
SUMMARY REPORT

Application Ref:	20250141
Site Address:	Coachfields Northfleet Green Northfleet Gravesend
Application Description:	Conversion of an existing equestrian feed barn and equipment store to a residential dwelling and associated works.
Applicant:	Mrs Ruth Arnold
Agent:	Peter Biggs, PJB Planning Ltd
Ward:	Istead Rise, Cobham And Luddesdown
Parish:	Non-Parish Area
Decision due date:	17 April 2025
Publicity expiry date:	9 April 2025
Decision Level:	Committee Decision
Reason for referral:	Councillor Call-In
Recommendation:	Refusal

Summary of Reasons for Recommendations

The proposed development is contrary to local and national planning policy for the following reasons:

1. The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt where the construction of new buildings is inappropriate development unless it is for one of the exempted forms of development set out in paragraph 154 or 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). The proposal is for a new dwelling in an unsustainable location and the building of a dwelling, whether as conversion or otherwise would still by definition result in a form of encroachment in the countryside and harmful to the openness by reason of the nature of the development and the paraphernalia and associated development that goes with what will be a separate dwelling. The development does not, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). No very special circumstances have been put forward to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt or any other identified harm and therefore the proposal is contrary to Policy CS01 (Sustainable Development) and Policy CS02 (Scale and Distribution of Development) of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (Protecting Green Belt Land).
2. The proposed development by virtue of the size and design of the private amenity space would undermine the spatial layout or character of the area and therefore fails to respect the rural characteristics and value within the Kent countryside and landscape. The development is therefore contrary to Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy

(2014), Gravesham's design code: Design for Gravesham (2024) and Gravesham's Householder Design Guidance SPD (2021), as well as Sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

3. The proposal would result in a detrimental impact on the amenities of future occupiers in terms of substandard private amenity area, due to insufficient depth, contrary to the objectives of Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy September 2014, paragraph 135(f) of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) and Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines (2020).
4. The proposal fails to secure a contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites to resolve disturbance issues to wintering birds, and in the absence of this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the development fails to comply with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and paragraphs 193 and 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

MAIN REPORT

1. Site Description and Surroundings

- 1.1. The site is located within Northfleet Green, which is a rural location within the Borough, approximately 3.4 miles to the south-west of Gravesend town centre/railway station and 1.7 miles from Istead Rise shopping parade.
- 1.2. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and is surrounded by agricultural land to the north, south, east and west.



- 1.3. The existing site is a feed barn and equipment store, as approved in 2019, under planning application reference 20181154. The surrounding land is in use as equestrian, with a detached stable building, horse exerciser and horse manage.
- 1.4. The site is accessed from an existing entrance from Northfleet Green, which has secure gates.

- 1.5. Northfleet Green is a single track road that does not benefit from a footpath or lighting. A Public Right of Way (PRoW) NU28 is approx. 350m from the site and links Northfleet Green Road to the A227, and also links to NU27 which provides access to Istead Rise. NU13 and NU26 separately provide pedestrian access towards Southfleet.



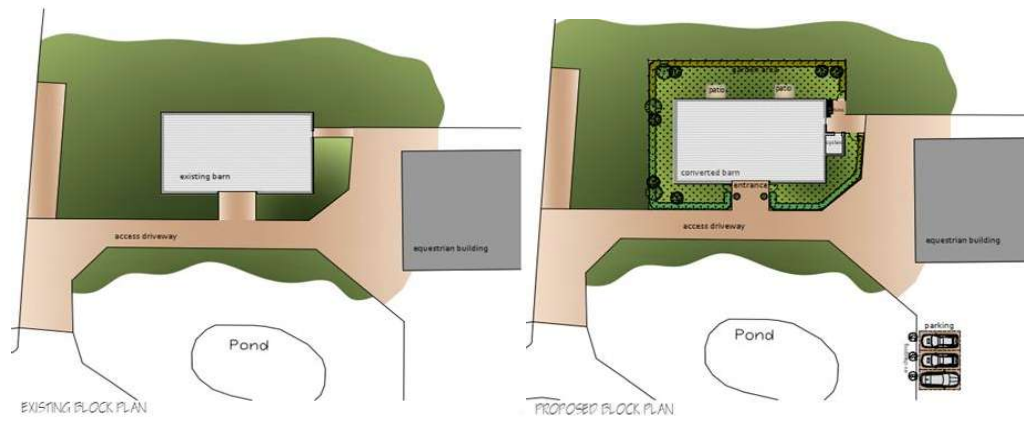
2. Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20190766	Continued use of land for equestrian purposes and the retention of a detached stable building, horse exerciser and horse manège.	Permission	04.11.2019
20181154	Erection of a detached feed barn and equipment store.	Permission	09.01.2019
20170912	Application for the approval of conditions 8 and 9 attached to planning permission reference no. 20161114 relating to details of landscaping proposals and refuse and waste arrangements.	Refused	28.12.2018
20161114	Change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian and the erection of a detached stable building, horse exerciser and horse manège	Permission	21.07.2017
20130740	Application for the prior approval for erection of a machinery storage building.	Prior Approval Granted	05.09.2013

3. Proposal

- 3.1. This application seeks permission for the conversion of the existing equestrian feed barn and equipment store to a residential dwelling with associated works.

Existing and Proposed Block Plans



Proposed Elevations



north elevation



west elevation

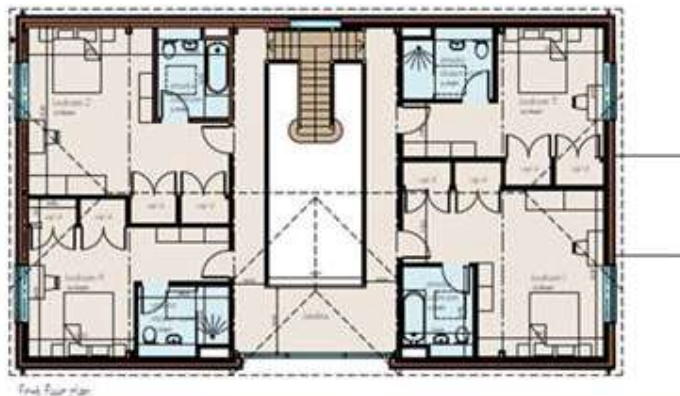


south elevation



east elevation

Proposed Floor Plans



3.2. The proposed dwelling would have a large entrance hall spanning from ground to first floor level with full length glazing, open plan kitchen/dining area, separate utility and shower room, tv/lounge and snug on the ground floor, and four bedrooms each with en-suites on the first floor.

3.3. Parking would be to the front for three vehicles with EV charging.

3.4. A new fenced garden area surrounding the building is proposed with soft landscaping, bin and cycle storage.

4. Planning Policy, Development Plan and other Material Considerations

4.1. The Development Plan for Gravesham currently comprises:

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and Policies Map, September 2014;
 Saved policies in the Gravesham Local Plan First Review, November 1994;
 The Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024 to 2039, March 2025).

4.2. The relevant policies for this proposal are as follows:

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development
- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS14 – Housing Type and Design
- CS15 – Housing Density
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Design and Development Principles
- CS20 – Heritage and the Historic Environment

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- C11 – Change of Use of Redundant Buildings in the Countryside
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards
- T1 – Impact of Development on the Highway Network
- T4 – Development outside the Built-Up Area

4.3. Paragraph 34 of the NPPF (2024) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

4.4. The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2024), the Council will also seek to replace these saved policies via the emerging Local Plan.

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 11 – Making effective use of land
- Section 12 – Achieving well-designed places
- Section 13 – Protection Green Belt Land
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG2 – Residential layout guidelines including Housing Standards Policy Statement October 2015 Adopted 1996 – amended June 2020
- Technical Housing Standards – National Described Space Standard (2015)
- SPG4 – KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Gravesham Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guide (2021)
- Design for Gravesham – Design Code SPD (2024)

- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

5. Consultations and Publicity Responses

External Consultees

KCC Heritage Conservation

The site lies within an area of multi-period archaeological potential. However, based on existing Historic Environment Record data for the area and the past development of the site, I consider it unlikely that these proposals would have a significant below-ground archaeological impact and have no further comments to make in this case.

KCC Highways and Transportation

Referring to the above description, it would appear that this development proposal does not meet the criteria to warrant involvement from the Highway Authority in accordance with the current consultation protocol arrangements. If there are any material highway safety concerns that you consider should be brought to the attention of the HA, then please contact us again with your specific concerns for our consideration.

KCC Public Rights of Way

Public Footpath NU13 leave Northfleet Green Road immediately next to the west side of the entrance to the application site but is not directly affect.

I therefore have not objection to the proposal.

The granting of planning permission confers no other permission or consent on the applicant. It is therefore important to advise the applicant that no works can be undertaken on a Public Right of Way without the express consent of the Highways Authority. In cases of doubt the applicant should be advised to contact this office before commencing any works that may affect the Public Right of Way. Should any temporary closures be required to ensure public safety then this office will deal on the basis that:

- The applicant pays for the administration costs
- The duration of the closure is kept to a minimum
- Alternative routes will be provided for the duration of the closure.
- A minimum of six weeks notice is required to process any applications for temporary closures.

This means that the Public Right of Way must not be stopped up, diverted, obstructed (this includes any building materials or waste generated during any of the construction phases) or the surface disturbed. There must be no encroachment on the current width, at any time now or in future and no furniture or fixtures may be erected on or across Public Rights of Way without consent.

Internal Consultees

GBC Environmental Protection

No objection to the application. The following to be considered:

Drainage/sewerage informative

The foul sewage shall be removed by means of the mains drainage system and not by the use of non-mains sewerage systems, unless connection to the drainage system is not

reasonably practicable. If foul sewage is to be removed using non-mains sewerage systems, a sewage treatment plant or septic tank system will be considered in preference to a cesspool. Such a system may require the prior consent of the Environment Agency under the terms of the Water Resources Act 1991. Applicants are therefore advised to discuss their requirements with the Environment Agency at the earliest opportunity. It should be ensured that the septic tank or cesspool is of adequate capacity to serve the proposed development and suitable access and hardstanding area shall be maintained to it on site.

Lighting

Artificial lighting can cause a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It is important that the applicants are not permitted to install external lighting that illuminate anything other than the ground within the curtilage of the new property in order to assist in preventing a nuisance from occurring (which would be most likely if the bedrooms on neighbouring properties are illuminated).

Neighbouring Properties

5.1. The application has been advertised by displaying of a site notice and individual neighbour letters sent to 5 properties with an overall consultation period expired of 9th April 2025.

5.2. No comments have been received.

6. Planning Analysis and Head of Planning Comments

Principle of Development

6.1. The application site is located in the Green Belt and as such Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) Policy CS02 is relevant. Development in the urban area is prioritised as the sustainable location for development. In the rural area, Policy CS02 states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the policies map. Development outside those settlements, i.e. in the Green Belt, will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the LPCS.

6.2. The principle issues in determining this application;

- Housing Need;
- Green Belt;
- The effect on the character and appearance of the area and landscape;
- Residential Amenity;
- Parking and Highways; and
- Other matters.

Housing Need

6.3. In *Hopkins Homes Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* [2017] 1 W.L.R. 1865, Lord Carnwath reemphasised that the National Planning Policy Framework is only a material consideration in planning decisions and that that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan. Paragraph 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024) expressly states that the starting point for decision-making is the development plan. Lord Carnwath as part of the Supreme Court decision stated,

“It is important, however, in assessing the effect of the Framework, not to overstate the scope of this policymaking role. The Framework itself makes clear that as respects the determination of planning applications (by contrast with plan-making in which it has statutory recognition), it is no more than “guidance” and as such a “material consideration” for the purposes of section 70(2) of the 1990 Act... It cannot, and does not purport to, displace the primacy given by the statute and policy to the statutory development plan. It must be exercised consistently with, and not so as to displace or distort, the statutory scheme.”

- 6.4. It is a matter of law that all planning applications need to be considered in accordance with the legislation and relevant policy that applies at the point a decision is taken. The Council published a revised 5 year housing land supply statement in February 2025, it demonstrates that based on data up for the period 2024-2029, the Council can only demonstrate a land supply of 3 years.
- 6.5. Given the Council's current inability to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, and as the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75%) that required by the Housing Delivery Test, the housing delivery element of Gravesham's Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) Policy CS02 must be regarded to be out of date, as required by the Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024). This requires that in regard to housing development, planning permission should be granted unless:
 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.
- 6.6. In the Gravesham context, the policies referred to in paragraph 11(d)(i) above are those set out in the NPPF at footnote 7 (rather than those in development plans) relating to any of the following:
 - habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
 - land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast;
 - irreplaceable habitats;
 - designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and
 - areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.
- 6.7. In determining applications for planning permission involving housing, the Council will therefore apply a weighted balance in favour of granting planning permission in accordance with relevant case law and guidance, having regard to the acceptability or otherwise of the proposals when evaluated against development plan policy, the need to make efficient use of land (paragraph 130(c)) in context, the relative contribution the proposal makes towards the alleviation of any shortfall in housing delivery at that time and any other considerations material to the proposed development.
- 6.8. The proposed development for a net increase of '1' residential units would offer a minimal contribution towards meeting this local need and, accordingly, officers

considers that this should be accorded limited weight in support of the application. However, this has to be balanced against other requirements of the Development Plan and material considerations such as the NPPF (2024), which requires new development to contribute positively to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and create acceptable amenity for future occupiers.

Green Belt

- 6.9. Policy CS02 of the Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. In the rural area it states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements (which is the case here), will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and local policies (LPCS).
- 6.10. Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. In the rural area it states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements (which is the case here), will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the LPCS.

Is the proposed development appropriate in the Green Belt?

- 6.11. Green Belts are of great importance. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by preserving the open and permanent characteristics of Green Belts (paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2024), with the Green Belt serving five purposes (paragraph 143):
 - a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
 - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*
- 6.12. Paragraph 153 of the NPPF (2024) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. A Local Planning Authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt unless it falls within the specified exceptions of paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF (2024).
- 6.13. In the case of this proposal, the applicant has argued that the following exceptions from the NPPF apply, Para. 154 exception (c) and (h). The exceptions of para 154 of the NPPF are explored below.

- 6.14. As the proposal is not for agriculture and forestry use, Para. 154 (a) does not apply; the proposal does not relate to outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments and Para. 154 (b) does not apply.
- 6.15. Exception (c) relates to the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The proposal is not for the extension or alteration of a building. Therefore, the exception set out in Para. 154 (c) does not apply to this proposal.
- 6.16. As the proposal is not for the replacement of a building, Para. 154 (d) does not apply; as the proposal is not within or adjacent to a village no consideration needs to be given to Para. 154 (e), as such it does not apply; and the proposal is not for affordable housing, as such Para. 154 (f) does not apply.
- 6.17. The NPPF (2024) defines previously developed land as land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage, and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. The definition excludes land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings but does not exclude equestrian buildings. As the building has been in equestrian use (as permitted under 20181154), the site is considered previously developed land and would fall to be considered under Para. 154 (g). In order for the exception under this criterion to apply the impact of the proposal on openness needs to be considered. In light of the proposal being considered under Para. 154 (g), it is not considered that any of the exceptions provided for under Para. 154 (h) apply.
- 6.18. The supporting documents presented by the applicant, also state that the development should be considered under paragraph 155 (a), (b) and (c) of the NPPF (2024), on the basis that the applicant considers the site to be grey belt.
- 6.19. As previously mentioned, the definition of previously developed land within the NPPF (2024) refers to land which is occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land. It is agreed that the site meets the definition of previously developed land based on the lawful use of the site. Therefore, there is no dispute that the site meets the grey belt definition as outlined in the annexe of the NPPF (2024) and that the land does not strongly contribute to the purposes (a) sprawl of large built-up areas, (b) towns merging or (d) setting and character of historic towns, of paragraph 143. Therefore, consideration of the exceptions given in paragraph 155 are relevant, of which all must apply to the development for it be deemed inappropriate:
 - a) The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
 - b) There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
 - c) The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and*
 - d) Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.*
- 6.20. The development is considered to fit within (a) and (b), with (d) not relevant to the scale of the proposal, but the Local Planning Authority disagree with the sustainable location of the site (c).

Sustainability

- 6.21. The NPPF (2024), taken as a whole, represent the Government's view of what constitutes sustainable development. Paragraph 84 of the NPPF (2024) provides specific advice on sustainable development in rural areas and seeks to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances, which are listed as follows:
- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;*
 - b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;*
 - c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;*
 - d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or*
 - e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:*
 - i. is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and*
 - ii. would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.*
- 6.22. This is continued in paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF (2024) which seek to focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting need to travel or offer a genuine choice of transport modes, with safe and suitable access for all users.
- 6.23. In this case, the closest settlements to the site are Istead Rise (approx. 1.7 miles) and Northfleet (approx. 1.6 miles), a small village of Southfleet (approx. 0.7 miles) with a small farmshop or Dene Holm Shopping Parade in Northfleet (approx. 1.8 miles). These settlements offer varied services and amenities. At Istead Rise the services and amenities are more limited to a small parade of shops, with a greater density and variety of choices within the urban area of Northfleet and Gravesend.
- 6.24. All of these settlements are served by bus, however the bus service within Istead Rise does not operate frequently, and there are no public transport connections directly linking the site to these or other settlements. The nearest bus stop is on New Barn Road which is approx. 0.7 miles from the site and has limited service, with a maximum of 2no. buses per hour in either direction. The roads connecting the site to nearby settlements are narrow, winding, undulating, unlit and lack footpaths. While walking or cycling to access public transport is technically possible, the routes are either along the aforementioned roads or via unpaved and unlit footpaths (including Public Rights of Ways).
- 6.25. As such, it is considered that reliance of private vehicles would be likely for future occupiers of the dwelling to access services and amenities, and that the development is not in a sustainable location. Therefore, the proposal would not meet the exception of paragraph 155 of the NPPF (2024).

The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt

- 6.26. Referring back to paragraph 154(g) of the NPPF, this allows for the limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential), which does not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. As set out previously, the site is previously developed and therefore it is relevant to consider if the proposal meets the stated fundamental aim of Green Belt policy that is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open (paragraph 142). It also states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.
- 6.27. The openness of the Green Belt has both spatial and visual aspects, and any new built form of development is harmful to its open character. The Courts have identified a number of factors to be taken into account when assessing the impact of a proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt (PPG Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722), which include both spatial and visual consideration, as well as duration and remediability of the development, and the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic movement.
- 6.28. The proposal would convert the existing feed barn and equipment store and create a single dwelling. There would no change to the gross external area and volume of the building and therefore not change to the spatial openness of the Green Belt in quantitative terms.
- 6.29. In visual terms, the existing barn will not be increased in footprint or height. However, the proposed block plan shows that a private amenity area will be created surrounding the whole building, and that this will be fenced. The site at present is relatively open with views of the surrounding fields. This would not be the case for the proposed development, albeit with the dwelling positioned towards the northern boundary, the associated boundary treatments and paraphernalia would enclose the site and therefore erode existing visual openness.
- 6.30. The encroachment of the countryside is a stated national purpose of the Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF (2024). The proposed change of use, would introduce urbanising features (additional car parking, light pollution, hard landscaping and residential paraphernalia) that would adversely affect the character of the landscape (as shown in the map extract below).



- 6.31. There would be an increased level of activity generated by the change of use that would also affect the openness of the site compared to how it is currently experienced. The associated parking and external domestic paraphernalia would all contribute to the development interrupting the visual openness of the Green Belt. Traffic movements associated with the change of use, as well as light emitted from the properties from later on in the day, would visually disrupt and impact on openness that, would be perpetual features of the development
- 6.32. Therefore, the development would represent the encroachment of built, residential development which would result in a reduction in openness. Whilst the effect of the proposal on Green Belt openness would be localised it would nevertheless have a greater impact on openness than the existing development.
- 6.33. Paragraphs 153 of the NPPF (2024) informs us that inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Whether the development causes any other harm and whether there are any other relevant considerations to balance the overall planning argument, shall be considered next.

Consideration of Very Special Circumstances

- 6.34. The supporting planning statement does not provide any grounds for very special circumstances, and the Local Planning Authority is not aware of any in this instance, it is therefore considered that no very special circumstances exist for this proposal.

Final Balancing of Inappropriateness in the Green Belt

- 6.35. The proposal would constitute inappropriate and harmful development in the Green Belt and paragraph 153 of the NPPF (2024) states that substantial weight should be given to this. The weight afforded to the delivery of a single dwelling and the benefits from economic activity arising from the development are limited and minimal, and

with no very special circumstances present, do not outweigh the harms identified and therefore do not provide necessary justification for the development.

The Effect on the Character and Appearance of the Area and Landscape

- 6.36. In addition to being within the Green Belt, the application site falls within the Istead Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. Paragraph 189 of the NPPF (2024) states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and Policy CS12 (LPCS) seeks to protect the Green infrastructure within the Borough and states at 5.7.26 the overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced.
- 6.37. Policy CS19 (Development and Design Principles) (LPCS) states that new development will be visually attractive and locally distinctive. It should also conserve and enhance the character of the local built and natural environment and integrate well with the surrounding area. Moreover, Section 12 (Achieving well-designed places) of the NPPF (2024) sets out that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character.
- 6.38. Gravesham's Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guidance SPD (2021) set out key principles for developments. Generally, the SPD highlights the importance of new development complimenting and corresponding to existing character and the wider context. In this case, the rural character of the area and other surrounding dwellings should be considered. This is corroborated by the Borough's recently adopted design code; Design for Gravesham (2024), which expects new development to reflect the prevailing pattern of built form in rural villages, meet a minimum density of 30dph in rural areas and pay close attention to materiality amongst other key design concepts.
- 6.39. The surrounding properties on Northfleet Green Road are relatively large two storey detached dwellings on generous plots. The proposed dwelling would be a large detached two storey dwelling and it is not considered to be out of character with the surrounding buildings within the vicinity.
- 6.40. There is no general objection to a modern, contemporary extension/adaptions to a period feature, however it is considered important in both local and national planning policy for new development to compliment and correspond to locally distinctive features. The proposed conversion would have a large full length glazing entrance lobby, however the remaining windows are smaller and more subtle. Overall the design of the proposed dwelling respects the original barn style and design.
- 6.41. The surrounding properties have relatively large plots with extensive gardens. The proposed private amenity space would be small in its context and does not respond to the spatial layout or character of the surrounding area. It would be bounded by soft hedging and fencing which is also generally not the common character of the area, with gardens being much larger and open. This lack of open space surrounding the property would detract from the rural characteristic of the development.
- 6.42. Whilst the materials of the existing barn would be unaltered and the new windows and doors would respect the existing development, the small garden and form of enclosure undermines the spatial layout and rural open character of the surrounding area, which is the key feature that should form the focal point of the development by virtue of its rural characteristics and value within the Kent countryside and landscape.

The development is therefore contrary to Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014), Gravesham's design code: Design for Gravesham (2024) and Gravesham's Householder Design Guidance SPD (2021), as well as Sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

Residential Amenity

- 6.43. The NPPF (2024) states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users (paragraph 135f). Paragraph 198 of the NPPF (2024) seeks to ensure that new development takes into account the likely effects of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. The impact on amenity is also considered with regard to the criteria within Policy CS19 (LPCS), which states that new development should be located, designed and constructed to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants, and those of neighbouring properties and land and avoid adverse impacts from pollution.

Future Occupiers

- 6.44. Policy CS19 (LPCS) requires that all development should be 'fit for purpose' and be 'adaptable to allow changes to meet the need of users' and that 'the design and layout of new residential development, including conversion, will accord with the adopted Residential Layout Guidelines' (RLG) (2020). Moreover, on 25 March 2015 the Government issued a written ministerial statement, which introduced new technical housing standards in England and set out how these would be applied through planning policy. These standards came into effect on 1 October 2015.
- 6.45. The gross internal area and rooms in the proposed dwelling are in accordance with the Nationally Described Space Standards (2015) and Gravesham's Residential Layout Guidelines (2020). It is considered that all habitable rooms will receive sufficient natural light by virtue of the window size and location. The garden size exceeds the requirement set out in the RLG, however the depth measures at 5m which is deficient, with the minimum standard being 10m. Therefore, whilst the internal living conditions are acceptable, the rear garden fails to safeguard the amenity of future occupiers in accordance and is contrary to Policy CS19 (LPCS), Section 12 of the NPPF (2024) and the Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines (2020).

Impact on Amenity of Surrounding Properties

- 6.46. The proposed dwelling will be approx. 47m from Elm Tree Cottage and approx. 56m from Abbotsview, both of which are residential properties. The proposed family dwelling would therefore not result in any impacts in terms of loss of light, outlook, noise or sense of enclosure impacts for the existing neighbouring properties. Although introducing habitable windows at first floor level, there is sufficient distance from the neighbours and at an obscure angle to private amenity space to safeguard privacy. As such, the proposal is considered to safeguard the amenity of surrounding properties in accordance with Policy CS19 (LPCS), Section 12 of the NPPF (2024) and the Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines (2020).

Parking and Highways

- 6.47. The development should provide an acceptable amount of parking, not be detrimental to the highway network and promote sustainable transport methods, to

accord with saved policies T1 and P3 of Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994) and Policy CS11 (LPCS) and Section 9 of the NPPF (2024).

- 6.48. The new dwelling would be accessed using the existing vehicle access from Northfleet Green Road, which has been in situ for a number of years. The access is formed of hardcore material and is sufficient to accommodate traffic associated with the 4-bedroom dwelling, which would provide 3no. parking spaces within the site, with EV charging. As such, there are no objections to the proposed development on highways grounds in regard to vehicular access and parking provision.

Heritage and Archaeology

- 6.49. Policy CS20 (LPCS) gives a high priority towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of its heritage and historic environment as a non-renewable resource, central to the regeneration of the area and the reinforcement of sense of place. Particular attention in this regard will be focused on those heritage assets most at risk. When considering the impact of a proposed development on a designated heritage asset, the weight that will be given to the asset's conservation value will be commensurate with the importance and significance of the asset. For non-designated assets, decisions will have regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 6.50. Saved Policy TC7 (LPFR) 1994 indicates that planning permission may be refused without adequate assessment of the archaeological implications in areas of archaeological potential.
- 6.51. At a national level paragraph 214 of the NPPF (2024) advises that where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest (evidence of past human activity), local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.
- 6.52. The application lies within an area of multi-period archaeological potential and has been reviewed by KCC Heritage who have recommended an archaeological planning condition be attached, should permission be forthcoming.
- 6.53. However, as this is a change of use of an existing building and no substantial below ground works are proposed the inclusion of an archaeological condition is not required in this instance.
- 6.54. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal complies with Policy CS20 (LPCS), Saved Policy TC7 (LPFR) and paragraph 214 of the NPPF (2024).

Recreational Pressures on the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and SAMMS

- 6.55. The Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA) are internationally important for nature conservation as the area is a wetland and supports important numbers of wintering water birds and migrating birds. There has been a decline in the number of birds using these sites in recent years. Studies show that this could be due to people using the estuary and marshes for recreation purposes. The North Kent Bird Disturbance Report concludes that all new housing development within 6km of the North Kent Ramsar Sites or Special Protection Areas (including the Thames Estuary and Marshes) and larger housing development beyond 6km from the sites could have an adverse impact on them. This is because

new housing development is likely to lead to further increases in recreational use of the sites, which means that further declines in the bird population cannot be ruled out. Possible mitigation measures are set out in the Thames, Medway and Swale Estuaries Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy. Having considered a number of options, the Council have decided to impose a tariff on new housing development. Developers will need to pay £337.49 for every new dwelling provided within 6km of the Ramsar site and SPA and for larger housing developments beyond 6km from them. The money raised will be used to pay for schemes to avoid the adverse impacts of new housing development on the birds.

- 6.56. In this instance, the proposed development would result in the creation of an additional residential property and as such, additional recreational activity would result. Therefore, it is considered that there would be an adverse impact to the Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar Buffer Zone, which should be mitigated in line with Policy CS12 (LPCS). In such cases the Borough Council has adopted a tariff that is payable for each new dwelling unit within 6km of the SPA/Ramsar site of £337.49 per new dwelling unit.
- 6.57. The applicant has not paid the SAMMS Mitigation Contribution Agreement for the new residential property and therefore has not met the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and Section 15 (specifically paragraphs 192 and 193) of the NPPF (2024) and Policy CS12 (LPCS) (2014).

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.58. Biodiversity net gain is a way of creating and improving biodiversity by requiring development to have a positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity.
- 6.59. In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This statutory framework is referred to as 'biodiversity net gain' in Planning Practice Guidance to distinguish it from other or more general biodiversity gains.
- 6.60. Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition"). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.
- 6.61. The proposed development would be the conversion of an existing building with no extensions. The proposed garden area would be soft landscaped. The land surrounding the existing barn is currently mowed grass area. The supporting planning statement states that the proposed development would not impact more than 25 square meters of priority habitat or metres of linear habitat and would be exempt from the statutory requirement of providing 10% net gain.
- 6.62. As such, the development is exempt from biodiversity net gain.

Overall Planning Balance

- 6.63. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act provides that planning decisions should be in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.64. In this case, there would be a conflict with particular policies of the development plan, as set out within the report, notably Policies CS01, CS02, CS12 and CS19 (LPCS) (2014). However, the NPPF (2024) is an important material consideration that must be taken into account.
- 6.65. Having found that very special circumstances do not exist, policies within the NPPF (2024) relating to land designated as Green Belt provide a clear reason for refusing the development. Therefore, notwithstanding the issue of housing land supply as the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable supply of five year housing land, with the evidence indicating a supply of 3 years, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply and this indicates that permission should not be granted.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. As the proposal is in conflict with adopted Development Plan policies, and as the NPPF (2024) represents a material consideration which indicated that permission should not be granted, the proposed development is recommended for refusal.

8. Recommendation

Refusal.

9. Refusal Reasons

1. The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt where the construction of new buildings is inappropriate development unless it is for one of the exempted forms of development set out in paragraph 154 or 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). The proposal is for a new dwelling in an unsustainable location and the building of a dwelling, whether as conversion or otherwise would still by definition result in a form of encroachment in the countryside and harmful to the openness by reason of the nature of the development and the paraphernalia and associated development that goes with what will be a separate dwelling. The development does not, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). No very special circumstances have been put forward to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt or any other identified harm and therefore the proposal is contrary to Policy CS01 (Sustainable Development) and Policy CS02 (Scale and Distribution of Development) of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (Protecting Green Belt Land).
2. The proposed development by virtue of the size and design of the private amenity space would undermine the spatial layout or character of the area and therefore fails to respect the rural characteristics and value within the Kent countryside and landscape. The development is therefore contrary to Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014), Gravesham's design code: Design for Gravesham (2024) and Gravesham's Householder Design Guidance SPD (2021), as well as Sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

3. The proposal would result in a detrimental impact on the amenities of future occupiers in terms of substandard private amenity area, due to insufficient depth, contrary to the objectives of Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy September 2014, paragraph 135(f) of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) and Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines (2020).
4. The proposal fails to secure a contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites to resolve disturbance issues to wintering birds, and in the absence of this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the development fails to comply with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and paragraphs 193 and 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.