

Hillingdon Borough Council

PLANNING

[Electronic submission via email]

Date

25th July 2025

Reference No.

AC/0030

Application for Permission in Principle for up to 6 no. dwellinghouses At: Land at Cripps Field, Springwell Lane, Harefield

Introduction

This letter accompanies an application for permission in principle made under the Planning (Permission in Principle) (Amendment) Order 2017 in relation to the above site. The application comprises the following:

- Completed permission in principle application form;
- Site Location Plan;
- Illustrative Site Layout Plan;
- Illustrative Site Elevation Plans; and
- This Covering Letter

The Order confirms that an application must comprise the following information – commentary has been provided in *italics* below regarding this submission:

- a) Be made in writing to the local planning authority in which the land is situated, on a form published by the Secretary of State (or a form to substantially the same effect) – *an application form is part of the submission;*
- b) Include the particulars specified or referred to in the form; - *the application form has been completed with all required information*
- c) Be accompanied, whether electronically or otherwise, by:
 - i) A plan which identifies the land to which the application relates – *a site location plan is provided, showing a north arrow and identifying the relevant land. An illustrative site layout plan is also provided, showing a north arrow and identifying the relevant land.*
 - ii) Except where the application is made by electronic communications or the local planning authority indicate that a lesser number is required, 3 copies of the form; and
 - iii) Where consultation is required by virtue of article 5C, particulars of this – *this is not relevant as no wind turbines are proposed.*

The application site is an infill plot of land to the North of Harefield in the settlement of Hill End. It currently contains no buildings.

The land self-evidently does not house any listed buildings but to the North the site could arguably be within the setting of listed buildings at Cripps Farm (the Farmhouse and barn) – for this reason the indicative layout shows development moderated away from the northern boundary.

There are no Article 4 Directions in place. No TPOs. No archaeological constraints.

The site is located in Flood Zone 1, the lowest risk of flooding potential.

There are no designated footpaths running through or adjacent to the site.

Although in a semi-rural location, the application site comprises land within the settlement of Hill End, within very close proximity to Harefield, located on a main bus line and arterial route. And, being a borough of London, being very close to a significant level of services, facilities and employment opportunities, principally by public transport.

The site is located within the Green Belt, and the subject land is currently vacant and not part of an agricultural landholding.

The site is located amongst a high-density collection of buildings forming a ribbon of development along the Springwell Lane stemming from the settlement of Harefield, which is a short walking distance away (for the most part, there is a continuous footpath) and the area is characterised by a heavy presence of residential properties.

It is not an isolated location as the proposal site is located within a ribbon of development/extension along the Springwell Lane with built form on its southern side boundary and further residential buildings to its north. There is a handful of community and commercial uses within the immediate vicinity. It is therefore not 'open countryside'. Vehicular access would be direct from the Springwell Lane, with safe and appropriate visibility achievable in both directions. The indicative site layout demonstrates the ability to enter and exit the site in a forward gear.

The site is also part of a designated as 'Nature Conservation Sites of Borough Grade II or Local Importance. Matters relating to this can be addressed at the technical matters stage with the submission of detailed ecological and biodiversity preservation and enhancement proposals.

It is considered that in all other cases - including in relation to design and landscape character – which are not matters of principle, should be assessed as part of the formalised proposals for the site at technical matters stage. Any comments from the LPA will be helpful insofar as initiating discussion and how the site design would evolve, but the impacts cannot be quantified or qualified at this stage due to the absence of design detail. On the whole, matters of light pollution and domestication, which would not appear alien in this setting given the context described, can be appropriately addressed by planning conditions and requests for the submission of more detailed information before work commences on site.

Planning Policy Considerations

Government Guidance of relevance to this proposal is comprised within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), whereas Development Plan policies of relevance are comprised within the Hillingdon Local Plan (Parts 1 and 2).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also a material consideration.

NPPF continues the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Councils should take a positive approach and decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan. Where the development plan is absent, silent, or relevant policies are out of date, Councils should grant permission unless the adverse impacts outweigh the benefits when set against the policies in the NPPF.

In relation to housing, it continues to seek to boost housing supply. It encourages the provision of small sites for development (seeking some 10% of allocated sites for such purpose); supports the development of windfall sites, asks LPAs to give great weight to suitable sites within settlements, and encourages the subdivision of large sites; makes clear that development should be resisted where harm is caused; promotes and supports the development of under-utilised land and seeks to optimise the use of land.

A high standard of design is required. The NPPF makes clear that:

- Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible; and that they should:
- Give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land.

In relation to alternative uses of land, it states:

- Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans, where this would help to meet identified development needs. In particular that decisions should:
- makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land.

Planning Assessment

In the case of *Cornwall Council vs Corbett* [2020] EWCACiv 508 it was confirmed that, even in cases where there is one policy drafted in very trenchant terms against development, a proposal may nevertheless be lawfully found to be in accordance with the overall development plan if there are policies which support the nature of development under consideration. This is one case of many that confirm that the idea of compliance with the development plan is a rounded judgement and that there is no need for every scheme to comply in full with every clause and policy of a development plan, which is to be taken and considered as a whole.

We operate in a plan-led system. Parliament has provided, by section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The consequences of that for development proposals which accord with a development plan are made abundantly clear in paragraph 11(c) of the NPPF – they are to be approved without delay.

Accordingly, it is clear that this application seeks to bring the site forward for development in a sustainable manner, and that this application aligned with the broad requirements of the Development Plan and, most pertinently, amendments to the NPPF in relation to green belt policy and assessment of sites within. Whilst in this instance the proposal only amounts to a potential net gain of six potentially family sized dwellinghouses, this is nevertheless important, especially given that the site is a highly sustainable one and would not lead to land take of greenfield land in more peripheral locations beyond the reach of Greater London. There is a considerable need for housing locally and it is important that every effort is made to provide development at the most appropriate locations, in order to achieve sustainable development more widely.

London and its boroughs is the most sustainable for location for development. In accordance with the settlement hierarchy Hill End and Harefield actually performs very well when considering it is effectively a suburb of London and has all the City's services within very easy reach.

Paragraph 124d of the NPPF states that planning decisions should promote and support the development of under-utilised land; the applicant considers the plot to be under-utilised, such that it could be more effectively/efficiently used. The wider area is constrained given that London more generally is surrounded by a Green Belt, the belt being provided so as to protect city from outward urban sprawl.

The Green Belt (NPPF p143) serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Point e being particularly pertinent in this case. The Council's policies seek to protect the Green Belt, and that policy forms part of the development plan. There is a need to consider a development in the round- to discern what the overall plan is driving at. In this case the plan, as set out in the strategic policies, is seeking more development in the most sustainable locations and to avoid development in protected areas such as Green Belt, National Landscapes and other areas, including the countryside hinterland.

The Green Belt policy (NPPF p146) identifies that green belt boundaries are to be drawn so as to ensure that the overall strategy makes as much use of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land as possible. This being read also in the context of NPPF p70 stating that great weight should be given to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes.

The site of the proposed dwellings is well aside from the valuable area that encircles London and forms the area of paramount green belt importance and clearly in the midst of a residential area and a stone's throw from heavily built up areas.

It is contiguous with development as identified above. The spatial planning merits of this proposal alone should hold great weight in the consideration of the proposal, with priority given to new windfall housing in highly sustainable areas within the Borough.

Although Hill End and Harefiel is not the top order settlement for development in the Borough this really relates to its constrained siting and girdling by the Green Belt, not allowing significant opportunity for outward growth as is occurring beyond the Green Belt. Actually in terms of access to high level services it performs very well comparatively to areas outside of Greater London. It is easily accessible with direct bus and cycle path links.

The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework further establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions as set out in paragraph 154. The exception of most relevance to this appeal is 154.e) limited infilling in villages. Limited infilling is deemed to be 'appropriate' development. This is one angle in which the proposal is made.

The Local Plan does not define settlement boundaries. There is also no made neighbourhood plan. In the absence of a village envelope the test of whether the site is within or outside the village is one for the decision-maker taking account of facts on the ground and local characteristics. Furthermore, in the appeal case, *Julian Wood v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* case (2015), the Court of Appeal established that while a village boundary defined in a local plan is a relevant

consideration, it's not necessarily determinative when deciding if a development constitutes "limited infilling" within a village.

In the case of this appeal, the development plan is silent on the matter of settlement boundary and therefore it has not been defined so is not fixed and there is no outer limit that would be breached. In *Julian Wood v SoS and Gravesham Borough Council [2015]* it was found that the term "village" is not necessarily the same as a settlement boundary, and that there is a need to consider the facts on the ground. The court found that the fact that the site lay outside the village boundary as designated in the development plan was not determinative; the inspector had misdirected himself as to the proper meaning of paragraph 89 in limiting himself to considering whether the proposal was within the designated village boundary. In a similar vein, the appellant considers that the LPA has misdirected itself here, too, relying on an imaginary and arbitrary boundary as a stop gap for no further development.

Having regard to facts 'on the ground', it is noted firstly that the site sits within the 30mph speed sign. There is no sign directing one that they are either in or outside of a settlement. Instead, the site is noted to be bounded by continuous residential development along a main arterial road into Harefield. There is no break in development.

In the context of its highly sustainable and well-connected location, it is considered that a scheme of 6 no. dwellings (perhaps less if so determined) would by any assessment constitute a limited form of infilling. The indicative layout and arrangement of houses, having regard to adjoining density, is complementary and not an incongruous quantum of development. It is inevitable that change would occur, as is this case with any development – but the houses would only ever read as part and parcel of existing Springwell Lane highway fronting development arranged at regular spacing with access direct from the highway.

Undertaking an assessment of the site's capabilities, it is important to assess whether the site serves the five purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 143 of the Framework.

The NPPF confirms that 'Grey Belt' is:

"For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the green belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143." **[Author emphasis].**

It is clear that land does not need to be previously developed, provided it does not strongly contribute to the five purposes laid out in Paragraph 143. An assessment of how the site meets this definition and can be reasonably classified as 'grey belt' is included below.

The Hillingdon Local Plan does not take account of paragraph 155 of the revised Framework, which identifies that the development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate, subject to certain criteria.

Paragraph 155 states the development of homes should not be regarded as inappropriate where (a) the development would utilise 'grey belt' land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan; (b) there is a demonstrable

unmet need for the type of development proposed; (c) the development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework; and (d) where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in Framework paragraphs 156-157.

"Grey belt" is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of the purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143, and excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

Given the context as described in this statement, the location and value of the land would not create coalescence, nor affect the setting and special character of a historic town.

It is therefore argued that the site would not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143 of the Framework, and thus would be considered 'any other land' for grey belt purposes.

This being the case, the proposal would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area that falls within Hillingdon Borough, or indeed the principal aim of the Green Belt around London which seeks to prevent urban sprawl.

Limb (a) has two parts to consider, and both parts must be complied with. Firstly, is the site grey belt land and secondly, if it is, would it fundamentally undermine all the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. In this context, that would be all of the Green Belt within the Hillingdon Borough Area.

The NPPF glossary defines grey belt as land in the green belt "*comprising previously developed land and / or any other land that in any case does not strongly contribute to any of the purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.*" It also excludes land where a strong reason for refusal is identified under footnote 7 excluding Green Belt. The site is not part of or within the setting of a national landscape and is deemed acceptable. Therefore, it is not considered that footnote 7 is applicable in this case.

Paragraph 143 sets out the five purposes of Green Belts. The specific criteria of (a), (b) and (d) are:

- a. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and*
- d. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.*

It is considered that the site, in relation to purpose A, is a small parcel that makes a nominal contribution (at best) to preventing the outward sprawl of the built-up area, having regard to purpose "A". However, it is necessary to consider the site itself within context. The site is set facing the road. Although the layout for a PIP is indicative, the plan gives a good indication of how the six dwellings could be laid out. Overall, the site comprises the "end of a row" of existing properties. It is acknowledged that there is the potential to see the proposed dwellings but there is a degree of separation and heavy vegetation that would significantly restrict views.

In summary, with respect to "A", it is considered that the site to a great extent is situated adjacent to existing development on Springwell Lane and for this reason it is not considered that it contributes strongly in checking unrestricted sprawl given the context within which it sits.

It is not considered having regard to "B" that the site prevents neighbouring towns from merging. Given the separation distances to Harefield the parcel of land contributes weakly in this regard.

In terms of “D”, the appeal site does not meet this Purpose because it does not abut an identified historic settlement.

Limb B

Turning to limb (b), given the Government’s recent mandates and efforts to boost the supply of housing there is a demonstrable unmet need for housing across the Borough. Limb B is therefore met.

Limb C

In respect of limb (c), it is an assessment of the sustainability of the site. Paragraph 115 sets out criteria to assess this and criteria (a), (b) and (d) are the relevant parts of this paragraph.

Part (a) requires that sustainable transport modes are prioritised. The proposed access would be located in close proximity to bus stops along Springwell Lane. A detailed analysis of the site’s sustainability is considered earlier in this statement. Electric vehicle charging points can be addressed through the technical details stage. The principle of a proposed access to the site would also be acceptable and given the nature of the development, it would not likely have a significant adverse impact on the transport network or highway safety.

Limb D

Limb (d) relates to major developments and is therefore not applicable.

In view of the above, the proposed development would not represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore the principle of development is acceptable.

The planning system is designed to prevent harm and it is there to control land use in the public interest. The evident change in character and effect on low density will be negligible. Scale, design and massing are consistent with that of neighbouring buildings. From the streetscene the impact will be negligible as the character remains that of two-storey houses set back from the frontage. There will therefore be little to no palpable difference in the look, feel and character of the street scene.

Admittedly, the extent of ribbon development along the road will change. However this change will be most apparent from within the site and would not be an appreciable change from widely outside the site curtilage and from public vantage points. Like many places, the area as a whole has a wide range of different plot widths, lengths, shapes and angles. The existing plot is uniform in terms of its width and length, the width broadly consistent from the front to its rear. This gives the site – as shown to be subdivided – much in common with its neighbours. Consequently, the proposed division of the existing plot to create six new plots will subsequently share common plot shapes with their neighbours.

The existing residential properties in the immediate area are typically orientated in a forward facing direction, towards the road with principal amenity space to the rear. Therefore the proposal does not create harm to the character of the area in this respect. It is not considered that the site’s contribution to the area is so special that it must remain as it is. In our view the site has capacity for change and change which will help to deliver the objectives and desirable outcomes of the Local Plan more broadly.

The proposal delivers on an acceptable infill development whilst at the same time securing a high-quality residential development. The absence of a zero impact on the character and appearance of the site, a difficult proposition when the principle of developing the site is accepted and supported by policy, should not and does not render the scheme inconsistent with the development plan read as a whole.

NPPF paragraph 187b requires the decision maker to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The site is not open countryside and is of limited character and beauty due to the site now lying within the settlement / developed framework of Hill End beyond open countryside. The proposal will preserve the character and appearance of the area, which is characterised by built residential development. The proposal, consistent with NPPF paragraph 187, therefore does have regard to recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The scheme is considered to be consistent with the NPPF when taken as a whole.

The application is therefore acceptable in respect of the NPPF's approach to development in the countryside in the event the site was classified as such.

The impact of the proposal though will be very much tempered by the physical and visual containment afforded by existing development and well established landscaping. The landscape framework of the existing site, will be enhanced through these proposals with additional planting planned.

This being the case, the proposal would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area , or indeed the principal aim of the Green Belt around London which seeks to prevent urban sprawl.

Conclusions and Summary

Consequently, this proposal for up to 6 no. dwellings would accord with paragraph 155.a of the Framework. Coupled with the demonstrable need for more housing, there is a clear case for the Council to confirm that new dwellings on this site are acceptable in principle. Therefore, overall, the proposed development would utilise grey belt land and would satisfy all the relevant criteria of paragraph 155 of the Framework. For this reason, the proposed development would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt and permission should be granted without delay.

When considered against the development plan as a whole, the proposal amounts to sustainable development and should be supported.

Matters of technical detail will be considered in detail at the next stage of the permission in principle process.

Yours faithfully,

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