Our ref: TDK/Stevens
Your ref:

1st July 2025

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Dear Ms Dew,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION IN PRINCIPLE FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF 4-5 RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS AT LAND NORTH EAST OF HIGH GABLES BUCKWORTH ROAD ALCONBURY WESTON (LPA REF: 25/00890/PIP)

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Applicants, following our recent email correspondence.

As acknowledged in the submitted Planning Statement, the site lies beyond the defined built-up area of Alconbury Weston. However, in the context of paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024), and the Council's current housing land supply, Policy LP9 must be considered out of date for decision-making purposes. The tilted balance in favour of sustainable development is therefore engaged.

It is important to highlight that the Council's five-year housing land supply (5YHLS) position shows a significant deficit. The housing land requirement, including a 5% buffer, is 5,501 homes, while the current 5YHLS stands at 4,330 homes, equivalent to only 3.94 years' supply. This clear shortfall means the Council must positively consider and approve appropriate development proposals on the edge of settlements, such as this one, to address its housing needs.

The site benefits from boundary screening, which serves to minimise its visual impact. As illustrated in the Google Street View images provided below, the land is well-enclosed and sits in close proximity to the existing village form, thereby limiting any material encroachment into the open countryside or erosion of rural character. The site is not visible from North Road to the west, and only glimpses of the site are available from Buckworth Road to the north when passing by. The site would not be visible from any PRoW within the surrounding area.

Importantly, the perception when travelling past the site is that one has already entered the village, as shown in Figure 2 below. Surrounding development and infrastructure – including existing dwellings, access points, and established hedgerows – collectively create a visual and physical sense of arrival. This existing context ensures that the proposed development would not disrupt the village edge or undermine the rural setting of Alconbury Weston.

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Figure 1: Google Street View from North Road (to the east)



Figure 2: Google Street View from Buckworth Road (to the west)



Figure 3: Google Street View from Buckworth Road (to the east)

With regard to the suggestion that the site is separated from essential services and would result in an unsustainable reliance on private vehicles, it is important to note that Alconbury Weston and nearby Alconbury offer a range of day-to-day services, including a primary school, shop/post office, pub, village hall, recreational facilities, and local employment opportunities. These facilities are all within short driving or cycling distance, and walking is a viable option for some residents, particularly via established routes.

In the context of rural development, it is unrealistic to expect complete reliance on non-car modes of transport. The NPPF recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport will vary between urban and rural areas (Paragraph 110), and modest development in a location such as this, which is functionally linked to an existing settlement, is consistent with both national policy and Local Plan objectives. Any limited car dependency arising from the site would be typical for a rural village setting and does not amount to significant or demonstrable harm.

The Council's suggestion that the site is isolated from essential services, resulting in an unsustainable reliance on private vehicles, is inconsistent with its own previous assessment of the local area. In paragraphs 7.20–7.22 of a recent decision at Land North Of Butchers Close (21/02027/OUT), the Council acknowledged that "the village is well connected to Alconbury, *which is less than 1 mile from the application site and can be accessed via cycling and walking".* It further noted that Alconbury provides a wider range of services, including a convenience store, post office, school, pub, and sports facilities.

Crucially, the Council also recognised that Alconbury Weald, located within 2 miles of the site and accessible by bus, cycling and walking, is delivering a substantial mixed-use development including thousands of homes, schools, employment areas, and a broad range of community services. The same assessment concluded that *"the services they can offer should be considered in relation to this development proposal."*

In light of this, the claim that the site is unsustainably located lacks a consistent or credible policy basis. The proposed development would benefit from and support access to a well-established and growing network of nearby services, and any reliance on private transport would be typical of rural living, not harmful in planning terms.

Given the current shortfall in housing land supply and the need to apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development, the benefits of the proposal, including the delivery of new homes in a sustainable and appropriate location, clearly outweigh any minor and localised impacts. As such, the proposal does not result in significant and demonstrable harm when assessed against the development plan and the NPPF as a whole.

In respect of archaeological concerns, specifically relating to ridge and furrow earthworks, it is acknowledged that the site lies within an area of historic landscape sensitivity. Following consultation with an archaeologist, it remains unclear what additional benefit a Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) would provide at this stage, particularly in the absence of field-based evidence or a clear rationale for such a requirement.

Importantly, the presence of ridge and furrow does not, in itself, preclude development, especially where the extent, integrity, and significance of surviving features remain unverified. The site has been subject to agricultural disturbance over time, and any remnants are likely to be fragmentary and of limited heritage value.

The application site constitutes approximately 20% of the 2.65-hectare paddock on which it sits. The wider paddock contains significant areas of medium and high surface water flood risk, rendering much of it undevelopable and thereby naturally protecting any archaeological remains in those parts.

Furthermore, the public benefits of delivering new housing in a sustainable location clearly outweigh any limited or non-substantial archaeological harm. This is particularly relevant given the Council's housing land supply shortfall and the NPPF's strong emphasis on boosting housing delivery.

Finally, it is important to note relevant DEFRA guidance regarding land productivity, which states:

"You need a screening decision before you increase the productivity of 2 hectares (ha) or more of uncultivated land or an SNA.
Increasing productivity includes (but is not limited to):
- *disrupting the soil surface by ploughing, discing, harrowing or rotovating."*

The application site is less than two hectares and therefore could be ploughed or otherwise disturbed without requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment screening decision. This presents a realistic fallback position that must be given material weight in the planning balance. The proposed development represents a more managed and considered use of the land, further supporting the case for approval.

For the reasons set out above, the proposal represents sustainable development that accords with the development plan when read as a whole and the NPPF. We respectfully request that the Council reconsider their position in respect of this application site.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

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