

Paul Chaston
Planning and Building Control
North Herts Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

7th May 2026 (by email)

Dear Paul Chaston,

**Planning application no. 26/00558/HYA
Land at Pound Farm, Bedford Road, Ickleford**

Hybrid application for a mixed-use development to provide a total of up to 230 dwellings, a residential care home (Use Class C2), an Independent Special School (ISS) and new sports pitch, with access from Bedford Road, landscaping, parking and SuDS comprising: Phase 1 Application for full planning permission for the erection of 100 dwellings, an ISS, new sports pitch and associated parking, landscaping, open space and SuDS; Phase 2 An outline application on the remaining part of the site for the erection of up to 130 dwellings, a residential care home (Use Class C2) and associated works with access from Bedford Road (all matters reserved apart from 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 Applicant's planning consultants note the 2024 revision of the NPPF and the introduction of the concept of grey belt as a significant justification for the submission of this application. No other special circumstances are identified relating to local conditions and circumstances which would justify development in this location as opposed to any other similar location apart from issues relating to the Green Belt.
3. This is an entirely speculative application for a site which is not allocated 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.



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4. Very significant local community opposition continues to development in the Green Belt. The proposed development would clearly constitute a breach of the first and third purposes of the Green Belt as identified in the NPPF (paragraph 143) to prevent urban sprawl, the coalescing of settlements and encroachment onto open countryside.
5. We entirely refute the assertion that the first purpose of the Green Belt has 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 clearly urban sprawl on completely undeveloped land beyond the built-up area of Ickleford which the 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. We challenge the assertion that the site is in a sustainable location. It is on the northern edge of Ickleford and two miles away from the nearest railway station and considerable distances to services and facilities.
8. 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. This is clearly an unsustainable position 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.
9. CPRE Hertfordshire will continue to campaign vigorously for changes in national planning policy and PPG to redress the imbalances that now exist in assessing the impact of the merging of Green Belt settlements, regardless of the settlement size. Unrestricted development around villages adjacent to and between towns could ultimately lead to the coalescence of larger settlements.



10. CPRE Hertfordshire believes that the first reason for the Green Belt as identified in NPPF paragraph 143 applies in this case, and together with purpose c) regarding encroachment onto the countryside, they provide the “strong reason” required to refuse development as noted in the NPPF footnote 7. Recent planning inquiry, and increasingly Council planning decisions permitting development are demonstrating the hugely damaging impact of the present definition of grey belt on open countryside.
11. A further serious concern relates to the long agricultural use of the site, despite the Planning Statement suggesting that the site is presently “unused agricultural land”. The site is Grade 2 and 3a agricultural land which is classed as Best and Most Versatile by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It is completely unacceptable both to categorise this as grey belt and remove it from productive use as farmland.
12. Remaining issues quoted in the Planning Statements constitute obligations which would accrue to any proposed development of this size and function. As significant as any proposed benefits is the growing paucity of open space adjacent to built-up areas with its attendant physical and mental health benefits. The Green Belt in this area is under unrelenting pressure for development which is jeopardising the highly valued benefits which protection brings, and its continual reduction is in danger of bringing the planning system into disrepute.
13. The existence of legally binding agreements between appropriate institutions involved in the provision of truly affordable low-cost housing should be required in this case. Given the inadequacy of the official definition to reflect the true state of the housing market in Hertfordshire, affordability for average earning households is generally unattainable in the County.
14. We note the intention to provide 50% affordable housing but this is essentially meaningless without further information and commitments to its provision. There is significant experience in Hertfordshire and elsewhere of initial commitments to affordable housing not being maintained, generally quoting viability issues and at the very least the Council should seek robust guarantees regarding affordable housing proposals.
15. In summary, it is 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. Whereas a proportion of such applications may warrant consideration for various reasons,

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the 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.

16. Rural 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.

We urge the Council to refuse permission for this 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.