THE SWORDERS

RURAL PROPERTY UPDATE

SWORDERS
Agricultural Commercial Residential

AUTUMN 2026



INTRODUCTION



The summer has come to a close, which means an Autumn update from the Sworders' team. Since our last update in Spring 2026, farmers, landowners and professional advisers continue to face challenges in response to Government policy.

For our planners it has been a particularly busy period, reviewing and understanding new planning legislation, including changes to National Planning Policy and Biodiversity Net Gain, alongside new Housing Delivery Test results.

Alongside these changes, we also experienced the potential for a 'new norm' of summer heatwaves, with droughts having a significant impact on the farming industry. Our regular farming update summarises the implications on this year's harvest.

On a more positive note, this edition features a case study on planning success in July 2026 for a major residential scheme in North Weald Bassett, Essex. Over eight years, Sworders guided the site from Local Plan allocation to planning approval, demonstrating our commitment to long-term client relationships.

In addition, we provide a roundup of successful design projects and, finally, Sam Allcock, our Graduate Trainee Planner, reflects on his journey into the planning profession.

We hope you find this newsletter helpful and if there are any articles that you would like to discuss further, then please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Sworders' team.



NEW NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Earlier than expected, 17th August 2026 saw the long-awaited publication of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which has kept the Sworders' planning team busy.

The new NPPF replaces the December 2024 version and is the first major re-write since first publication in 2012, introducing significant changes to boost housing delivery, strengthen plan-making and support sustainable growth.

The key changes within the new NPPF include:

- The clear separation of plan-making and national decision-making policies.
- A permanent presumption in favour of sustainable development (which replaces the tilted balance under paragraph 11 of the previous NPPF).
- The introduction of encouraging residential and mixed-use proposals that is within reasonable walking distance of well-connected railway stations.
- A greater emphasis on up-to-date Local Plans.
- Reinforcement of policies relating to the loss of key community facilities.
- A new definition for strategic sites and clarification of a new category for medium developments.
- Maintaining the relatively recent concept of 'grey belt'.

As the sector adjusts to the new policy framework, the impact on current and future projects will become clearer. Whether it delivers the Government's objectives remains to be seen.

Marie Laidler | marie.laidler@sworders.com | 01279 771 188



DELIVERING A STRATEGIC RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME IN NORTH WEALD BASSETT

The summer started off well with Sworders securing a resolution to grant planning permission for up to 195 new dwellings in North Weald Bassett, Epping, following a lengthy Planning Committee debate. The work exemplifies our multi-disciplinary approach, carried out over several years, seeing the site through Local Plan allocation to planning consent. The 7.3-hectare site comprises three agricultural fields south of the A414.

Local Plan

Sworders first started working with the landowner in 2018, with our strategic team promoting the land through the Epping Forest Local Plan process at its various stages.

Upon Local Plan adoption in March 2023, the land was allocated as part of a wider strategic urban extension and Strategic Masterplan Framework (SMF). This was a watershed moment as it immediately removed our client's site from the Green Belt, thereby significantly enhancing its development potential.

At that stage, Sworders set out various options available to the landowner, for example, an immediate sale of the site, or the marketing of the site for a promotion agreement.

Planning Application

Sworders were instructed to prepare and submit an outline planning application to maximise the value of the land for the client. Working alongside a team of specialist consultants and our in-house architects, we coordinated the technical assessments, masterplanning and supporting plans required to bring the proposals forward efficiently.

As part of the preparation, Sworders carried out a pre-application public consultation exercise with local residents, the Parish Council and community representatives. The meetings and resulting feedback were essential in helping to inform and shape the indicative planning proposals, which feature multiple inter-linked green infrastructure, play spaces and footpath links amongst the dwellings.

Following submission, a number of issues were raised. Sworders worked closely with Council Officers and consultants to address these and refine the proposals. This collaborative approach secured committee support in July 2026.

Since then, Sworders has been working towards securing the associated Section 106 Legal Agreement, which is to include significant financial contributions towards local services. Once signed, the approval decision notice will be issued later this year.

Overall, this scheme showcases the strategic planning, design, development and agency expertise delivered by Sworders. We are proud to have provided a fully integrated service, from initial site promotion through to securing planning consent.

If you are a landowner and would like to explore development potential on your land, please do not hesitate to get in touch and we would be pleased to offer an initial, confidential discussion.

Tom Allington | tom.allington@sworders.com | 01279 771 188



It has been another successful period for Sworders' Planning and Architecture teams, with approvals secured across a wide range of projects, sectors and local authority areas. These successes highlight the breadth of our expertise and how our integrated planning, architecture and surveying teams help clients unlock opportunities across a variety of sites and developments.

New Homes and Residential Development

- 69 new homes in North Hertfordshire on a heritage site, through a mix of conversion and new-build development.
- Two new homes in St Ippolyts, North Hertfordshire.
- Redevelopment of existing residential site with five new homes in Rugby.
- Permission secured on appeal for seven dwellings in Braintree.
- Replacement of an equestrian use with four new homes in North Hertfordshire.
- Class Q approval in Uttlesford for the conversion of three barns to ten new homes.



Supporting Rural Businesses

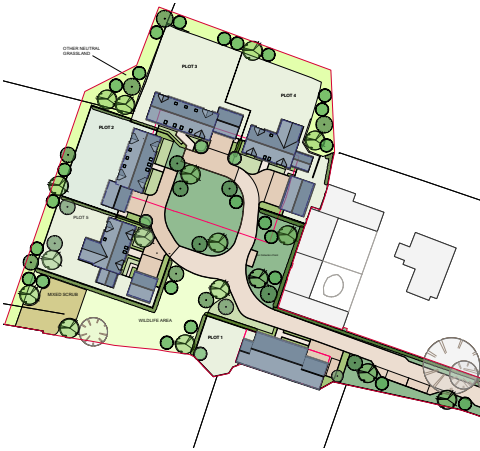
- Holiday accommodation through the conversion of agricultural buildings and a stable block in Stratford-on-Avon District and new chalets associated with a public house in Harborough District.
- Class R prior approvals for the change of use of rural buildings in East Hertfordshire and Somerset.
- Steel-framed agricultural buildings for general storage in East Hertfordshire and South Cambridgeshire.



Unlocking Opportunities

These approvals demonstrate the importance of more specialist complex planning advice:

- The removal of an agricultural occupancy condition in West Northamptonshire.
- Planning in Principle consent for nine dwellings in North Norfolk.
- Reserved Matters approval following outline consent in Uttlesford.
- Certificate of Lawfulness approvals in East Hertfordshire.
- Change of Use approvals, for redundant office buildings and land in King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and paddocks to residential gardens in North Hertfordshire.
- Alterations to public house premises in North Norfolk, including changes to internal floorspace, guest accommodation and residential development.



Sustainability and Heritage

- Solar panel installations on residential and rural buildings in Uttlesford and North Hertfordshire.
- Air source heat pump installations to dwellings in King's Lynn and West Norfolk.
- Conversion to dwellings of two barns within a listed farmstead in East Hertfordshire.
- Heritage and conservation-led building improvements in East Hertfordshire, including traditional roof, render and chimney works.
- Conversion of a Grade II* listed former college in North Hertfordshire to provide new homes through a mix of conversion and new-build development.



Have you a project in mind?

Sworders' planning, architecture and surveying teams work together to guide projects from concept to delivery. Please get in touch to explore your options.

Charlotte Blake | charlotte.blake@sworders.com | 01279 771 188



FARMING REVIEW

For many of our arable clients, the less dwelt on Harvest 2026 the better. Attention across our patch, from the light Breckland soils of Norfolk, through the Hertfordshire chalk and out to the Warwickshire clays, has already turned firmly towards the 2027 crop. Yet the season deserves a moment's reflection, if only because it proved the earliest harvest since AHDB records began in 2006. Combines were on the move in the final week of June and, for most, cutting was finished by the end of July. Rapid progress in the field however translated into distinctly mixed results in the barn.

A mild winter gave way to an exceptionally dry spring, with parts of the arable belt receiving barely 60% of average rainfall between April and June, followed by sustained summer heat. Drying costs were minimal but crops that never had the moisture to fill have paid the price.

Wheat and Barley

AHDB reports place winter wheat around 6.8 t/ha, down 13% on the five-year mean, with only 10% of surveyed farms beating their own historic yields. Winter barley finished closer to average nationally, though early-drilled crops suffered 15% to 20% penalties. Spring malting barley has been the quiet casualty of the drought, with pinched grain and elevated nitrogen tipping too many samples out of malting specification.



Oilseed Rape

The bright spot belongs to OSR. National yields averaged around 3.9 t/ha, up 17% on the five-year mean, backed by a 30% rise in planted area following 2025's forty-two-year low. For many, it will be the difference between a workable margin and a red line.

Looking Ahead

With grain markets remaining subdued amid ongoing Black Sea shipping disruption, the shape of 2027 is already forming. Reduced tonnage, tight margins and persistent cost inflation mean that cropping and rotation decisions are among the most important conversations our team is having this autumn.

Michael Sills | michael.sills@sworders.com | 01279 771 188

SAMUEL ALLCOCK'S PATHWAY TO PLANNING



I joined Sworders in 2024 as a Graduate Trainee Planner. My route into planning began with interests developed during university. I studied an undergraduate degree in Politics with International Relations at University of York but found local politics and policy to be more relevant to people's lived experience than decision making on the national and international level.

Exiting university into the pandemic, with associated free time, I considered how I might get involved in local decision making and developed an interest into how the built environment affects us. I subsequently decided to pursue a career in planning.

To do this, I completed a Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) accredited MSc in Urban Planning at Newcastle University, in which I focused on matters relating to rural development and small-medium housebuilding. The course also gave me a thorough overview of planning law and policy, academic theories surrounding the practice and ethics of planning, and practical experience in assessing sites for their development potential. The course was condensed into a single year, making this route challenging but productive.

Since joining Sworders, I have been supported in working towards the RTPI Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC) and aim to submit my application for RTPI Chartered Membership in November 2026.

If you are interested in pursuing a career in planning, I would encourage you to explore this pathway. It is an excellent route into the profession, provides opportunities to develop skills relevant to the job, and ensures that you will emerge with a clear understanding of the planning system and your role within it.

Sam Allcock | sam.allcock@sworders.com | 01279 771 188



MEET WILL ELDRIDGE
Graduate Trainee Apprentice Surveyor

We are pleased to welcome Will Eldridge to our Hertfordshire office as a Graduate Trainee Apprentice Surveyor.

Alongside his role with Sworders, Will is studying for an MProf in Rural Estate and Land Management at Harper Adams University and is working towards qualification as a Chartered Surveyor through the RICS APC Rural pathway.

The apprenticeship programme provides Will with the opportunity to combine his academic studies with practical experience across our rural property, planning and land management teams. We look forward to supporting his professional development and seeing his career progress in the years ahead.



MEET EMMA LLOYD
Graduate Trainee Surveyor

We are pleased to welcome Emma Lloyd to our Wolston Office in Warwickshire as a Graduate Trainee Surveyor. Emma graduated from Harper Adams University this year with a degree in Rural Property Management. Emma will be working towards completing her Assessment of Professional Competency to become a Chartered Surveyor.

PROMOTIONS

In March, Anna Robinson was promoted to Senior Surveyor and Jeremy Pidgeon to Senior Associate.

In May, Abigail Harris passed her RICS APC and is now a qualified Chartered Rural Surveyor.

As rural property professionals, we advise across the agricultural, commercial and residential sectors on all aspects of rural property. We provide advice that seeks to maximise the value of clients' properties, often on a shared risk basis.

To be sure you are maximising the value of your asset, please contact us to discuss your opportunities.

Sworders recognises its impact on the environment throughout its business and is passionate about the need to reduce and manage waste wherever practicably possible. Please recycle or give me to a friend.

To unsubscribe please email your request to: post@sworders.com

Please note, the articles featured in this publication have been selected and prepared with a view to disseminating key information available at the time of publication and are not intended to be comprehensive nor to provide advice. It should not be acted upon or relied upon, and is not a substitute for seeking professional advice that is specific to your individual circumstances.



The Hall,
Priory Hill,
Rugby Road, Wolston,
Warwickshire, CV8 3FZ

T: 01788 435 435



3 The Gatehouse,
Hadham Hall,
Little Hadham, Ware,
Hertfordshire, SG11 2EB

T: 01279 771 188



The Pelican Suite, RM 4
Ketteringham Hall,
Wymondham,
Norfolk NR18 9RS

T: 01328 854 400



Suite 12, Swallow Court,
Devonshire Gate,
Tiverton,
Devon, EX16 7EJ

T: 01823 426 500