

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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By email only

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I write in relation to the above application and compliance with Policy SP9 and SP17.

Policy SP17 Site HT1 Highover Farm, Hitchin states that *a comprehensive and deliverable Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation is to be prepared and agreed between the landowner/developer and the Council.*

Where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed prior to the or as part of the grant of planning permission.

Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability requires *Strategic Masterplans to be produced in collaboration with the council and subject to consultation with key stakeholders and the community.* SP9 requires applicants to confirm the scope and contents of individual Strategic Masterplans with applicants in pre-application discussions. To ensure sites are comprehensively planned and delivered planning applications should be preceded by and consistent with a Strategic Masterplan agreed by the Council. *Where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed prior to the or as part of the grant of planning permission.*

The application was submitted before the above policy provisions/requirements of SP9 and SP17 were introduced as proposed modifications to the local plan and the Council was applying material weight to the emerging policies given the stage in the local plan examination.

As such there was no ability to confirm the scope and contents of the Strategic Masterplan in pre-application discussions. The applicable policy provision for the application is therefore

Where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed prior to the or as part of the grant of planning permission.

From March 2021 onwards the applicant has positively engaged with the council to a) confirm the scope and contents of a Strategic Masterplan and b) worked collaboratively with the Council to prepare and agree a Strategic Masterplan.

Strategic Masterplan Framework December 2021

The culmination of this work was the Strategic Masterplan Framework that was subject to formal public consultation from the 14th January to 11th February 2022. Any responses to this

consultation regarding the Strategic Masterplan Framework should be taken into account by the relevant case officer.

Green Infrastructure Issues

The section on Green Infrastructure needs further clarity to ensure the green space standards of the Council are understood and delivered.

The Green Infrastructure Framework Plan on page 36 should indicate that the north-south stretch of hedgerow (that links into Highover Park and the Icknield Greenway) is also classified as Dane Walk.

The Icknield Linear Greenway should continue to the far south west corner of the site to provide the same landscape, habitat and amenity buffer as the rest of the corridor. Criteria e of Policy SP17 requires *appropriate separation distances from the adjoining railway embankment to safeguard residential amenity*. Other parameter plans should be amended to reflect this green corridor.

Paragraph 4.4.3 should explain that Table 1 confirms the green space requirements for the development as indicated by the Fields in Trust Standards and that the Council's cabinet resolved in July 2021 to use these standards pending the formal update to the Councils open standards. The table should also include the following categories:

- Playing pitches 1.20 per 1000 population
- Other outdoor sports provision 1.60 per 1000 population
- Equipped play 0.25 per 1000 population
- Other outdoor provision (MUGA etc) 0.30 per 1000 population

And the site requirement as follows

- Playing Pitches 2 hectare
- Other outdoor sports provision 0.7 hectares
- Equipped play 0.4 hectares
- Other outdoor play provision (e.g. MUGA) 0.5 ha.

The development creates the need for 1 NEAP and 1 MUGA and 2 LEAPS. Whilst the location of a NEAP and 2 LEAPs has been agreed the location of a MUGA has not. Options should be looked at both on and off-site to provide this requirement.

The sizes and separation distances for these should be included as below:

Play Provision	Minimum Size	Separation Distance (to nearest habitable room)
LEAP	0.04 hectare	20 m
NEAP	0.1 hectare	30 m
MUGA	0.1 hectare	30 m

Following the setting out of standards it should be explained that the requirement for playing pitch and other outdoor sports provision is to be met off site at Walsworth Common and other sports centres through the improvement of existing sports facilities.

In terms of space **provided** an additional table should be created as below. in each of the green space categories there should be a clear cross reference to the Green Infrastructure Framework Plan which should be re-coded to the following categories (whilst retaining the

names of each proposed space). The table should be represented as follows to provide greater clarification of planning and design intent:

Green Space Type	Size Requirement	Proposed Size Provision	Description of Green Space Proposed
Parks and Gardens	1.3		Currently in the Masterplan document the whole of Highover Park and Hitchin Meadows is coded as parks and gardens. We advise that this is changed to include a) 1.6 hectares of Highfield Park b) the LEAP pocket park in the proposed Grovelands character area of the site (with size) and c) the proposed pocket park which would include the LEAP along the southern boundary of Hitchin Meadows. The remainder of Hitchin Meadows should be re-designed as semi-natural green space.
Amenity Green Space	1		This should include the Stotfold Road , Icknield Dane Walk, greenways additional spaces can be identified as part of the detailed layout
Semi-natural green space	3.02		This should include Threshing Barn Green (with size) and Hitchin Meadows (with re-calculated size as above)
Equipped play (1 NEAP and 2 LEAPS)	0.4		This should indicate the NEAP and 2 LEAPS with sufficient space as required
Other outdoor provision (MUGA)	0.5		This should indicate the location of a MUGA with sufficient space as required
Allotments	0.5		This should indicate the location of allotments with sufficient space as required
Total	6.7 hectares		

On page 38 where each of the green spaces is described under Hitchin Meadows the final bullet should state:

- A play area *set within a pocket park* will be located within the Meadows...the approximate size of this space should be clarified

Under Threshing Barn Green, the approximate size of the site should be confirmed.

Biodiversity and Landscape

It is important that there is minimal conflict within the proposed Green Infrastructure Network between recreational use and ecological connectivity, health and function.

To address potential conflict between these uses the Council advises that the area of species rich grassland shown within the Biodiversity and Landscape Framework within Hitchin Meadows where a pocket park is proposed and within the north of Highover Park

where a NEAP is proposed are redesignated from *species rich grassland* to '*modified grassland*' which is a more deliverable landscape/habitat given the proposed intensity of recreational use. The BNG calculation post development should be re-calculated accordingly but it is anticipated the 10% net gain will still be achievable.

The emerging local plan contains Policy NeX which requires *appropriate buffers of complimentary habitat for designated sites and other connective features, wildlife habitats, priority habitats and species in the ecological mitigation and design. The appropriateness of any buffers will be considered having regard to the status of the relevant habitat. 12 metres of complimentary habitat should be provided around wildlife sites, trees and hedgerows.*

The Strategic Masterplan document needs to provide clearer design intent in relation to complying with this policy and to address concerns raised by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Suggestions are outlined below.

The Biodiversity and Landscape Framework requires further clarification. The key at present codes Category U trees red, vegetation to be removed in red as well as the site boundary in red. Colours should be differentiated to ensure the correct interpretation of this plan.

Proposed new structure planting should continue along the entire length of the railway line (Icknield Greenway) providing a landscape, habitat and amenity buffer.

A new key should be added to the Biodiversity and Landscape Framework with the following areas hatched and referenced 'buffers of complementary habitat to be provided of at least 12 m (or if not a reasonable width given the condition and value of the habitat to buffer)

- Wildlife sites of Stotfold Road verges LWS and Hitchin Railway Banks LWS
- Mature tree belt and hedgerows along the entire length of Stotfold Road
- Trees and hedgerow along the entire length of the Icknield Way Corridor (at present the proposed Icknield greenway proposed along the railway line appears to end whilst the existing tree belt and habitat to be buffered continues, this needs to be addressed)
- The existing north-south hedgerow and east-west hedgerow to be retained and enhanced along Dane Walk
- The tree belt along the southern boundary of the site. This was previously identified as a green corridor with proposed tree planting. This would provide complimentary habitat to the existing trees alongside suitable deep rear gardens, also providing a landscape and amenity buffer to the adjoining existing residential properties.

The width of each proposed buffer should be clarified in the key.

In addition, a new bullet point should be added under the Biodiversity and Landscape Principles as follows:

- *The masterplan parameters and design principles have been developed to retain and buffer the majority of habitats on site.*
- *The framework plan clarifies where at least 12 m buffers or otherwise of complimentary habitat will be provided to protect the habitat connectivity and functionality of these ecological assets and ensure they can continue to provide wildlife corridors as part of the wider ecological network, as well as provide space for nature for residents.*
- *In many areas the buffer will extend further than 12 m as the Green Infrastructure Framework proposals indicate under each proposed green space*
- *There will be some unavoidable loss of an area of trees and hedgerow along Stotfold Road to allow the new access junction to be built as well as the loss of some lower*

quality hedgerow to the south of the site to allow connections between development parcels but this will be compensated for by the proposed extensive new planting across the site.

- *New development will maximise the use of native species in plot boundaries, streets and spaces to ensure species and vegetation diversity*
- *All new development will utilise domestic scale features to support wildlife such as integral bird and bat boxes*

Illustrative Masterplan

Whilst the plan is only illustrative there are concerns with the proposed location of buildings which form a L shaped arrangement in the south west corner of the site directly adjacent and in close proximity to the railway line. Whilst it is appreciated that some enclosure and overlooking of the footway to the allotments is required, it is considered that the current disposition of the buildings is too close to the railway line and not in accordance with criteria e. of Policy SP17 *to provide appropriate separation distances from the adjoining residential embankment to safeguard residential amenity.*

The siting of buildings in this part of the site should reflect the current plot and garden layout along High Dane. The proposed buildings should be removed or reconfigured to allow the proposed green corridor along the entire length of the railway line as referred to in the green infrastructure comments and a more appropriate set back.

Energy Efficiency

The application proposals are relatively silent on how carbon emissions will be minimised in accordance with the energy hierarchy. Whilst the proposals clearly have been developed to reduce transport emissions and maximise biodiversity it would be helpful to provide some aspiration on increasing energy efficiency and incorporating low and renewable energy and sustainable technologies as a precursor to more detailed applications.

Conformity of the Strategic Masterplan Framework with Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability

The document demonstrates conformity with Policy SP9 and SP17 subject to the resolution/clarification of the green space network as advised above. It provides clarity and clear design intent on the key parameters and principles for which approval is sought as the main approval document.

It provides a robust design framework to secure and co-ordinate design quality and support and inform further detailed design through reserved matters subject to the recommended pre-commencement conditions. The document provides the following documentation as required by Policy SP9

- Clear and site-specific distinctive vision and place-making objectives based around a landscape-led design, community heart and walkable community.
- Contextual and character analysis to ensure proposals are in accordance with the National Design Guide and SP9
- Understanding of how the site can effectively integrate with the green infrastructure network and walking, cycling and public transport routes and hubs
- Understanding of site constraints and opportunities which have informed the masterplan development

- Robust set of framework plans which fix the structure of the masterplan in terms of land use, movement, green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape and urban design parameters and principles
- Illustrative Masterplan to provide an example of how the site could be developed within the parameters and principles set out in the Strategic Masterplan Framework to achieve design quality and SP9 compliance (detailed layouts will be assessed and determined through reserved matters)
- Character Area Guidance to provide a balance of unification and diversity in the built form that respects and responds to local character.

The Strategic Masterplan Framework meets the following design objectives of SP9

- i) *Create buildings, spaces and streets which positively reflect and respond to the local landscape, townscape and historic character;*

The application proposals include a local townscape study, landscape analysis and a historical assessment and the masterplan has been developed to reflect local landscape, historic and townscape character. In terms of landscape, a substantial area of green space is retained to the north of the site to maintain a gap and visual and physical separation between Letchworth and Hitchin. This is in accordance with criteria f of Policy SP17 which *requires a visual and physical separation between Letchworth and Hitchin*. The proposed naturalistic character of this proposed space Hitchin Meadows will reflect the rural landscape character to the east and help to integrate the development into its landscape setting.

The hedgerows and tree corridors along the railway line and Stotfold Road will be retained and buffered and incorporated into green ways which will provide multi-functional benefits for recreational pathways, habitat enhancement and sustainable urban drainage as well as provide strong landscape, visual and noise buffers at the eastern and northern boundaries of the development.

The hedgerow on site running east to west will be retained and incorporated into a greenway and the surrounding block pattern and development parcels. It will also be appropriately buffered by additional tree planting and provide a green corridor to help to integrate new buildings.

The existing pond and improved grassland on site will be retained, enhanced and incorporated into the landscape structure through integration with the new proposed Highover Park in a naturalistic approach to protect their ecological and landscape value.

A series of green streets will be delivered running through the development. As well as providing a wayfinding role they will also act as green landscape fingers helping to visually embed the development into the landscape alongside the strategic greenways and The Avenue.

To reduce impact on the setting of the Grade II Threshing Barn a no build area is proposed that will provide a green space in the south west of the site. This also accords with criteria g of Policy SP17 which *requires sensitive consideration of designated and non-designated heritage assets at Highover Farm including the Grade II listed Threshing Barn*.

In terms of townscape character a local townscape study has distilled the key positive characteristics of the area and applied this to the proposed streets, spaces and buildings through Character Area Guidance. This includes guidance on a range of densities, (with higher densities around the community heart/neighbourhood centre and lower densities on the countryside edge) housing typologies, setbacks/building lines, materials, boundary

treatments and landscaping which take positive local cues to help integrate the proposed development into the local context and character. These 5 character areas are

Highover Green: this includes Highover Park, the proposed primary school and neighbourhood centre, the community heart of the development with co-location of community uses and primary green space on the active travel corridor.

Key characteristics include a positive frontage overlooking the park, mature tree planting, bus, pedestrian and cycling priority spaces and low timber fencing of a village green character. The school is proposed to enclose the Avenue and overlook Highover Park with a positive frontage over the key green space. The school pitches are proposed to the rear of the school adjacent to the railway line to provide a buffer space. The neighbourhood building is located adjacent to the school enclosing the avenue to form a village street style space linking directly (both visually and functionally) to Highover Park.

The Avenue: this area includes the central primary street/active travel corridor that extends east to west through the development from High Dane to Stotfold Road with a gently winding alignment to follow the contours of the site. The character along this street will be a strong unifying and consistent character as the main defining street in the proposed development where important community facilities are co-located and public transport will be accessed.

The street will take on a formal garden city character with wide shrub planted verges and mature tree planting. Typically, detached and semi-detached buildings will be set back from the street with front gardens and recessed on plot parking. Formal brick white render and some stone detailing will reference to local Hitchin and Letchworth will define the architectural character. Density would range from 35-40 dph with higher density nearer the community heart.

Grovelands: This area is proposed to the south of the site and abuts existing residential areas around Grovelands Avenue, Collison Close and Roundwood Close so there is an existing built form and street pattern to reflect to support integration.

The character here will reference the more urban character, pattern and materiality of existing properties with a formal grid pattern of short rows of terraced and semi-detached houses with a continuous building line. Densities will range from 25- 35 dph with up to 40 dph nearer the Avenue.

Narrower setbacks will be proposed with smaller front gardens and side or courtyard parking and hedges and railing to define plot boundaries.

The use of predominantly red brick with stone detailing will reference existing architectural character. Key marker buildings will introduce variations in height and a wider palette of materials.

A key feature of this character area will be the proposed and centrally located pocket park (defined by a grove of trees and LEAP (play area) where dwellings will be designed to enclose and overlook this space within a setback/buffer.

A green street extends east to west through this area connecting Highover Park with the pocket park and Stotfold Road to the west to support connected green spaces and walkable and direct routes. A new pedestrian access point is also proposed at Collison Close to support walking and integrate the development with the surrounding street pattern.

Meadow View: this area to the north of the development will be defined by the large Hitchin Meadows green space to the north and Dane Walk (an existing mature hedgerow) to the south.

The character in this part of the site will be more rural, green and informal to respond to the countryside edge and integrate these naturalistic landscape features. Lower densities are proposed with informally arranged perimeter blocks with a more varied building line and deeper setbacks and variations. Large front gardens will be bound by shrub planting and trees. Architectural principles and materials will utilise a more rural typology with mix of brick, stone and timber boarding that reflects the transition to the rural edge.

Hitchin Meadows will predominantly comprise meadow parkland. It will include a pocket park area and LEAP to the south opposite residential properties. The majority of the Meadows will contain a more naturalistic character incorporating a series of swales, an attenuation pond and infiltration basin to support sustainable urban drainage. New habitat will comprise new marginal planting around the SUD areas and new species rich grassland and tree planting to support biodiversity. Dane Walk will provide the southern boundary to the character area. This key landscape feature will be retained and enhanced with new native hedging to provide a green corridor for wildlife and pathways for active travel.

Threshing Barn Green: This character area is defined by the preservation of a large green space to protect the setting of the Grade II listed Threshing Barn Green. The landscape treatment of this space will reflect the grassland meadow character of the current site and area. New development introduced at the western edge of this space will be between 25-35 dph and informally arranged development blocks of short terraces and semi-detached properties.

The green informal character will be reinforced by a variety of setbacks and front gardens with on plot parking. The materials of properties will reflect the informal character of the listed barn including a soft palette of timber weather boarding and slate roofs. Brick will be used to link with the adjacent Avenue. Timber stock fencing will be used on site boundaries will reinforce the rural character.

Views to the north of the barn along the existing farm track will be retained within the layout connecting visually to the retained field pond to be incorporated into Highover Park. Grassland meadow parkland will provide biodiversity value with pathways cut through for recreational use. New tree and shrub planting will be used to soften edges and reinforce boundaries.

A central new cycle/pedestrian pathway will extend through the grassland into Highover Park and into walking and cycling routes to Hitchin Town Centre and railway station.

- ii) *Create integrated, accessible and sustainable transport systems with walking, cycling and public transport designed to be the most attractive forms of transport and effectively linking into the surrounding areas;*
- iii) *Provide a clear structure and hierarchy of pedestrian friendly streets and well-connected footpaths and cycle ways integrated with the wider environment and communities;*

The site benefits from access to both Hitchin and Letchworth rail stations and frequent bus services. 20-minute walk and 10 minute cycle respectively.

The Strategic Masterplan Framework clearly sets out a walkable new community that is easy to navigate, safe and secure through a permeable and connected street network and a network of footpaths that provides edge to edge connectivity, prioritises walking, cycling and public transport and effectively links into the surrounding areas. This will encourage physical activity and pedestrian and cycle movements both within the site and to key destinations in Hitchin and Letchworth. The design is developed to maximise the number of internal trips made by foot or cycle and reduce the convenience of using the car. This approach accords with criteria b of Policy SP17 *to provide sustainable modes of transport and comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks.*

A low-speed environment of 20 mph will support active travel and sustainable modes of transport with all houses to be within 400 m of a bus stop.

The masterplan contains a clear street hierarchy framework plan which clarifies the design specification and approach for the streets proposed so they function as places for people as well as vehicular access. Street typology drawings are provided to indicate the design approach to street design which supports multi-functionality and active travel.

The primary street through the development will be the Avenue with the main point of access at Stotfold Road in accordance with criteria b of Policy SP17. The Avenue will provide the central spine to the development where higher levels of activity will be focused providing access to the community heart and the main bus and active travel corridor. The design of the street infrastructure will reflect this with a wider carriageway to accommodate buses, segregated cycle and footways and a well landscaped verges with structural formal tree planting. The building frontage along this route will include a smaller setback with a continuous line, commonality in house typologies, architecture and materials and generously landscaped frontages.

The second point of vehicular access is to the west of the development at High Dane but this will be limited to serve 137 dwellings. To prevent 'rat-running' and to support active travel a bus gate /modal filter is to be provided in the vicinity of the proposed school. This will only allow buses to access the entire length of the Avenue. Cars will be restricted to either the High Dane access for properties to the east of the school or the Stotfold Road access for properties to the west of the school. Bus stops will be located along the Avenue.

The street and public realm area around the school will be designed to reduce traffic speeds and to facilitate pedestrian crossing to Highover Park through material specification and raised table designs.

A series of secondary streets are identified which will act as the main access and circulation routes utilising a garden village approach in their design. Tertiary streets with shared surfaces will provide access to individual development plots and buildings. A series of green streets have also been identified which will act as visual and functional connectors between key destinations and spaces. Their prominence and wayfinding role will be strengthened through the greater use of landscaping where the built form will be set back.

As well as a permeable street network to support everyday active travel commutes to community destinations such as shops and schools a series of recreational pathways have also been proposed to support active travel and recreational use. These routes are aligned to the green spaces and corridors and will support contact with nature, walking, running, dog

walking, cycling, relaxing for recreational purposes and support the use of green spaces by local people.

To ensure pedestrian connectivity with the surrounding area new pedestrian links will be provided to integrate the development with the surrounding community at Stotfold Road, Collison Close and Armour Rise.

In addition, a new toucan crossing at Stotfold Road and new footway to link into the Letchworth greenway is proposed to secure pedestrian and cycle access to Letchworth and its various facilities.

- iv) Plan for integrated and mixed-use communities with walkable locally accessible community, employment and retail facilities;*

The Strategic Masterplan Framework includes the provision of neighbourhood level retail facilities of approx. 500 sq m and a new 2FE primary school with playing fields. This accords with criteria a and d of Policy SP17 *to provide neighbourhood level facilities providing approximately 500 sqm (net) of retail floorspace and 2 hectares of land for a new primary school.*

These uses have been co-located together and integrated with the proposed Highover Park to create a focus for social interaction and community centre for activities. The centre is located on the primary street and a number of other pedestrian routes converge on the centre to support accessibility. These are all legible and overlooked and aligned to green spaces to support their activity, safety and interest. Other retail, employment and community destinations beyond the site can be suitably reached on foot and cycle. The proposed new pedestrian linkage to the Letchworth Greenway will enhance pedestrian accessibility to Letchworth and its schools, shops and services.

- v) Positively integrate with adjacent rural and urban communities and positively contribute to their character and the way the area functions, including addressing cumulative, cross boundary planning and infrastructure matters;*

The Strategic Masterplan Framework proposes a development that will provide a sensitive north east extension to Hitchin with key strategic green spaces to help integrate the development with its historic and landscape setting and character.

The proposed retention and enhancement of key landscape features (such as the mature hedgerows and trees along Stotfold Road and east-west hedgerow on site) will respect the existing character of the area and the way it functions (in landscape and ecological terms). The character area guidance included in the Masterplan will help to ensure that local context and character is respected in the new development. The model filter along the new Avenue will prevent the surrounding neighbourhoods being used as a new rat run and associated traffic impact. A new crossing and pedestrian pathway to the Letchworth Greenway will strengthen the pedestrian network and accessibility.

- vi) Create an accessible multi-functional green infrastructure network that provides*

- *a key structuring and functional placemaking feature supporting healthy lifestyles, sport, play and recreation, linking into the wider Green Infrastructure Network*
- *A high-quality integrated network to support ecological connectivity, biodiversity net gain, climate adaptation and mitigation linking into the Ecological Network*

The proposed development is structured around a connected series of multi-functional and accessible green spaces of different scales and functions and exceed the open space requirements. A significant amount of work has gone into the planning and coding of each green space so there is clarity on its proposed role, function and design. This is detailed in the Green Infrastructure Framework section of the Strategic Masterplan document. In summary this comprises

- 3 strategic green spaces of Hitchin Meadows, Threshing Barn Green and Highover Park 1 NEAP and 2 LEAPs
 - Hitchin Meadows to the north of the site will provide the key area of semi-natural green space providing a landscape and visual buffer between Hitchin and Letchworth, accommodating strategic SUD features and new habitat as well as a locally accessible and overlooked pocket park with LEAP
 - Threshing Barn Green to the south of the site will provide a green and naturalistic setting to the listed Threshing Barn and incorporate the existing farm track through the site providing an attractive naturalistic gateway to the development from the south and area of informal recreation
 - Highover Park will provide the key recreational space for the new development strategically located on the main Avenue opposite the proposed primary school and neighbourhood centre incorporating existing natural features of improved grassland and pond and incorporating a neighbourhood area of play which will act as a spill out area for the school supporting social interaction and community cohesion
- A neighbourhood pocket park will also be provided within the proposed Groveland area incorporating a Local Area of Play. This space will be overlooked and located on a green street to support connectivity
- An area of allotments will be provided in an accessible location backing onto the railway line and adjacent to the neighbourhood centre. The allotment site will provide a gateway into the Icknield Greenway, adjacent to pedestrian pathways and its proximity to the proposed primary school can support learning through nature.

The key green spaces are linked together by a series of greenways or 'linear parks' these are areas that will include the protection and enhancement of existing hedgerows and tree belts with additional planting, the incorporation of paths for walking and cycling and new habitat. They will provide an attractive alternative to using streets and bring people closer to nature. They will provide ecological, recreational, landscape and amenity benefits ensuring development is embedded in a green setting appropriate to the countryside edge and setting. They will also provide mitigation from noise from both the railway line and Stotfold Road. Sensitive lighting strategies will be required for hedgerows to maintain them as dark corridors for wildlife (including insects and bats).

Complementing these recreational greenways are a series of 'wayfinding' green streets which will provide additional support for pedestrian and cycle movement to key destinations

Outdoor sports provision will be provided through an off-site contribution to enhance provision at Walsworth Common and other sports facilities.

The majority of the site is of relatively low ecological value forming cultivated arable fields. The proposed development retains and incorporates (through landscape buffers) the key existing ecological assets including the hedgerows and trees along the railway line and Stofold Road and the east to west hedgerow which runs through the site, It also incorporates the existing pond and semi improved grassland into the proposed Highover Park.

Measurable Biodiversity Net Gain is demonstrated by use of the Defra Metric 3.0. The results of the calculation show that overall the development is capable of achieving a net gain of 15.36% based on the number of biodiversity units post development. This will be though

- New hedgerow and tree planting including around retained hedgerows to enhance their status to species rich
- A new attenuation pond and swales enriched for wildlife through native aquatic and marginal plants
- Enhancement of semi-natural grassland to create species rich grassland
- Enhancement of existing pond by planting native aquatic and marginal plants
- Tree planting at various locations using suitable native species with the retention of the mature tree belt along Stofold Road which is suitable for supporting protected species
- Grassland habitat for farmland birds

The retention and creation of new on-site habitat will enhance the existing ecological network by strengthening wildlife corridors and habitats to improve habitat functionality and connectivity.

vii) *Ensure the effective use of sustainable urban drainage and sustainable water management;*

Only the northern part of the site is at risk of surface water flooding. The proposed development is located outside of flood risk areas. The masterplan follows natural drainage patterns and proposes the use of SUDs to sustainably manage and treat surface water run off through using the northern area of the site to accommodate attenuation ponds (permanent water areas) and infiltration basins and a series of linear swales.

Reference is made to the creation of multi-functional suds with the use of aquatic and marginal planting to enhance biodiversity as part of the overall landscape strategy for Hitchin Meadows. This will provide amenity and ecological benefit and is integrated into the proposed multifunctional green space network. The proposals accord with criteria f of Policy SP17 *to address surface water risk*. A maintenance and management plan for the water features that form the SUDs system will need to be generated and agreed prior to construction in order that good maintenance practices are followed for the lifetime of the development.

viii) *Ensure a hierarchy of linked, high quality and attractive public spaces and public realm that is safe, attractive and supports social interaction for all age groups; and*

The proposed development incorporates a hierarchy of linked public spaces from strategic to neighbourhood to doorstep spaces as described under the green space section. The central and most intensively used public space/village square will be provided in and around the school and Highover Park and include the central section of the Avenue. This will require an integrated and multi-disciplinary design process to ensure that a high quality attractive and accessible public space is provided that places people first.

The Urban Design Framework sets out a series of place-making principles to support the high-quality design of public space and public realm. These include:

- Relatively compact form of development to support active travel, social interaction, support shops and facilities
- Perimeter block structure to ensure that routes and spaces are overlooked and enclosed with clear separation of public and private space
- Network of green and public spaces throughout the development to provide breathing space, aid orientation and legibility and create opportunities for gathering and interaction and contact with nature
- Hierarchy of connected streets to provide edge to edge connectivity and support active travel, safety and security
- Varied block size, structure and building line to support variety and enclose and define key spaces to support legibility
- Key frontages where a consistent approach is required to the building line and interface between buildings and streets/green spaces to secure an attractive environment that is safe and enclosed.
- The central spine of the Avenue will provide the primary route through the development where a consistent design approach will be required to define its importance as a movement corridor and public space
- Location of gateways, landmark and focal point buildings at key nodal points throughout the development to aid legibility, interaction and a sense of place
- Identification of key internal views and vistas to support wayfinding and legibility and moving around the development.

ix) Design to last with clear stewardship, management and maintenance plans

The management and maintenance of green spaces, play areas, SUDs and other components of public realm will need to be agreed to support the lifetime of the development and that green space is sustainably managed to a suitable level of quality and condition for all residents.

Further discussion on the most appropriate management organisation, financial requirements and community involvement is required.

Recommended Conditions

The application proposals are subject to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental impact Assessment) Regulations 2011. The Environmental Statement and Supplementary Reports submitted consider the likely significant effects of the proposed development during its construction, and once it is complete and operational. The ES assesses the maximum

quantum, physical extent and development principles defined for the proposal as set out in the parameter plans which are to be approval documents.

Regulation 24 of the Regulations state that where an EIA application is determined by a local planning authority a statement shall be made available with a description where necessary of the main measures to avoid, reduce and if possible, offset the major adverse effects of the development. It is recommended that to meet this requirement a Table is provided with a clear schedule of the mitigation proposed in the Environmental Statement and that this is a condition of any planning permission. This will ensure that the development takes place in accordance with the mitigation proposed in the Environment Statement.

NPPF at para 135 states that local planning authorities should seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion. In order to ensure policy compliance with NPPF, National Design Guide and the National Modal Design Code, the delivery of the Strategic Masterplan Framework, the phased co-ordination of the development and further design development I recommend the following conditions be attached to the outline permission.

List of Approved drawings

The development, hereby permitted, shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans save for only minor variations where such variations do not deviate from this permission or are not predicted to lead to any additional or materially different significant environmental effects to those assessed in the Environmental Statement:

- a) Planning application boundary plan
- b) Parameter Plan - Land Use
- c) Parameter Plan - Access and Movement
- d) Parameter Plan - Green Infrastructure
- e) Parameter Plan – Landscape and Biodiversity
- f) Parameter Plan – Urban Design
- g) Parameter Plan - Density and Building Heights

List of Approved Documents

The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the approved documents as set out below, except to the extent that those details are superseded or expanded by an approved Design Code or by any Reserved Matters approval or other approval pursuant to any condition of this planning permission.

- a) Strategic Masterplan Framework: Design Parameters and Principles
- b) Design and Access Statement

Reason: To facilitate any future application to the Local Planning Authority under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and to ensure that the details and approach are consistent with good planning, in accordance with Policy SP9 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan

Phasing & Delivery

No development shall commence apart from enabling or associated works until a Site Wide Phasing & Delivery Plan which accords with the s106 triggers and Transport Mitigation Strategy has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter each subsequent reserved matters application for any phase (or part thereof) shall be accompanied by an updated programme or statement of compliance for approval by the local planning authority.

It shall include the expected sequence of delivery of development within geographical phases related to the phased implementation of physical, social and green infrastructure according to key trigger points where applicable to support a co-ordinated and comprehensive development.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Phasing Plan unless there are unforeseen events / obstacles to delivery and alternative timing for provision is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

All reserved matters submissions shall be in accordance with the Phasing Plan as approved by the Local Planning Authority, unless otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

The Site Wide Phasing Plan shall include but not be limited to the sequence of providing the following elements:

- a) A framework masterplan
- b) Residential development parcels;
- c) Location of self build plots
- d) Local bus service and stops;
- e) Major distributor roads/routes within the site, including timing of provision and opening of access points into the site;
- f) Strategic footpaths and cycleways;
- g) Primary school (playing pitches), community/neighbourhood centre facilities
- h) Strategic foul and surface water features and SUDS;
- i) Formal and informal public open space, park/square, allotments, parks, NEAP and LEAP;
- j) Strategic/structural landscaping
- k) Strategic electricity, telecommunications and gas networks;
- l) Infrastructure for the provision of fibre optic cables;
- m) Biodiversity net gain;
- n) Environmental mitigation measures
- o) Off-site highway improvements.

Reason: To secure comprehensive, co-ordinated and sustainable development and assist with the determination of subsequent reserved matters applications in order to ensure that infrastructure provision and environmental mitigation are provided in time to cater for the needs and impacts arising out of the development, in accordance with Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability, SP6 Sustainable Transport and SP7 Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions

Design Code

Prior to or concurrent with the submission of the first application for approval of reserved matters a design code for the character areas identified on plan X as follows

- The Avenue
- Highover Green
- Threshing Barn Green

Shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The Design Code shall be prepared in accordance with the approved parameter plans, Strategic Masterplan and Design & Access Statement unless otherwise agreed by the LPA.

The Design Code shall include a '**regulating plan**' that establishes the framework for development. The '**regulating plan**' is the key plan associated with the Design Code and the content of the plan and its associated key will guide the structure of the Design Code

The Design Code shall include the following design detail for each character area

The Avenue

- Form of enclosure and definition to development blocks including character and treatment of key gateways, groups of buildings, focal points and landmarks along its entire length
- Relationship of the Avenue to proposed building line of adjacent properties, including setbacks, building typologies, heights, architectural principles, materials, parking, boundary and landscape treatments along its entire length
- Typical cross section and long section of the total length of the Avenue
- Details of the extent of the adoptable highway
- Detail of segregated pedestrian and cycle paths
- Location of street trees and landscaping/planting
- Location of sustainable urban drainage
- Details of surfacing treatments and materials
- Details of intersections and where streets and routes cross and access to individual blocks/plots
- Details of pedestrian crossings and traffic calming measures/speed suppression measures
- Location and design of bus gates, bus stops and manoeuvring/circulation space
- Implementation and phasing details, including any temporary arrangements required to enable safe access to properties in advance of the adoption of the whole corridor

Highover Green

School

- The disposition, layout, entrance, height and frontage design of the school building
- The location of playing fields, play areas, hard and soft landscaping, boundaries and lighting
- The relationship of the school development parcel with Highover Park, Icknield Linear Greenway, Dane Walk and allotments in terms of pedestrian footways and crossings, set-backs, heights, elevational and boundary treatments, landscaping and access
- Details of staff and visitor vehicular and cycle parking and circulation space
- Details of pedestrian and cycle linkages and crossings to the school

Highover Park

- The formal and informal green space locations
- Pedestrian and cycle paths and surfacing treatments
- Character and treatment of pedestrian crossing points to the school
- Locations and surface treatments for any hard landscaped areas
- Locations and surface treatments/planting proposals for soft landscaped areas
- Locations and species details of tree and hedge planting
- Details of intersections where streets and routes cross
- Boundary and lighting treatments
- Integration of public art (identifying appropriate locations) and guidance on materials, signage, utilities, and any other street furniture.
- Sustainable Urban drainage features
- Habitat retention, enhancement and creation
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Retention and integration of hedgerow
- Relationship of Highover Park to adjacent proposed building enclosure and line of adjacent properties, including setbacks, building typologies, heights, architectural principles, materials, parking, boundary and landscape treatments around its periphery

Threshing Barn Green

- The formal and informal green space locations
- Pedestrian and cycle paths and surfacing treatments
- Locations and surface treatments for any hard landscaped areas
- Locations and surface treatments/planting proposals for soft landscaped areas
- Locations and species details of tree planting
- Details of intersections where streets and routes cross
- Boundary and lighting treatments
- Integration of public art (identifying appropriate locations) and guidance on materials, signage, utilities, and any other street furniture.
- Sustainable Urban drainage features
- Habitat retention, enhancement and creation
- Biodiversity Net Gain features
- Relationship of Threshing Barn Green to proposed building enclosure and line of adjacent properties, including setbacks, building typologies, heights, architectural principles, materials, parking, boundary and landscape treatments around its periphery

Strategic Landscape Design

Prior to the submission of the first reserved matters application strategic landscape proposals for the following strategic green spaces as defined on drawing XXX shall be submitted and approved in writing by the local planning authority:

- Hitchin Meadows
- Icknield Linear Greenway
- Stotfold Linear Greenway/Gateway

- Dane Walk (East to west and north-to south extent)

Landscaping proposals shall include the following:

- a) Width of any required buffer as set out in the Masterplan Framework Parameters and Principles Document
- b) General arrangements of strategic urban drainage systems (SUDs)
- c) Strategic earth modelling and mounding
- d) Pedestrian and cycle access paths, surfacing, boundary treatments and lighting
- e) Treatment of existing and retained hedges and trees
- f) New planting
- g) Biodiversity net gain/habitat creation measures
- h) Design details of adjacent frontage development, including building line, set back, height, plot design, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular access and perimeter landscaping

Future Design of the Primary School

The proposed primary school building will be a key community use at the heart of the development. It is located adjacent to the main 'Avenue' and Highover Park where design integration will be essential to ensure a high quality, enclosed, accessible and attractive public space as required by the National Design Guide and NMDC.

Whilst the application identifies the land area required for the school further design decisions and planning permission will be required on the school building footprint, height, building line, entrance, materials, boundary treatment, landscaping and cycle and pedestrian, bus and vehicular access. These design decisions need to be made in the context of the planned surrounding development to ensure design integration. The design code condition recommended will achieve this aim.

However, it is understood that this code is unlikely to be enforceable as the County will be granting its own planning permission for the detailed planning permission for the school and as such would not be subject to this design code condition.

This risks poor quality piecemeal design lacking integration. The district council should agree with the County how a design brief or code will be agreed for the school that ensure that the 'community heart' (comprising the proposed primary school, the Avenue, neighbourhood centre and Highover Park) is planned as one composite piece to ensure good functional and aesthetic design in line with planning policy.

Yours sincerely



Helen Flage

Principal Strategic Planning & Implementation Officer

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