

Joshua Lemm  
Planning and Building Control  
Hertsmere Borough Council  
Civic Offices, Elstree Way  
Borehamwood  
Herts. WD6 1WA

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

11<sup>th</sup> September 2026 (by email)

Dear Joshua Lemm,

**Planning application no. 26/0988/OUT  
W Block, Clare Hall Laboratories, Blanche Lane, South Mimms  
Outline application (with all matters reserved except for means of access) for the demolition  
of buildings on site and erection of up to 185 homes (including 50% affordable housing)  
alongside access, landscaping, car parking and associated works.**

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 Hertsmere Core Strategy 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 the primary justification for the submission of this application. They also present a "fall-back position", as is becoming increasingly common with applications of this nature that, in the event of grey belt not being established, very special circumstances can be identified to clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt in this location.
3. This application is part of a flood of planning applications on the Green Belt being made by developers and land-owners since the revision of the NPPF in December 2024, to the extent that the principle of protection of the countryside, especially in southern Hertfordshire is being very seriously jeopardised. The site is not presently allocated for housing in the adopted Core Strategy and this is a standard speculative application for residential development of a nature that Green Belt legislation is designed specifically to prevent.



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4. Very significant local community opposition continues in Hertsmer to development in the Green Belt and as evidenced by the volume of community representations received to public consultations on the emerging Local Plan and increasing number of planning applications throughout the Borough. The site is partly previously developed but does not constitute a sustainable location for residential development as it is outside the settlement boundary of South Mimms and adjacent to industrial uses.
5. The proposed development would very clearly constitute a breach of the first and third purposes of the Green Belt as identified in the NPPF (GB2) to prevent urban sprawl and encroachment onto open countryside. 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.
6. 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. The proposed development is clearly urban sprawl beyond the built-up area of South Mimms which the Green Belt legislation was designed to prevent.
7. 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 this part of southern Hertfordshire. South Mimms and the adjoining areas south and west of Potters Bar are already subject to proposed development of a major data centre, solar installations and residential development which effectively means the disappearance of the Green Belt around the major settlement of Potters Bar.
8. It is noteworthy that virtually every major planning application for residential and commercial development within the Green Belt in Hertfordshire made since 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.



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10. CPRE Hertfordshire believes that the first reason for the Green Belt as identified in NPPF (GB2 1a) applies in this case. 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. Remaining issues quoted in the Planning Statements regarding very special circumstances constitute obligations which would accrue to any proposed development of this size and function. The now standard practice in major planning applications in the Hertfordshire Green Belt of listing such benefits, including public services and facilities and the like reduces the consideration of such issues to a check-list of items irrespective of the conditions and circumstances of the location and inevitably renders them as less "special".
12. As significant as the 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. We note the intention to provide 50% affordable housing but this is essentially meaningless without further information and commitments to its provision. With regard to the provision of affordable housing, legally binding agreements between appropriate institutions involved in the provision of truly affordable low cost housing should be required.
14. 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. 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 planning policy context created by the 2024 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, the illogicality of the NPPF supporting five purposes of the Green Belt and then only permitting three purposes to be considered in applications is unsupportable in this case.



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16. Southern 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.