

Development Management
East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
Hertfordshire

26th February 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

Reference : 3/26/0207/OUT

Address : Land Adjacent To Manorview 21 High Street Walkern Hertfordshire

Proposal : Outline planning permission (including details of access, layout and scale) for construction of 2 x 3-bed serviced self-build dwellings with parking and associated works (with details of appearance and landscaping reserved)

Walkern Parish Council formally object to the above outline planning application for two detached self-build dwellings on land adjacent to 21 High Street, Walkern.

This proposal follows the refusal of application 3/25/0371/FUL and the subsequent dismissal of appeal APP/J1915/W/25/3374781 by Inspector Jennifer Wallace on 30 January 2026. While the applicant asserts that this revised scheme overcomes the Inspector's concerns, it fundamentally fails to address the principal reason for dismissal: the harmful loss of an important open space that positively contributes to the character and significance of the Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings.

1 Harm to the character and appearance of the Walkern Conservation Area

The site lies within the Walkern Conservation Area and was expressly identified by the Inspector as:

“one of these open and undeveloped spaces [that] positively contributes” to the Conservation Area's character.

The Inspector made clear that the site's undeveloped nature itself is a key characteristic feature, contributing to:

- The interspersed fields and holdings within the settlement
- The transition from village core to open countryside
- The visual and spatial connection with the rural landscape

The revised proposal still introduces two substantial dwellings, a shared yard, hardstanding, access, domestic paraphernalia and associated residential domestication of the land. Regardless of architectural styling, this represents the permanent loss of an undeveloped orchard which currently forms part of the village's historic core.

The fundamental issue is not simply “suburban detailing,” fencing type, or roof complexity. The Inspector’s decision makes clear that the harm arose from the erosion of the site’s openness and its contribution as a gap. That harm remains.

Changing the buildings to “barn-style” forms does not alter the fact that two new residential dwellings will occupy land that is presently open and undeveloped. The spatial loss is irreversible.

2 Harm to the setting of the listed Walkern Free Church

The site lies immediately adjacent to Walkern Free Church (Grade II listed).

The Inspector found that the site’s undeveloped character enhances the significance of the Church by allowing appreciation of:

- Its social and historic importance
- Its relationship with its graveyard
- Glimpsed views within a relatively open setting

The proposal would introduce built form directly alongside the Church boundary. Even with a gable-end orientation, this materially reduces the sense of openness that currently contributes to its setting. The introduction of domestic curtilage, vehicles, lighting, fencing and residential activity would suburbanise a currently semi-rural edge condition.

The applicant acknowledges “less than substantial harm.” However, the Inspector previously identified harm mid-way within that category. The presence of buildings — regardless of styling — continues to erode the Church’s open setting. The harm remains real and meaningful.

Under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council must give considerable importance and weight to preserving the setting of listed buildings. That statutory duty is not reduced simply because the applicant characterises the harm as “lower end.”

3 Loss of an important transitional open space

The Inspector found that development here would:

“reintroduce the higher density development found within Walkern just as densities are reducing and layouts altering to reflect the transition away from the settlement and into the surrounding countryside.”

This site forms part of that transitional edge. It marks a perceptible shift from tighter village form to looser rural landscape. Introducing two dwellings — yard, access, turning areas and domestic landscaping — urbanises that transition.

The applicant’s argument that “a large portion of frontage remains open” does not change the reality that the orchard ceases to exist as an undeveloped space. Visual permeability through fencing does not replicate the contribution of genuine open land.

The Conservation Area’s significance derives not merely from views through gaps, but from the actual presence of those undeveloped spaces.

4 Outline application and lack of detail

This is an outline application with appearance and landscaping reserved. However:

- The heritage impacts arise from built form within a sensitive setting.
- Final appearance, materials, detailing, fenestration and landscaping are critical to assessing that impact.
- The Council cannot fully assess harm to the Conservation Area or listed buildings without those details.

The applicant relies heavily on an agricultural aesthetic and specific materials (black weatherboarding, clay tiles), yet these are not secured at this stage. There is no guarantee that future reserved matters would faithfully reflect the design narrative now presented.

Given the sensitivity of the site, full details should be required at this stage. The outline approach limits meaningful heritage assessment.

5 “Barn-style” does not neutralise harm

The applicant argues that agricultural-style buildings mitigate harm by referencing local barns. This is not supported by the reality of what is proposed. These are permanent residential dwellings, not agricultural structures, and their use, massing, glazing, lighting, domestic activity and boundary treatments will clearly read as residential. The cumulative suburbanisation of the site cannot be disguised by vernacular styling.

5.1 Vernacular features are cosmetic, not contextual

The applicant lists features such as simple linear forms, steep pitched roofs, black weatherboarding, clay tiles, brick plinths, minimal openings and cart-door proportions. These are superficial references that do not alter:

- The domestic use of the buildings
- The loss of openness
- The tightening of built form at a point where the settlement should transition to countryside
- The erosion of the Conservation Area's spatial character

The Conservation Area is defined by open spaces, not by the presence of barn-style buildings. The Inspector valued the undeveloped nature of the site, not its potential to host pastiche agricultural forms. Pastiche is not preservation.

5.2 Risk of competing with genuine historic barns

The proposed buildings risk visually competing with the authentic historic barns beyond the site, confusing the historic narrative of Walkern's agricultural evolution rather than reinforcing it.

5.3 The "Farmyard Grouping" claim is not credible

The applicant suggests that the shared gravel yard creates a "farmyard grouping." This is unconvincing. The site will function as two private dwellings with:

- Cars
- Domestic lighting
- Bins
- Garden furniture
- Domestic activity

None of this resembles a working farmstead. A gravel surface does not transform a residential development into an agricultural one. This is suburban infill in disguise, not a farmyard.

6 Self-build status does not outweigh heritage harm

The proposal places significant weight on self-build delivery under the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. However:

- Self-build status does not override heritage policy.
- The public benefit of two dwellings is modest.
- The Inspector previously did not find the benefits sufficient to outweigh harm.
- The statutory presumption in favour of preservation of heritage assets carries considerable weight.

Two additional dwellings, even if self-build, do not constitute a level of public benefit capable of clearly outweighing harm to designated heritage assets in this sensitive location.

7 Precedent and cumulative impact

Approval of this scheme would weaken the protection afforded to other open orchards and transitional spaces within the Conservation Area. The erosion of one such gap risks incremental suburbanisation of the settlement edge, fundamentally altering the historic morphology of Walkern.

8 Conclusion

The Inspector previously concluded that development of this site would harm:

- The character and appearance of the Walkern Conservation Area
- The setting of Walkern Free Church
- The transitional rural character of this part of High Street

Those core issues remain unresolved. While the architectural language has been amended, the principal harm — loss of an important open and undeveloped space — persists.

The proposal results in less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets. However, such harm must still be given great weight. The limited public benefits of two self-build dwellings do not clearly and convincingly outweigh that harm.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that East Hertfordshire District Council refuse this application.



Yours faithfully
on behalf of Walkern Parish Council

Abi Brown
Clerk to Walkern Parish Council