

To:	Planning Inspectorate obo Inspector Baird
Cc:	
From:	Cameron Austin-Fell, Planning Director, Tetra Tech.
Date:	03 September 2026
Subject	Response to Third Party Comments

The purpose of this note is to respond to the themes arising from third party comments submitted during the Inquiry. It is to be read alongside the other topic-based statements provided by the Appellant's team.

The Proposed Development

Comments were made by Cllr's Stungo and Jolowicz (CD14.32 and 14.36) that locals have been tainted by bad experiences from another recent development (Killingdown Farm) which included infrastructure that never materialised. No material from the proposal in question has been provided and it is not the Appellant's role to mediate whether enforcement action is or is not appropriate in this case.

Those same concerns are manifest in relation to this proposal, however the Appellant can offer confidence that the infrastructure and non-residential uses proposed in the appeal scheme can and will be secured. The key mechanisms for this are the planning conditions and legal agreement attached to this application. Between these documents, the development would secure the necessary triggers for certain infrastructure to come forward and a future developer would be obliged to do so before phases of the development could come forward. This is a scheme that will deliver what it sets out to do.

Separate comments were made by Cllr's Mitchell (CD14.34) on the currency of the application. In particular, reference was made to the direction from the Minister of State to introduce this land as an allocation in the emerging Three Rivers Local Plan. Cllr Mitchell believed that the fate of the site lay with the local plan. Whilst the Government is clearly concerned with getting a plan in place for Three Rivers, it should be noted that this does not prevent applications from coming forward separately. As the Appellant has clearly evidenced, the need for housing in this District is both compelling and urgent. If approved, the Appeal site would enable the quicker release of housing, which is very much the aim of the Government and their current policy framework.

The Neighbourhood Plan

In his response, Mr Parks draws attention to Policy 1 of the 2025 Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan (CD5.3). This was not a policy considered relevant by the Council when it was took before planning committee for consideration (CD4.2) and is not something that the

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Appellant considers falls to be a most important policy. The aim of the policy is to direct growth in villages and hamlets. Whilst the Appellant notes that Croxley Green falls to be a village, unlike other standalone villages in the Sarratt area, this is one which shares a contiguous boundary with the built up edge of Watford. The overarching objective of the policy is to see development accord with the principles of the development plan. As set out in agreed evidence, this scheme does just that (CD9.18). Whilst not small of scale, the proposal does respond to an identified unmet need for housing, a matter of critical importance for not only national policy, but for this planning authority.

A further comment has been made that the Appellant has not successfully engaged with the local community and there is no evidence that the community is satisfied with the proposal. Respectfully, that is not the purpose of the policy. The policy requires the submission of a Statement of Community Involvement, which includes evidence of local engagement that has taken place prior to the submission of a planning application. The evidence for this is set out at CD1.27, which draws together the consultation exercises undertaken, and a summary of the responses to this exercise. This provision of Policy 1 has been clearly met.

The Green Belt

Comments on this topic have been raised by most of the third parties in some form. Those with substance have been received from Parish Councillor Stungo (CD14.32), Mr Grant (CD14.30), Mrs Wall (CD14.29), J King (CD14.26), the Three Rivers Residents Association (CD14.31), Mr Drury (CD14.41) and Mr Parks (CD14.33).

Many of the comments here draw criticism of the land from a visual and landscape perspective. A response to these matters are presented by the Appellant's landscape consultant Silke Gruner (Iceni). My comments concern the relationship to the policy framework, and whether the proposals can be considered 'grey belt'.

The comments from Mrs Wall in particular raise the treatment of the site in the Council's own evidence, including the [Stage 4] Arup 2025 Green Belt review, prepared for the emerging Local Plan. The Appellant duly responded to this evidence during the application in 2025 (CD2.16 and CD2.32), disputing the claim at the time that the site strongly contributed to Green Belt Purpose A. The 2026 Green Belt review (CD7.10) continues to evolve the evidence further and rectifies further discrepancies in the way that Purpose A of the Green Belt is treated. The Appellant however continues disagree with important elements of this evidence and notably the overall treatment against green belt purposes.

An important point here is that this evidence, prepared for the emerging Local Plan, remains unadopted and yet to be tested in a forthcoming examination. It is not set in stone and will need to be considered by a Local Plan Inspector in due course. It may well even be the case that the study is reviewed further ahead of Examination. The same can be said of the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (known as the SHELAA) for which criticism is also drawn.

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The Appellant instead draws on the more credible evidence of Ms Gruner (CD13.3). Her now uncontested evidence provides that more important evolution of the Council's case which is set out in the Statement of Common Ground between parties (CD9.5). The Council here accept that the appeal scheme would not strongly contribute to green belt purposes, including the previously contested Purpose A and Purpose C to which Mr Drury refers (CD14.41). The Statement of Common Ground goes further here, and when read alongside the additional joint statement from parties on the new NPPF (CD9.18) demonstrates how the appeal proposal meets the Government's expectations for 'golden rules' which, amongst things, ensures that the scheme secures 50% affordable housing. This is a scheme which the Appellant says meets the Government's tests for consideration as grey belt which, as we know in national policy, is considered a not inappropriate use. Even if this were not the case, the Appellant argues that Very Special Circumstances exist to outweigh the substantial harms to the Green Belt, a matter which the Council is also in agreement (CD9.18).

The Natural Environment

Comments were received from Dr Porter, King and Mr Butler (CD14.38, CD26 and CD14.27) on the loss of the fields and the impact that this would have on local biodiversity. I observe from the outset that these fields are currently managed for agricultural purposes, and present a low ecological baseline. The application was supported by a suite of ecological reports and surveys which diligently reviewed the current ecological potential of the site. This information was met with satisfaction by the Council's ecologist subject to the necessary conditions (as set out in CD3.41 and CD3.42). Furthermore, Natural England, as the statutory body for the natural environment was consulted and offered no objection subject to the imposition of conditions. These conditions have duly been captured and will need to be adhered to prior to, during and after the construction process.

Lastly, and very importantly, this proposal will lead to demonstrable gains in biodiversity. The 2021 Environment Act introduced a duty for all development to demonstrate how net gains in biodiversity could be met either on or off site. The Act requires a minimum of a 10% improvement. This appeal site goes much further here, committing to a 34% increase in habitats and a 42% increase in hedgerows (as set out in the BNG metric at CD1.24). This is clearly a scheme that goes beyond the minimum in this regard and will lead to considerable improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment.

Design & Character

Comments on these matters are made by Cllr Jolowicz, detailed in his response as part of CD14.36. The comments alight on concerns with the design, layout and density of the appeal scheme. Attention is given to the illustrative designs which were not felt to be appropriate. Importantly for this appeal, those matters of design and layout are not proposed to be fixed. This is an outline scheme with only the matter of the site access to be made in detail. It will be the case that subsequent Reserved Matters applications will be

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needed to provide the detail for which Cllr Jolowicz requests, and such matters will be available for further comment in due course. On same can be said of building heights. Whilst concerns allude to the impact of four storey buildings, the precise detail of building heights will be the matter of a subsequent application. The submitted illustrative heights plan (CD2.2) provides an indication of how the site could come forward with 'up to' heights for different parts of the site. If a similar approach were to be taken for those subsequent reserved matters applications, this would see that any four storey buildings would be limited to the centre of the development, with up to two storeys to the south on Little Green Lane in particular. This gradual feathering would ensure that the focus or centre of the development is scaled appropriately, and the edges of the scheme are softened and compliment the areas of green infrastructure and land beyond the site.

On the matter of scale, the representation from Mrs Wall (CD14.29) suggests that Croxley Green has exceeded its quota for development, and that opportunities should be sought elsewhere, with reference here given to previously developed land. The Appellant respectfully disagrees here in the strongest terms. On a District level, the Authority is in dire need for new housing. That need is acute and present, and can only be diminished through the provision of new housing. It is simply not the case that Croxley Green cannot accommodate more development and this becomes very clear when we turn to the impact of development.

The Appellant and Council are now in agreement that there are no severe impacts on local infrastructure (including the highways network) that would prevent development from coming forward. Bar the contribution towards secondary education (which will be a matter for the Inspector to decide upon), parties are in agreement that the package of contributions and proposed on-site facilities will ensure the impacts of the development are accounted for. Finally on the previously developed land point, this is a Council which accepts that it cannot meet its housing requirement in the emerging plan on brownfield sites alone. It is necessary to find sustainable greenfield sites, and this is one of those. It is not for this Appellant to entertain discussions on what may come to pass when the authority merges with Watford and Hertsmere in 2028. Until then, there is a pressing need for growth which is not going away