

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

Planning Application 26/00373/PIP

Planning Permission in Principle for up to 6 dwellings, garages and associated access drive

Walnut Tree Farm, Dark Lane, Astwood Bank, Redditch, Worcestershire

Applicant: Mr and Mrs Adrian and Julie Nicholls
Ward: Astwood Bank and Feckenham Ward

The case officer of this application is Emily Cox, Planning Officer (DM), who can be contacted on Tel: 01527 881699 EXT 1699 Email: emily.cox@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for more information.

Permission in Principle (PIP) is an alternative route of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. This process separates the issues concerning the principle of the proposed development, from the technical details of the proposal. The process has two stages - permission in principle, which establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle; and the second stage, technical details consent, where the detailed development proposals are assessed. The new process was introduced in June 2018 and was intended to speed up and simplify the planning process for small housing developments.

While assessing applications for permission in principle, the scope for assessment is strictly limited to the following issues:

- Location
- Land use
- Amount of development

Consideration of this application has to be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is one such material consideration. Following a grant of Permission in Principle, the site must receive a grant of technical details consent before development can proceed. The granting of technical details consent has the effect of granting planning permission for the development.

Site Description and Relevant Planning History

This application seeks permission in principle for one dwelling on land at Walnut Tree Farm, Dark Lane, Astwood Bank.

The site lies just outside of the designated residential area of Astwood Bank, which is a village and is in the Green Belt. The site currently forms the wider residential curtilage of Walnut Tree Farm. The site is bound by Dark Lane to the south, agricultural fields to the north and west of the site, and by a row of dwellings to the east of the site. The row of dwellings to the east of the site are in the residential area.

Relevant Policies :

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
Policy 2: Settlement Hierarchy
Policy 4: Housing Provision
Policy 5: Effective and Efficient Use of Land
Policy 8: Green Belt
Policy 16: Natural Environment
Policy 17: Flood Risk Management
Policy 19: Sustainable Travel and Accessibility
Policy 20: Transport Requirements for New Development
Policy 39: Built Environment

Others

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
Redditch High Quality Design SPD

Relevant Planning History

25/01245/PIP	Proposed new dwelling with associated access drive, garage and gardens	Granted	06.01.2026
--------------	--	---------	------------

Consultations

Worcestershire Highways - Redditch

WCCHA have no objection. In principle based on location, highways raise no objection to PIP stage 1, however notwithstanding the proposal for 6 dwellings will lead to a significant highway issue in terms of additional trip generation.

From information available to me it appears that visibility is obstructed in both directions from the point of access, given the potential increase in trips we would request that visibility is improved based on the 85 percentile vehicle approach speeds.

The site access via Dark Lane is on an unclassified road subject to the national speed limit. It is a single-track lane with restricted width for most of its length. Dark Lane can only accommodate one vehicle at a time and has limited opportunities for vehicles to pass safely. This would increase the likelihood of unavoidable vehicular conflict and introduces increased risk to all users of the highway.

Notwithstanding the above, based on the criteria used to review PIP Stage 1, the Highway Authority submits a response of no objection; however, we will require further information to be submitted should the application progress to the Technical Details Stage.

North Worcestershire Water Management

Have no issues in principle. The proposed development site is situated in the catchment of the Doe Bank Brook. The site comprises an area of 0.44 hectares, with current land use noted as gardens and a tennis court. The site falls within Flood Zone 1 and it is not considered that there is

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

any significant fluvial flood risk to the site. The EA's flood mapping, however, indicates that there is some surface water flood risk to the immediate site, as well as a significant flood risk to land at Walnut Tree Farm, which may affect the development site. For this reason, a Flood Risk Assessment must be submitted at the technical matters stage of application, which must include the associated access drive.

Mapping indicates there is an existing watercourse that flows through the site and into a spread owned by Walnut Tree Farm. It is required that the technical matters outline how the watercourse will be incorporated into the development, and a condition survey must be submitted to determine baseline conditions of the watercourse. It should be noted that this watercourse is not included in the national Flood Risk Assessment mapping. As such, any Flood Risk Assessment submitted via the technical details should account for this catchment to ensure accurate modelling of fluvial flood risk.

As no detailed block plans have been submitted, the following is primarily information for the applicant to be aware of. In line with Policy 17.9 of the Redditch Borough Local Planning Policy, de-culverted watercourses are prioritised to ensure natural flow and migration of the stream. All works that have the potential to alter the flow in an ordinary watercourse would require a Land Drainage Consent, as set out in Land Drainage Act 1991 section 23.

Soilscapes (accessible at: <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/>) indicates that the underlying soil is likely to be loamy and clayey, meaning that the site could be seasonally wet with impeded drainage. If a soakaway is proposed a porosity test would be needed to determine if this is suitable. If not suitable, other options may need to be considered. STW records indicate that there is a public combined sewer running along Dark Lane. If a connection is needed, consultation with STW would be required. Where surface water runoff cannot be kept on site an appropriate level of attenuation should be included. It would be required that surface water runoff from the site is restricted to greenfield runoff rates up to the 1 in 100 return period, including an additional 40% allowance for climate change, which should be supported by calculations.

While in principle I have no issues with the proposed development from a flood risk perspective, no drainage details have been provided with this application. I would therefore suggest the applicant, at the technical matters stage of the application, include a drainage strategy to avoid the need for conditions. This should be in the form of a drainage plan and should include the means to manage surface water from the site appropriately. It should identify where surface water will be discharged to, as well as detailing the extent of any new buildings and any new hard standing and what materials will be used to finish these areas.

Public Consultation Response

Site Notice posted 16 April 2026; expired 10 May 2026

Neighbour Letters sent 16 April 2026; expired 10 May 2026

Following the end of publicity, 15 objections have been received from members of the public. Their comments are summarised below, and can be viewed in full on Public Access.

- Loss of rural character and peaceful environment;
- Concerns over additional traffic along a single track lane from additional dwellings, and safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, existing residents;
- Impact on local wildlife and natural environment;

PLANNING COMMITTEE

xx xx 2026

- Increase in light pollution;
- Set a precedent for future development in the countryside;
- Construction traffic concerns;
- Services impacted at schools and doctors surgeries;
- Concerns regarding the harm to the Green Belt;
- Impact on drainage;
- No BNG and ecology reports submitted as part of the application;

Concerns relating to the Green Belt have been addressed within the Report. All other matters would be subject to a Technical Details Consent application. All material planning considerations have been taken into account and are set out within this Report, all non-material planning considerations have not been considered. Permission in Principle is not a planning permission in itself. The consideration of this application is limited to very specific matters and cannot at this point be the subject of any conditions, other matters raised must be considered at the subsequent Technical Details Consent Stage.

Assessment of Proposal

The main issue is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, proposed land use and amount of development.

The Council cannot currently demonstrate a five year housing land supply (5YHLS) and therefore regard should be had to paragraph 11(d) and footnote 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which together state that for applications providing housing, where the Council cannot demonstrate a 5YHLS, the policies which are most important for determining the application are considered out-of-date and planning permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong 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, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Location

The site lies within the Green Belt.

In respect of Green Belt policy, it has been established through case law that the list of exceptions for 'appropriate development' set out in Policy 8 of the BORLP4 and the NPPF amounts to a closed list. Thereby, proposals not included on the list are regarded as 'prima facie' inappropriate development. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF sets out exemptions to inappropriate development, including at parts e and g:

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

e) limited infilling in villages

g) redevelopment of previously developed land.

The site is currently forms the wider residential curtilage of Walnut Tree Farm. It is considered that the site could fall within exceptions e) and g) listed in paragraph 154 of the NPPF.

The Applicant's Green Belt statement also considers the exemptions, who believe the site could fall either within exemption e) or g). The applicant also considers the site to be Grey Belt land, under paragraph 155 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 155 of the NPPF states that: the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all of the following apply:

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;

D: where applicable, the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156 - 157.

Grey Belt is defined within Annex 2 of the NPPF as follows:

Grey Belt: for the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of the purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey Belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

Does Green Belt land on the site strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes a), b), or d)?

To establish whether the application site can be considered 'grey belt' it must be first be determined whether the site strongly contributes to Green Belt purposes a), b) or d) of the Green Belt which is set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF.

a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (LBUA); in terms of purpose A, given the site's location within Astwood Bank and the separation to Redditch, which is classed as a LBUA. The development is not considered to amount to sprawl of a LBUA and make a weak contribution to purpose A.

b) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; the site location is located just outside of the settlement boundary of Astwood Bank, along a road with existing dwellings. The distance from Astwood Bank to Redditch (Town) has a defined separation distance. As such, it is considered therefore to be a weak contribution to purpose B.

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; Astwood Bank is not considered to be a 'historic town' for the purpose of purpose D.

To summarise, the site does not strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes a), b) or d).

Would the application of non-Green Belt NPPF footnote 7 policies to the scheme proposed on the site provide a strong reason for refusing development?

Footnote 7 states "The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats site (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."

None of the footnote 7 policies would apply and therefore do not present a strong justification for refusing planning permission.

Would the proposed development on grey belt fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan?

Purposes a, b, and d have already been assessed above. Regard however must be made to c and e.

c) Safeguard the countryside from encroachment. It is accepted that the spatial occupation of the site would not encroach into the countryside, as the current use of the site is a tennis court and the wider domestic curtilage. In relation to the wider function the Green Belt the comparatively small nature of the site itself that it does not fundamentally undermine purpose c) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.

e) Assisting in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. The proposed development would not fundamentally undermine the purpose of Green Belt criterion.

Is there a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed?

The NPPF at footnote 56 explains that demonstrable unmet need would apply where there is a lack of five year supply of deliverable housing sites. The Council cannot currently demonstrate a 5 year supply.

Would the development in the grey belt be in a sustainable location?

The application site is located outside but adjacent to the settlement of Astwood Bank, as identified on the Council's Proposals Map. Astwood Bank is considered a Sustainable Rural Settlement within Policy 2 with a variety of services and amenities. Whilst the application site is not within the settlement boundary, it is immediately adjacent (30 metres to the east) and is considered a sustainable location for housing.

Does the proposal include major development involving housing?

The application proposes up to 1 dwelling with a site area of 0.176 ha and as such would not be caught by the requirement to also satisfy the 'Golden Rules' when considering grey belt policy.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

xx xx 2026

In conclusion, it is considered that the site is Grey Belt and would meet the Paragraph 155 requirements and thus the proposal should not be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework.

Land Use

The application site is adjacent to other residential dwellings and is not considered to conflict in terms of land use with its immediate surroundings.

Amount of Development

The amount of development (up to 6 dwellings) is acceptable given the area of land shown within the red line boundary on the location, the existing number of dwellings and indicative plans showing the layouts.

Other Matters

North Worcestershire Water Management. The proposed development site is situated in the catchment of the Doe Bank Brook. The site comprises an area of 0.44 hectares, with current land use noted as gardens and a tennis court. The site falls within Flood Zone 1 and it is not considered that there is any significant fluvial flood risk to the site. The EA's flood mapping, however, indicates that there is some surface water flood risk to the immediate site, as well as a significant flood risk to land at Walnut Tree Farm, which may affect the development site. For this reason, a Flood Risk Assessment must be submitted at the technical matters stage of application, which must include the associated access drive.

Mapping indicates there is an existing watercourse that flows through the site and into a spread owned by Walnut Tree Farm. It is required that the technical matters outline how the watercourse will be incorporated into the development, and a condition survey must be submitted to determine baseline conditions of the watercourse. It should be noted that this watercourse is not included in the national Flood Risk Assessment mapping. As such, any Flood Risk Assessment submitted via the technical details should account for this catchment to ensure accurate modelling of fluvial flood risk.

As no detailed block plans have been submitted, the following is primarily information for the applicant to be aware of. In line with Policy 17.9 of the Redditch Borough Local Planning Policy, de-culverted watercourses are prioritised to ensure natural flow and migration of the stream. All works that have the potential to alter the flow in an ordinary watercourse would require a Land Drainage Consent, as set out in Land Drainage Act 1991 section 23.

Soilscapes (accessible at: <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/>) indicates that the underlying soil is likely to be loamy and clayey, meaning that the site could be seasonally wet with impeded drainage. If a soakaway is proposed a porosity test would be needed to determine if this is suitable. If not suitable, other options may need to be considered. STW records indicate that there is a public combined sewer running along Dark Lane. If a connection is needed, consultation with STW would be required. Where surface water runoff cannot be kept on site an appropriate level of attenuation should be included. It would be required that surface water runoff from the site is restricted to greenfield runoff rates up to the 1 in 100 return period, including an additional 40% allowance for climate change, which should be supported by calculations.

While in principle I have no issues with the proposed development from a flood risk perspective,

PLANNING COMMITTEE

xx xx 2026

no drainage details have been provided with this application. I would therefore suggest the applicant, at the technical matters stage of the application, include a drainage strategy to avoid the need for conditions. This should be in the form of a drainage plan and should include the means to manage surface water from the site appropriately. It should identify where surface water will be discharged to, as well as detailing the extent of any new buildings and any new hard standing and what materials will be used to finish these areas.

Worcestershire County Council Highway Authority: have no objection in principle. Based on location, highways raise no objection to PIP Stage 1, however notwithstanding the proposal for 6 dwellings will lead to a significant highway issue in terms of additional trip generation. From information available, it appears that visibility is obstructed in both directions from the point of access, given the potential increase in trips WCCHA would request that visibility is improved based on the 85th percentile vehicle approach speeds.

The site access via Dark Lane is on an unclassified road subject to the national speed limit. It is a single-track lane with restricted width for most of its length. Dark Lane can only accommodate one vehicle at a time and has limited opportunities for vehicles to pass safely. This would increase the likelihood of unavoidable vehicular conflict and introduces increased risk to all users of the highway.

Notwithstanding the above, based on the criteria used to review PIP Stage 1, the Highway Authority submits a response of no objection; however, WCCHA will require further information to be submitted should the application progress to the Technical Details Stage.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

The Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS) and therefore regard should be had to paragraph 11(d) and footnote 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which together state that for applications providing housing, where the Council cannot demonstrate a 5YHLS, the policies which are most important for determining the application are considered out-of-date and planning permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong 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, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

For limb i), having regard to the policies within the Framework, identified at footnote 7, there are no policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance that provide a strong reason for refusing the development.

For limb ii), The proposal would contribute six dwellings to local housing land supply. The site is in a sustainable location and is of suitable land use and amount. This is a two-stage approach, and the Technical Details Consent will consider the detailed development proposals. On this basis, there are no known adverse impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits as set out in limb ii) and Permission in Principle is granted.

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

xx xx 2026

RECOMMENDATION:

That having regard to the development plan and to all other material considerations, permission in principle be GRANTED.

Conditions

1. This decision notice only relates to the grant of planning permission in principle. It does not give any approval or consent which may be needed under any legislation, enactment, byelaws, order or regulation other than the Housing and Planning Act 2016. You may need other approvals, consents or licenses for the development e.g. Technical Details Consent or building regulations approval.

Permission in Principle is not a planning permission; it is a precursor to it. A planning permission only exists when the Permission in Principle and Technical Detailed Consent have been granted.

Procedural matters

This application is being reported to the Planning Committee because 11 (or more) objections have been received.