

PART A	
Report of: DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SECTION HEAD	
Date of committee:	19th November 2015
Site address:	37, Bucks Avenue, Watford
Reference Number :	Hertsmere Borough Council ref.15/1895/FUL
Description of Development:	<p>Consultation from Hertsmere Borough Council on development adjoining the Borough:</p> <p>Demolition of 37 Bucks Avenue and equestrian facility, removal of hardstanding, maneges, buildings and structures and the redevelopment of the site to include 34 dwellings (including 12 affordable dwellings) comprising 12 x 1 bed apartments, 4 x 2 bed apartments, 10 x 3 bed houses and 8 x 4 bed houses, parking, village green with pond and play area served by modifying existing access from Bucks Avenue/Sherwoods Road. Provision of public footpaths & cycleways connecting Bucks Avenue to footpath no. 17 and ecological enhancement of land to South East of dwellings to include biodiversity enhancement, landscaping, wildflower meadows, formation of ponds and communal orchard.</p>
Applicant:	Clovercourt Fusion
Date Received:	Consultation received 2nd November 2015
21 day response date:	23rd November 2015
Ward:	Oxhey

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report relates to a consultation received from Hertsmere Borough Council on a planning application for the redevelopment of the Bucks Meadow Riding School at 37, Bucks Avenue, located within their borough. Watford Council has also received a planning application relating to this development but this relates only to the access to the site which is located within Watford Borough. All of the proposed dwellings and associated development (roads, car parking, footpaths, environmental improvements, etc.) are located within Hertsmere Borough and they will determine the application for this development. This consultation from Hertsmere is to seek the Council's views on their application. In respect of the planning application submitted to Watford, this will be determined at a future committee meeting and will relate only to the proposed access arrangements and associated traffic impacts arising from the proposal. As such, this report does not consider these issues and the Committee should make no reference to these matters in their response to Hertsmere.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The site is located almost entirely within Hertsmere Borough with its access off Bucks Avenue, at the junction with Sherwoods Road, within Watford Borough. The overall area of the site is approximately 13 hectares and comprises a dwelling, the Bucks Meadow Riding School, outdoor maneges, paddocks and extensive grazing fields extending from the site entrance to the east. The site itself is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The riding school closed in September 2015.
- 2.2 The site comprises a large number of existing buildings in various states of repair. The largest building on the site is an indoor manege (2 storey) with a number of other single storey buildings including stables, store buildings and other ancillary buildings. Various areas of parking and hardstanding also exist.
- 2.3 The site is adjoined to the north, west and south by the residential areas of Oxhey,

with Talbot Avenue to the north, Bucks Avenue to the west and Sherwoods Road, Lawson Grove and Elm Avenue to the south. These roads are characterised by detached and semi-detached houses with detached bungalows on Lawson Grove on Elm Grove. Most of the dwellings were developed in the 1920s and 1930s as individual plots and are typical of their era. Consequently, designs and materials are very varied and include a number of mock-Tudor designs. Only those properties on Wilcot Avenue and Talbot Avenue are more uniform in their appearance. To the north-east, the site adjoins the Paddock Road Allotments site.

3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The proposal involves the demolition of all existing buildings on the site and the erection of 34 dwellings, comprising 16 flats (1 and 2 bed) and 18 houses (3 and 4 bed). The flats are provided in 3 blocks and the houses in 4 blocks of terraced houses and one pair of semi-detached houses. These 8 blocks are arranged around a 'courtyard' comprising the internal access road, car parking areas and landscaped open space. This development is located in the western corner of the site, adjacent to the access from Bucks Avenue and in the area of the existing buildings on the site.

3.2 All of the proposed blocks are either single storey or two storey, with accommodation in the roofspace of some. The design approach is more rural than urban, with the extensive use of dark, timber cladding, to give the general appearance of traditional brick and timber barns. All of the blocks have an individual but complimentary design with common materials of dark red brick, dark timber cladding and brown roof tiles with elements of tile hanging and white render.

3.3 The single access from Bucks Avenue leads to 2 turning heads within the 'courtyard' and serves the various parking areas serving the blocks. Parking is provided in the form of frontage parking to the houses, small garage/parking courts and small parking areas, principally within the 'courtyard'.

3.4 Aside from the proposed dwellings, the application also includes environmental and

ecological improvements to the open land to the east and footpath links to the existing footpath network linking to Merry Hill to the north and Carpenders Park to the south.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 There is no planning history of relevance to the consideration of the proposed development. The riding school has been established on the site since the 1950s (albeit with a break in use in the 1980s, recommencing in 1991) with the indoor manege built in 1992. The existing house was built in the 1960s.

5.0 PLANNING POLICIES

Although the Committee are not determining the planning application, which Hertsmere must determine against their own Development Plan policies, the following policies of the Development Plan for Watford are relevant in the consideration of the proposal.

Development plan

- 5.1 In accordance with s.38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan for Watford comprises:
- (a) *Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31*;
 - (b) the continuing “saved” policies of the *Watford District Plan 2000*;
 - (c) the *Hertfordshire Waste Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2011-2026*; and
 - (d) the *Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002-2016*.
- 5.2 The *Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31* was adopted in January 2013. The *Core Strategy* policies, together with the “saved policies” of the *Watford District Plan 2000* (adopted December 2003), constitute the “development plan” policies which, together with any relevant policies from the County Council’s *Waste Core Strategy* and the *Minerals Local Plan*, must be afforded considerable weight in

decision making on planning applications. The following policies are relevant to this application.

5.3 **Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31**

WBC1	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
SS1	Spatial Strategy
SD1	Sustainable Design
SD2	Water and Wastewater
SD3	Climate Change
SD4	Waste
HS1	Housing Supply and Residential Site Selection
HS2	Housing Mix
HS3	Affordable Housing
T2	Location of New Development
T3	Improving Accessibility
T4	Transport Assessments
INF1	Infrastructure Delivery and Planning Obligations
UD1	Delivering High Quality Design
GI1	Green Infrastructure
GI2	Green Belt
GI3	Biodiversity
GI4	Sport and Recreation

5.4 **Watford District Plan 2000**

SE7	Waste Storage, Recovery and Recycling in New Development
SE27	Flood Prevention
SE36	Replacement Trees and Hedgerows
SE37	Protection of Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows
SE39	Tree and Hedgerow Provision in New Development
SE40	Landscape Character Assessment
T10	Cycle Parking Standards
T21	Access and Servicing
T22	Car Parking Standards

- T24 Residential Development
- L8 Open Space Provision in Housing Development
- L9 Children's Play Space
- CS3 Loss of Community Facilities

5.5 Hertfordshire Waste Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2011-2026

- 1A Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- 2 Waste Prevention and Reduction
- 12 Sustainable Design, Construction and Demolition

5.6 Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002-2016

No relevant policies.

5.7 Supplementary Planning Documents

The following Supplementary Planning Documents are relevant to the determination of this application, and must be taken into account as a material planning consideration.

5.8 *Residential Design Guide*

The Residential Design Guide was adopted in July 2014. It provides a robust set of design principles to assist in the creation and preservation of high quality residential environments in the Borough which will apply to proposals ranging from new individual dwellings to large-scale, mixed-use, town centre redevelopment schemes. The guide is a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications.

5.9 *Watford Character of Area Study*

The Watford Character of area Study was adopted in December 2011. It is a spatial study of the Borough based on broad historical character types. The study sets out the characteristics of each individual character area in the Borough, including green spaces. It is capable of constituting a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications.

5.10 *SPG10 Open Space Provision*

This guidance sets out the standards of open space provision required per thousand population as part of new developments. The guidance was adopted in October 2001 and is a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications.

5.11 **National Planning Policy Framework**

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The following provisions are relevant to the determination of this application, and must be taken into account as a material planning consideration:

Achieving sustainable development

The presumption in favour of sustainable development

Core planning principles

Section 1 Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 4 Promoting sustainable transport

Section 6 Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes

Section 7 Requiring good design

Section 8 Promoting healthy communities

Section 9 Protecting Green Belt land

Section 10 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Section 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Decision taking

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

6.1 No neighbour notifications or technical consultations have been undertaken in respect of this consultation. All notifications, consultations and publicity relating to the application has been undertaken by Hertsmere.

7.0 **APPRAISAL**

7.1 **Main issues**

The main issues to be considered in respect of this proposal are:

- (a) Impacts on the Green Belt
- (b) Loss of the existing riding school as a community facility
- (c) General housing policies
- (d) Design, scale and appearance
- (e) Character of the area
- (f) Impacts on adjoining properties
- (g) Car parking provision
- (h) Environmental impacts

7.2 (a) Impacts on the Green Belt

National policy relating to development in the Green Belt is set out in paragraphs 87-89 of the NPPF.

This states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances (para 87). When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations (para 88).

New buildings in Green Belt should be considered as inappropriate in the Green Belt unless the development complies with one of 6 exceptions (para 89). The only exception relevant to this application is the following:

“Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land) which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development”.

The NPPF also gives a definition of previously developed land which includes land which is occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. Various exclusions from this definition are given, including agricultural and forestry buildings and residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments.

7.2.1 The existing dwelling and the various buildings and areas of hardstanding and car parking associated with the riding school constitute previously developed land (brownfield land). These are clustered in the eastern corner of the site close to the existing access and occupy an area of approximately 0.7 hectare. The 3 existing outdoor maneges adjoining the buildings to the east are not considered brownfield land and are excluded from this area. The proposal is for the complete redevelopment of this brownfield land under the exception set out in paragraph 89 of the NPPF. The proposal is therefore acceptable in principle, subject to the development not having a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development on the site.

7.2.2 In order to aid this assessment, the applicant has provided existing and proposed figures for building footprints and hardstanding areas and building volumes for comparison.

Existing	Footprint/area (m²)	Volume (m²)
Buildings	2799	10922
Hardstanding/parking	5001	
Total	7800	10922

Proposed	Footprint/area (m²)	Volume (m³)
Buildings	1902	10986
Hardstanding/parking	2077	
Roadway	886	
Total	4865	10986

	Existing	Proposed	Difference
Footprint/areas	7800	4865	-2935 (-37.7%)
Volume	10922	10986	+64 (+0.58%)

7.2.3 It can be seen from these figures that the volume of buildings proposed is virtually identical to that of the existing buildings. The area of hardstanding, car parking, roadway and footpaths is also significantly less than the existing. The form and typology of the proposed residential blocks is different to that of the existing buildings, with the site currently dominated by the indoor manege building. The proposed residential blocks are more in keeping with the scale of the surrounding houses and have been designed to have a more rural appearance than urban, particularly with those blocks that back onto the Green Belt. The layout of the site has also been designed to allow views between the blocks out into the Green Belt.

7.2.4 In conclusion on this matter, the extent of new development is confined to the agreed area of previously developed land, the volume of new buildings is virtually identical to that of the existing buildings and this volume has been broken down into smaller blocks. It is not, therefore, considered that the proposed development will have any greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or any other purpose for including land within the Green Belt than the existing development, and consequently, will cause harm to the Green Belt.

7.3 (b) Loss of the existing riding school as a community facility

The application is accompanied by a Needs Assessment of the existing equestrian facility by a Sport England Framework Partner Company. Within Hertsmere Borough, 3 other equestrian centres are also the subject of planning applications for residential development, with one of these, in addition to the current site, having recently closed. As a result, Hertsmere and Sport England have requested the needs assessment in order to determine any impact from the closure and any perceived loss of a community facility.

7.3.1 Following consultation with various national equestrian organisations, the County Council, Hertsmere Borough Council and Sport England, it is agreed that the riding school at the site is not of strategic or regional significance (unlike other equestrian facilities in Hertsmere).

7.3.2 The report reviews the low levels of usage at the riding school in tandem with declining demand for equestrian sport, competition from and the capacity of other facilities, changes in the market and the financial circumstances of the riding school (the business has incurred significant losses in the past 5 years), and concluded that the riding school is no longer a viable business. Since the report was commenced, the riding school has closed. Although this is regrettable, the report concludes that the closure will have a minimal negative impact on the provision and delivery of equestrian sport in the local area.

7.3.3 With reference to paragraph 74 of the NPPF, this states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- i) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- ii) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- iii) the development is for alternative sports and recreation provision, the needs

for which clearly outweigh the loss.

7.3.4 In this case, the report concludes that there are numerous equestrian facilities, with a comparable service offer, within a short distance from the site. There are 5 other facilities within 5 miles (2 with capacity for new users) and a further 19 within 5-12 miles of the site (9 with capacity). Given the low level of use at the time of closure (32 people per week), there is sufficient capacity locally to meet this demand. There is also no ignoring the fact that the current facility has closed after making significant losses over the past 5 years.

7.4 (c) General housing policies

Policy HS1 gives criteria for the selection of new housing sites and the consideration of windfall housing sites, such as this one. In this respect, the use of the site for residential development is broadly consistent with this policy in that the part of the site to be developed is previously developed land, the land is not at risk of flooding (Flood Zone 1), the site has reasonably good access to passenger transport (Bushey Station is 720m to the north) and the provision of the majority of the dwellings as houses (18 of the 34 units) is in general accordance with the Council's spatial strategy.

7.4.1 The applicant is proposing 12 units as affordable housing (35%) with a mix of 8 flats and 4 houses, which meets Hertsmere's requirement for 35% affordable housing. The internal floorareas for the proposed dwellings range from 50m² to 139m² and are significantly in excess of the Council's guidelines. Overall, the proposal is considered acceptable in principle.

7.5 (d) Design, scale and appearance

The design of the buildings could be described loosely as a rural farmstead typology, reflecting the general design of brick and timber clad farmhouses and barns. The style draws on the precedent of the award winning development at Wall Hall near Aldenham. The scale of the buildings are single and two storey with low eaves, deep roofs and Dutch hipped, gables. The main materials are a red brick and dark stained timber cladding with red multi roof tiles. The blocks of flats

incorporate large, picture windows often seen in modern barn conversions.

7.5.1 The 8 proposed blocks are arranged around a courtyard which includes at its centre an area of open space and a pond, reminiscent of a traditional village green. This setting will complement the rural design typology and help to create a distinctive sense of place for the development. The two blocks adjoining the entrance (Units 1-8 and 9-12) have identical designs with large feature windows, and will form a gateway into the site. Car parking is broken up around the site with varying degrees of success, the least successful being in the northern part of the development and adjoining the access, where parking dominates the layout. These areas will need careful landscaping and treatment to minimise the visual impact of the parking.

7.5.2 Surrounding the proposed blocks to the north, east and south are areas of open space which will be available for the residents to use together with a children's play area. No details have been given of this at this stage.

7.5.3 Overall, the scale of buildings, design approach and proposed materials are considered acceptable and appropriate for this urban/rural fringe site and will create a distinctive sense of place.

7.6 (e) Character of the area

The general character of the area is of detached and semi-detached houses and bungalows, with the bungalows predominantly located on Elm Grove and Lawson Grove. With the exception of the houses on Wilcot Avenue and Talbot Avenue, which are more uniform in their style and materials, the remaining houses and bungalows are very varied in their design and materials, with an eclectic mix ranging from brown, pebbledash rendered semi-detached houses to large mock-Tudor houses.

7.6.1 The existing riding school contributes little to the streetscene due to its relatively narrow access on the outside of the bend in the road, where Bucks Avenue joins Sherwoods Road, and the set back of the buildings behind the existing houses.

Consequently, the site contributes little to the character and appearance of the wider area. A similar situation will exist with the proposed development, which, as with the existing riding school, will appear as a small enclave on the edge of the urban area. It has been designed and laid out to reflect its more rural setting and to create a unique sense of place for this site, set around a small green and pond, which is considered an acceptable and appropriate approach.

7.6.2 Overall, it is considered the proposal will have no adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area.

7.7 (f) Impacts on adjoining properties

Several properties in Watford Borough directly adjoin the site and the potential impact on these properties needs to be assessed.

7.7.1 *1, Sherwoods Road* – This property adjoins the entrance to the site on its southern side and its side garden boundary is shared with the application site. The nearest proposed block to this property is a block of flats (Units 9-12) sited in line with the rear boundary of the property. The back-to-back facing distance, albeit off-set, is 36.5m which is significantly in excess of the Council's minimum of 27.5m.

Furthermore, there are only 2 windows at first floor level closest to the boundary and these are to a bedroom and a bathroom, limiting further any opportunities for overlooking. Retained trees along the boundary will also help to mitigate any oblique overlooking of the garden area. The siting of the proposed building will have no adverse impact on the outlook and natural light to no.1.

7.7.2 *35, Bucks Avenue* – This property is sited on the northern side of the site entrance and also shares its side garden boundary with the application site. A row of trees is sited along this boundary and is to be retained. The nearest proposed block is a reversed L-shaped block of flats (Units 1-8), which is a 2 storey building. The 'foot' of the building aligns with the flank elevation of no.35 and contains no windows. The 'leg' of the building is sited parallel to the side boundary of no.35, set back 12-15m from the boundary. This set back is in excess of the Council's minimum guideline of 11m and any overlooking will be further mitigated by the retained row

of trees. The siting of the proposed building will have no significant adverse impact on the outlook and natural light to no.35.

- 7.7.3 Adjacent to Units 1-8 to the north is a short terrace of 4 houses (Units 31-34), comprising 2 storey units with accommodation in the roof. Two of these houses face towards the end of the garden of no.35. These are set back 12-16.5m from the boundary and also exceed the minimum guideline distance of 11m. The siting of this building will have no significant adverse impact on the outlook and natural light to no.35.
- 7.7.4 *22-30, Talbot Avenue* – These properties back onto the northern boundary of the site. The nearest proposed buildings are Units 31-32, part of the terrace of houses comprising Units 31-34, and an adjacent block of flats (Units 27-30), a 2 storey building. Both of these proposed buildings are sited 37-47m from the rear elevations of the houses in Talbot Road. The nearest first floor windows in the proposed buildings are 12m from the boundary and existing trees will also be retained along this boundary. As such, these buildings will have no significant adverse impacts on the amenities of the houses in Talbot Avenue.
- 7.7.5 *1a-6, Lawson Grove* – These properties all share a rear boundary with the site and have relatively short garden depths of 5-12m. Two of the proposed blocks are sited adjacent to this boundary. Units 13-14 are a pair of semi-detached chalet style bungalows and Units 15-18 a block of flats. Both buildings are designed as single storey with a second level of accommodation in the roofspace. Units 13-14 back onto the garden area of no.1a and are set back 16m from the boundary. This is in excess of the Council's minimum 11m guideline. Furthermore, only two small dormer windows to bedrooms face towards Lawson Grove which, together with existing retained trees, will ensure these units will have no significant adverse impact on the amenities of this property.
- 7.7.6 In respect of 2, Lawson Grove, the nearest dormer window in Unit 14, albeit off-set, is sited 28.5m from the rear elevation of this property, in excess of the Council's minimum guideline of 27.5m.

7.7.7 The proposed block containing Units 15-18 is sited at right-angles to the boundary, with its flank elevation facing 3, Lawson Grove. The flank elevation is sited 10.5m from the boundary and 19.5m from the rear elevation of no.3 at its closest point. This flank elevation contains 1 obscure glazed, secondary window to a bedroom at first floor level. The siting and scale of the building will ensure it has no significant adverse impact on the amenities currently enjoyed by no.3.

7.8 (g) Car parking provision

The proposal provides 70 parking spaces for the proposed 34 dwellings, a ratio of 2.05 spaces per dwelling. This provision is broken down as follows: 1 bed flats – 1.5 spaces, 2 bed flats – 2 spaces, 3 bed houses – 2 spaces, and 4 bed houses – 3 spaces. This level of provision slightly exceeds the Council's maximum standard of 67.5 spaces for the proposed development. This level of provision will be sufficient to ensure no overspill parking will occur on Bucks Avenue and Sherwoods Road.

7.9 (h) Environmental impacts

The application includes a range of measures to improve the environmental and ecological value of the site, specifically the 11 hectares of grazing land forming the vast majority of the overall site. A biodiversity enhancement strategy has been proposed which includes native landscape planting, the creation of species-rich neutral grassland, the management of existing grassland either as hay meadows or through a grazing regime, the planting of a small woodland and an orchard, the creation of a parkland area, the restoration of two ponds and the retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows. In addition, measures to encourage bats, reptiles and amphibians will be incorporated. As a major application, the proposal will also be required to incorporate a sustainable surface water drainage scheme.

7.9.1 Two new footpath/cycleways will also link the site with the existing footpath network to the south-east and allow public access across the site for the first time.

7.9.2 All of these measures are welcome and will provide not only an enhancement of the site but also an additional public benefit from the application.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This is a consultation from Hertsmere Borough Council on an application for the redevelopment of the existing Bucks Meadow Riding School. The proposal is for the redevelopment of the riding school with 34 dwellings. The riding school closed in September 2015 and although this loss is regrettable, a detailed needs assessment has concluded that sufficient capacity exists in other similar facilities within a Hertsmere. The loss of this facility is therefore considered acceptable.
- 8.2 The site is within the Green Belt and that part of the site comprising the existing buildings and hardstanding areas constitutes previously developed land. The proposed development has been confined to this part of the site and, having regard to the scale and siting of the proposed buildings, is not considered to have any greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing buildings.
- 8.3 The layout of the site and the scale, design and appearance of the buildings is considered acceptable and appropriate for this urban/rural fringe site and will have no detrimental impacts on the amenities of adjoining dwellings or on the character and appearance of the wider area.
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9.0 RECOMMENDATION

That Hertsmere Borough Council be advised that Watford Borough Council has no objection to the application but would wish to see conditions imposed on any grant of permission to cover the following matters:

1. That no part of the development shall be occupied until the existing access to Bucks Avenue has been modified and constructed in full, as shown in principle on drawing no. 150318-2D.

Reason: To ensure safe access to the site in the interests of vehicular and pedestrian users of the highway.

2. That the trees along the south-western boundary and along the north-western boundary are retained and measures installed to protect the trees during demolition and construction works.

Reason: These are an important visual amenity to adjoining residential occupiers and will help to mitigate the visual impact of the development.

3. That the first floor window in the south elevation of Unit 15 shall be obscure glazed and non-opening.

Reason: To prevent overlooking and a loss of privacy to the adjoining property at 3, Lawson Grove.

4. The development shall provide at least 67 car parking spaces.

Reason: To prevent overspill parking on the adjoining highway on Bucks Avenue and Sherwoods Road.

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