OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00414/OUT **Outline Application**

Proposal: Infill development for 5 new detached self build dwellings with garages

Location: Land Between Halefields And 26 Colne Road Somersham

Applicant: Mr L Jones

Grid Ref: 536939 277162

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site comprises a parcel of agricultural land circa 0.42ha situated between Halefields and No. 26 Colne Road, Somersham. The agricultural field expands northeast, is accessed off Colne Rd, and is within the ownership of the applicant but is not associated with the application. The site is bound to the west, south and north by mature hedgerows and trees and is accessed off Colne Road. The site is situated between the villages of Colne and Somersham.

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (lowest probability of fluvial flooding), per the Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) 2024 and Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning. The site is partially at risk from surface water flooding along the southern boundary of the application site according to the Council's SFRA 2024 and the northwestern corner of the site is partly susceptible to groundwater flooding. The site is not located within a Conservation Area nor are any trees within or adjacent to the site are afforded with tree preservation orders.

The application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of 5 self-build dwellings. The application seeks outline planning permission for access off Colne Road. All other matters (relating to landscaping, appearance, layout and scale) are reserved and shall not be considered as part of this application.

It is noted that the application site was subject to a previous application for a similar scheme in 2024. The application was withdrawn for the following reasoning:
- The application site is considered to be outside of the built-up area of Somersham and Colne and primarily relates to the characteristics and nature of the surrounding countryside. In addition, the proposed development does not accord with any of the specific opportunities for development on land within the countryside provided for by other policies of the Local Plan.
- Insufficient evidence to assess the impact of the proposed development on Great Crested Newts. As such, the application did not adequately demonstrate that its effects on biodiversity would be acceptable.
- Due to insufficient information the proposal did not provide safe or suitable access arrangements and would lead to an unacceptable impact on highway safety, contrary to Local and National Policies.

It should be noted that at the time Officers considered the previous application (ref 24/00555/OUT) the Councils policy position was different, and the Council could demonstrate a 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS). Therefore, policies relating to the supply and location of future dwellings within the district are now considered out of date, as per paragraph 11 (d) of the NPPF. Further discussions regarding the principle of development and the tilted balance shall be discussed in greater detail in a latter section of this report.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE
The National Planning Policy Framework (12th December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES
Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019
o LP1: Amount of Development
oLP2: Strategy for Development
oLP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
oLP5: Flood Risk
oLP6: Waste Water Management
oLP9: Small Settlements
oLP10: The Countryside
oLP11: Design Context
oLP12: Design Implementation
oLP14: Amenity
oLP15: Surface Water
oLP16: Sustainable Travel
oLP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
oLP25: Housing Mix
oLP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
oLP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
*Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
*Huntingdonshire Townscape and Landscape Assessment SPD (2022)
*Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
*Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024).
*Huntingdonshire Tree Guidance Note 3
*Annual Monitoring Report, regarding housing land supply.

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY
24/00555/OUT-Infill development for 5 new detached self build dwellings with garages- Withdrawn 18.10.2024

CONSULTATIONS
Parish Council- No objection. Several of the issues previously raised by the Parish in relation to the earlier application have now been addressed. The Parish Council has requested the opportunity to review the archaeology report following the completion of the archaeological dig.

Officers acknowledge the comments made regarding archaeology. Should the development be approved, a condition will be imposed requiring the submission of details relating to any

archaeological findings. This documentation will be made publicly available as part of the discharge of condition process.

CC Archaeology- No objection. Due to the archaeological potential of the site a further programme of investigation and recording is required in order to provide more information regarding the presence or absence, and condition, of surviving archaeological remains within the development area, and to establish the need for archaeological mitigation of the development as necessary.

CC Highways- No objection. Based on the submitted information Officers note the revised drawings show the drainage channel at the highway boundary and tarmac up to the highway boundary which is acceptable. Based on the submitted information the Local Highways Authority (LHA) consider the proposed development to be acceptable, subject to the imposition of conditions.

Environmental Health- No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS

One third party representation in support of the development proposal was received at the time of determination. The letter raised the following reasoning for support:

- Additional family homes, particularly larger ones, would help create a more active and safer community.
- Increased housing would naturally slow traffic due to more vehicle movements.
- The presence of more residents would help deter crime, contributing to a greater sense of security.
- The currently unused field between two existing houses is seen as underutilised land. The supporter believes that, in the context of current housing needs, such spaces should be used more effectively to benefit the wider community.

One third party representation in objection to the development proposal was received at the time of determination. The representation raised the following material planning considerations (as summarised):

- Concern that the proposed development will significantly impact the local environment and wildlife that currently thrive on the field.
- Objection to building on agricultural land, which is considered an inappropriate location for housing.
- Concern that the proposed development will increase traffic generation and subsequently create noise and light impacts.
- Belief that the proposed houses are unnecessary given the number of new developments already underway in the area.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

When considering the determination of this application the main matter is to consider whether the proposal conflicts with Development Plan policies. If conflicts are found the application is considered against the Development Plan when taken as a whole. Material considerations, including the NPPF (2023) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which indicate that planning permission should be granted are further analysed if an application in accordance with the Development Plan. With this in mind, the report addresses the following issues:

- Principle of development
- Design and Visual amenity
- Residential Amenity
- Flood Risk/Surface Water Drainage
- Highway Safety, Access and Parking Provision
- Biodiversity
- Developer Contributions

*Principle of development (including design and visual amenity)
Huntingdonshire's development strategy is outlined in Policy LP2 of the Local Plan, which seeks to focus growth in areas offering, or with the potential to offer, a comprehensive range of services and facilities. The application site lies between Colne and Somersham, both designated as Small Settlements under the Local Plan, making Policy LP9 relevant to this proposal.

Policy LP9 supports development within the built-up area of Small Settlements where the scale and location are considered sustainable. The Local Plan defines a built-up area as a distinct group of buildings comprising 30 or more homes, including land that relates more to the built form than to the surrounding countryside.

To determine whether the principle of development is acceptable, it must be established whether the site lies within the built-up area of either Colne or Somersham. While the Local Plan does not provide mapped boundaries, it offers guidance (pages 53-55) on what should be included or excluded. Notably, page 55 excludes isolated properties, ribbon development, that is visually and physically detached from the main built form. This exclusion criteria also considerers intervening countryside and agricultural land from the built-up area given 'these spaces can provide a visual buffer between built development and the open countryside, softening the visual impact and linking the built up area with its rural context.'

From aerial imagery, it is evident that the site is both visually and physically separated from the built-up areas of Colne and Somersham. Development here would constitute ribbon development on agricultural land that currently acts as a visual buffer between the two settlements. As such, the proposal does not align with the Local Plan's definition of built-up area and is therefore contrary to Policy LP9.

Given the above, it is considered that the application site is outside the built-up area of Colne and Somersham and as such the starting point to establish the principle of development is Local Plan Policy LP10 development within the countryside.

Development within the countryside
Policy LP10 states 'Development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of this plan. All development in the countryside must:
a. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:
    i. avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) where possible, and
    ii. avoiding Grade 1 agricultural land unless there are exceptional circumstances where the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the loss of land;
b. recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
c. not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.'

It is acknowledged that third parties raised concerns regarding the loss of agricultural land. In relation to part a of Policy LP10, the site is classified as Grade 1 agricultural land, which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food defines as excellent quality land with minimal limitations for agricultural use. This type of land supports a wide variety of crops, including top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops, and winter-harvested vegetables, with consistently high yields. Within Huntingdonshire, 98% of agricultural land is classified as Grades 1, 2, or 3, with Grade 1 land making up only 15%, primarily concentrated in the northeast of the district and along the Ouse Valley. The proposal would result in the loss of 0.42 hectares of this best and most versatile land. It is however noted the wider agricultural field, within the applicant's ownership would be retained for agricultural purposes. No supporting evidence has been submitted to demonstrate exceptional circumstances or that the benefits of the proposal would significantly outweigh the loss of this high-quality agricultural resource. It is therefore considered the proposal conflicts with part a(i) of Local Plan Policy LP10.

In relation to Part b of Policy LP10, and within the wider landscape context, the site lies within the Fen Margin character area as defined in the HDC Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022). This area is characterised by small, irregular fields enclosed by tall hedgerows and trees, often with hedge-banks along older lanes. While the landscape is generally enclosed, this is partially offset by expansive views of the sky.

The immediate context along Colne Road comprises a mix of linear residential development interspersed with agricultural fields and buildings. The application site itself forms a narrow parcel of land, part of a larger agricultural field to the east. Residential dwellings are located in a linear arrangement to both the north and south, while to the west lies an agricultural field and a dwelling set back approximately 100 metres from the highway. The site is enclosed by mature vegetation on all boundaries except the eastern edge.

The proposed development would further subdivide this small agricultural field and introduce built form into an area where development is typically sparse and linear. Although the application is in outline form, the accompanying illustrative layout indicates that five dwellings could be accommodated in a linear arrangement, set back from the highway with a shared access road. The plan also shows potential for a landscaping buffer along the eastern boundary to help screen the development from the open countryside.

While the illustrative layout demonstrates that the dwellings could be positioned in a manner consistent with the existing linear pattern of development, the proposal would nonetheless result in the encroachment of built form into the countryside and would further subdivide a smaller agricultural field in the Fen Margin character area. This would erode the rural character of the area and fail to respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy LP10(b) of the Local Plan.

Third-party representations have raised concerns that the proposed development would lead to increased traffic generation, resulting in noise and light impacts that are currently absent from the site. Officers acknowledge that the noise profile of the site would shift from agricultural activity to typical residential use, including general movements and associated lighting. However, this change is considered to be minor and not significantly different or harmful when compared to the existing agricultural use. As such, the proposal is considered to comply with Policy LP10(c) of the Local Plan.

It should be considered that Local Plan Policy LP10 restricts development in the countryside to the limited and specific opportunities provided in other policies of the Local Plan. Opportunities in the countryside are limited under Policies LP19 Rural Economy, LP22 Local Services and Community Facilities, LP23 Tourism and Recreation, LP28 Rural Exceptions Housing, LP33 Rural Buildings and LP38 Water Related Development for which these are not applicable to this application.

The proposed self-build residential development is located in the countryside, where new residential development is restricted to limited and specific opportunities as set out in other policies of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. The proposal does not fall within any of the exceptions provided under other policies of the Local Plan and as such, the development is contrary to Policy LP 10 and the overarching spatial strategy as set out in Policy LP2 of Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

Self and Custom Build Development
This application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of 5 self-build dwellings with all matters reserved except access.

Under section 1 of the Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, local authorities are required to keep a register of those seeking to acquire serviced plots in the area for their own self-build and custom house building. They are also subject to duties under sections 2 and 2A of the Act to have regard to this and are required to provide planning permission to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding in their area. The level of demand is established by reference to the number of entries added to an authority's register during a base period.

If the Local Planning Authority were to fall short in meeting the identified need for custom or self-build plots, this would constitute a material consideration in favour of the development. However, only moderate weight would be attributed to this factor, as the proposal comprises five market self-build dwellings located in the countryside. This consideration would not be sufficient to outweigh the identified conflict with the development plan, as outlined above.

Given the above, the LPA can demonstrate there are sufficient permissions for self-build and custom plots to meet the demand and as such this is not a material consideration in this case.

Taking the above into account, the site lies outside the built-up areas of Somersham and Colne and relates more closely to the surrounding countryside. The proposal does not meet any of the exceptions for residential development in the countryside set out in the Local Plan and would result in the encroachment of built form into a rural area, failing to respect its intrinsic character and beauty.

The site comprises Grade 1 agricultural land, among the best and most versatile, and no exceptional justification has been provided to outweigh its loss. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies LP2, LP9, LP10 (a and b), LP11, and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. The principle of the proposed development is therefore not supported. Other material planning considerations will be assessed below.

It should be noted, however, that despite the identified conflict with the Local Plan policies listed above, the policies relating to the supply and location of housing, namely LP2, LP7, LP8, LP9, and LP10 within the Development Strategy chapter, are considered out-of-date. This is due to the Council's current inability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, and as such, these policies can no longer be afforded full weight in the determination of planning applications. As a result of this, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied for decision-taking in accordance with paragraph 11 (d) and footnote 8 of the NPPF in relation to applications involving the provision of housing. This is generally referred to as 'the tilted balance'. A tilted balance exercise shall be completed at the end of this assessment.

*Design and Visual Amenity
Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity. It should however be noted that these policies relate more to the detailed design considerations that would be addressed as part of the reserved matters relating to layout, scale, appearance and landscaping.

As outlined above, the proposal would result in the encroachment of built development into the countryside and the further subdivision of a smaller agricultural field within the Fen Margin character area. This would erode the rural character of the locality and fail to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, contrary to Policy LP10(b).

While the application is in outline form, the illustrative layout indicates that the proposed dwellings could be positioned in a manner that reflects the existing linear pattern of development, situated between residential properties to the north and south. This arrangement may help integrate the development into the immediate built context. Additionally, the retention of existing boundary vegetation and the introduction of a new eastern hedgerow could help mitigate some visual harm.

The illustrative layout also demonstrates that the site has sufficient depth to accommodate the proposed shared access, five self-build dwellings, associated rear amenity space, and a landscaped eastern boundary to provide screening from the open countryside.

Nonetheless, despite these mitigating factors, the proposal fails to respond positively to its wider context, which is predominantly defined by the surrounding natural environment and open agricultural landscape. The development would introduce built form into an area that contributes to

the rural setting and character of the Fen Margin, resulting in harm that cannot be fully offset by design measures alone. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to be contrary to Policies LP11 and LP12 (parts a and b) of the Local Plan.

*Residential Amenity
Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

As all matters are reserved for future consideration, the detailed impact of the scale, layout, and design of the proposed dwellings on neighbouring properties cannot be fully assessed at this outline stage. However, it is noted that the site appears capable of accommodating up to five modestly scaled dwellings without resulting in significant harm to the amenity of nearby properties, including Halefields and No. 26 Colne Road, in terms of overlooking, loss of light, or overbearing impact.

While the development may generate some additional noise and disturbance, this is not considered sufficient to warrant refusal. The proposed density of development provides adequate scope to ensure that the amenity of neighbouring residents and future occupiers can be safeguarded at the detailed design stage. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

*Flood Risk and Drainage
The site is exposed to minimal risk to surface water flooding and is located within Flood Zone 1 (lowest probability of fluvial flooding), per the Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) 2024 and Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning. The site is partially at risk from surface water flooding along the southern boundary of the application site according to the Council's SFRA 2024 and the northwestern corner of the site is partly susceptible to groundwater flooding.

Paragraph 175 of the NPPF (2024) states the sequential test should be used in areas known to be at risk now or in the future from any form of flooding (emphasis added), except in situations where a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates that no built development within the site boundary, including access or escape routes. Whilst it is acknowledged the site is at risk from surface water flooding, this application relates to a minor development at low risk of fluvial flooding.

The southern boundary of the site is identified as being subject to surface water flooding, while the site itself is only partially susceptible to groundwater flooding. According to the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA, 2024), the available datasets relating to groundwater flood risk are not considered sufficiently robust to inform the application of the Sequential Test (see page 59). Furthermore, as matters pursuant to layout are reserved for future consideration, Officers are satisfied that there is adequate space within the site to accommodate the proposed dwellings outside of the areas identified as being at risk from both surface and groundwater flooding. On this basis, it is considered that the submission of a Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessment and Sequential Test is not required in this instance.

The accompanying application form states the proposal would discharge surface water through soakaways and main sewers and foul water would be disposed of through a package treatment plant. Given the limited scale of the proposal for a minor residential development it is considered there would be no significant additional surface water run-off impacts and precise surface and foul water drainage details would be satisfactorily addressed as part of building regulations, should the development be permitted.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in regard to flood risk and drainage in accordance with Policy LP5 of the Local Plan and the NPPF 2023 in this regard.

*Biodiversity

Local Plan Policy LP30 states a proposal will be required to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated. A proposal that is likely to have an impact, either direct or indirect, on biodiversity or geodiversity will need to be accompanied by an appropriate appraisal identifying all and cumulative potential impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity. A proposal will ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

As of the 2nd April 2024, a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was imposed on small sites. The application is accompanied with a statutory Biodiversity Net Gain Metric for small sites. The matrix identifies the onsite habitat baseline for the site as 3.64 habitat units and 3.02 hedgerow units. The proposed habitat enhancement includes the planting of urban and orchard trees, mixed scrub and neutral grass land which would increase the habitat units by 10.68% (0.39 onsite habitat units created). The planting of a species rich hedgerow offering 31.26% gain in hedgerow units (0.94 onside hedgerow units created). Given the nature of this outline application, landscape details securing these habitat enhancements would be agreed at reserved matters stage however, the applicants have demonstrated the proposal is able to provide an onsite BNG.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) set out the types of development which is exempt from mandatory BNG. Self-build and custom build applications are considered exempt should the development:

- consist of no more than 9 dwellings
- be on a site that has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares
- consist exclusively of dwellings that are self-build or custom housebuilding as defined in section 1(A1) of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015

The proposal consists of no more than 9 dwellings, and the site is no larger than 0.5 hectares. Officers are satisfied the proposal is exempt from a mandatory net gain as the development is self-build. Furthermore, Officers have no evidence of the contrary to suggest development would not be exclusively self-build or custom dwellings. As it is on this basis only that 10% BNG is not to be secured, a condition to ensure the properties would be self-build properties shall be imposed should the development be permitted.

The application is also accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) conducted by Elite Ecology and dated Jan 2024. The PEA found no presents of badgers and bats on the site however, there is a high potential for onsite habitats to support nesting birds and hedgehogs.

The submitted PEA found Great Crested Newts to be recorded within the local landscape given the proximity to four ponds and one linear waterbody within 500m of the application site. The PEA recommends a further survey effort is conducted for amphibians including Great Crested Newts and reptiles. A subsequent DNA (eDNA) ecological report prepared by Elite Ecology was submitted as part of the application. The report confirmed no presence of great crested newts in any of the surveyed ponds within a 500m radius. While the site has low potential to support other amphibians, precautionary measures are recommended during construction to avoid harm. These include staff awareness, habitat management, and ecological supervision. Overall, the impact on protected amphibian species is considered negligible, and the site is deemed suitable for development from an ecological perspective, subject to adherence to the recommended method statements in both the PEA and DNA survey.

The proposal has demonstrated that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity has been investigated and is therefore considered to accord with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework 202, in that regard.

*Highway Safety, Access and Parking Provision

Policies LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.

The outline application seeks planning permission for the formation of a singular site access off Colne Road. The proposed access would be to the south of the existing agricultural access and would serve 5 dwellings as a shared private road. The Local Highways Authority (LHA) was consulted as part of the application and noted the submitted information includes a drainage channel at the highway boundary and tarmac up to the highway boundary. Based on the submitted information the Local Highways Authority (LHA) raised no objection to the proposed development subject to the imposition of conditions.

A condition shall be imposed on any consent seeking the details of secure cycle storage, 1 per bedroom as per Local Plan Policy LP17.

Details of the appearance, landscaping and layout are matters reserved and as such vehicle parking and rotating within the site would be assessed by Officers in a future reserved matters application, should the development be permitted.

Given the above, the proposal is considered to provide a safe and acceptable access arrangement in accordance with Policy LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2024.

*Developer Contributions
Unilateral Undertaking for Wheeled Bins
This application is accompanied by a completed Unilateral Undertaking for the provision of wheeled bins and therefore complies with part H of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (2011) and Policy LP4 of the Local Plan to 2036.

Accessible and Adaptable Homes
Policy LP25 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals for housing to meet the optional Building Regulation requirement M4(2)" Accessible and adaptable dwellings" unless it can be demonstrated that site specific factors make this unachievable. A condition could be imposed upon any consent to ensure that the development is built in accordance with these standards and maintained for the life of the development.

Water Efficiency
Policy LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals for housing to comply with the optional building regulation for water efficiency, as set out in Approved Document G. A condition could be imposed upon any consent to ensure that the development is built in accordance with these standards and that they are maintained for the life of the development.

Conclusion and Planning Balance:
The presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied for decision-taking in accordance with paragraph 11 (d) and footnote 8 of the NPPF in relation to applications involving the provision of housing. This is generally referred to as 'the tilted balance'. While no 5YHLS can be demonstrated the Local Plan policies concerned with the supply and location of housing as set out in the Development Strategy chapter (policies LP2, LP7, LP8, LP9 and LP10) of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 are considered to be out-of- date and can no longer be afforded full weight in the determination of planning applications.

Officers are able to proceed to the second stage of assessment, as outlined in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is because the proposed development is not considered to result in harm to habitat sites (including those listed in paragraph 194), Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Green Spaces, irreplaceable habitats, designated heritage assets (or other

heritage assets of archaeological interest as referenced in footnote 75), or areas at risk of flooding, as outlined in the above assessment. Accordingly, the application is deemed to satisfy the first test.

In terms of the economic dimension of sustainable development, the proposal would contribute towards economic growth, including job creation - during the construction phase and in the longer term through the additional population assisting the local economy through spending on local services/facilities. Moderate weight is afforded to this.

The proposal would deliver five self-build dwellings, which represents a potential benefit in contributing to the housing supply and supporting the Government's objective to increase self-build and custom housebuilding. It is noted that, if permitted, the dwellings could be delivered within five years, particularly given that the application seeks outline permission only. However, Officers are likely to place greater weight on a full planning application in assessing the deliverability of residential development proposals, especially in light of the time constraints associated with implementation. As such, while the provision of five self-build dwellings is acknowledged as a positive aspect of the scheme, this benefit is afforded limited weight in the overall planning balance.

In terms of the environmental dimension of sustainable development, the proposal offers potential for the incorporation of energy efficiency measures such as water efficiency. These benefits are afforded limited weight.

Whilst it is recognised that new residential development in the open countryside is generally not considered sustainable, the application site is located between two identified sustainable settlements, Somersham and Colne. Somersham, situated approximately 700 metres to the north of the site, offers a range of day-to-day services and facilities including a supermarket, village hall, public house, service station, church, dental practice, library, doctor's surgery, post office, and primary school. A pedestrian footpath, albeit unlit, runs along the same side of Colne Road and provides a continuous connection between the application site and Somersham, facilitating access on foot. In addition, bus services to the market towns of St Ives and Ramsey, as well as the village of Warboys, are available approximately 700 metres from the site and are also accessible by foot. These sustainability credentials are afforded moderate weight.

The site is located within Flood Zone 1, is at low risk from surface water and ground water flooding. The proposal is acceptable in terms of flood risk and drainage. This planning matter is afforded moderate weight.

It has been determined that the proposal conflicts with Policies LP2, LP9, LP10 (parts a and b), LP11, and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. These policies, which relate to the supply and location of housing as set out in the Development Strategy chapter, are considered out-of-date and can no longer be afforded full weight in the determination of planning applications. In particular, the elements of these policies that restrict development in the countryside are to be given reduced weight.

The development would result in the permanent loss of Grade 1 agricultural land, which is nationally recognised as among the best and most versatile for food and crop production. Although the site is relatively small in comparison to the wider extent of such land within the district and would not prevent the continued farming of the surrounding field, the loss is irreversible and constitutes a significant adverse impact. This harm conflicts with Policy LP10(a)(i) and is afforded significant weight.

Notwithstanding the potential for new landscape screening along the eastern boundary, the development would encroach into the countryside and further subdivide a smaller agricultural field within the Fen Margin character area, resulting in erosion of the rural character of the locality. This impact gives rise to conflict with Policies LP10(b), LP11, and LP12, and is afforded moderate weight.

While harm has been identified in relation to the loss of agricultural land and the impact on the countryside, it is concluded that this harm would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal when considered as a whole.

The delivery of five self-build dwellings contributes positively to housing supply and aligns with national objectives, albeit with limited weight due to the outline nature of the application.

In light of the current shortfall in the Council's five-year housing land supply, there is considered to be an overriding need for residential development within the district. This need carries significant weight in the planning balance and justifies support for proposals that may not ordinarily be considered acceptable in circumstances where a sufficient housing land supply exists.

Having regard to all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that outline planning permission be granted, with all matters reserved except for access.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Charlotte Dew**