

Meeting: Planning and Development Committee **Agenda Item:**

Date: 29 November 2023

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Application No:	22/00781/RMM
Location:	Land to the North of Stevenage, off North Road and Weston Road, Stevenage.
Proposal:	Reserved matters application for the construction of a Country Park including access, layout and landscaping pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM.
Drawing Nos.:	BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3100-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4052-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4053-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4054-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7420-A-C01; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7421-A-C01; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7407-A-C01; M1-NPA-CP-OS-RP-Y-4600-A-C01; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7400-A-C04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4000-R08; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4001-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4002-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4003-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4004-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4005-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4006-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4007-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4008-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4012-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4013-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4014-R05; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4015-R03; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4016-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4017-R02; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4018-R03; BM1-OC-V1-ZZ-DR-C-0042-P08; P1708.TB.01_B; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7404-A-C01.
Applicant:	Bellway Homes (North London) and Miller Homes Ltd
Date Valid:	23 August 2022
Recommendation:	APPROVAL OF RESERVED MATTERS.

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site which measures approximately 75 hectares in area is located to the north of Stevenage and is situated to the east of North Road, to the north east of Granby Road and Chancellors Road and to the west of Weston Road and Great Ashby Way. To the north are agricultural fields. This site is agricultural land comprising a number of arable fields with semi mature hedgerows and trees. The site undulates with a ridgeline running along the northern boundary which adjoins trees. There are two sets of electricity pylons running through the site, with 132Kv pylons toward the north of the site and 440Kv pylons within the centre of the site.

- 1.2 The northern boundary of the site adjoins the borough boundary with North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). The land to the north of this is included in the adopted NHDC local plan for residential development. To the west the site faces onto North Road and the Wrenbridge employment site currently under construction, adjacent to which is the nearby Rugby Club and Lister Hospital. Along the south western boundary of the site is a public footpath/bridleway which runs along the boundary with properties in Chancellors Road, Granby Road and respective cul-de-sac spur roads. There are also footpaths running through the site to land to the north. To the east of the site is Weston Road which contains the Cemetery to the south west and the nearby St Nicholas Church and adjoining listed buildings on Rectory Lane. Finally, also to the east of the site is Rooks Nest Farm which comprises a number of listed buildings including the grade II listed farm itself and associated outbuildings and Rooks Nest House which is a grade I listed building. The south eastern part of the site is located within the St Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area and the Green Belt.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 Planning application 17/00862/OPM granted Outline consent for the erection of 800 residential dwellings, creation of a new local centre, provision of a primary school, provision of landscaped communal amenity space including children's play space; creation of new public open space together with associated highways, landscaping, drainage and utilities works. The application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement. The decision was issued on 1st September 2022 following completion of a Section 106 Agreement.
- 2.2 Application 21/01354/FP granted permission for access works (comprising a new access to land to the west of North Road) on North Road, Stevenage in association with the Employment development on land to the west of North Road. The decision was issued on 1 April 2022.
- 2.3 Application reference 22/00806/RMM for the approval of reserved matters (layout, landscaping, scale, and appearance) for residential development of 115 units comprising Phase 1 Parcels D pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM was approved by members at the committee meeting of 26 October 2023. The decision is awaiting issuing subject to final sign-off of the drainage proposals by the Council's Drainage consultants.
- 2.4 Application reference 22/00808/RMM for the approval of reserved matters for Site Wide Infrastructure including Highways Infrastructure, Drainage and Surface Water, and Green Infrastructure pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM was approved by members at the committee meeting of 9 February 2023 and the decision was issued on 15 March 2023.
- 2.5 Application reference 22/00810/RMM for the approval of reserved matters (layout, landscaping, scale, and appearance) for residential development of 243 units comprising Phase 1 Parcels A-C and commercial unit (Use Class E) pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM was approved by members at the committee meeting of 9 February 2023 and the decision was issued on 15 March 2023.
- 2.6 Application reference 22/00850/NMA was granted for a non-material amendment to outline planning permission 17/00862/OPM to amend wording of conditions 4, (Approval of Details), 18 (Service and Delivery Plan) and 37 (Power Lines). The decision was issued on 17 October 2022.
- 2.7 Application reference 22/00840/COND for the discharge of condition 36 (Flood Risk) attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 6 November 2023.
- 2.8 Application reference 22/00841/COND for the discharge of condition 14 (Construction Management Plan - Temporary Access) attached to planning permission 17/00862/OPM was approved on 31 March 2023.

- 2.9 Application reference 22/01099/COND for the discharge of conditions 7 (Method Statement Ecology) and 8 (Construction Environmental Management) attached to planning permission 17/00862/OPM was approved on 31 March 2023.
- 2.10 Application reference 23/00013/NOI as a notice of intent to ground the overhead power lines and install two terminal towers under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 and in accordance with the Overhead Lines (Exemption)(England and Wales) Regulations 2009, as permitted development was agreed on 6 February 2023.
- 2.11 Application reference 23/00011/CLPD for a Certificate of Lawfulness (Proposed) for the erection of a 3m high brick wall enclosure around proposed terminal tower 314A (subject to Section 37 of the Electricity Act) adjacent North Road was agreed on 22 February 2023.
- 2.12 Application reference 23/00014/TPTPO for works to trees covered by tree preservation orders to include the cutting back of mixed broadleaf trees (T47-T60) under TPO 71 along Bridleway 022 adjacent to No. 22 North Road and No.11 Granby Road was approved on 24 February 2023.
- 2.13 Application reference 23/00070/COND for the discharge of condition 9 (Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy) attached to planning permission 17/00862/OPM was approved on 11 April 2023.
- 2.14 Application reference 23/00086/TPCA for works to trees sited within the Conservation Area to include works to various mixed broadleaf hedgerows, mixed saplings and Elm saplings within the Conservation Area to provide minimum height clearance of 3.4m to 5.2m and minimum width of 3m to Bridleways 022 and 023 was agreed on 24 February 2023.
- 2.15 Application reference 23/00204/COND for the discharge of condition 6 (housing and infrastructure phasing plan) attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 16 May 2023.
- 2.16 Application reference 23/00205/COND for the discharge of condition 22 (Highways infrastructure (d) bus stops) attached to planning permission 17/00862/OPM was approved on 11 April 2023.
- 2.17 Application reference 23/00206/COND for the discharge of conditions 27 (Archaeological trial trench) and 28 (Archaeological Mitigation) attached to planning permission 17/00862/OPM were approved on 04 July 2023.
- 2.18 Application reference 23/00215/COND for the discharge of condition 5 (phasing plan) attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 31 May 2023.
- 2.19 Application reference 23/00216/COND for the partial discharge of condition 37 (power lines and pylons) attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM relating only to the technical specifications and general phasing plan was approved on 04 July 2023.
- 2.20 Application reference 23/00310/NMA for a non-material amendment of reserved matters (layout, landscaping, scale, and appearance) for residential development of 243 units comprising Phase 1 Parcels A-C and commercial unit (Use Class E) pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM relating to make changes to the external appearance of blocks 1-4 in the local centre to include Juliet balconies and brick detailing; addition of block paving around the play area in the local centre; changes to parking area around block 1; changes to hard surface materials to commercial and rear parking area of block 1; addition of a disabled bay at block 1; erection of a new sub-station; and change in orientation of plots 60-62, 70 and

71 in the Bellway sales area to include change in house type from TH to MA was approved on 31 May 2023.

- 2.21 Application reference 23/00360/NMA is currently being considered for a non-material amendment of reserved matters application 22/00808/RMM to amend condition 2 (approved plans) with regards to SuDS basins, drainage layout, planting, hardsurface materials, boundary treatments, landscaping and pedestrian routes.
- 2.22 Application reference 23/00377/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of condition 35 (Drainage Strategy) relating to side wide infrastructure, attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM.
- 2.23 Application reference 23/00378/COND for the discharge of condition 26 (hard surface materials) relating to site wide infrastructure, attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 17 July 2023.
- 2.24 Application reference 23/00430/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of condition 35 (Drainage Strategy) relating to Phase 1A-C, attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM (Phase 1A-C).
- 2.25 Application reference 23/00431/NMA for a Non-Material Amendment to reserved matters approval reference 22/00810/RMM to replace bay windows with flush windows on some dwellinghouses was approved on 06 July 2023.
- 2.26 Application reference 23/00509/COND for the discharge of condition 26 (Materials) relating to the Bellway Homes plots, attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 13 September 2023.
- 2.27 Application reference 23/00526/RMM for the approval of reserved matters (layout, landscaping, scale, and appearance) for residential development of 243 units comprising Phase 1 Parcels A-C and commercial unit (Use Class E) pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM was approved by members at the committee meeting of 26 October 2023 and the decision was issued on 6 November 2023.
- 2.28 Application reference 23/00529/S106 is currently being considered for the modification of Schedule 2 Clause 2.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7, Schedule 5 Clause 1.2, 1.5 and 2.1.1 and Schedule 7 Clause 2.1 to Section 106 Agreement (dated 01.09.2022) approved under planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM relating to the Country Park clauses.
- 2.29 Application reference 23/00551/COND for the discharge of condition 26 (Hard Surfacing Materials) relating to the Miller Homes plots, attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM was approved on 14 September 2023.
- 2.30 Application reference 23/00656/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of condition 11 (Piling and Foundation) attached to planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM.
- 2.31 Application reference 23/00667/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of condition 7 (Bat and Swift Boxes) relating to Phase 1A-C attached to reserved matters permission reference number 23/00526/RMM.
- 2.32 Application reference 23/00668/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of condition 13 (External Lighting) relating to Phase 1A-C attached to reserved matters permission reference number 23/00526/RMM.

- 2.33 Application reference 23/00669/COND is currently being considered for the discharge of Condition 14 (External Materials) relating to Phase 1A-C attached to reserved matters permission reference number 23/00526/RMM.

3. THE OUTLINE APPLICATION AS APPROVED

- 3.1 The outline application (reference 17/00862/OPM) was submitted to establish the principle of development at the site, with all matters reserved except for the means of access. The outline proposal sought permission for a residential development of up to 800 dwellings as well as the creation of a new local centre, provision of a primary school, provision of landscaped communal amenity space together with associated highways, landscaping, drainage and utilities works. The outline application was approved with a masterplan and a series of parameter plans identifying design coding, building heights and showing the illustrative layout of the development, including how the development will impact on the St Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area.
- 3.2 The primary access to the site is to be taken from North Road via two vehicular access points from which the remainder of the road network for the site will be formed. The primary access road, or spine road, forms a loop within the residentially developed land between the two main access points. Beyond this, the highway network will extend into the residential parcels to provide permeable access to all parts of the site, including the proposed Country Park. A bus route is provided along the primary access route through the site, with a connection proposed to the neighbouring North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) NS1 designated residential site in their adopted Local Plan. The primary access route would also have dedicated cycle and footways, with access off an improved cycleway provision along North Road in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).
- 3.3 The residential development on site will be limited to the western side, with the eastern half of the site providing a fully accessible Country Park. The residential provision is separated into northern and southern parcels, with the primary school and local centre located centrally between. The layout of the developed part of the site accommodates the 440kv electricity pylons within a landscaped corridor running east-west across the site and to the south of the primary school and local centre. The northern 132kv cables within the site will be grounded with terminal towers being provided on the western and eastern parameters of the developed area of the site.
- 3.4 The outline application was approved in September 2022 with the S106 Agreement being signed at the same time. This agreement makes provision for financial and developer contributions towards (but not limited to) primary education, affordable housing, the Country Park, outdoor open space and children's play space, highways works, improved pedestrian and cycle connections along North Road and the NHS.

4. RESERVED MATTERS APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Following the approval of the outline application, the permission was conditioned such that further details were to be submitted by reserved matters applications for the siting, layout, landscaping and appearance of the development. Four reserved matters (RM's) applications have been submitted for 1. Infrastructure; 2. Country Park; 3. Residential Phases 1A-C (Including Local Centre parcel); and 4. Residential Phase 1D (Conservation Area Parcel).
- 4.2 Application reference 22/00781/RMM relates to the Country Park reserved matters (RM) which is the application being considered by this report. The details of this RM are discussed below in section 5.
- 4.3 The infrastructure (highways, drainage and green) for the site has been considered under application reference 22/00808/RMM and was approved by members at the 9 February 2023

Planning and Development Committee meeting. This would provide the main spine road, primary roads, foot and cycleway connections, four drainage basins and associated connections, including the pumping station. The green infrastructure is extensive and includes the large west to east central corridor and smaller north/south green links connecting to existing bridleways and public rights of way (PROW). Extensive planting and landscaping is also proposed along the eastern boundary between Phase 1D and the proposed Country Park, as well as additional planting in parts along the southern PROW/bridleway. The proposals for infrastructure also include for numerous play areas within the site, including a skate park and MUGA with the local centre local equipped play area (LEAP) and local play area (LAP).

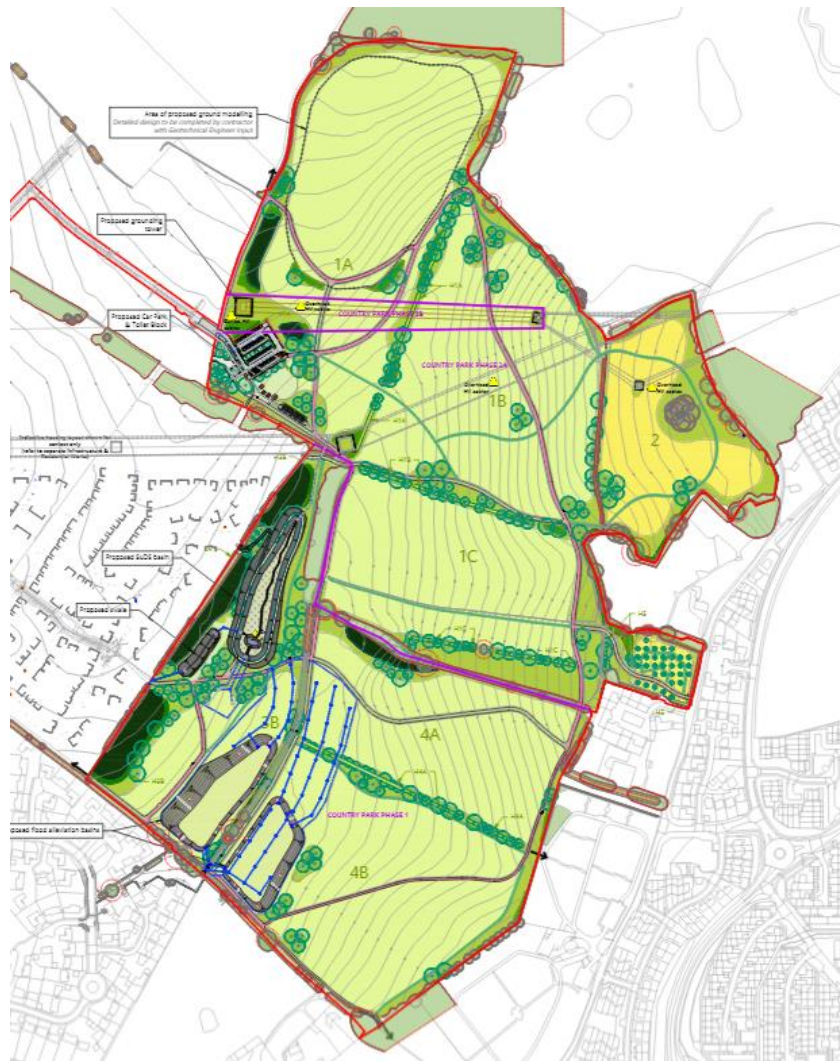
- 4.4 The developed area of the site is distinguished largely in two parts, the western and northern areas, known as Phases 1A-C, parcel C being the local centre, and then the eastern Phase 1D which is the area contained within the St Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area. All parcels in Phase 1 would equate to a total of 358 dwellings, which includes a provision of flats in the local centre, and larger aspirational homes in the Conservation Area. These applications are being considered under application references 22/00810/RMM and 22/00806/RMM respectively.
- 4.5 The residential RM applications include all areas of open space and landscaping not contained in the infrastructure application; secondary roads and cul-de-sacs; parking areas; communal areas; cycle stores and bin stores (where appropriate).

5. APPLICATION DEFERRAL

- 5.1 The current application was heard at the Planning and Development Committee on 14th March 2023. Members elected on this committee voted to have the application deferred. The reasons for deferral stated in the minutes for this meeting are as follows –

- The provision of a comparison between the baseline assessment for biodiversity net gain for the Country Park and the re-assessment of the baseline assessment by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust;
- The carrying out of further consultation on the Country Park proposals with other groups/organisations, such as disability groups, schools and local community groups/residents, and consideration be given to obtaining advice from the National Trust;
- Further discussions with the applicant regarding the 'mound' to be created in the Country Park using materials displaced as part of the approved residential development under Reserved Matters applications 22/00808/RM and 22/00810/RMM;
- Further discussions with the applicant regarding a more imaginative design of the car park toilet block;
- Further discussions with the applicant regarding the highway safety along Weston Road/Great Ashby;
- Further discussions with the applicant/HCC Highway regarding the width of the footways to be provided across the site;
- Further justification for the size of the car park.

- 5.2 Following the application deferral and work by officers to meet the points raised above, the proposals are largely unchanged in principle. Amendments have been made to the toilet block design, car park provision (inclusion of an 'overflow' area), footpath route and landscaping near Rooks Nest House and amended biodiversity information has been submitted. The proposed application therefore includes -
- A single storey, green flat roof toilet block;
 - A 50 space car park (including 'overflow' reinforced grass area, disabled parking and EV spaces);
 - Various foot and cycleways creating perimeter paths and desire line paths around and through the site varying in width up to a maximum of 3.5m, and consisting of bound gravel or mown grass;
 - Two dry, grass lined flood attenuation basins (SuDS basin, swales and deep borehole soakaways located in Country Park but approved under the Infrastructure application);
 - Land remodelling to increase the levels of existing contours across the northern field of the proposed Country Park;
 - Introduction of new field barriers through additional tree and landscaping planting to re-create historic field de-lineation;
 - Creation of hay and wild flower meadows across the fields, with possible animal grazing in the north eastern field;
 - Creation of a community orchard;
 - Street furniture, including benches, cycle stands, bins and directional signage posts.
- 5.3 The proposed Country Park would utilise the eastern parcel of land within the total site, bordering the proposed residential development of HO3 to the west, Chesfield Park, Ten Acre Plantation and Gorsedell Plantation to the north, Weston Road and associated properties and the cemetery along the eastern boundary, and St Nicholas Church, graveyard, adjoining fields and residential properties in Mathews Close and Chancellors Road to the south. As laid out in the S106 agreement attached to the outline permission, the Country Park will be transferred to and adopted by Stevenage Borough Council.
- 5.4 The Country Park would be formed of seven field areas, referenced 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 3B, 4A and 4B on submitted drawing number BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3100 C04, following creation of several new field boundaries.



- 5.5 Field 2 would remain as existing pasture and would allow for future use for animal grazing. The remaining five fields would be seeded to be hay meadows. The proposed community orchard is a small area of land to the east of field 1C and sits due north of Rooks Nest Barns and would provide pedestrian and cycle access onto Weston Road.
- 5.6 Fields 3B and 4B would accommodate the proposed flood and SuDS drainage, including the wet basin and swale approved under the infrastructure application and the two dry attenuation basins which form part of this application. A water connection is also proposed for field 2 to accommodate any future use by livestock. This connection runs from the proposed toilet block building.
- 5.7 To the south west of field 1A it is proposed to construct a 50 space car park and single storey toilet block with grass sedum roof. The toilet facility would provide two unisex toilets and a disabled toilet. A storage area for maintenance equipment used by SBC Parks and Amenities team is proposed on one side of the building, with covered cycle parking at the rear. The building would be located towards the south western corner of this area screened to the west by proposed tree planting. The proposed car park would be sited to the north east of the building with vehicular access from the north west. The car park would come forward in two phases in line with the undergrounding of the overhead power cables. The area marked as Phase 2B coming forward at a later date, would utilise reinforced grass for the parking bays instead of the reinforced gravel proposed for the first stage of the car park. The car park would be slightly banked to take account of the topography and additional planting is proposed to

the east of this area. A small area of picnic benches is proposed to the south of the car park and landscaping.

- 5.8 A collection of footpaths is proposed around most of the perimeter of the Country Park, with east/west crossing connections as well. The widest of these would measure 3.5m in accordance with Hertfordshire County Councils LTP4 policies to enable sufficient space for pedestrians, mobility users and cyclists to adequately pass each other. This would also allow access to the eastern side of the park by maintenance teams. Narrower 2m wide paths for pedestrians are proposed at other desire lines, as well as mown footpaths. The bound surfaces would be constructed of self-binding gravel with timber edging.
- 5.9 The proposed use of sub soil taken from the creation of the SuDS and flood basins and residential phases of the development would create an increase in land levels in field 1A to the north of the site. The existing topography of the field is such that the land slopes east/south east with a dip in the central area of the field leading towards the eastern tree lined boundary. The proposed soil distribution is concentrated in this central area with a displacement leading outwards from this area at a decreasing level. The re-modelling of this field would result in a maximum increase in topography levels of up to 1.75m.
- 5.10 The proposed Country Park would include the provision of furniture for use by park users, including benches, bins, cycle stands near the toilet block and car park and the installation of wayfinder/directional signs/bollards to demarcate the bridleways/PROW.

6. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

- 6.1 Following submission of amended plans, further consultation was sent to those properties who had made third party representations on the application. Following this re-consultation, the following objection points have been received –
- Council need to consider access to countryside and nature is important to health and wellbeing;
 - Insufficient consideration of security risks / anti-social behaviour in context of nearby residential properties;
 - Unacceptable reduction in height of hedgerow between Rooks Nest Barns and Rooks Nest House;
 - Council to consider self-closing gate at entrance to the Orchard from Weston Road;
 - The Council must consider the provision of meadows which properly represent what the area would have looked like in EM Forster's Time;
 - The Council has not included the list of native species in plans which were requested by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust;
 - Unacceptable loss of ancient fields which should remain in a natural state;
 - The proposal does not accord with the original outline scheme of delivering hay meadows and designed to be an urban park which is harmful to the historic setting (that of EM Forester) of the area;
 - Paths too close to Rooks Nest Farm Barns and Rooks Nest House;
 - No consideration for parking restrictions on Weston Road;
 - Border between the orchard and Rooks Nest Farm Barns is incorrect and currently drawn over private driveway;
 - Lack of consultation than of a condensed group of recreational users;
 - Footpath connection to Weston Road could lead to safety issues on the single lane road;
 - Paths being built over drainage areas for properties at Rooks Nest Farm Barns;
 - Loss of privacy and outlook;
 - Traffic congestion at entrance to Rooks Nest Farm Barns due to footpath access;
 - Excessive use of modern furniture;

- Substantive concerns over the continued provision of a car park and toilet block which significantly detract from historic settings and will cause undue harm to the amenities of the area;
- The Council has not given residents sufficient time to consider these alternative proposals;
- The Council must consider the alternative layout for the paths (See representations by FoFC regarding these alternative proposals);
- The Council is in breach of its legal constitutional obligation to act with transparency, integrity and inclusion. Councils are bound by law to consult a wide catchment of people to ensure best possible outcome. There is little evidence the Council has achieved a minimum standard of consultation and what has been undertaken is substandard. It is the authority responsibility to provide the highest quality service to those who pay for the service i.e., the public.
- The Council needs to be aware of the decline of the natural world, harm caused by development where it replaced irreplaceable environments. There is a need to restrict harmful development and encourage natural regeneration with immediate effect.
- Disappointment over the lack of consultation with local residents.

Note: A verbatim copy of all the comments and objections received can be viewed on the Council's website. These comments should also be read in conjunction with the representations already received for this application and as detailed in section 6.2 of the March 2023 committee report for this application (please see attached Appendix).

6.2 Friends of Forster Country (FoFC) -

6.2.1 Summary

We call upon the Planning Committee to:

- Reject the Bellway Miller Vision for an 'Urban Fringe Recreation Park' and agree that the fields should be restored to a form that Forster would have recognised, fully accessible and designed from First principles to celebrate the Town's heritage, culture, and rural past.
 - Reject the need for the 3.5-meter-wide orbital road and cycle superhighway and instead consider and agree the alternative proposals we have put forward within this objection and alternative proposition
 - Reject the current 50 car car park and toilet proposal and agree instead to one of the alternatives set out herein.
 - Reject the dumped spoil mound and instead open the northern, and most beautiful part, of the fields so that everyone – not just the able bodied can enjoy the spectacular views.
- Background This objection refers to the revised proposals for developments in the St Nicholas Conservation area – known as Forster Country and specifically St Nicholas Meadows – put forward by Bellway Miller.

6.2.2 This objection must be read in conjunction with our original objection which for ease of reference is attached and forms a full part of this objection. At its meeting in March, the Development and Planning Committee deferred a decision on the 'Country Park' and requested that a much more fulsome public consultation be undertaken. In particular, the Committee asked Bellway Miller to undertake a 'first principles' consultation that invited the people of Stevenage to determine the purpose and their vision for this open space. Without any public consultation, they had presented the Committee with a proposal for an 'urban fringe recreation park' that was an exceptionally long way away from the heritage asset and distinctively rural proposition set out in the Local Plan and at outline planning. They had no mandate to do this and quite rightly the Committee felt there was a need to start again on consultation.

6.2.3 Our strong view – supported by Historic England, the Council's own heritage consultants and numerous other relevant stakeholders was that an urban recreational park was not appropriate for these conservation fields. Fields that had inspired a young Stevenage resident to write one of the finest works of English literature. What a massive opportunity lost, to create

a uniquely special place that could inspire future generations of young and old Stevenage residents to see their world differently and make new connections between each other the beauty of the landscape on their doorstep.

- 6.2.4 It is deeply regrettable that Bellway Miller have ignored the wishes of the Planning Committee. No attempt has been made by them to genuinely engage all residents and interested parties in the future of this space. Instead, they have undertaken “behind closed doors” private meetings with a handful of recreation special interest groups. Little wonder that those groups agree with the proposal to build a recreation park.
- 6.2.5 In this context, we feel the choice for the committee is a simple one:Do they want to see these fields restored to a form that Forster would have recognised, fully accessible and designed from first principles to celebrate the town’s heritage and culture and with a promise to keep that for the future? Or do they want to allow the developers to build an urban recreation park replete with a cycle superhighway and maintenance road that will forever destroy the landscape and unique heritage and character of this space?
- 6.2.6 An alternative proposal from Friends of Forster Country
Our vision is a restoration of the meadows as they may have been experienced by EM Forster. This is what was promised in the Local Plan and in the outline planning application and what we believe the developer should now deliver. Our vision is for an accessible landscape that all residents of Stevenage and beyond can enjoy. We want it to accessible to the young and old, rich and poor – those with a disability and those who are non-disabled.
- 6.2.7 Our vision is for the meadows to be a heritage destination not the “urban fringe recreation park” envisaged by Bellway Miller. We want future generations to be inspired by the landscape – to visit Rooks Nest House and St Nicholas Church and in so doing experience something special and unique about this remarkable part of Stevenage and Hertfordshire. Bellway’s proposal will forever change the landscape and render it just like any other urban green space – its heritage character will be destroyed forever.
- 6.2.8 We have a vision for the Country Park that emphasizes the Country and much less municipal Park. These are the last remaining open fields in Stevenage. They are the gateway to the beautiful countryside north of Stevenage. This landscape inspired one of the greatest novels in English Literature. A book that celebrated the connection between people and people and the land. The proposals to build an ‘urban fringe recreation park and cycle superhighway’ through the conservation area would be, as the Times newspaper put it – an act of cultural vandalism. But it is not too late to adopt an alternative, much less obtrusive plan.
- 6.2.9 1) Paths and overly urban layout - The revised reserved matters application retains
- The development of a 2.5 kilometre 3.5-meter-wide orbital “open space multi- purpose path” made from “self-binding gravel” which to all intents and purposes is a road, intended to be used by maintenance and refuse trucks and as a cycle super-highway. AND
- An excessively urban approach to path layout, furniture, litter bins and benches that is not in line with national best practice in terms of inclusive access to rural spaces or the preservation of historically significant conservation areas. Bellway Miller have adopted an urban fringe model which is completely inappropriate for this place.
- 6.2.10 The Friends of the Forster Country Society have long campaigned for the land we love to be more accessible, inclusive and available for use by all. Indeed, for many years we have been a lone voice in this endeavour. We would support and champion proposals that carefully balance the needs of all users, including those using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs with the objective of preserving and restoring the very essence of why people want to visit the conservation area, and what Forster himself described as “one of the finest views in England” in the first place.

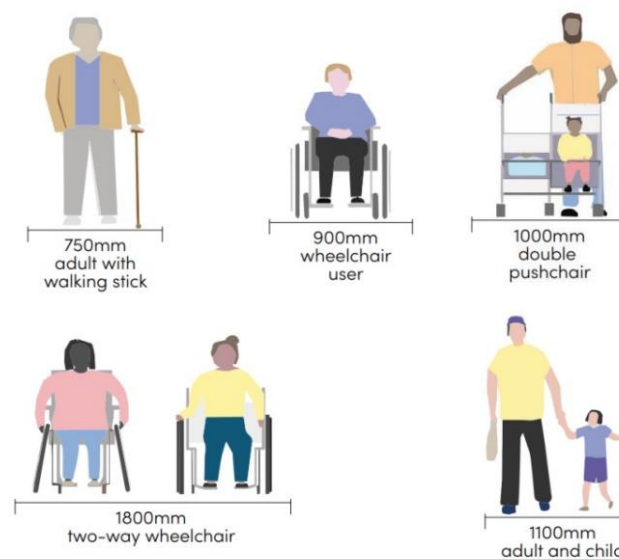
- 6.2.11 It is why, for all its flaws we took some solace from the fact that the outline planning permission included an undertaking to restore St Nicholas Meadows to a rural landscape the nature and character of which would have been recognised by EM Forster and other late 19th Century visitors.
- 6.2.12 Unfortunately, what is included in the revised reserved matters application does not live up to that promise. Instead, there is an over designed and unnecessarily urban proposition that focuses too heavily on a municipal parks led vision for the meadows rather than one that reclaims its rural heritage and charm. What is being proposed is not the rural landscape the Forster would have recognised. The developer has used an “urban fringe” template when developing this proposal. This is completely the wrong model to adopt for rural setting of such huge historic and cultural relevance. They would know this, had they undertaken proper consultation.
- 6.2.13 The most concerning feature of the reserved matters plan is the inclusion of a 2.5 kilometre 3.5 meter-wide orbital “open space multi-purpose path” made from “self-binding gravel”. To all intents and purposes this is a road, and certainly from a planning perspective is a permanent structure that should be considered as having the same impact on the conservation area as if it were an actual road. Indeed, Weston Road, within the northern part of the conservation area is itself barely 3.5 meters wide and in many places is narrower than that. Although the reserved matters Design and Access strategy suggests that this “multi-purpose path” is designed for use by mobility impaired users (which we support) the accompanying Highways Technical Note 19-188 dated August 2022 states that the real reason for the 3.5 meter width is so that Council maintenance and refuse pick-up trucks up to 5 meters in length and 1.75 meters wide can drive around the Country Park to make repairs to park benches and empty litter bins. Why have the Council designed a park that is so cluttered with urban artefacts that all these van journeys are going to be necessary? With a less engineered and less urban design, the need for such wide paths could be avoided and the rural heritage of the meadow enhanced yet further.
- 6.2.14 The multi-purpose path is also intended to act as commuter cycle superhighway. The developer says this has been requested by Hertfordshire County Council. This is simply not true. FOFC met with the relevant highways officer (Mr Adrian McHale) from the County Council on Friday 13th October. Mr McHale was very clear that the County Council does not require an orbital cycle path, and that from the County’s perspective a short east west route suffice. It turns out that there is no need for such a wider path all over the Country Park and we ask the Committee to reject it.
- 6.2.15 With imagination Bellway Miller could create a stunning local heritage asset of national significance. And it could do so in a manner that significantly reduces the burden of traditional maintenance regimes and enhance access for all. The Charity Groundworks UK estimates that 97% of England’s Wild Flower Meadows have been lost in recent years and that proposals to re-adopt less manicured meadows and open spaces should be encouraged. They also note that future and on-going maintenance regimes and costs are significantly lower meadows than they are for more traditional parks.
- 6.2.15 Reasons to reject the proposal from Bellway Miller
The latest proposal from Bellway Miller proposes the development of 3.5 meter wide self-binding gravel multi use path. This is, to all intents and purposes, a road that will run around the park. This is proposed in a conservation area! Adjacent to Grade 1 and 2 listed buildings! And is wider than Weston Road! The developer says the road is needed to accommodate a cycle superhighway and to allow maintenance trucks to drive around the park and empty bins and mow the grass.
- 6.2.16 This is unnecessary for the following reasons: This land has been maintained for hundreds of years without the need for road running through it. The need for refuse trucks to empty bins is removed if the developer adopts the same approach to bins, as the National Trust –

namely to keep the number to a minimum and only ever install them at the entrance to the open spaces they look after. This approach has been PROVEN to reduce litter and significantly reduces the need for hard infrastructure in their open spaces.

6.2.17 There is no transport need for the cycle superhighway. We have met with the County Council's highways team and their requirement for a cycle path is only for a simple east west route through the fields. This can be accommodated, without the need for the circular road meaning a much less intrusive approach.

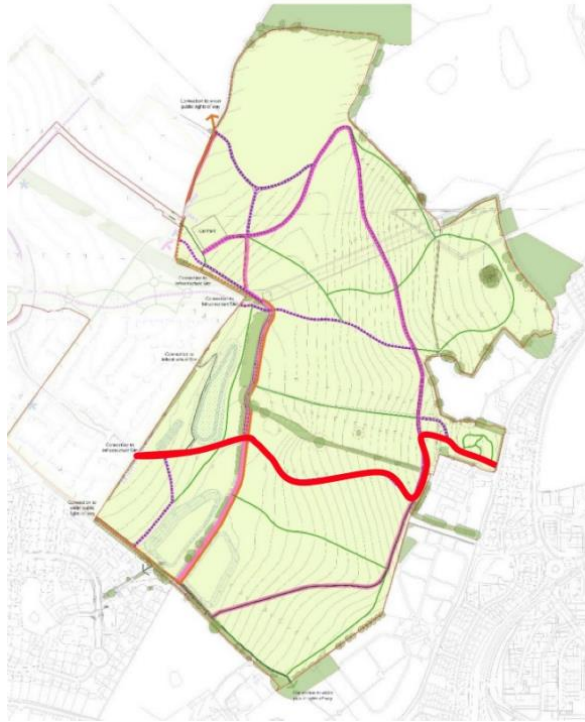
6.2.18 Alternate proposal

By the developers own admission, the appropriate width for an accessible path is 1.8 meters. Made from crushed gravel. This is what is in place at Great Ashby Park. Except for the east-west cycle route, and the existing bridle way, there is no need for any path to be wider than 1.8 meters and so, in our view, this should become the default width. Extract from developer's proposal –



6.2.19 An east west cycle route

There are three potential east west cycle routes 1) The first is to use just part of the path already proposed by the developer as shown in Red below



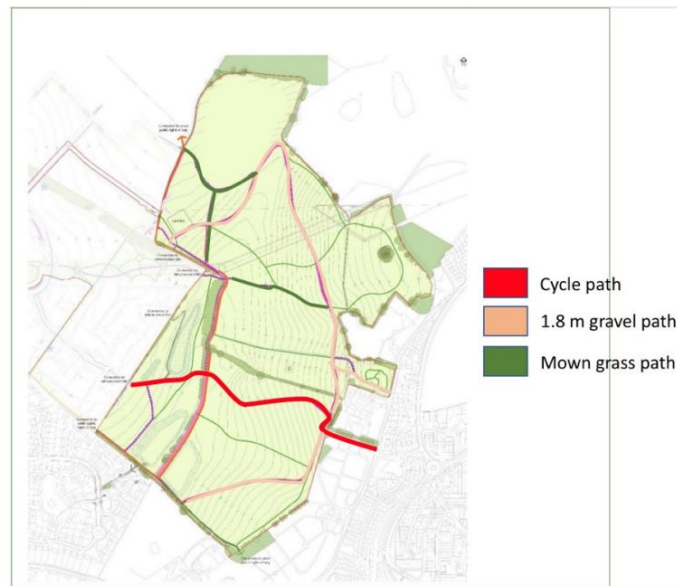
6.2.20 2) Alternatively, an even less intrusive approach would be to bring the cycle path through the unused strip of land at the north of the cemetery as marked in red below. The developer has had ample time to consider this proposition had they bothered to properly consult.



6.2.21 3) The final alternative would be for the cycle path to use the existing access to Weston Road via the cemetery.



6.2.22 Either which way, with a more tightly defined cycle path, all other new paths in the meadow could then be 1.8 meters in width and made from simple compacted gravel (like they are in Great Ashby Park) We believe there is also scope, to reduce the overall number of hard paths as shown below.



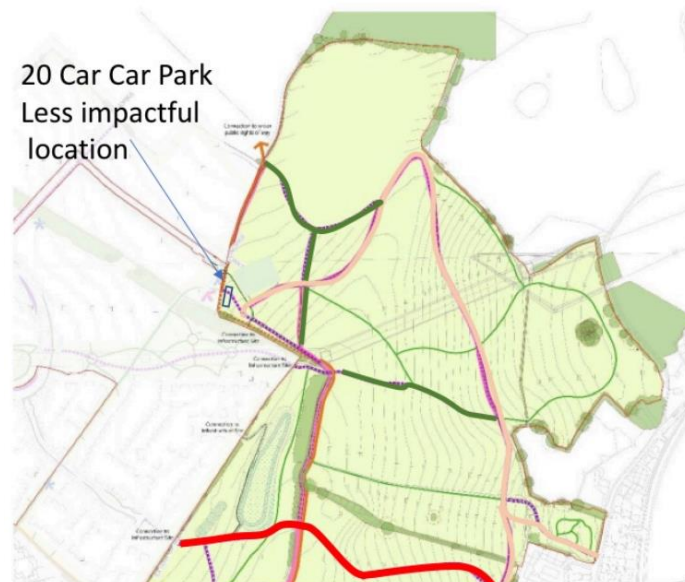
6.2.23 Car Park and Toilet Block - The revised proposal continues to include the proposal for a 50-car car park and toilet block, even though there are already adequate parking and toilet facilities on site. This objection will not repeat what we set out in our previous objection documents that are attached. But suffice to say, that our view remains that the need for the car park has not been properly established and so there is no case for the development in the conservation area. If the Council is determined to push ahead with additional car parking

and toilet facilities beyond those that are already there, we would ask that they consider the following alternatives.

- 6.2.24 A new multi-use car park adjacent to St Nicholas Church This proposal has come forward with the full support of St Nics Church. Indeed, the Church is in advanced conversations with the landowner to purchase the land in question and use their own resources to convert it into a car park. This would see additional car parking being made available to visitors of the meadows in a period similar to that being brought forward by Bellway Miller for their car park. The land is in the ownership of the same land-owner Bellway Miller has purchased the meadows from. Indeed, over a year ago, Bellway Miller promised a meeting of FOFC, officers of the Council and the relevant Cabinet Member (Cllr Speller) that they would approach the landowner to see whether they could incorporate the land into their proposal. A year on and they have not followed through on that promise, they have not contacted the landowner and no progress has been made.
- 6.2.25 The new car park could be used by visitors to the church, cemetery, and meadows. It would draw visitors to the heart to Forster country. It could also be used as overspill for major church events and by parents at school pick up time. We strongly urge the Committee to reject the car park idea, until this option has been carefully considered by the developer and the Council.



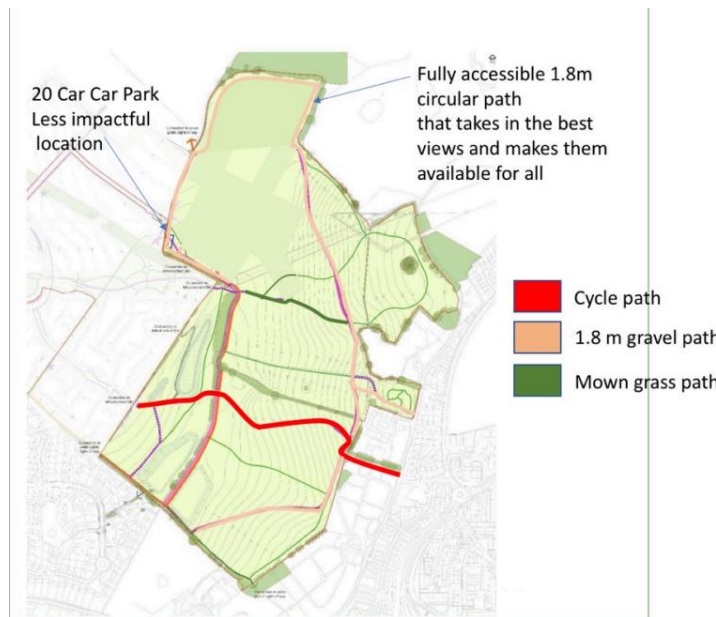
- 6.2.26 If the Council and Bellway Miller are determined to go ahead with building a car park and toilet block in the fields, we would recommend a much more modest arrangement. The car park at Great Ashby Country Park has just 20 places. This should be perfectly adequate, for the meadows given that this open space is significantly smaller than Great Ashby, given the 40+ parking spaces that are already there, and given that 57,000 people live within a 5-to-10-minute walk.
- 6.2.27 In this context we would ask the planning committee to consent no more than 20 spaces and for the proposed car park to be “tucked away” in the corner of the site so that it is far less prominent on the ridge line of the meadow. We would also ask that if the developer persists in requiring a second toilet block in addition to the block on the eastern side of the meadows, that this is as small as possible and tucked away too. See below.



6.2.28 Creation of a 'landscaped mound" made from spoil from the construction site in the north-west part of the conservation area We provided a detailed objection to this proposal when it first appeared. Please see our original objection attached. We find it deeply disappointing that Bellway Miller are persisting with this outrageous proposal. If agreed, the dumping of spoil, will, forever alter the topography of the landscape as it would have been known to EM Forster. It causes unnecessary harm to an area that is already beautifully contoured and one of the most attractive parts of the conservation area for no apparent benefit other than it makes lighter work for the developer and saves them money.



6.2.29 An alternative proposal - By rejecting the mound, the planning committee can open the prospect of the northern part of the meadows to becoming publicly accessible. The views from the northern part of the meadows are stunning. Routing paths this way would also ensure maximum use of the paths/bridle way that are already there rather than putting more development on the fields. This would reduce the need for the multiple paths around the car park, and the additional developed paths criss-crossing the open fields. What a shame Bellway Miller chose not to consult us and instead put forward their plans using only a desk top exercise. We have known these fields for decades and know the best bits. On this basis, an alternative is proposed below. We invite the planning committee to agree this alternative proposal and reject the mound.



6.2.30 As shown above we propose looping what we would like to see as the 1.8m gravel path up to the north of the fields rather than cutting across them, before linking into the existing bridle way.

6.3 North Herts Ramblers Association –

6.3.1 Many thanks for confirming how public access to the Country Park is going to be achieved. I'm happy to confirm that North Herts Ramblers have no comments on the layout or design of the Country Park. However, we would be interested to know more about the provision of public rights of way. I'd be grateful if you'd pass our details to the PROW officer. We'd appreciate being consulted about that.

7. CONSULTATIONS ON THE AMENDED PLANS

7.1 Hertfordshire County Council as Highways Authority

7.1.1 HCC Highways consider its 8 February 2023 decision to recommend approval still remains valid, however it is recognised that SBC are in negotiation with local groups as to the path network within the country park which may or may not require the recommendation to be revisited.

7.2 Hertfordshire County Council as Lead Local Flood Authority

7.2.1 To be reported.

7.3 North Hertfordshire District Council

7.3.1 No further comments received.

7.4 Council's Conservation Advisor BEAMS

7.4.1 Amendments have been made to the scheme. It is noted the car park surface has been changed to reinforced grass with timber log rail as the boundary treatment (although its scale and suburban character has not altered). The size of the toilet block has been reduced along

with improvement to its design. Both of these represent minor improvements to the original reserved matters application.

7.4.2 BEAMS still maintains concerns over the suburbanisation of this part of the Conservation Area, with formalised paths and associated bins, signage etc significantly changing the character of the area. The regrading of the northern part of the country park is also of concern.

7.4.3 The creation of a Country Park has already received outline consent. BEAMS take the view that, as a whole, the proposal will result in harm to the significance of the St Nicholas / Rectory Lane Conservation through the cumulative impacts of a car park / WC (and associated infrastructure), new paths and, potentially, the regrading of the existing landscape.

7.4.4 As a whole the proposals will result in 'less than substantial harm' to the significance of the St Nicholas Rectory Lane Conservation Area. As decision maker Stevenage Borough Council should weigh the 'less than substantial harm' against any public benefits the proposal may possess (as directed by NPPF para. 202).

7.5 Hertfordshire County Council Rights of Way

7.5.1 No comments received.

7.6 Council's Arboricultural Manager

7.6.1 Comments contained within Parks and Amenities / Green Spaces section below.

7.7 Council's Parks and Amenities / Green Spaces

Supplementary comments on planning application amendments (latest comments in italics under original comments):

7.7.1 Car Park:

We note changes to incorporate gravel containment within the car park. However, we stipulate that there should also be a requirement to include markers to denote parking spaces, disabled bays and any electric charging points.

It is unclear in these amendments if this has been included; however, this is a relatively minor request, and it could be conditioned for a later stage.

Seek comments from the Engineers (Rob Woodisse) regarding electric vehicle charging.

7.7.2 There are significant amounts of wooden fencing and bollards around the proposed car park. We are moving away from wooden security measures in our parks due to the limited lifespan and cost of replacement. To help reduce the amount of wooden fencing and bollards, there could be opportunities in some areas to consider bunding and, where considered appropriate, the use of metal hoop barriers.

I note that the post and rail fencing has been changed to a low-level wooden log rail. This could work directly adjacent to parking spaces. However, to reduce the amount of wood further, soil bunding could be used for those areas that are not close to parking spaces, such as at the arrival space and the northeast boundary of the car park.

7.7.3 We have concerns regarding the three proposed *Populus tremula* located just to the north of the toilet building, which could cause maintenance issues. Therefore, a suitable species substitution shall be considered here.

This has been addressed in the amended plans.

7.7.4 Whilst beyond my expertise, any EV charging points shall be robust and protected from possible vehicle strikes.

Seek the advice from the Engineers on electric vehicle charging.

- 7.7.5 Toilet building:
We have concerns about the potential fire resistance of the proposed timber effect composite cladding on the toilet building. As such, it may be more appropriate to consider a metal or cement-based product as an alternative. The external finish must be robust, exhibiting good resistance to vandalism, graffiti and fire.
Included in the design of the new toilet block/store area.
- 7.7.6 The proposed building layout shows limited natural lighting, which we anticipate meaning a reliance on artificial lighting. As such, we'd like to see the inclusion of roof light tubes to maximise the use of natural light and minimise the dependence on artificial lighting and energy.
The current re-design does not feature natural ceiling lighting or light tubes, but small windows. We request the use of natural lighting be improved as much as possible to reduce the dependency on artificial lighting as far as reasonably practicable.
- 7.7.7 The entire building must be designed to be safe and secure when locked.
The amended design of the toilet block includes a corridor area that, whilst it appears it could be lockable, could be used for hiding and making the building feel unsafe during operational hours. Furthermore, we'd need clarification if this proposed corridor would pose any challenges for disabled or limited mobility users.
- 7.7.8 Whilst, in principle, the footprint of the building can be accepted, the interior layout, fixtures and fittings of the building still need to be discussed, determined and agreed upon with SDS. The current setup is an over-provision and could be reduced and made more inclusive. For example, this could be 1x disabled, 2x separate unisex toilets, or additional storage. The entire building must also be designed to be easily maintainable.
The design was amended to take this into consideration. Further details with respect to fixtures and fittings are to be agreed.
- 7.7.9 The toilet building shall also be designed and built to meet excellent environmental credentials. This shall include minimising water use, electric/ energy, sound insulation and heating, sustainable materials, etc.
It is unclear how this will be achieved in the current submission. Further details are required. The building has a more aesthetic appeal due to its curved appearance.
- 7.7.10 General
We are concerned about the proposals for removable wooden bollards for maintenance access. All removable bollards shall be of metal construction for improved durability and must be lockable.
We continue to have concerns regarding the amount of wooden furniture proposed. The wooden signs, fingerpost, picnic tables, removable bollards and seating are all not suitable and will cause maintenance and upkeep challenges, and we require durable, robust alternatives whilst also retaining the softer visual appearance.

Wooden bridge – we require further details regarding the proposed timber bridge and its location. The footboarding surface shall be durable and have a high-rated non-slip surfacing that is suitable for the proposed use. Consideration could be given to using a GRP material.
- 7.7.11 We acknowledge including the tussock grass management within the management plan. However, to assist with future maintenance, some measurements showing the width of tussock grass (or margin) would be helpful in some areas.
TBC
- 7.7.12 Where there are proposals to retain existing fencing, gates or boundary treatments, the condition of these must be assessed and, where required, improved to ensure the boundary

treatments remain effective for a minimum period as set out in the management plan, i.e., at least ten years.

TBC

- 7.7.13 Signage shall also be provided at entrances and points where the use of motorcycles is restricted.

TBC

- 7.7.14 We require clarification regarding the maintenance and upkeep of the car park swale. The management plan states that:

5.4 "... the responsibility of the activity set out in this Landscape and Management Document is to transfer to Stevenage Borough Council, with the exception of the SuDS (south of the car park and in the south west of the Park,) for which the development management company will be responsible. It is provisionally agreed that the management company will be responsible for the drainage pipes, inspection chambers, headwalls, swale, SuDS basin and deep bore soakaways. They will also be responsible for the vegetation in the swale, on the verge beside it and the vegetation in the SuDS basin and its banks. Whilst SBC will adopt and maintain the surrounding trees, grass, and meadow, including where over the deep bore soakaways."

Please confirm that the appointed ManCo will also manage the car park swale.

Confirmation still needs to be confirmed.

- 7.7.15 Basin 4 proposals show an area of permanent water. A risk assessment shall be carried out to determine if water safety equipment may be required. If the assessment outcome determines that such safety equipment is needed, then this will be managed and maintained by the appointed ManCo.

TBC.

- 7.7.16 Whilst beyond my expertise, all borehole covers shall be lockable and able to withstand heavy vehicles, i.e. tractors and machinery running over them. Furthermore, boreholes must be clearly demarcated to prevent damage, as we anticipate they may be difficult to find when the meadow grass is long.

TBC

7.8 Historic England

- 7.8.1 Thank you for your letter dated 3 October 2023 regarding further information on the above application for planning permission. On the basis of this information, we do not wish to offer any comments. We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers, as relevant.

- 7.8.2 It is not necessary for us to be consulted on this application again, unless there are material changes to the proposals. However, if you would like detailed advice from us, please contact us to explain your request.

7.9 UK Power Network (UKPN)

- 7.9.1 No comments received.

7.10 Thames Water

- 7.10.1 No comments received.

7.11 Affinity Water

7.11.1 Affinity Water has no comments to make in respect of this application.

7.12 Anglian Water

7.12.1 No further comments received.

7.13 Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

7.13.1 No further comments received.

7.14 Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

7.14.1 No further comments received.

8. REASONS FOR DEFERRAL

8.1 Biodiversity Net Gain Comparison

8.1.1 The further details submitted following deferral of the application in March 2023, include an updated Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report and calculations matrix based on the Warwickshire Metric Calculation which is considered most appropriate by the Council’s Ecological consultants Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

8.1.2 The outline application was assessed based on an Ecology Chapter forming part of an Environmental Statement (where ecological surveys including habitat surveys were undertaken) produced in 2016 and later updated in 2019. A Biodiversity Impact Assessment was undertaken at this point using the same Warwickshire Metric.

8.1.3 As advised to members, the Country Park provides ecological mitigation and enhancement for the rest of the development. Therefore, a Biodiversity Metric Calculation has been undertaken for the entire site (as shown outlined in red in the outline permission). This calculation requires a baseline habitat survey to be conducted (August 2022) to inform and compare the proposed habitat calculations against, enabling a proposed on site provision to be determined.

8.1.4 The up-to-date calculations have taken full account of the approved reserved matters for infrastructure and residential parcels in Phase 1A-C as those approved at the time of the report being completed. The below table is taken from the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric Calculation Report showing the concluding figures.

On-site baseline	<i>Habitat units</i>	168.90	
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	26.55	
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00	
On-site post-intervention <small>(including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	269.93	
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	31.14	
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00	
On-site net change <small>(units & percentage)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	101.02	59.81%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	4.60	17.32%
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00	0.00%

8.1.5 The Metric calculations show that the development proposals exceed the 10% net gain requirement, with a 59.81% net gain calculated for habitat units and at least 17.32% gain in hedgerow units (excluding hedgerow enhancements). This is a fully on site provision, and takes account of any tree or hedge loss across the whole site in the calculation.

8.2 Further Consultation with Other Groups

8.2.1 Following the planning meeting in March where the Committee deferred the application for further consultation, officers have sought engagement with several local groups, outside of the standard application consultation process. Email correspondence was sent to the following groups/contacts –

- North Herts Ramblers Association;
- East Herts Footpath Society;
- Sustrans;
- Cycling UK Stevenage;
- Health Improvement Lead Planning and Place, HCC;
- Fairlands Valley Spartans;
- Stevenage Striders Running Club; and
- Herts Disability Sports Foundation.

8.2.2 The correspondence sent to each group stated the following –

I am writing to you as the contact point for Stevenage Striders Running Club.

I am the Principal Planning Officer at Stevenage Borough Council dealing with the various applications to develop land to the North of Stevenage off North Road and Weston Road.

The site is allocated in the Council's Local Plan and has outline permission for the erection of 800 houses, a new primary school, local centre, drainage, landscaping and open spaces. The proposals also include for a 38 hectare Country Park. We have been approving finer details of certain elements over the last few months. Recently the application to agree the details of the proposed Country Park was heard by elected members of the Planning and Development Committee. The decision for these details was deferred as members advised they wanted further details on certain elements, along with wider community engagement.

It is for this reason I am making contact with you.

As part of a wider engagement with local groups, the Local Planning Authority, along with the developers Bellway and Miller are looking to host a workshop to allow further discussions about the Country Park and to take on board people's views about its layout, design and accessibility.

A date, time and venue is to be agreed but I would be grateful if you could advise whether persons from your group would be willing to take the time to attend this workshop to engage on these plans from a local recreational group perspective.

I would be grateful for your response at your earliest convenience.

8.2.3 In response to the email correspondence officer's received responses from the local Ramblers Association, Sustrans, Cycling UK Stevenage and Herts Disability Sports Foundation. Of these groups only two were able to attend an in-person discussion (Sustrans and Cycling UK Stevenage), with written comments received from the other two parties who responded.

8.2.4 A workshop was held with Sustrans and Cycling UK Stevenage, as well as the developer, their agent and landscaping consultants, on 8th June 2023. The workshop was informal in nature with plans presented on screen and a round table discussion over various elements including footpath widths and routes, cycle parking facilities, toilet facilities and resting spots.

8.2.5 The main points taken from the workshop were –

- A greater need for wider footpaths to allow sufficient travel by persons on bike without interfering with other users such as pedestrians, wheelchair/mobility scooter users, horses;
- Provision of Sheffield stands at benches;
- Provision of greater covered cycle parking near the toilet block;
- Provision of a café or similar at the toilet block;
- Provision of additional cycle parking provision by the car park/playground (sited in Phase 2 residential area);
- Better desire line connections northwards towards NS1 from the car park area.

8.2.6 The majority of these points have been taken into consideration in the amended plans. It was explained at the workshop that provision of a café or similar was not proposed and did not form part of the S106 requirements for the developer to provide. Widening of a couple of areas of footpath currently 2m in width was not taken forward on officer advice as the overall gradient did not meet the County Council's guidance on acceptable level inclines for cyclists. There is also the balance between provision to meet policy and provide acceptable accessibility and seeking to reduce the harm the proposals will create.

8.2.7 In respect of comments made by the local Ramblers Association, they had no comments to make on the layout and design of the Country Park but would be interested to know more about the provision of PROW.

8.2.8 The representative from Herts Disability Sport Foundation has raised several points in respect of the plans. Firstly, the toilet block would be a welcome opportunity to provide a changing places cubicle in the borough. Only a handful of others exist, with some in private buildings and only available during opening times (M&S). Secondly, they raised some concerns over the gradients of the site and full accessibility but note this as a constraint of the site due to existing field contours.

8.2.9 They advised that the proposals could go further to ensuring good accessibility. At the time of writing this report further communication is being held in respect of further opportunities and these will be presented to Members at the scheduled meeting for consideration.

8.2.10 Consultation with local resident's and Friends of Forster Country (FoFC) has been extensive through statutory consultation of this application. This has included several rounds of neighbour notification letter and posting of site notices in three locations (Rectory Lane, North Road and along the southern PROW on site at the entrance to The Brambles. The application has also been publicised in the local paper as required.

8.2.11 FoFC have been party to several meetings at the Council with officers, the developers, the portfolio holder and Chair of Planning Committee at different times throughout this application process. Therefore the further consultation was more targeted to other groups who would make use of the space, not just recreational as alleged, but to provide a greater scope of users than just preservation of the land. Officer's are satisfied that this was accomplished.

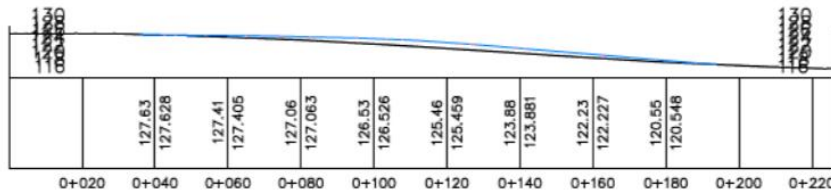
8.2.12 It is proposed, through officers and the developers to undertake engagement with local schools to provide some form of artwork to be used on the external wall of the toilet block and potentially elsewhere on site to encourage good place making and to emphasise the historical heritage of the site.

8.3 Further Consultation on the Land/Soil Re-Grading

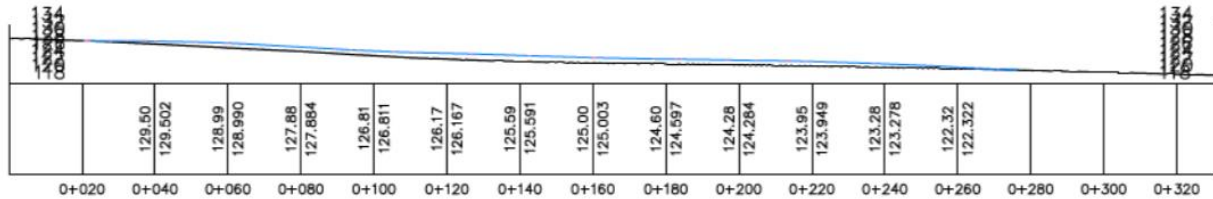
8.3.1 Members requested officers have further consultation with the applicant on the proposed re-grading of land in field 1 to the north of the site. It was asked that further discussion be held in respect of the proposals, the type of soil being proposed to be used and clarification over management of this proposal to ensure rubble is not contained within the soil deposition.

- 8.3.2 Officer's did undertake enquiries about use of a quantity of the soil within SBC sites. However, the amount that could be utilised on Council owned sites was not significant enough to make an impact and it was unknown when it may be required and thus difficult to propose a timeframe for this purpose.
- 8.3.3 Following discussions with the applicant on this matter a Technical Note (TN) has been submitted in support of the proposals following the deferral and to provide further information on the soil type and movement of soil across the site. Essentially, topsoil from the residential parcels would be utilised in the Country Park and subsoil from the Country Park works would be re-used within the residential parcels, the aim being to achieve a balance across the site.
- 8.3.4 The TN goes on to state that the earthworks across the site as a whole will result in a net surplus of topsoil. Unless this can be re-used on site, it would need to be transported off-site and deposited elsewhere. Testing of the topsoil by a soil scientist has informed the proposed landscaping for the development, with half of the topsoil surplus being used in the residential landscaping, gardens and proposed green corridor and smaller green link areas within the site.
- 8.3.5 The use of the remaining 50% of surplus topsoil was then considered within the Country Park. The Country Park proposals include the conversion of the existing agricultural fields into hay meadows, an essential component of re-creation of the landscape character as described by EM Forster's writing. The topsoil is high in nutrients and thus it must go through one of two processes (dilution and/or inversion) to enable it to be used within the Country Park and even then there are constraints on where in the proposed park it can be used. These issues are all outlined in the TN submitted, but essentially are –
- Ground levels of the existing overland flow routes and flood risk areas not suitable for raising;
 - Existing tree and hedge root protection areas must be retained;
 - Biodiversity exclusion zones must be respected;
 - Existing hay meadow areas within the Country Park should be maintained as they are; and
 - The areas under the existing overhead power lines cannot be used to deposit the soil.
- 8.3.6 The proposal to use field 1A to the north of the site was identified when taking these constraints into account. The TN explains that the area chosen 'is less visually prominent in views from elsewhere within the Country Park, as is located furthest away from the Listed Buildings and the most sensitive elements of the Conservation Area, thus having the least impact in heritage terms.' Officers don't disagree with this statement.
- 8.3.7 The field is of a significant size and would allow for the soil to be spread across a large area and following the contours and grading of the existing slopes, such that it would blend in. It would not be a prominent heap of soil or a typical 'mound' form. The below profiles taken from the TN represent the changes in a good visual form, showing the grading change and not the 'mound' shape perceived following previous use of this noun.

West-East PROFILE



North-South PROFILE



- 8.3.8 In respect of extraction of the soil off-site, the TN provides several figures in this regard outlining why the developers have continued to regard the proposals as the most sustainable method. The quantum of soil being considered has been estimated at 24,300m³. A single HGV using the highway network could hold approximately 10m³ of soil, and thus saving a possible 2,430 HGV vehicle movements by retaining the soil onsite. This number of HGV trips would have their own impacts both on local residents and the environment in particular. The TN states that it is difficult to quantify the carbon footprint of these trips as no potential receptor site has been identified, however in quantifying the environmental impact can be estimated.
- 8.3.9 The TN explains that it is likely each lorry would have to travel at least 25 miles (approximate distance to the developers nearest sites) which would result in c. 125 tonnes of carbon emissions – or equivalent of 128 transatlantic return flights. On this basis officers supports the proposal to retain the surplus soil on site in this case. This is because of the significant carbon footprint of transporting the soil off site, the greater impact on the residents with respect to additional HGV movements combined with further implications in relation to traffic on the highway network.
- 8.3.10 On a separate matter, one of the key concerns raised at the March Planning Committee where the application was first presented, was the ability to control the quality of the topsoil being transported into the Country Park. At this time officers advised that a condition could be imposed on any approval to ensure the material is certified. The applicant's have agreed that a condition requiring a Soil Management Plan (SMP) for the Country Park be submitted and approved by the LPA. The SMP would ensure the amount of soil being deposited is quantified correctly and remains as stated in the RMA, whilst also adding a requirement for verification that it is only topsoil being deposited. Officers consider this to still be an acceptable and appropriate means to manage this concern.

8.4 Toilet Block Design

- 8.4.1 The design of the toilet block was one of the key issues raised by members previously. The proposed single storey flat roof building has come about from the desire to lessen the impact by keeping the height down and using materials, such as a grass sedum roof, to blend in with the surrounding area. Previously, the shape and footprint of the building was an oblong. Following discussions with officers, it was suggested that the overall size and height were acceptable, retaining a flat roof because of the reduced visual impact in comparison to some form of pitched roof. However, the design and finish of the rest of the building should be

looked at. It was suggested a more fluid appearance through the introduction of rounded edges could work, removing the sharper corner finish and thus softening its appearance.

- 8.4.2 The oval shaped footprint siting under a rectangular roof provides a differential in the design and is supported through the use of cement board cladding and the green sedum roof. Use of cement boarding has been proposed for durability and maintenance purposes at the request of the Green Spaces Officer. An area on the building frontage has been identified for future visitor information about the area and its historic and heritage links. An area of storage is also retained for use by the Council's Parks and Amenities team.
- 8.4.3 The overall internal layout of the toilet block is not fully acceptable, with concerns raised over the size of the disabled cubicle (being too small), and a loss of natural light being able to enter the toilet cubicles and the corridor area proposed. Taking these points into consideration, firstly loss of natural light entering into the toilet cubicles, officers consider this could be addressed using light tubes in the roof, without compromising the design and height of the roof.
- 8.4.4 In respect of the toilet cubicle layout (the size of the disabled toilet) there has also been the proposal to include a changing places unit within the block. This is supported by officers. However, further investigation into the current size requirements of such units is being considered, as the overall size of the toilet getting larger is not supported. It is considered reasonable to impose a condition seeking a revised layout plan for the toilet block within the footprint size shown on Drawing number P1708.TB.01 Rev G to enable the changes suggested without affecting the overall size and appearance of the block.
- 8.4.5 At this stage it is considered appropriate changes to the design have taken place which respect the need to keep the visual impact low, whilst trying to accommodate a non-standard block building. It is officers' opinion that a suitable compromise has been reached subject to the above revisions with the layout.

8.5 Further Consultation on Highway Safety onto Weston Road

- 8.5.1 The development of this allocated site has always been about more than the provision of housing and open spaces. The development of the land with the delivery of key strategic infrastructure would like this currently constrained area to the north of the borough with much improved non-car related transport connections. In particular the additional cycling infrastructure being provided, this is in respect of connections to and from North Road, the Granby Road estate, the proposed NS1 site in North Herts and also the east west connection to Weston Road and Great Ashby beyond.
- 8.5.2 The proposed Country Park layout shows a pedestrian and cycling connection exiting the park through the proposed orchard and onto the northern section of Weston Road, the no-through road section of this road. Concerns were raised by objectors and members about the safe use of this stretch of the road.
- 8.5.3 Hertfordshire County Council as the local highway authority advised during initial consultation of the application that the northern part of Weston Road (low trafficked, with a mobility filter at its northern end; being narrow, etc), is conducive to encouraging active travel. Furthermore, around Hertfordshire it has been advised that there are several 'Quiet Way' projects aiming to establish exactly the parameters that Weston Road already benefits from.
- 8.5.4 As to the wider implications of connection, Weston Road is mentioned in SBC's adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) 2019. The connection at the north end to St David Close (along Great Ashby Way) is mentioned as forming part of the LCWIP route 2. The proposed cycling route through the Country Park to the northern section of Weston Road at least will present an attractive connection to LCWIP route 2.

- 8.5.5 Alternative options have been presented by third parties, with a connection onto Weston Road further south than existing (albeit north of the cemetery) utilising privately owned land outside the applicant's control. Highway's have informally advised this would not be desirable because of its proximity to the junction with St Albans Link, which would pose greater safety risks than the proposed access point.
- 8.5.6 The local highway authority has confirmed in their most recent consultation response that their comments previously still stand. From a highway safety standpoint, the access on to Weston Road is considered acceptable and will provide a much needed connection onto nearby walking and cycling connections.
- 8.5.7 Furthermore, the local highway authority have made no suggestion that the proposals would require any parking restrictions to be put in place along Weston Road given the proposed pedestrian and cycle access from the community orchard. The provision of the car park and facilities on the western side of the park and accessed from the new development is considered sufficient to prompt people visiting to use these facilities and not seek to park elsewhere.

8.6 Further Consultation on Footpath Widths

- 8.6.1 For most of the proposed footpath network around the Country Park the width would be a maximum of 3.5m, with some narrower 2m wide connections and then mown paths in places. The width has been proposed at the maximum 3.5m having due regard for national and local policy and guidance.
- 8.6.2 Following consultation with local groups it has been established that wider paths would benefit users, especially cyclists and wheelchair/mobility scooter users. A minimum of 2m has been stated in conversation with the local disability contact to enable a wheelchair user and carer to move side by side. However, in terms of ensuring sufficient space for the variety of users anticipated to use the space the wider 3.5m have been considered most appropriate, in particular by the cycling and movement groups involved.
- 8.6.3 Furthermore, the Country Park will require maintenance and the Council's Parks and Amenities team will need access to various locations by buggy, tractor, wood chipper etc. To avoid damage to grass areas along the side of footpaths a surfaced path of adequate width for maintenance vehicles is essential in the upkeep of this 38 hectare area.
- 8.6.4 The Country Park would provide key cycling and pedestrians connection within this northern part of the borough. The west – east connection from the approved housing and infrastructure development across to Weston Road is an important piece of the wider Stevenage network puzzle. Whilst it may seem a simple horizontal connection, it is also important to make sure these connections are fully integrated with the whole development, the allocated North Herts NS1 site, and also to existing estates and highway networks. Consequently, there is a need for shared paths from each of these areas into the Country Park and across to Weston Road.
- 8.6.5 The siting of these paths is constrained by the existing site gradients and contours. HCC Highways have confirmed that paths over 8% gradient are not appropriate for cycling routes and where the gradient is approximately 5% this should not be for more than 30m without a level section providing relief for users. As such, the extent of the footpaths around certain areas, in particular to the north, fully consider the proposed gradients.
- 8.6.6 Alternative proposals have been put forward and these have been considered. The local highway authority has reinforced the need for adequate connections to various points within the development and beyond, and that the cycling connection should not be restricted to a single point of access from the west and the proposed housing, in particular Phase 1D of the development. Key access points are the central green corridor which has been designed with

raised tables across the main spine road, along with a connection north of the grounding tower where a key green space within NS1 would meet this boundary.

8.6.7 Alterations have been made to the line of the path close to Rooks Nest House, with added landscaping also proposed to provide additional mitigation against the limited views out of the property garden into the Country Park.

8.6.8 Officer's consider that the widths of the proposed paths has been adequately considered throughout the application assessment, and that adequate argument has been put forward in retaining the 3.5m width. The assessment of the impact on Heritage Assets was extensively covered in the original officer report contained in the March 2023 agenda and these findings still stand. The public benefit in providing shared paths that meet minimum requirements of Active Travel England and the local highways authority, to allow access for all is considered to hold significant weight against the visual harm in this case.

8.7 Justification for the Size of the Car Park

8.7.1 The amended plans submitted show the same size car park, with 50 spaces. The proposal remains for the car park to come forward in two phases, due to the grounding works of the existing overhead power lines. Phase 2 of the car park, the northern half is now shown as reinforced grass to the parking bays, similar to overflow parking in other Stevenage parks car parks.

8.7.2 In respect of the overall size of the car park, providing 50 car parking spaces, this is still considered an appropriate number of spaces for the size of the park. The below table shows the comparison of the proposed Country Park and car park size with other parks in the borough. Based on these figures, the size of the proposed car park is considered justifiable.

Park	Area (in hectares)	No. of parking spaces (approx.)
North Stevenage	38	50
Fairlands Valley Park	48.5	3 car parks with at least 50 spaces each
Great Ashby District Park	28.3	20
St Nicholas Park	11.3	Over 50
Hampson Park	9.7	70
Chells Park	5.6	60

8.8 Other Matters

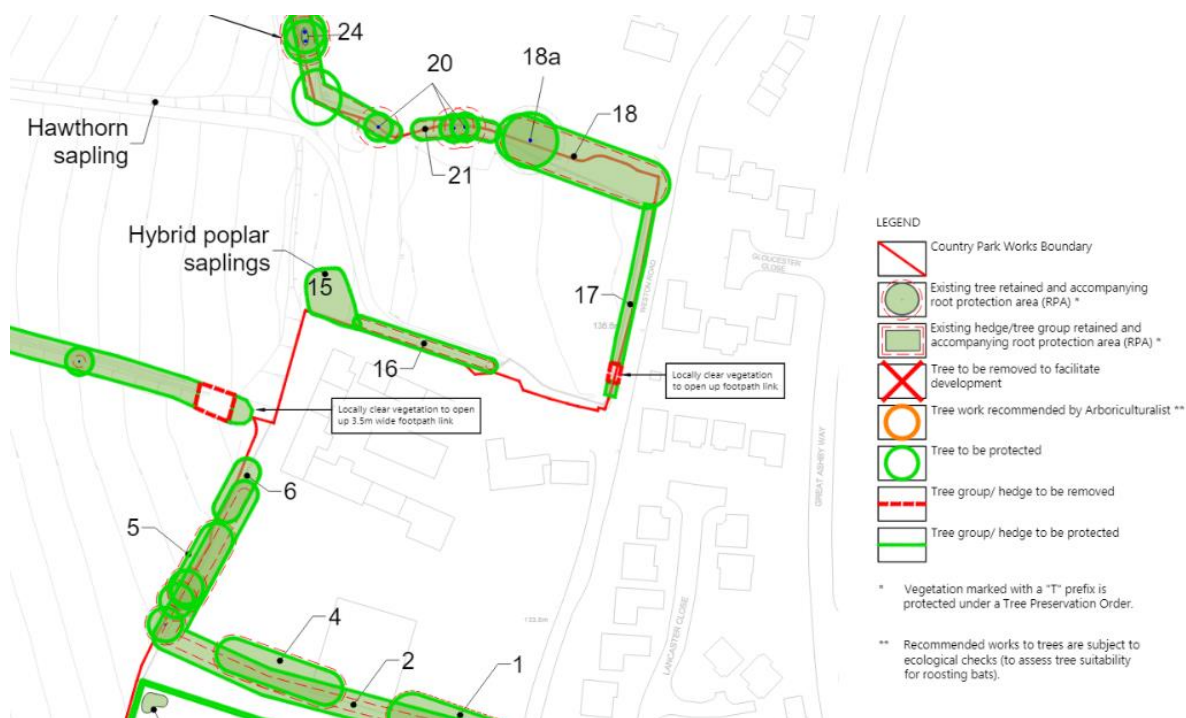
8.8.1 Whilst the reasons for deferral from the previous committee meeting the application was heard at have been covered in the above sections, there are some areas raised through further consultation that it would be prudent to address. Firstly, in terms of minor changes to the scheme that officer's or members may feel are important to better the proposals as set out, it is officer's professional opinion that these could be dealt with by imposition of condition for agreement with the Chair and Vice-Chair at a later date if necessary.

8.8.2 Secondly, in terms of alternative options for various elements raised in further correspondence, in particular from the Friends of Forster Country, who have been involved in numerous meetings previously with officers, the developers and the Chair/Portfolio Holder, these are generally covered below where they have not already been mentioned above.

8.8.3 An alternative car park location within the Country Park has been shown in basic form on a proposal map. This would see the car park tucked into a corner of the park due west of the proposed car park location. This would see the loss of current landscaping and would be in close proximity of the proposed play area in this area of the site. A realignment of the car park in this area has already been explored at the request of officers. It was dismissed due

to the siting of the grounding tower and the access point required here, and due to the proximity to the play area. It would also see the loss of landscaping which provides a green barrier between the residential development to the west of this area and the Country Park.

- 8.8.4 The other alternative suggested relates to land outside of the developer's ownership. The land in question sits off the northern end of Rectory Lane on a tight bend and on an elevated level to the road. The small field, currently laid to grass is an attractive green area at this juncture of the road. It is also in very close proximity of the Grade I listed St Nicholas Church and Grade II* listed The Old Bury and nearby Grade II listed cottages (Dominic and Church Cottages). At this stage there has been no further investigation by FoFC as to whether it is viable to have a car park in this location on highway safety grounds given Rectory Lane is a narrow road. Furthermore, it is officers' opinion that the creation of a car park in the proposed location would be harmful to the setting of the listed buildings mentioned above. More so than the proposed car park because of the proximity to these buildings.
- 8.8.5 There are also concerns over access to the Country Park from this site. There is no clear direction, and it would require users to cross at an awkward bend along Rectory Lane. With the little information provided on this alternative proposal officers do not believe it is a viable option, not least because it is not in the developer's ownership and therefore cannot be secured as part of the wider North Stevenage site.
- 8.8.6 There are also several points raised in the latest third party representations that officer's would make comment on. The provision of street furniture in the park has been raised with comments centring on using a similar model to the National Trust, with the expectation that people take their rubbish home with them. Whilst the idea is preferable, it is not considered this would be achievable in this case. National Trust sites are privately owned with payment being needed on entry in most cases. The proposed Country Park is a free and open space to all. Our Green Spaces team have advised that for cleaning and maintenance purposes the provision of bins will be essential in ensuring the park is kept litter free as best as possible.
- 8.8.7 Additionally in respect of benches and cycle parking, these are considered important features in ensuring the space is accessible for all. Given the gradient changes on site, the provision of benches is considered important to provide suitable resting spots for users. The provision of cycle stands near benches allows the cyclist somewhere to park their bike nearby if they stop rather than being expected to park it elsewhere near the facilities proposed.
- 8.8.8 It is proposed to impose a condition on any approval seeking further details of all street furniture to ensure it is acceptable aesthetically, as well as functionally. In a similar fashion, the provision of furniture to prevent anti-social behaviour can also be controlled through imposition of condition to agree its appearance and suitability.
- 8.8.9 In terms of loss of privacy or amenity issues, this matter has been covered in the previous report under section 9.8. The existing properties at Rooks Nest Farm Barns sit on slightly elevated ground to the site and the boundaries are typically screened with hedging and some trees. Works to existing hedges and landscaping will be for maintenance purposes and are covered in the submitted landscaping details but none of these works are proposed near Rooks Nest Farm Barns based on the submitted plan extract below. Additional landscaping has been proposed along parts of the eastern boundary to better screen the development from some residential properties also.



8.8.10 Furthermore, in terms of the planting schedule, the amended details take full account of the comments initially provided by HMWT in terms of species and management of the meadows. This is acknowledged in their later comments viewable online.

8.8.11 In respect of comments relating to red line errors and paths being built over existing drainage for Rooks Nest Farm Barns, these are comments that have come to light very late in the day for the application and were not raised following any previous consultations sent to these properties. The red line plan that encompasses the proposed Country Park is the same as that agreed under the outline permission and is based on the ownership deeds of the land. There is nothing to suggest this has always been wrong. The matter has been raised with the agents for confirmation.

8.8.12 The third-party representation that refers to paths being constructed over existing drainage areas for private properties of Rooks Nest Farm Barns is being investigated. Again, there has been nothing following surveys etc of the land to suggest this is the case. The matter has been raised with the agents for clarification.

9. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 In summary, this report has demonstrated that the reasons for the application being deferred from the March 2023 Planning and Development Committee have been addressed and presented to Members. The proposals for the use of the land identified in the red line boundary as a Country Park are considered to be acceptable. This is especially given the principle of a Country Park on this site has been established by the adopted Local Plan (2019) and the outline planning permission for North Stevenage. The works, including the construction of foot/cycleways, a toilet block and car park, as well as the provision of various street furniture are considered to provide significant public benefit to the use of this land by the public as a Country Park. The scheme has undergone various revisions to take account of initial comments from statutory consultees as well as concerns raised by third parties and these changes are considered to have enhanced the scheme further.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That reserved matters planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following:-

10.2 The imposition of suitable conditions, with authority given to the Assistant Director of Planning and Regulation in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Planning Committee, to amend or add to the suggested draft conditions set out in this report, prior to the decision notice being issued, where such amendments or additions would be legally sound and most effectively deliver the development that the Planning Committee has resolved to approve. These suggested conditions are as follows: -

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3100-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4052-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4053-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4054-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7420-A-C01; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7421-A-C01; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7407-A-C01; M1-NPA-CP-OS-RP-Y-4600-A-C01; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7400-A-C04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4000-R08; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4001-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4002-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4003-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4004-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4005-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4006-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4007-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4008-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4012-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4013-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4014-R05; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4015-R03; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4016-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4017-R02; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4018-R03; BM1-OC-V1-ZZ-DR-C-0042-P08; P1708.TB.01_B; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7404-A-C01.

REASON:- For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

2. Notwithstanding the details as set out in the approved plans set out under condition 1, prior to installation of any street furniture within the Country Park details of their design and materials shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The street furniture to be included are benches, bins, picnic benches, wayfinding markers, information posts, signage, and bollards. In addition, details of lifesaving equipment to be positioned near the retention basins / within the Country Park shall also be provided for the local planning authority's written approval. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details within each respective phase of delivery of the Country Park, including the provision of lifesaving equipment, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity and to ensure they preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and Country Park.

3. Prior to commencement of any works relating to landscaping within the Country Park, a landscape planting timeframe document shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This document shall detail the sequence of planting for each phase and/or field area of the Country Park as identified on Drawing number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-3100-A C06 hereby approved. The works shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity, ensuring the landscaping is utilised to provide appropriate screening/buffers between the proposed Country Park area and developed land to the west and around the car park and toilet block whilst works to undertake the development are underway.

4. Prior to the construction of the LEAP (local equipped area of play) or any imaginative play areas at the juncture of the residential area and the Country Park, details of all play equipment (including imaginative play), fencing and surfacing materials to be used within the LEAP along with a detailed maintenance strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the

Local Planning Authority. The LEAP shall be constructed in accordance with the approved materials prior to first use of any given phase of the Country Park hereby permitted unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity and ensuring suitable play equipment is made available for future users of the Country Park.

5. Prior to the commencement of any works, details of any temporary boundary treatment needed to prevent unauthorised vehicular access (including off road motor-vehicles) to access any respective phase of the Country Park whilst under construction shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The temporary boundary treatment shall be installed in accordance with the approved details of works of any given phase of construction for the Country Park and shall remain in place until relevant permanent measures have been installed prior to first use of any given phase of the Country Park.
REASON:- To control any potential anti-social behaviour activities whilst the Country Park is under construction and to protect the visual amenities of the Country Park upon completion of each phase of the Country Park.
6. Prior to the commencement of any phase of the Country Park, details of measures to prevent off-road vehicles (other than those authorised for construction and maintenance purposes) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The preventative measure shall be installed and put in place prior to the first use of each phase of the Country Park unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- To control any potential anti-social behaviour activities whilst the Country Park is under construction and to protect the visual amenities of the Country Park upon completion of each phase of the Country Park.
7. Prior to the construction of the car park hereby permitted, details of the access deterrents for the car park, including any bollards, access gates and height restriction barriers shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- To restrict the parking of unauthorised vehicles within the Country Park.
8. Prior to the commencement of the Country Park hereby permitted, measures to avoid anti-social behaviour and nuisance for neighbouring properties which back onto the Country Park, such as the use of defensive planting, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- To mitigate any potential anti-social activities within the Country Park and to protect the amenities of neighbouring properties.
9. Prior to commencement of any works relating to the provision of drainage features hereby approved, a Drainage Timeframe Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Strategy will identify the works to be carried out, their sequence of construction and an indication of timeframes for each stage. The works shall thereafter be constructed in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity and to reduce the impact of the drainage works on the identified Heritage Assets by understanding the extent and timings of the works in the land to the east shown as the proposed Country Park.
10. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the soft and hard landscaping details submitted, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory appearance for the development.
11. All planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved landscaping details as agreed under condition 5 of this approval within each respective Phase of the delivery of the Country Park shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the first occupation of the development hereby permitted or, the completion of the approved

development whichever is the sooner within each respective Phase of the delivery of the Country Park.

REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory appearance for the development.

12. All hard surfacing comprised in the approved landscaping details as specified in condition 7 of this approval shall be carried out prior to first use of the each phase of delivery of the Country Park hereby permitted or, the completion of each phase of delivery of the Country Park, whichever is the sooner.

REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory appearance for the development.

13. Any trees or plants comprised within the scheme of landscaping, which within a period of five years from the completion of each phase of delivery of the Country Park die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory appearance for the development.

14. No tree shown on the approved landscaping scheme, shall be cut down, uprooted or destroyed, nor shall any retained tree be topped or lopped within five years of the completion of development without the written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON:- To ensure the protection of those trees which should be retained in the interests of visual amenity.

15. Before any development commences within the Country Park phase, trees on the site shall be protected in accordance with Drawing number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7404-A-C01 Tree Protection Enclosure Plan as hereby approved. Such protection may be inspected by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the work and these measures shall be maintained until the conclusion of all site and building operations within each respect phase of delivery of the Country Park.

REASON:- To ensure that the retained tree(s) are not damaged or otherwise adversely affected during site operations.

16. No development above slab level of the toilet block hereby permitted shall be carried out until details/samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the toilet block (including the grass sedum roof and how this roof is to be maintained) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details/samples.

REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity, to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and Country Park and in the interests of high quality design and development.

17. Prior to first use of the proposed car park, details of the height restriction barrier to be sited at the start of the entrance road into the Country Park red line shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The barrier shall be installed in accordance with the details approved prior to first use of the car park unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

REASON:- In the interests of visual amenity, to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and Country Park and to ensure it will adequately perform its function.

18. The earthwork remodelling proposed to the northern field of the Country Park shall not exceed in size, scale, form or area those measurements identified on Drawing number BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4016-R04 Earthworks Assessment.

REASON:- As these were the details presented to, assessed and approved, and any change increase in these will require further assessment and consideration in their impact on the topography of the site and impact on local designated heritage assets.

19. All areas of hedges, scrub or similar vegetation where birds may nest which are to be removed as part of the development within each phase(s), are to be cleared outside the bird-nesting season (March - August inclusive) or if clearance during the bird-nesting season cannot reasonably be avoided, a suitably qualified ecologist will check the areas to be removed immediately prior to clearance and advise whether nesting birds are present. If active nests are recorded, no vegetation clearance or other works that may disturb active nests shall proceed until all young have fledged the nest.
REASON:- Nesting birds are protected from disturbance under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (As amended).
20. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the Landscape and Management Plan dated 05/08/2022 by Nicholas Pearson Associates, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
REASON:- For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure the proposals are appropriately carried out and maintained.
21. Prior to first use of or transfer of the Country Park (in its respective phases) to Stevenage Borough Council, whichever is the sooner, all pedestrian and cycle routes within each respective phase shall be constructed and made ready for use, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
REASON:- In the interests of promoting sustainable modes of travel in and around the site.
22. Prior to first use of each respective phase of the Country Park, all identified ecological improvement works and/or features that do not expressly form part of the landscaping works shall be provided in accordance with the details of the Design and Access Statement and Drawing Number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-3100-A C04 hereby approved, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
REASON:- To ensure the proposed improvement measures are carried out in the interests of ecology on the site.
23. Prior to first use of each respective phase of the Country Park the identified and approved cycle parking in the form of Sheffield stands, shall be made available and ready for use within its respective phase of the Country Park. The cycle parking shall thereafter be retained for its intended and specific use.
REASON:- To ensure adequate cycle parking provision is provided on site in accordance with the Council's and local highway authorities requirements.
24. No demolition, construction or maintenance activities audible at the boundary and no deliveries of construction and demolition materials shall be undertaken outside the hours 07:30 hours to 18:00 hours Mondays to Fridays, 08:00 hours to 13.00 hours on Saturdays and shall not operate on a Sunday or Bank Holiday, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.
REASON:- To ensure the demolition of the existing buildings and the construction and maintenance of the development does not prejudice the amenities of occupiers of nearby premises due to noise pollution.
25. Prior to relevant works in phase 2A of the Country Park, details of any external lighting to be installed on the toilet block building hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved external lighting shall be provided before phase 2 of the Country Park is made available for use by the public.
REASON:- To ensure the development does not prejudice the amenities of future adjoining occupiers, visual amenities of the area, and for the protection of bats and other wildlife.

26. No works associated with the earthwork remodelling proposed to the northern field of the Country Park shall take place until a Soil Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Soil Management Plan shall include details of the topsoil being utilised, any processes it is to go through for its proposed use, and to ensure no foreign objects of debris are transferred to the identified area of transfer. The works shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
REASON:- To ensure the soil being transferred from the residential phases is of sufficient quality for its purpose and to ensure only topsoil is used, in the interests of the ecological and landscaping schemes proposed in the Country Park.
27. At all times, access for maintenance vehicles to Rooks Nest House shall be kept available at the neighbouring properties south western boundary with the Country Park to ensure existing access for field maintenance is retained.
REASON:- To ensure the neighbouring property maintains appropriate access for field cutting via the existing field access to the north west of the community orchard.
28. Notwithstanding the details submitted on Drawing number P1708.TB.01_G, an alternative internal layout of the toilet block shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The alternative layout shall not exceed the proposed footprint of the block of the toilet block layout nor change its external wall design. The revised layout shall provide as a minimum a disabled compliant cubicle (with the possibility of a changing places unit) and two unisex cubicles, and a storage area accessed externally. The details shall also include the provision of additional natural light sources. The development shall thereafter be completed in accordance with the approved details.
REASON:- To ensure the layout makes adequate provision for suitable disabled facilities, as well as increased natural light provision.

Pro-active Statement

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. The Council acted pro-actively through positive engagement with the applicant at the pre-application stage and during the determination process which led to improvements to the scheme. The Council has therefore acted pro-actively in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

INFORMATIVES

1 Hertfordshire Highways

AN1) Storage of materials: The applicant is advised that the storage of materials associated with the construction of this development should be provided within the site on land which is not public highway, and the use of such areas must not interfere with the public highway. If this is not possible, authorisation should be sought from the Highway Authority before construction works commence. Further information is available via the website <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/highways-roads-and-pavements.aspx> or by telephoning 0300 1234047.

AN2) Obstruction of public highway land: It is an offence under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 for any person, without lawful authority or excuse, in any way to wilfully obstruct the free passage along a highway or public right of way. If this development is likely to result in the public highway or public right of way network becoming routinely blocked (fully or partly) the applicant must contact the Highway Authority to obtain their permission and requirements before construction works commence. Further information is available via the website <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/highways-roads-and-pavements.aspx> telephoning 0300 1234047.

AN3) Road Deposits: It is an offence under section 148 of the Highways Act 1980 to deposit mud or other debris on the public highway, and section 149 of the same Act gives the Highway Authority powers to remove such material at the expense of the party responsible. Therefore, best practical means shall be taken at all times to ensure that all vehicles leaving the site during construction of the development are in a condition such as not to emit dust or deposit mud, slurry or other debris on the highway. Further information is available via the website

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/highways-roads-and-pavements.aspx> or by telephoning 0300 1234047.

AN4) Construction standards for works within the highway. The applicant is advised that in order to comply with this permission it will be necessary for the developer of the site to enter into an agreement with Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 to ensure the satisfactory completion of the access and associated road improvements. The construction of such works must be undertaken to the satisfaction and specification of the Highway Authority, and by a contractor who is authorised to work in the public highway. Before works commence the applicant will need to apply to the Highway Authority to obtain their permission and requirements. Further information is available via the website

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/highways-roads-and-pavements.aspx> or by telephoning 0300 1234047.

AN5)

2 **Thames Water**

With regards to surface water drainage, Thames Water would advise that if the developer follows the sequential approach to the disposal of surface water, we would have no objection. Where the developer proposes to discharge to a public sewer, prior approval from Thames Water Developer Services will be required.

12. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.
2. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Parking Provision adopted October 2020, Stevenage Design Guide adopted January 2023, The Impact of Development on Biodiversity adopted March 2021, Stevenage Borough Council Developer Contributions adopted March 2021.
3. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 adopted 2019.
4. Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4 adopted May 2018.
5. Responses to consultations with statutory undertakers and other interested parties referred to in this report.
6. Central Government advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework September 2023 and Planning Policy Guidance.