

Sam Dicocco
Planning and Building Control
North Herts Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

18th March 2026 (by email)

Dear Sam Dicocco,

**Planning application no. 26/00006/FP
Land to North of Stevenage Road, Hitchin
Erection of 50no. residential dwellings (including affordable) with public open space,
associated parking, landscaping and access**

I write with regard to the above planning application to which CPRE Hertfordshire objects for the following reasons.

1. The land identified for this proposed development is designated as London Metropolitan Green Belt in the adopted North Herts Local Plan where development is stated as being inappropriate unless very special circumstances are identified which clearly outweigh the harms caused, according to criteria in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
2. The site is not included in the adopted Local Plan. It is not appropriate in our view for such a significant allocation in the Green Belt to be determined outside the Local Plan process, particularly where the Council has indicated an imminent review of the Local Plan as in this case.
3. The Applicant's Planning Statement notes the 2024 revision of the NPPF and the introduction of the concept of grey belt as the justification for the submission of this application. No further very special circumstances are demonstrated which relate to local conditions or requirements other than the general lack of housing land supply.
4. Significant local community opposition continues both generally to development in the Green Belt and to this specific application. The proposed development would clearly constitute a breach of the first, second and third purposes of the Green Belt as identified in the NPPF (paragraph 143) to prevent urban sprawl and encroachment onto open countryside.

5. We entirely refute the assertion that the first and second purposes of the Green Belt have no relevance in this case and that this site constitutes grey belt under the present legal definitions. In the case of the London Metropolitan Green Belt, the first purpose of the Green Belt refers as much to the effect of the urban sprawl emanating from the growth of the capital as the major development generator in this and the surrounding areas, as to the sprawl of other major settlements.
6. The proposed development is in a relatively isolated location between the major settlements of Hitchin and Stevenage of the type that Green Belt legislation was designed to prevent. Arguments relating to the inconsequential impact of each individual application on the Green Belt as a whole become seriously inappropriate when the cumulative effect of several applications is considered, as is occurring in Hertfordshire.
7. As well as constituting encroachment onto the countryside this proposal contributes to the coalescence of major settlements and should be considered within the context of the cumulative effects noted above. It is noteworthy that virtually every major planning application for residential and commercial development within the Green Belt in Hertfordshire made since 12th December 2024 has identified the site as grey belt, notwithstanding the quality and character of the landscape or local conditions in each case.
8. This is clearly an unsustainable location for development and it is becoming increasingly clear that the existing definitions and guidance on grey belt are entirely inadequate to prevent the wholesale removal of highly valued and significant Green Belt protections. It is also undeniable that the new planning policy context created by the 2024 revised NPPF has provoked a disturbingly high number of new applications and re-applications for sites which were previously refused permission.
9. Whereas a proportion of such applications may warrant consideration for various reasons, the purposeful illogicality of the revised NPPF supporting five purposes of the Green Belt (para 143) and then only permitting three purposes to be considered in applications (NPPF Glossary definition) is unsupportable in this case. This application is a particularly egregious case of inappropriate development in the Green Belt and marks an unacceptable intrusion of grey belt into open countryside between two towns.
10. A further concern relates to the proposed provision of low cost housing and we note the intention to provide 50% affordable housing. Given the inadequacy of the official definition to reflect the true state of the housing market in Hertfordshire this is essentially meaningless without commitments to legally binding agreements between appropriate institutions involved in the provision of truly affordable low cost housing.

11. Affordability for average earning households is generally unattainable in the County and there is significant experience in Hertfordshire and elsewhere of initial commitments to affordable housing not being maintained. This is generally due to questionable viability issues and at the very least the Council should seek robust guarantees regarding affordable housing proposals.
12. CPRE Hertfordshire supports fully the concerns expressed by local residents regarding the inadequacy of local infrastructure including the road network, potential flooding issues, impacts on the River Purwell chalk stream and the inaccuracy of the supporting information relating to the sustainability of the location.
13. Hertfordshire is under unrelenting pressure for development and the value of the open countryside that remains increases for local communities and visitors, notwithstanding wider environmental benefits relating to the amelioration of the effects of climate change, maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity, and physical and mental health.

This application is not supported through the Local Plan process and we urge the Council to refuse permission for this highly inappropriate speculative development.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Berry
Planning Manager

NOTE: We would request that this letter is published on the Council's website as a document relating to this application and should be grateful if you would notify us of the date of the appropriate meeting if it is to be determined by planning committee.