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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON THURSDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2026 AT 7.00 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Nigel Mason (Chair), Emma Fernandes (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Ian Mantle, Bryony May, Louise Peace, Dave Winstanley, Mick Debenham (In place of Val Bryant) and Claire Strong (In place of Martin Prescott).*

In Attendance: *Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jamie Graham (Democratic Services Apprentice), Shaun Greaves (Development and Conservation Manager), Sarah Kasparian (Senior Planning Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Nazneen Roy (Locum Planning Lawyer).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately nine members of the public, including registered speakers.*

146 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 53 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caroline McDonnell, Val Bryant, Tom Tyson and Martin Prescott.

Having given due notice, Councillor Claire Strong substituted for Councillor Prescott and Councillor Mick Debenham substituted for Councillor Bryant.

147 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 15 seconds

There was no other business notified.

148 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 19 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair clarified matters for the registered speakers.
- (4) The Chair confirmed the procedure for moving to debate on an item.
- (5) The Chair advised that Section 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to the meeting.

- (6) The Chair confirmed the cut off procedure should the meeting proceed at length.
- (7) The Chair advised that there had been an additional meeting of the Planning Control Committee scheduled for Tuesday 21 April 2026.

149 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 46 seconds

The Chair confirmed that the registered speakers were in attendance.

150 24/01013/HYA LAND SURROUNDING BURLOES COTTAGES, NEWMARKET ROAD, ROYSTON, HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds

N.B. Councillor Bryony May Declared an interest and moved to the public speaking area to act as Member Advocate.

The Senior Planning Officer advised that written updates on matters relating to application 24/01013/HYA had been published as a supplementary document and advised that, item 1 needs to be revised as Natural England requested the Recreation Mitigation Strategy to be agreed before the decision so the following should be added to the recommendation “A revised Recreation Mitigation Strategy, in consultation with and receipt of no objection from Natural England, and delegate power to the Development and Conservation Manager to agree this.”

The Senior Planning Officer presented the report in respect of Application 24/01013/HYA accompanied by a visual presentation consisting of plans and photographs.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Nigel Mason

In response to questions, the Senior Planning Officer advised that:

- It was standard practice for the Section 106 not to be finalised at this point and therefore it was in draft form.
- The independent viability report looked at the site as a whole. Even though the first third has come forward with a good housing mix, the other two thirds have been estimated. The S106 agreement would cover the entire site and there would not be a lowering of the amount owed in S106 contributions as the viability review progressed.
- The 22% provision of affordable housing could not go down for the rest of the site, it could however go up.
- There were no flats in this phase of the development. Increased height buildings would be in the bowl on the site up to 3.5 storeys or 15m, for example due to topography with 2.5 storeys in the upper slope and the 3.5 storeys in the lower side.
- The emergency access was not a public right of way.
- Most of the Biodiversity Net Gain would be on site, with some off-site provisions.
- Strand 1 Highways works would be complete before occupation and the Strand 2 works would be complete after occupation.

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- Sports England use a calculator which suggested that Royston did not need more changing rooms, but needed more cricket and hockey facilities.
- There was not an option to look at sports on Newmarket Road at the time.
- The viability report was done by the applicant and their consultant, this was then reviewed by Officers.

In response to questions, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that:

- The viability review mechanism works in a way that if viability improves further contributions would be needed, however if viability worsens there would not be a reduction in financial contributions.
- This was the minimum financial contribution that the applicant will have to pay.

In response to questions, the Locum Planning Lawyer advised that:

- The Section 106 was a legal agreement which ties the applicant into certain contributions, these must be provided even if viability changes.
- The Planning Committee should be only focusing on the planning application in front of them.

In response to questions, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised that, there was not a public right of way along the road that would be used as emergency access, but there would be an active travel access in the north-east corner which would be closed to the Newmarket Road.

The Chair invited the Public Objector, Clive Hall to speak against the application. Mr Hall thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- He was speaking as Chair of the Conservators of Therfield Heath and Greens.
- In 2019 he addressed the Planning Control Committee about the harmful impact of development on the Therfield Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) since then the area had worsened.
- In 2024 Natural England downgraded the SSSI, the area was under pressure and no longer recovering.
- Every time developments were permitted without sufficient mitigation the SSSI was damaged, he hoped that he would not come to the Council in the future to state that the aspects that made it and SSSI had been destroyed.
- Since 2019 the Council had declared a climate emergency and later an ecological emergency.
- The Council had a Local Plan that at paragraph 4.16.2 stated that in the absence of any European habitat sites in a district, it would give Nationally important sites levels of protection reserved for European sites.
- The Council agreed a supplementary planning document which extended policy to include Therfield heath SSSI mitigation strategy, which was later agreed with Natural England as a material planning consideration.
- The section 106 funding for SSSI was £350 per dwelling which when indexation was included worked out lower than that of a 2020 planning application on the same site.
- Sport would receive 100% of the funding that requested so why would Therfield Heath not.
- He requested that the item be deferred due to the declared ecological emergency, to allow the applicant more time to agree with natural England a revised recreation mitigation strategy.
- The strategy should give all funds that were requested not 28% of funds.
- The SSSI could not be protected by conditions or reserve matters.

In response to a point of clarification from Councillor Ian Mantle, Mr Hall responded that the development was in the inner zone of the SSSI which was classified as within a 1.9km radius.

The Chair thanked Mr Hall for his presentation and invited the Member Advocate Objector, Councillor Bryony May to speak against the application. Councillor May thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- Her purpose was to put forward the views of the Royston Meridian Ward Members who were unable to attend this evening. The comments that follow were of qualified acceptance.
- The proposal had been well put together and would meet housing need but there were reasons for concern.
- There could have been comparison with the Barkway Road site previously refused by the Planning Control Committee, however this site was in the local plan and had previously granted permission.
- Whilst building on this site involved the loss of country side it was a natural extension of the town and could be integrated well.
- The route into town was flat and cycling and walking had been properly considered, it was also in walking distance to the Kings James Academy.
- It was also welcome that there had been a proposal to provide more pedestrian access to Studlands Rise First School, while minimising the impact on Bury Plantation.
- The applicant had engaged with the local community and had improved the plan following that engagement.
- However, the Members did not accept the highways statement that there was no need for mitigation at the junction between Newmarket Road and the A505. The highways authority was embarking on a safety review of a different section of the A505.
- The mitigation for the junction should be to close the right turn exit and direct traffic to the roundabout to the west, making the junction safer.
- The second issue was the section 106 contributions for Therfield heath SSSI, were the level of financial contribution for mitigation measures continues to be in an arbitrary fashion. The conservators had made their position very clear that contributions were not sufficient, nor had they been contacted early enough to reach an agreement.
- Affordable housing being set at 22% which was better than nothing but less than 40% required by the adopted Local Plan. The reasons for this lower level on this site were specific, and it was important that this would not set a precedent for other development.

There were no points of clarification from Members.

The Chair thanked Councillor May for his presentation and invited the Applicants agent, Mr David Fletcher to speak in support of the application. Mr Fletcher thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- The planning application had been a collaborative process between applicants and planning officers, which was underpinned from a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) agreed from the outset.
- The PPA included the hybrid planning application and the preparation and completion of the strategic masterplan framework.
- As part of the strategic masterplan process there were a number of design workshops with the Planning, Urban Design, Ecology and, Transport Officers, as well as the Highways Authority.
- He thanked the local Member for comments about the engagement process, which he felt had been positive, and included attending the Royston Community Forum.
- The scheme would deliver a number of benefits for future and existing residents, including a crossing over Newmarket Road, a new footway, a new cycle way, a package of section 106 contributions, and bus access in the first stage of development.

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- A contribution of £875,000 had been allocated to support a new bus service early on in the development.
- Consideration had also been given to Therfield Heath and a detailed recreation strategy was submitted as part of the planning application.
- The Scheme includes a 2.7km walking route on land to the south of the site which will be a fully dogs of lead site, benefiting new and existing residence.
- In terms of next steps if planning permission was given then development would commence immediately on site.
- A contribution of £875,000 had been allocated to support a new bus service early on in the development.
- Consideration had also been given to Therfield heath and a detailed recreation strategy was submitted as part of the planning application.
- The Scheme includes a 2.7km walking route on land to the south of the site which will be a fully dogs of lead site, benefiting new and existing residence.
- In terms of next steps if planning permission was given then development would commence immediately on site.

The following members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to points of clarification Mr Fletcher responded:

- The bus turning loop will be part of phase one to allow busses into the site as soon as possible, however a new bus service would not begin until there were enough residents to use it.
- The applicant was keen to get busses into the site, to get residents into the habit of using them.
- The footpath would be constructed as informal route to dog walk, the formal details around material will be agreed as part of the section 106, and the landowner will be in charge of maintenance. The pathway would be secured for 80 years which effectively meant it was secured in perpetuity.

In response to points raised in the verbal presentations, the Senior Planning Officer advised that:

- The footpath would be set out in the section 106; the materials would normally be agreed by the rights of way and would be in keeping with the countryside.
- There were two triggers for the footpath either 80 years or the lifetime of the development.
- It was a planning judgement to look at the viability of the plot, and 22% affordable housing was the best option allowed.
- The social housing mix was policy compliant with a 65%, 35% mix.
- The mix of housing sizes was 36% of the housing being 4 and 5 bedroom houses and the remaining 64% would be 1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses.

In response to points raised in the verbal presentations, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised that:

- Regarding the safety of the junction between Newmarket Road and the A505, the applicant looked at a 5 year history, which reported there had been two incidents recorded at that junction which were serious, however from a planning perspective it had been deemed that this development would not make things worse.
- The junction was a highways matter however some of the strand 2 contributions could go towards making it safer if highways and the applicant were both agreeable.

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- The first contribution for the bus service will be prior to occupation, it will be up to the bus team when a bus service will be provided but it was an option that an existing service may be diverted.

In response to points raised in the verbal presentations, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that:

- Local Plan Policy HS2 stated that the target for affordable housing for developments of 25 dwellings or more was 40%. However, the affordable housing target was subject to viability.
- Natural England had confirmed in their response that they were broadly satisfied with the mitigation measures proposed subject to these being detailed in a revised strategy.

In response to a question by the Chair, the Development and Conservation Manager advised that the condition raised in the supplementary document was no longer needed.

N.B. Following the conclusion of the public participation, Councillor Bryony May left the chamber.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed to grant planning permission, and this was seconded by Councillor Dave Winstanley.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown

Points raised during the debate included:

- That traffic should not take a particular route through the town.
- Overall the Strategic Masterplan was good and was an improvement on the 2020 application.
- The provision of an active travel route was an important improvement.
- The Section 106 contributions were good especially including sport.
- It was disappointing that the full contribution for Therfield Heath had not been agreed.
- Engagement from the applicant was very welcome.

As part of the debate Councillor Claire Strong proposed an amendment to condition 29 g to be worded that "Timing of construction activities (including delivery times and removal of waste) and to avoid the hours 08.00-9.15 and 15.00-15.45;" and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded, and following a vote it was carried.

As part of the debate Councillor Ruth Brown proposed an amendment to condition 29 to demand a specific route in for construction traffic. However, following advice from Officers that this would be too specific, the amendment was withdrawn.

Having been proposed and seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 24/01013/HYA be **GRANTED** planning permission, subject to:

- a) The completion of a satisfactory legal agreement including a conditional viability review mechanism and for officers to negotiate appropriate viability review triggers to ensure that viability is revisited at appropriate junctures throughout the development.
- b) The applicant agreeing to extend the statutory period in order to complete the agreement as required.
- c) Providing delegated powers to the Development and Conservation Manager to update conditions and informative with minor amendments as required.

- d) A revised Recreation Mitigation Strategy, in consultation with and receipt of no objection from Natural England, and delegate power to the Development and Conservation Manager to agree this.
- e) Conditions as set out in the report, subject to the amendments to Condition 29 g shown below:

Condition 29 g

“Timing of construction activities (including delivery times and removal of waste) and to avoid the hours 08.00-9.15 and 15.00-15.45;”

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item there was a break which ended at 20:50 and Councillor Bryony May returned to the chamber.

151 25/01420/FP HIGHOVER FARM, HIGHOVER WAY, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG4 0RQ

Audio recording – 1 hour 29 minutes 57 seconds

N.B. Councillor Nigel Mason declared an interest in this item, left the chamber and Councillor Emma Fernandes took over as Chair.

The Senior Planning Officer presented the report in respect of Application 26/01420/FP and 25/01383/LBC accompanied by a visual presentation consisting of plans and photographs.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Louise Peace
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Senior Planning Officer advised that:

- The access to this site was connected to the larger HT1 site, the highway comes straight up to the access road to the site, but was currently untarmacked. This road would curve in to the farmyard at a more logical angle.
- The new active travel corridor would carry on straight HT1.
- There was enough space for 42 waste bins or there was an option for the larger euro bins. If occupants subscribe to the garden waste bin then that would be kept in their gardens.
- Units 3-8 would all have access to the shared bin store, and other properties would have access to smaller bin stores on their property.
- There was sufficient space provided for the refuse vehicles to turn.
- This site was completely separated from the HT1 site and should be considered completely separately.
- The site does not provide any affordable housing but a £493,000 commuted sum toward affordable housing would be provided.
- Each dwelling had its own garden; there was no other green spaces on the site other than the Biodiversity Net Gain area. The Threshing Barn Green would be next to the site.
- All the inside barn beaming will stay and be preserved while the outside of the barn will be re-cladded.

The Chair invited the Member Advocate Objector, Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason to speak against the application. Councillor Wright-Mason thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

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- He was here to not to object but to raise a number of points on behalf of residents living near the planned development.
- Flooding and drainage were issues in relation to existing conditions on the access road, as well as how water behaved on the site.
- There was significant flooding in Hitchin including Woolgrove Road over a year ago, which had led to residents being more aware of the risk of flooding. This has led to questions about this site and the larger Hive farm site and how surface water would be managed.
- He asked Members to consider the lead flood authorities final position, how the proposed drainage approach responds to local ground conditions and how this scheme fitted in the wider drainage strategy.

There were no points of clarification from Members.

The Chair thanked Councillor Wright-Mason for his presentation and invited the Applicants agent, Mr Ian Coward to speak in support of the application. Mr Coward thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, and highlighted the following:

- After over a year of preapplication discussions the applicant was pleased to be before Committee with the recommendation to grant permission.
- The site had been vacant for some time, and the grade two listed threshing barn was in very poor state of repair and intervention was required.
- National policy recognises that small and medium schemes come forward efficiently and as soon as the applicant was able, they would start with the barn conversion.
- It was rewarding to bring heritage assets back to life and ensure their continued stewardship.
- There would be a balance of hard standing and green space, whilst accommodating all that was needed for 14 units including car parking and refuge provision.
- A scheme of this nature was different from volume house building schemes and provided a different type of home, specifically for those attracted to heritage properties.
- A mix of housing styles and types would be provided.
- It links in successfully to the larger HT1 site with a footpath linking the two.
- The lead flood authority was happy with the scheme.
- An obligation package was provided in accordance with viability for the site.

There were no points of clarification from Members.

Councillor Emma Fernandes proposed to grant planning permission, and this was seconded by Councillor Dave Winstanley.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Claire Billing
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Bryony May

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was great to see a listed building brought back to life and preserved for future generations.
- It looked like a nice scheme, reasonable size and an improvement on the current site.
- The barn was being maintained very tastefully.
- There was a good housing mix provided, including bungalows.
- It was good that there was an active travel route into the larger development.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 25/01420/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission, subject to:

- a) The completion of a satisfactory legal agreement.
- b) The applicant agreeing to extend the statutory period in order to complete the agreement as required.
- c) Providing delegated powers to the Development and Conservation Manager to update conditions and informatives with minor amendments as required.
- d) The conditions as set out in the report.

152 25/01383/LBC HIGHOVER FARM, HIGHOVER WAY, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG4 0RQ

Audio recording – 1 hour 59 minutes 12 seconds

In answer to a point of clarification from Councillor Ian Mantle, the Senior Planning Officer advised that the Conservation Officer had approved this application with conditions, and this Listed Building Consent was required to support the Full Planning granted in the previous item.

Councillor Emma Fernandes proposed to grant planning permission, and this was seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown.

As part of the debate Councillor Claire Strong commented that the barn conversion looked stunning.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 25/01383/LBC be **GRANTED** planning permission, subject to:

- a) The issuing of full planning permission for the farmyard reference 25/01420/FP.
- b) Providing delegated powers to the Development and Conservation Manager to update conditions with minor amendments as required.
- c) The applicant agreeing to extend the statutory period in order to complete the agreement as required.
- d) The conditions as set out in the report including the additional Condition 11 as outlined in the supplementary documents as follows:

Condition 11

“ Details of the floor finish to the Entrance Hall to Unit 4 in the listed barn on approved drawing no. 2208.LBC.03A shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the alterations hereby approved. Thereafter the finish of the former threshing floor shall be installed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.”

153 APPEALS

Audio recording – 2 hours 4 minutes and 3 seconds

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The Development and Conservation Manager provided an update on Planning Appeals and advised:

- There were no appeal decisions to report.
- One appeal had been lodged relating to a storage unit site at Cadwell Lane in Hitchin.
- A full update on an appeal decision relating to The Cabinet in Reed would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chair