure that the development will have an acceptable appearance which does not detract from the appearance and character of the surrounding area.

3. The approved details of landscaping shall be carried out before the end of the first planting season following either the first occupation of any of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased, shall be replaced during the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority agrees in writing to vary or dispense with this requirement.

Reason: To safeguard and enhance the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality.

4. None of the trees or hedgerows to be retained on the application site shall be felled, lopped, topped, uprooted, removed or otherwise destroyed or killed without the prior written agreement of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard and enhance the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality.

5. The existing hedgerow to be retained to the eastern boundary of the application site, shall be maintained at a height of between 6 and 8 metres, as measured from natural ground level, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard and enhance the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality.

6. **Before commencement of any part of the development, detailed plans shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and Highway Authority which show all geometries associated with the proposed access arrangements including: kerb radii, lane widths, roundabout diameter(s), visibility splays, etc.**

Reason: In the interests of maintaining highway safety.

7. **Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Stage 2 Road Safety Audit, for the proposed highway improvements and access junction shall be completed and submitted for approval by the Highway Authority.**

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

8. Before the development hereby approved is first occupied, all on site vehicular areas shall be accessible and surfaced in a manner to the Local Planning Authority's approval so as to ensure satisfactory parking of vehicles outside highway limits. Arrangements shall be made for surface water from the site to be intercepted and disposed of separately so that it does not discharge into the highway.

Reason: In order to minimise danger, obstruction, and inconvenience to users of the highway and of the premises.

9. A Car Parking Management Plan is required for the 10 car parking spaces to ensure that they will be used only for the cottages along Holwell Road. Prior to first occupation of the development, a Car Parking Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, in consultation with the highway authority. It shall include the following as a minimum:

- Details of car parking allocation for the cottages 2 - 24 Holwell Road;
- Methods to minimise on-street car parking along Holwell Road; and,
- Monitoring required of the Car Parking Management Plan to be submitted to and approved in writing in accordance with a timeframe to be agreed by the local planning authority.

The Car Parking Management Plan shall be fully implemented before the development is first occupied or brought into use, in accordance with a timeframe agreed by the local planning authority, and thereafter retained for this purpose.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to ensure sufficient available on-site car parking.

Proactive Statement

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. The Council acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant during the determination process which led to improvements to the scheme. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraphs 186 and 187) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.