



FULL-APPLICATION PLANNING STATEMENT

Construction of four dwellings

AT:

Acorn Lodge, London Road, St. Albans, AL3 8HB

APPLICANT:

Founthill Ltd.
71-75 Shelton Street,
London, WC2H 9JQ

March 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

This planning statement is in relation to the proposal to redevelop the storage site at Acorn Lodge, London Road, St. Albans, AL3 8HB (the Site) to provide 4no. 3 bedroom detached houses with associated access, car parking and landscaping.

2. APPLICATION SITE & LOCATION

The Site (bordered in red below) is located on the south of London Road, within the settlement of Friars Wash and the Parish of Flamstead. Currently, the site comprises of a number of storage buildings, hardstanding used for open air storage and an established access road. The site was historically a timber & road haulage commercial site in operation until 2006. From 2007 until the present time, this has been used for the storage of vintage vehicles and has an established B8 use.



Friars Wash

In accordance with the emerging local plan, the site is within the settlement boundary of Friars Wash.



Above shows an aerial view of the Friars Wash showing advertised businesses within the settlement boundary (bordered in red). Friars Wash is perhaps most well known for its proximity to Junction 9 of the M1. It is also home to around 15 residential dwellings and a number of commercial businesses.

Services within the red line settlement boundary include:

- Esso - Petrol Station
- Flamstead Truck Stop - Cafe
- Watling Street Truck Stop - Motorway services
- Harpenden Elite Services - Vehicle repair shop
- The Kitchen Depot - Homewares Shop
- Nextdoor Motors - Used car dealer
- There are also various commercial businesses situated within the settlement

Services adjacent or just outside the red line boundary shown on the map above:

- Premier Inn Luton - Hotel, restaurant & bar
- Harvester - Bar & grill
- Chargemaster - Electric vehicle charging station
- The Pop Up Farm - Fresh farm produce shop
- GC Craft Cabin - Craft shop (childrens activity)

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4/00400/15/FHA - Installation of acoustic fence (2.4 m) High (approved)

22/00331/LDP - Construction of a new storage building (approved)

22/03152/FUL - Construction of 4 dwellings (withdrawn)

Pre-App Advice

2022 - 21/04763/PRED - Redevelopment of Brownfield site to provide 5 no. dwellings with associated access, landscaping and parking

Following the receipt of the pre-app advice noted above, we have subsequently designed our application to accord with the advice and comments received as well as further advice and guidance provided through the withdrawn application for the same scheme. This statement focuses on the key areas raised within this and details how we have addressed these within the application.

4. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

4.1 Principle of Development

Whilst it is accepted that new development in the Green Belt is deemed inappropriate, the NPPF sets out a series of exceptions to inappropriate development in Paragraph 154, with the most relevant exception resting in sub clause 'G', which states:

“limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:

a) not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or

b) not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority”.

The site has an established B8 use class hence is deemed previously developed land.

In terms of not having a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, the proposed would result in a reduction in floor area, hardstanding and volume in comparison to the current buildings, thus having a reduction in overall impact both spatially and visually. Detailed metrics can be seen below:

Volume:

Description	Existing Volume (m3)	Proposed Volume (m3)	Decrease %
Gross External Volume	1986	1818	-8.46%

Building Footprint:

Description	Existing Area (m2)	Proposed Area (m2)	Decrease %
Gross External Area	454	394	-13.22%

Hardscaping:

Description	Existing Area (m2)	Proposed Area (m2)	Decrease %
Handscaping	574	566	-1.39%

Landscaping:

Description	Existing Area (m2)	Proposed Area (m2)	Increase %
Landscaping	824	917	+11.29%

There is no definition of “openness” within the NPPF and the National Planning Policy Guidance. It can be considered to mean the absence of built or otherwise urbanising development but also relates to the visual effects of such development. The proposed houses would be more dispersed across the site to the benefit of openness particularly when compared to the large, bulky warehouse building. Removal of the sprawling agglomeration of storage buildings and replacing them with 1.5 storey dwellings, with reduced massing at higher elevations, will also benefit openness in this location.

There would also be an introduction of landscaped areas, trees and garden land, all adding greatly to the ecological credentials of the proposal. There will also be a significant amount of remediation conducted to counter the years of commercial use.

The site does not conflict with any of the five key purposes of the Green Belt and it should be clear from the above that there will be a net positive impact on the openness of the Green Belt through the implementation of this proposal.

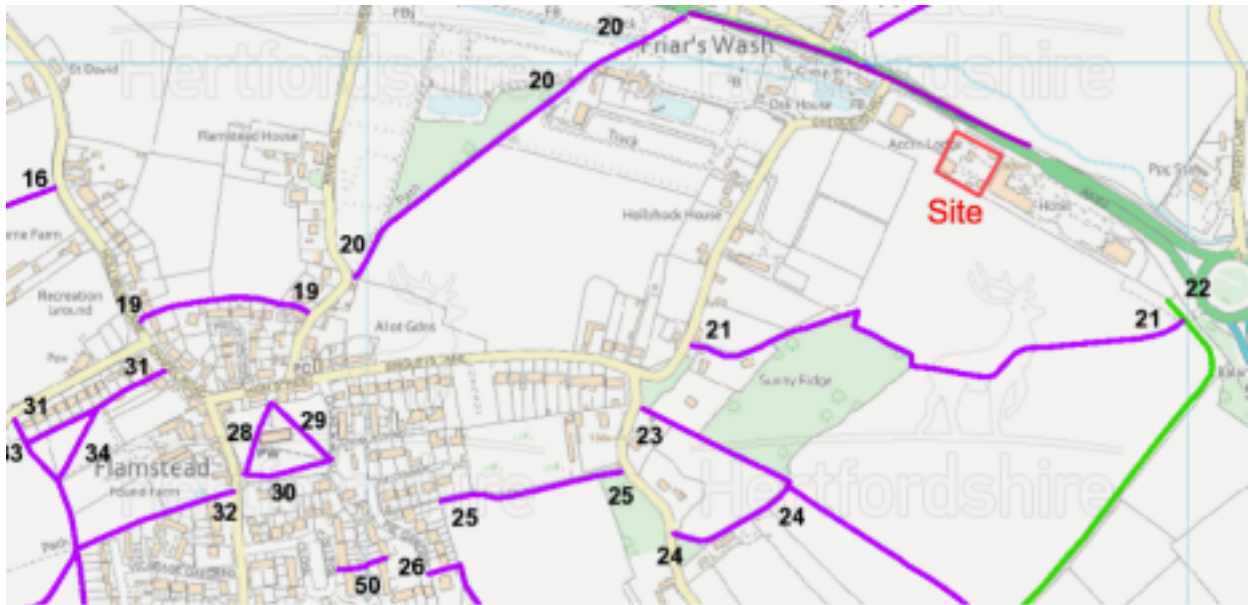
Furthermore, since the previous withdrawn submission this proposal now includes an extension to the public right of way network by connecting into footpath 21 and creating a safe pedestrian route as an alternative to walking down Chequers Hill which is unpaved for most of this section. As per the July 2019 update to the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for Development in the Green Belt which, in summary, indicates that harm caused through Green Belt development can be mitigated where the proposal provides *compensatory improvements* to the **environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt**. Examples are provided such as “new or **enhanced walking and cycle routes;**” (Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 64-002-20190722). Given this extension is primarily a wider community benefit and highways safety enhancement, significant weight should be given in terms of mitigating Greenbelt impact.

4.2 Sustainability

The site is located within Friar’s Wash which is a settlement that is varied in nature. It is also home to around 15 residential dwellings, a number of commercial businesses including a Harvester restaurant and a Premier Inn hotel adjacent to the site. The site is well connected to the wider transportation networks and is walking distance to the amenities contained within Flamstead village nearby. The extension of existing footpath 21 down to the site and also out to the bus stop on Chequers Hill greatly improves the accessibility and connectivity of the site both for future occupants and the existing Acorn Lodge residents, not to mention the considerable wider public benefits this extension brings to this location.

Given the location of the site with good access to nearby amenities, transport links and environmental and economic advantages this redevelopment would bring, this site should be deemed suitable for sustainable residential development. We consider some of the key social, economic and environmental factors in this assessment.

Local footpath Network:



Above is the existing public footpath network



Above shows the proposed extension to the footpath network helping to join No.14 in the north to No.21 in the south.

As part of this proposal we are proposing an extension to the existing Hertfordshire Right of Way network such that it connects the site with the bottom of Chequers Hill (where there is a bus stop located) and also the village of Flamstead by connecting into existing footpath 21.

Following discussions with both Dacorum and Hertfordshire's respective rights of way teams, it is expected that the new footpath extending from footpath 21 down to Chequers Hill will be formally adopted and become part of the right of way network to be maintained in perpetuity. The private element of this path leading into the site will be managed through the estate management company which will deal with all communal aspects of the proposed development.

This footpath extension offers considerable benefits to the wider community who will now be able to avoid walking up Chequers Hill on the unpaved roadway, whilst also increasing the sustainability of this location by improving accessibility with the nearby village.

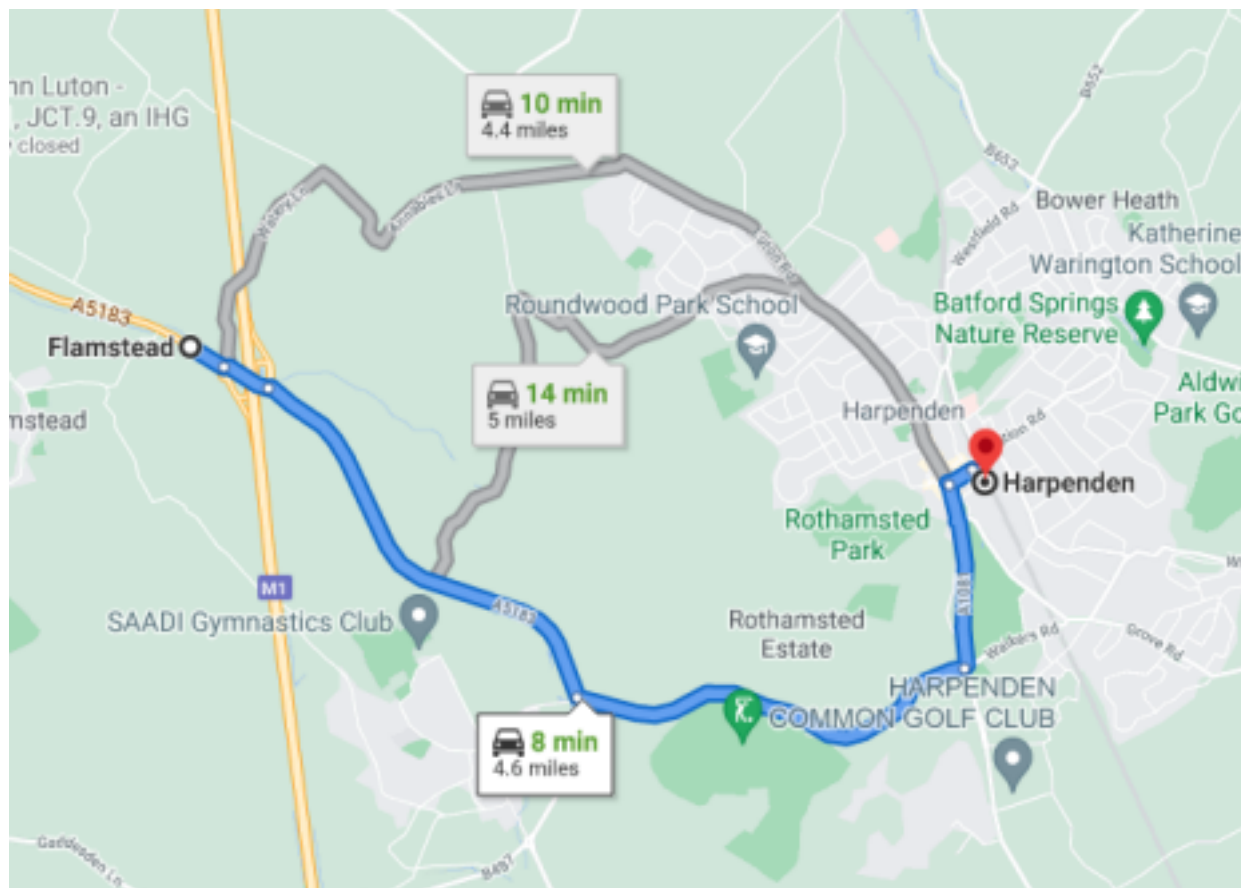
Bus Routes

There are two bus services running through the settlement with the nearest bus stop approximately 100 metres away on Cheques Hill or outside the Harvester restaurant.

Bus route 34 - Dunstable - Markyate - Flamstead - Redbourn - St

Albans Bus route 46 - Luton - Markyate - Redbourn - Hemel Hempstead

Train Routes



As can be seen above, Harpenden train station is an 8 minutes drive away. The ThamesLink train line provides a regular service to London Kings Cross taking 26 minutes.

Environmental Sustainability

This application proposal has been designed to bring forward significant environmental and ecological improvements in this location which very much support the council's objectives. The proposal makes more effective use of a previously developed, brownfield site and brings with it a vast array of benefits to the local ecosystem and environment, whilst supporting this country's move towards a low carbon economy.

Contamination Remediation and Landscaping

Firstly, as part of the demolition, the site area will be removed of contaminants, such as asbestos, fuels, glass/debris and other pollutants. The proposal will also

remove a considerable amount of hardstanding that is in place currently.

It should also be noted that the change of use to residential will result in the cessation of HGV and industrial vehicle movements in this location in favour of less polluting residential use through cars and bicycles. The inclusion of electric vehicle charging points for every dwelling will also aid in the move to lower carbon emissions and incentivise low emissions vehicles for future residents.

The proposal then seeks to introduce a significant added amount of landscaping area, where there is very little currently. This brings a considerable improvement to the overall environment and helps to bolster ecological sustainability.

In summary to the above, the pre-app advice has also concluded that this proposal would be deemed sustainable in terms of residential development in this location:

“The site although would be an isolated pocket of residential development among commercial development, it is approximately 1km walk on a mainly paved route to the village of Flamstead which can provide for some day to day needs without reliance on car journeys, as well as some bus services in close proximity to the site. A small scale residential development would not necessarily be unsustainable in this location.”

4.3 Design & Character

The immediate locality of Friars Wash does not offer a distinctive character and is quite varied in terms of the built environment. Furthermore, the proposed is quite set back into the site, away from the main road and would not be visible from most aspects. Nevertheless, following the pre-app advice we have attempted to enhance our proposal such that it results in high quality design that also takes into consideration the nearby village of Flamstead and the wider local area.

“The indicative design of the dwellings seem to be acceptable in principle subject to the use of high quality materials.”



Proposed Site Plan

During further consultation with the Council, it was agreed that a more compact, barn-style housing development would suit the location better and be more in character. Having two sets of semi-detached properties of a single storey at the front, rather than four detached two storey dwellings would help to minimise both visual and spatial impact. Furthermore, the lack of any first floor windows and the low eaves height will ensure that the amenity of nearby Acorn Lodge will be fully protected.

The unit design has very recently been successfully implemented at the nearby Shepherds Yard development in Flamstead Village and it was agreed that this would be a good fit for this application site too



Plot 2 Shepherds Yard, Flamstead

The proposed house type has been designed to be sympathetic with the local traditional design seen in Flamstead and across the Borough. Black horizontal cladding has been proposed with a red brick wall plinth below. Textured red / brown roof tiles will be used to help blend the houses with the traditional houses locally. Black windows and patio doors will be used to match the external cladding. Cast iron effect guttering and black cast iron effect downpipes adds traditional detailing.

4.4 Privacy, Amenity Standards and Impact on Future Occupants

All units will meet appropriate space standards and private amenity garden dimensions as prescribed in the relevant guidelines and policies.

All first floor habitable room windows are positioned at the rear of the properties looking south over their landscaped gardens and open countryside.

The site benefits from the adjacent acoustic close-boarded fence, 2.5m high, fronting the highway providing acoustic protection from London Road. The acoustic fence was consented and built in 2015, planning reference 4/00400/15/FHA.

4.5 Highways Parking and Access

The site will continue to use the established access onto London Road whilst removing the potential large HGV movements, thus having a positive impact on local highways. The access will serve both the proposed dwellings and the existing dwelling at Acorn Lodge.

10 car parking spaces are proposed, this being compliant with the council's policy in relation to the unit mix that is being offered.

A refuse truck will be able to safely turn around within the site. This also means that there is also ample space for fire services to access the site also.

4.6 Landscaping and Trees

The existing yard is regarded as having low ecological value in its current usage and is not a habitat for any protected or endangered species or trees. The site area has significant hardstanding and contamination issues which will be largely reduced and remediated as part of this proposal.

The proposal provides the opportunity to bolster the landscaping of this visually unattractive yard. The introduction of landscaping to the site's boundaries will further serve to soften any purported impact of the site whilst also enhancing the relationships with surrounding uses.

Any future agreed landscape plan will result in significant enhancements in biodiversity and will provide increased habitat for wildlife to flourish. This will be much more sympathetic to the surrounding countryside than the existing commercial storage which currently blights this part of the Friars Wash.

4.7 SAC

In November 2020 the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC topic paper included the following:

'Recreational pressure relates to the impact public usage has on the sensitive features of the CBSAC and this would include (but is not limited to): · the use of sites for recreational activities which are not compatible with the designation of the site'

'Evidence gathered to date has identified damage to the CBSAC from soil compaction and root exposure, erosion of footpaths by people, horses and bikes, den building, trampling of rare plants by walkers, visitor parking, littering, fires from barbeques, vandalism and enrichment of nutrients from dog fouling'

'Evidence gathered through the visitor surveys demonstrates that people travel regularly to CBSAC at Ashridge Estate from all across the borough and from some neighbouring areas. The vast majority of visitors are residents in the local area who use the site for recreation and other purposes'

'There is also potential for further deterioration through increased recreational activity arising from new development. It is the Council's legal duty to protect the CBSAC from the effects of new development. Therefore, an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken for each planning application involving new residential development (of one net dwelling or more). The Appropriate Assessment needs to assess the impact of the proposal on recreational pressures, alone and in-combination with other development proposals'

Regarding any potential recreational pressure on Ashridge Commons & Woods and Tring Woodlands, this we believe would be negligible; The low number of housing proposed would be more likely to choose The Woodland Trust at Heartwood Forest which is much closer by car journey.



Drive times from Site:

Tring Woodlands = 27 minutes

Ashridge Commons and Woods = 24 minutes

Heartwood Forest = 15 minutes

5. CONCLUSION

Through adopting a pro-active, design-led approach and introducing improvements to our original pre-app scheme and subsequent withdrawn application, this proposal is compliant with all relevant planning policies both at the local and national level.

The principle of development has been clearly established and it has been demonstrated that no additional harm will be inflicted on the Green Belt when compared with the current use. When considered alongside the significant compensatory measures in improving the overall setting of this site, it is clear to see that this will result in an overall improvement in the openness of the Green Belt and in policy terms constitutes appropriate development.

This proposal is a private and secluded setting that does not harm its surroundings in any way and serves to enhance this part of Friars Wash. The benefits outlined in the statement seek to remove the 'negative contributor' from this settlement and bring forward a scheme that is more in keeping and beneficial to the needs of the local community.

The proposal provides the council with the opportunity to provide much needed housing through the recycling of a brownfield site, whilst simultaneously providing enhancements to the Green Belt and local community. This application offers very few drawbacks and for all the reasons outlined in this statement should be approved to support the regeneration and enhancement of the settlement.