



**Report to:**

South Cambridgeshire District  
Council Planning Committee

13 April 2021

**Lead Officer:**

Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

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## **20/02929/OUT – Land Between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, Stapleford, Cambridge**

Proposal: Outline planning for the development of land for a retirement care village in Use Class C2 comprising housing with care, communal health, wellbeing and leisure facilities, public open space, landscaping, car parking, access and associated development and public access countryside park with all matters reserved except for access

Applicant: Axis Land Partnerships, D./M./W. Chalk/Trafford/Chalk

Key material considerations:

- Principle of Development in the Green Belt
- Green Belt Openness and Purposes
- Character and Appearance of the Area
- Landscape
- Biodiversity
- Trees
- Highway Safety and Parking
- Flood Risk and Drainage
- Heritage Impact
- Residential Amenity
- Renewables / Climate Change
- Contaminated Land
- Loss of Agricultural Land
- Other Matters
- Very Special Circumstances

Date of Member site visit: None

Is it a Departure Application?: Yes (advertised 02 September 2020)

Decision due by: 20 April 2021 (extension of time agreed)

Application brought to Committee because: Referred to the Planning Committee through Delegation Meeting held on 10 November 2020 following objection from Stapleford Parish Council.

Officer Recommendation: Refusal

Presenting Officer: Michael Sexton

## **Executive Summary**

1. This application seeks outline planning permission for the development of land for a retirement care village in Use Class C2 comprising housing with care, communal health, wellbeing and leisure facilities, public open space, landscaping, car parking, access and associated development and public access countryside park with all matters reserved except for access.
2. The site is located outside of the development framework boundary of Stapleford, in the Green Belt and countryside. The site is used for arable agricultural uses and as such there is little existing vegetation within the site, aside from a small area of tree planting towards the sites northern edge; no part of the site could be considered brownfield land. The site is located in an area designated as improved landscaping under the Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan.
3. The retirement care village would constitute in inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the retirement care village is also considered to result in harm by virtue of the loss of openness of the Green Belt, conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt, detrimental impact on the character of the area and an adverse impact to landscape character.
4. The applicant's agent has sought to argue that the proposed development would bring forward several benefits that would outweigh the identified harm. These arguments are considered in the report and, whilst it is acknowledged the development would bring forward some benefits, these factors are not considered to carry sufficient weight, individually or collectively, to constitute the 'very special circumstances' required to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt and to clearly outweigh the identified harm.
5. The application has therefore been recommended for refusal.
6. Should the application be approved following members conclusion that the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the application will need to be referred to the Secretary of State under The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009. There would also be a need to agree a full list of conditions and the requirements of any Section 106 agreement.

## **Relevant planning history**

7. 20/03141/SCRE – EIA - Screening opinion for a Proposed retirement village and 20 hectare green space Open for comment icon – pending.

8. S/0520/07/F – Erection of 18 affordable dwellings – Approved.
9. S/0442/06/F – 17 houses 8 flats and change of use of agricultural land for new football pitch – Approved.
10. S/1672/91/F – Public golf driving range – Refused.
11. S/0211/91/F – Public golf driving range – Refused.

## **Planning policies**

### **National Guidance**

12. National Planning Policy Framework 2019  
National Planning Practice Guidance  
National Design Guide 2019

### **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018**

13. S/1 – Vision  
S/2 – Objectives of the Local Plan  
S/3 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
S/4 – Cambridge Green Belt  
S/5 – Provision of New Jobs and Homes  
S/6 – The Development Strategy to 2031  
S/7 – Development Frameworks  
S/8 – Rural Centres  
CC/1 – Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change  
CC/3 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Developments  
CC/4 – Water Efficiency  
CC/6 – Construction Methods  
CC/7 – Water Quality  
CC/8 – Sustainable Drainage Systems  
CC/9 – Managing Flood Risk  
HQ/1 – Design Principles  
HQ/2 – Public Art and New Development  
NH/2 – Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character  
NH/3 – Protecting Agricultural Land  
NH/4 – Biodiversity  
NH/6 – Green Infrastructure  
NH/8 – Mitigating the Impact of Development in and adjoining the Green Belt  
NH/10 – Facilities for Recreation in the Green Belt  
NH/14 – Heritage Assets  
H/8 – Housing Density  
H/9 – Housing Mix  
H/10 – Affordable Housing  
H/12 – Residential Space Standards  
SC/2 – Health impact Assessment

SC/5 – Community Healthcare Provision  
SC/9 – Lighting Proposals  
SC/10 – Noise Pollution  
SC/11 – Contaminated Land  
SC/12 – Air Quality  
TI/2 – Planning for Sustainable Travel  
TI/3 – Parking Provision  
TI/8 – Infrastructure and New Developments  
TI/10 – Broadband

### **Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan 2008**

14. CSF/1 – The Vision for the Cambridge Southern Fringe  
CSF/5 – Countryside Enhancement Strategy

### **South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):**

15. Sustainable Design and Construction SPD – Adopted January 2020  
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD – Adopted November 2016  
Health Impact Assessment SPD – Adopted March 2011  
District Design Guide SPD – Adopted March 2010  
Landscape in New Developments SPD – Adopted March 2010  
Biodiversity SPD – Adopted July 2009  
Listed Buildings: Works to or affecting the setting of SPD – Adopted July 2009  
Open Space in New Developments SPD – Adopted January 2009  
Public Art SPD – Adopted January 2009  
Trees & Development Sites SPD – Adopted January 2009

### **Consultation**

16. **Stapleford Parish Council** – Objection.

See Appendix 1 for a full copy of the comments from Stapleford Parish Council dated 27 August 2020. The comments of Stapleford Parish Council are summarised as follows:

The Parish Council had, in 2015, made a statement supported by a local firm of solicitors regarding its position in regard to the Greenbelt:

Changes to land are governed by Cambridge Southern Fringe AAP;  
The Parish Council is tasked with preserving Stapleford's Green Belt for the pleasure and benefit of its current residents and as a custodian for future residents. The Parish Council, as is its duty, will consider afresh any Planning applications and paragraphs 81 and 87 of the National Planning Policy Framework will be taken into account in its objective consideration of the application and its merits.

We consider that the application does not comply with these policy statements.

Six members of the public registered their objections on the basis that:

- The proposed development is in the wrong place for connectivity, access to services and facilities, reliance on private cars, lack of parking for visitors to the retirement village and to the park.
- Affordability: not considered affordable for local people and would not encourage downsizing in the village, thus not releasing any of the existing housing stock.
- Incursion into the Green Belt: set a precedent leading to further erosion of this important regulatory feature.
- Height, bulk and scale of the proposed buildings.
- Covid-19: services would not be open to the general public due to the risk to the residents of the spread of Covid-19.
- Country park: this was seen as a 'sweetener' to obtain development.
- Local need: the need for this development to benefit the local community was not demonstrated by a local assessment, rather the development would be open to anyone who could afford it. It was considered to be a private, exclusive development which would not want, for example, local children using the proposed swimming pool.

The Parish Council supported the comments made by members of the public, and made further comment:

- Disproportionate in the context of Stapleford both in the height and mass and also in the number of accommodation units. It will provide for better off people from all over South Cambridgeshire and could therefore be built anywhere in South Cambridgeshire without the need to compromise the Green Belt.
- Carbuncle on the edge of the village.
- The design was not conducive for older people to move to, as bungalows were in greater demand.
- The impact on the street scene would be excessive and extensive, the bulk and scale was considered out of keeping with the vernacular.
- The proposal appears to assume that the Cambridge South East Busway will proceed. In fact, it still faces several significant obstacles.
- Lack of public transport to the site, reliant on private transport increasing congestion and on street parking within the village and concentrating around the doctors.
- Several similar schemes in nearby villages which are struggling to fill vacancies.
- The provision does not match any perceived local need, which has not been established.
- The proposed development has not demonstrated that it has any special reason which would require it to be built in the Greenbelt.
- No guarantees that the country park would be managed for the benefit and use of the whole community – there are 'promises' only.
- The Axis representative admitted that there are some negatives associated with the Retirement Village proposal. These negatives will be experienced by all residents of Stapleford but only better off people and those not requiring NHS treatment will be able to benefit from the Retirement Village. This is divisive and does not sit comfortably with the values and community spirit of Stapleford.

- So far as Axis's reference to the philanthropic nature of the proposal is concerned, the aspirations of the Magog Down Trust and of the Bridleway Group could be met by philanthropic access permissions and gifting of land which is not conditional on receiving planning permission for a Retirement Village.

Summary:

Stapleford Parish Council objects to this outline application for a retirement village on the grounds that it does not have the special requirements to make it necessary for it to be built within the Greenbelt – it could be built anywhere in South Cambs. The height, bulk and scale of the proposed development is incompatible with the high value landscape of the area.

No local need has been established, and it is unlikely to be affordable to the majority of local people wanting to downsize.

The country park could be delivered for local benefit without the encumbrance of the built development.

17. **Great Shelford Parish Council** – Objection.

The only section of this development which is within this PC is the perimeter of the Country Park proposal onto Hinton Way. This land is within Green Belt and cannot be construed as a Rural Exception Site as it meets none of the criteria for such. Therefore, we ask for the permission to be refused.

18. **Cllr Nick Sample** – Objection.

As a member for the local ward, I would like to register my objection to the proposed plans for the development of a retirement village. There is clearly a need locally for more affordable housing suitable for elderly residents. This would have the dual benefits of providing safe, local housing suitable for the needs of the intended residents, while also freeing up housing stock for families, including key workers. However, proposals for such developments must (1) be consistent with local planning policy, including policy on the green belt and rural exception sites (2) clearly demonstrate that the proposed housing will meet the needs of local elderly residents (3) demonstrate feasibility within the local context, including access and transport infrastructure.

In all three areas, there are fundamental issues with the plans for the proposed development 20/029029/OUT.

That said, I look forward to seeing alternative proposals for retirement homes in South Cambridgeshire that demonstrably meet the needs of our residents, are suitable to the local context and consistent with local planning policy.

19. **Affordable Housing Team** – No objection.

There is a need to provide accommodation for older people in the District but it

is likely that this type of scheme will only be suitable for those on high incomes.

If the retirement village is classed as C2 – unlikely to require affordable housing.

If affordable housing is provided on site – concerns that homes may not be affordable to those on low incomes due to high service charges.

What mitigations will be in place in terms of the recruitment pressures identified for the care workforce.

20. **Air Quality Officer** – No objection.

Recommend conditions for a Low Emission Strategy and Emission Ratings.

21. **Anglian Water** – No objection.

22. **British Horse Society** – Object.

Proposes to extinguish an existing safe, off road multi user path, fails to provide non-motorised user (NMU) access for all users contrary to the Cambs RoWIP and provides no mitigation for the 575 traffic movements in a 24 hour period on a road which is currently used by many NMU's.

23. **Cambridge Past, Present and Future** – Objection.

Cambridge Past, Present and Future objects to this application because it is a speculative development that is not in the Local Plan, outside the village framework and in the green belt. It is not compliant with planning policy and we do not see how it would be possible to demonstrate that there is not another suitable site for a retirement home in greater Cambridge that is not within the green belt. Below we set out our reasons in more detail and highlight other concerns that we have with this application.

The following grounds of objection have been summarised for the purposes of the committee report:

**Green Belt and Local Plan Policy**

- The land is in the Green Belt.
- The applicant offers no justification for proposed development in the Green Belt, only a mitigation in the form of a countryside park.
- Local Plan does not identify an urgent need for housing of the type proposed; therefore, no basis for an exception to Green Belt policy.
- Changes to land are governed by Cambridge Southern Fringe AAP; nowhere in the Local Plan is it suggested that this policy is contingent on development of any part of this land.

**Location in relation to village access**

- Building development would be over 2km away by road from nearest shop.

- Nearest bus stop is in Gog Magog Way, served by the intermittent no.31 Bus which only goes as far as Addenbrookes.
- The GCP busway is a long way from being realised and should not be a material planning consideration.

#### Countryside Park

- No evidence of any needs analysis for the country park, nor that one is required to support the development (given that there are already two serving the villages; Wandlebury Country Park and Magog Downs Countryside Site).
- Concerned about viability and parks partner to take on management of such a site.
- Ideally new countryside park should be adjacent to, and an extension of, Magog Downs.

#### Undeclared Transport Impacts

- No effort to measure capacities of the junction of Haverhill Road and Babraham Road (A1307) or Shelford Road (A1301).
- Development will boost traffic during busy hours, meaning that traffic levels will be higher than current evening peak.

#### 24. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue** – No objection.

Request adequate provision be made for fire hydrants by way of a Section 106 agreement of planning condition.

#### 25. **Conservation Officer** – No objection.

#### 26. **Contaminated Land Officer** – No objection.

Recommend conditions requiring a detailed desk study and site walkover, risk assessment, remediation method statement, verification report and identification of additional or unexpected contamination.

#### 27. **Definitive Maps Officer** – No objection.

#### 28. **Designing Out Crime Officer** – No objection.

#### 29. **Ecology Officer** – No objection.

Recommend conditions requiring a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP), a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) and a Lighting Design Strategy for biodiversity.

The Planning Officer may wish to provide separate conditions to secure landscaping and management for the Retirement Village and Country Park.

#### 30. **Environment Agency** – No objection.



31. **Environmental Health** – No objection.

Recommend conditions for hours of works, driven pile foundations, spread of airborne dust, comprehensive construction programme, burning of waste, scheme for protecting proposed dwellings from noise from Haverhill Road, external lighting, waste management and minimisation strategy and assessment of noise impact of plant or equipment. Informatives relating to the noise insulation scheme condition, noise attenuation schemes and the Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document are also recommended.

32. **Greater Cambridge Partnership** – Holding Objection.

The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) welcomes the applicant's acknowledgement of the Cambridge South East Transport scheme (CSETS) route as part of their proposed development. However, at present there is a clear conflict between the location of the retirement village and the preferred CSETS route, which is a committed development within the Local Transport Plan. It is important that the Parameters Plans are updated to show the correct route alignment for this section of the CSETS route and bus stop at Hinton Way and Haverhill Road are shown/land safeguarded.

The GCP would like the CSETS route, its dimensions and provision for the bus stop to the west of the site to be secured in a S106 agreement for safeguarding purposes. It is important that the CSETS route is not compromised or restrict alternative options to ensure the delivery of the route within the project timeframe and is of the highest quality in terms of its attractiveness and convenience for its users.

Having therefore reviewed the proposed Parameter Plans, the GCP believe there are areas of clarification and amendments required to enable the above objectives to comply with the scheme objectives of the CSETS route. Therefore, at this stage, the GCP has a holding objection to the proposal

33. **Historic England** – No comments to offer.

34. **Historic Environment Team** – No objection.

Recommend condition requiring a programme of archaeological work which has been secured in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI).

35. **Landscape Officer** – Part objection (retirement village) part support (countryside park).

Retirement Village (object)

Disagree with the applicant's assessment that the development with landscape mitigation measures after a 1yr period would be major/moderate adverse effect & after a 15yr period would be moderate neutral based on the following criteria:

- Development of a retirement village upon agricultural land would be contrary to the Statement of Environmental Opportunity as outlined within National Character Area 87.
- SEO 1: Maintain sustainable but productive agricultural land use, while expanding and connecting the chalkland assemblage of semi-natural grasslands, for example by sensitive management of road verges and extending buffer strips along field margins, to benefit soil and water quality, reduce soil erosion, strengthen landscape character and enhance biodiversity and pollinator networks.
- SEO 3: Conserve and promote the landscape character, geodiversity, historic environment and historical assets of the chalklands, including the open views of undulating chalkland, large rectilinear field pattern and linear ditches, strong equine association and the Icknield Way prehistoric route. Improve opportunities to enhance people's enjoyment of the area while protecting levels of tranquillity.
- SEO 4: Conserve the settlement character and create or enhance sustainable urban drainage systems and green infrastructure within existing and new developments, particularly in relation to the urban fringe and growth areas such as south-east Cambridge, to provide recreation opportunities, increase soil and water quality and enhance landscape character.

Development of a main village centre does not reflect similar developments within or adjacent to the site particularly upon the edge of the settlement.

A 12 metre high main village centre would appear overbearing and incongruous particularly upon the edge of the rural village. It would be a noticeable encroachment into the countryside and an extension of the village framework.

Development would be major change, a permanent removal of an open agricultural field and a prominent new feature in the landscape particularly upon the edge of the village.

Agree that views to the site are limited due to the presence of roadside hedges, surrounding woodland and limited number of public rights of way. However, due to the undulating nature of the topography the mass and scale of the development would be visible particularly from the south east and north east.

Even with landscape mitigation measures the harm would be significantly adverse, unacceptable and contrary to policy NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character and HQ/1: Design Principles.

Countryside Park (support)

Agree with the applicant's assessment that the development with landscape mitigation measures after a 1yr period would be major neutral effect & after a 15yr period would be major beneficial effect. This area will change from arable to seminatural grassland and trees/scrub and would be more in keeping with objectives for landscape improvement and recreational / biodiversity benefits.

36. **Lead Local Flood Authority** – No objection.

Recommend conditions requiring a surface water drainage scheme for the site and details for the long term maintenance arrangements for the surface water drainage system. Informatives relating to infiltration and pollution control are also recommended.

37. **Local Highways Authority** – No objection.

Recommend conditions for visibility splays (as per drawing number 406.09693.00002.14.H011.1), junction access specifications (including radius kerbs, engineering scheme and metalled/sealed surface for a minimum length of 10 metres from the edge of the existing carriageway), access drainage measures and a traffic management plan. An informative relating to works to or within the public highway is also recommended.

38. **Natural England** – No objection.

39. **Sport England** – No comments to officer (development does not fall within either out statutory remit or non-statutory remit).

40. **Sustainable Drainage Engineer** – No objection.

Recommend conditions requiring a surface water drainage scheme for the site, a foul water drainage scheme for the site and details for the long term maintenance arrangements for the surface water drainage system.

41. **Sustainability Officer** – No objection.

Recommend conditions requiring an Energy Statement demonstrating a minimum 10% reduction in carbon emissions and water efficiency.

42. **The Magog Trust** – No objection.

The Magog Trust have been approached by Axis Land Partnerships with regard to managing the informal natural open space, should the planning application for a retirement village and associated countryside park in Stapleford, be given approval. We have expressed serious interest in managing this piece of land in that event and are in discussion with Axis Land Partnerships.

The proposal falls within the aims of The Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) which provides an overarching strategy for Cambridgeshire and highlights existing natural green space and opportunities for creating, linking, and improving it, including the major ecological networks of the Gog Magog Hills.

43. **Trees Officer** – No objection.

Documents including hedgerow or woodland management plan, detailed tree protection, detailed tree planning and landscape plans, tree planting

specification and detailed tree establishment and management plan should be provided with any reserved matters application.

Raises some queries over the boundary planting, block planting, integration of CAM route and information on urban part of the site. These matters can be dealt with by way of condition or submission of appropriate details as part of any reserved matters application

**44. Transport Assessment Team – No objection.**

Recommend conditions to secure a Travel Plan and provisions to create further accessibility by way of an existing separate link onto Gog Magog Way to the south of the site.

**45. Urban Design Officer – Objection.**

The proposed massing and height and the general approach to the layout configuration would result in a poor site layout and an adversely impact upon the openness and the rural character of the site's wider area. This is contrary to Paragraph 127 of the 'National Planning Policy Framework' (2019) (NPPF) and Policy HQ/1 of the 'South Cambridgeshire Local Plan' (2018).

Layout for Areas A & B look overdeveloped while the layout arrangement with right angles within the site gives an urban approach which would fail to reflect the character of the area. Concerns over single aspect rooms and whether the developer has fully considered the constraint/opportunity of the potential CAM route.

The development seems excessively large in terms of its bulky mass and height of 7-12 metres in relation to its surroundings and would be out of character, appearing overbearing and will act as a barrier and block the view out of the surrounding sites as well as openness of the site.

Indicative masterplan shows an overprovision of parking spaces and would result in cars dominating the public realm.

Concerns over insufficient private and communal amenity spaces within areas A and B.

## **Representations from members of the public**

46. 64 representations have been received to the application, 54 raising objection, eight commenting in support and two providing neutral comment. Full redacted versions of these comments can be found on the Council's website.

47. In summary the following objections have been raised:

Biodiversity

- Impact on bats hunting.

- Site of biodiversity or geological importance lost.

#### Character / Landscape

- Carving up land of agricultural and archaeological value will change the character of the area.
- Chalk down land is relatively uncommon throughout the UK and should not be built on.
- Countryside enhancement strategies for the site would not be required if it was left as it currently is.
- Density and height of development is out of keeping.
- Destroy rural setting / rural character.
- Diminish public views across open land.
- Highly visible, significant erosion of landscape.
- Loss of unspoiled landscape.
- Negative impact on rural nature of important Gog Magog hills.
- Negative visual impact on entrance to village, irrevocably altering the eastern boundary of the village.
- Out of proportion to size and density of Stapleford.
- Overdevelopment.

#### Countryside Park

- Adjacent busway would not be conducive to the need for serenity in the 'country park'.
- Countryside park is a risible attempt to mitigate, cannot ignore significant size of development (12 acres of housing).
- Creation of a large enclosed pocket of land which will be target for further development.
- Loss of green belt too higher price to pay for a country park.
- No mention of how country park will be managed and maintained.
- No need for a further country park; two country parks already.
- No parking for country park visitors.
- Sweetener in lieu of development Green Belt land.
- Too far away from village centres for park to be appreciated fully.

#### Flood Risk & Drainage

- Increased flood risk.
- Increased pressure on water / sewage.
- Major draw on the aquifer underneath us which is already being depleted.

#### Green Belt / Countryside

- Blurring of soft rural edge.
- Destruction of fields for development.
- Encroaching markedly on rolling chalk hills loses distinct separation between villages.
- Erosion of Green Belt
- Important to preserve green spaces (Covid-19 lesson).
- Inappropriate development in the Green Belt and countryside.
- Lack of a very special circumstances case.
- Loss of open space.
- Not a Green Belt exception.

- Open view and aspect of green belt land would be irrevocably lost.
- Outside village framework.
- Precedent for future Green Belt development.
- Slowly losing village status and becoming a suburb of Cambridge.
- South Cambridgeshire is far from over-blessed with greenbelt land – ranked 109 out of 186 local authorities that have greenbelt land, with just 26% of available land so designated.

#### Highway Safety & Parking

- Car dependant, increased pollution.
- Inaccuracies in transport assessment for average road width on Haverhill Road.
- Increase in on-street parking.
- Increased accident risk.
- Increased traffic flow and congestion.
- Low parking capacity.

#### Residential Amenity

- Loss of light.
- Loss of privacy.
- Overbearing impact.

#### Retirement Village (use)

- Ancillary uses can be found in village and surrounding villages.
- Caters for many residents who have no connection with Stapleford or Great Shelford; does not meet local demand.
- Does not provide much needed affordable housing.
- Expensive / high service charge.
- Insufficient demand for high-end retirement living.
- No requirement as local retirement home in Stapleford has many vacancies.
- Only "some" of the onsite facilities are likely to be available to non-residents.

#### Sustainability

- Distance from village communities and facilities.
- Lack of public transport links.
- Strain on doctors and dentists.

#### Other Matters

- Already a planned retirement complex in great Shelford and an existing retirement complex.
- Cynical developer consultation.
- Expect demanding conditions (i.e. renewables, sewer improvements).
- General location already assessed and dismissed for development within the last local plan.
- Health impact (during construction).
- Impact on heritage assets.

- Locals do not want this development at this site and have not incorporated this site in their Neighbourhood Plans and do not welcome this development.
- Loss of agricultural land.
- New housing in Stapleford should be low cost affordable housing.
- Noise impact.
- Noise nuisance from autonomous bus.
- Still discussion about GCP busway.
- The alternative sites assessment is not sufficiently robust and assessed only a narrow range of 'alternative' sites.
- The applicant has not sufficiently demonstrated that there is a specific local need in Stapleford which outweighs the adopted Local Plan. The district-wide assessment clearly indicates that the proposals can also be delivered in an alternative, more sustainable location elsewhere within the district, including elsewhere within the Rural Centre itself.
- Unlikely to release housing stock (cost of retirement village, cost of local housing).

48. In summary the following points of support have been raised:

- Allows families to down-size.
- Buildings should be limited to 2-storey.
- Countryside park should be transferred into the ownership of the Gog Magog Trust.
- Countryside park will provide useful link between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way and improve access to Magog Down and Wandlebury.
- Economic benefits.
- Enhance an already thriving village community
- Free up housing stock
- It should be a requirement of any planning approval that the managers of the retirement complex must provide communal transport for residents to local village centres.
- Land used for community.
- New facilities and open space.
- Provision of essential accommodation with associated support services.
- Retirement village should ideally contain affordable units.

49. In summary the following neutral comments have been raised:

- Parking restrictions should be considered near country park to prevent significant congestion.
- Welcome a country park but would object if cannot be ensured.

## **The site and its surroundings**

50. The site is located outside of the development framework boundary of Stapleford, in the Green Belt and open countryside. The south-eastern boundary of the site is approximately 60 metres from the edge of Stapleford development framework. The site is located in an area designated as improved landscaping under the Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan.

51. Stapleford Conservation Area is approximately 350 metres south west of the site. The nearest listed buildings are no.57 Bar Lane, a Grade II listed building located approximately 240 metres south of the site, and Middlefield and Garden Wall, Haverhill Road, a Grade II\* listed building located approximately 130 metres north of the site. The Church of St Andrew, a Grade II\* listed building is located approximately 550 metres to the south west of the site. To the north east of the site are several scheduled ancient monuments; the Iron Age hill-fort at Wandlebury, a Bronze Age barrow and a Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Little Trees Hill and a Bronze Age tumulus at Wormwood Hill with a Neolithic longbarrow. The nearest of these is Little Trees Hill, approximately 650 metres from site.
52. The site lies within flood zone 1 (low risk) with some small areas of surface water flooding identified adjacent to Chalk Hill, Gog Magog Way and Haverhill Road.
53. The site is formed from an L-shaped parcel of agricultural land coving an area of approximately 24.37 hectares between Hinton Way and Haverhill Road, which form the north-west and south-east boundaries of the site. Most of the south-west boundary of the site abuts open agricultural land while the southern-most portion abuts the rear boundaries of existing residential properties of Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill. The north-eastern boundary of the site abuts a farm track and mix of paddocks, garden land and agricultural land.
54. The site is used for arable agricultural uses and as such there is little existing vegetation within the site, aside from a small area of tree planting towards the sites northern edge. Most of the boundaries are formed by mature hedgerows. The topography of the site rises to the north with the lowest point of the site being approximately 20 metres above ordnance datum (AOD) rising to a highest point of approximately 43 metres AOD over a 600-metre distance.

## **The proposal**

55. This application seeks outline planning for the development of land for a retirement care village in Use Class C2 comprising housing with care, communal health, wellbeing and leisure facilities, public open space, landscaping, car parking, access and associated development and public access countryside park with all matters reserved except for access.

## **Retirement Care Village – Context**

56. The following context to a retirement care village is taken in part from several documents which have been submitted in support of the outline application, including the Planning Statement and Planning Needs Assessment.
57. The application seeks outline consent for use class C2 accommodation (residential institution) in the form of a retirement care village.
58. The Use Classes Order defines a C2 Use as “use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care.” Care is defined in the



Order as “personal care for people in need of such care by reason of old age, disablement, past or present dependence on alcohol or drugs, or past or present mental disorder and treatment.”

59. National policy is clear that housing should be provided that addresses the needs of groups with specific housing requirements including specialist accommodation for a group of people with specific needs (such as purpose-built accommodation for the elderly). The developer has indicated that a registered care provider is on board.

60. Annex 2 (glossary) of the National Planning Policy Framework defines ‘older people’ as:

People over or approaching retirement age, including the active, newly-retired through to the very frail elderly; and whose housing needs can encompass accessible, adaptable general needs housing through to the full range of retirement and specialised housing for those with support or care needs.

61. A retirement care village provides a range of homes to rent and to buy, with additional care facilities to support those who need it. The retirement care village model offers a combination of independence and security where older people can continue to live within their own space, supported by a flexible package of personal care services and activities. The model proposed within the application comprises the combination of a full care facility (i.e. a care home) and retirement accommodation with care linked packages. Such packages are often referred to as ‘assisted living’ or ‘extra care’.

62. Assisted Living or Extra Care Accommodation can provide a range of services to meet individual care needs and cater to the level of dependence required. Elderly people may wish to downsize from family housing but are not in need of the kind of intensive care arrangements that other elderly people may need. The level of care can adapt as the needs of the occupants change, enabling the elderly to buy in care packages to suit their needs rather than paying the fixed costs of a nursing home or residential care home.

63. Alongside integrating with local communities, retirement care villages are provided with on-site facilities, which are available to the public as well as the occupants. Such facilities can include dining, leisure, gym, swimming pool, hairdressers, activity rooms and gardens with outdoor recreation).

## **Planning Assessment**

64. The application is an outline application with all matters reserved except for access; matters of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are reserved.

65. The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 provides a definition of what each matters means in practice:

“access”, in relation to reserved matters, means the accessibility to and within the site, for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians in terms of the positioning and treatment of access and circulation routes and how these fit into the surrounding access network; where “site” means the site or part of the site in respect of which outline planning permission is granted or, as the case may be, in respect of which an application for such a permission has been made;

66. The NPPG offers the following guidance concerning outline planning applications, which is relevant to the assessment of the application.

What details need to be submitted with an outline planning application?

Information about the proposed use or uses, and the amount of development proposed for each use, is necessary to allow consideration of an application for outline planning permission.

Under article 5(3) of the Development Management Procedure Order 2015, an application for outline planning permission must also indicate the area or areas where access points to the development will be situated, even if access has been reserved.

Paragraph: 034 Reference ID: 14-034-20140306  
Revision date: 06 03 2014

Can details of reserved matters be submitted with an outline application?

An applicant can choose to submit details of any of the reserved matters as part of an outline application. Unless the applicant has indicated that those details are submitted “for illustrative purposes only” (or has otherwise indicated that they are not formally part of the application), the local planning authority must treat them as part of the development in respect of which the application is being made; the local planning authority cannot reserve that matter by condition for subsequent approval.

Paragraph: 035 Reference ID: 14-035-20140306  
Revision date: 06 03 2014

67. Alongside the site location plan (J0027450\_011) which identified the extent of the site, the application is supported by several parameter plans. Paragraph 6.4 of the Planning Statement details that the parameters plans define the parameters of the development proposals and would provide the framework for subsequent reserved matters applications to follow. These plans are not marked “illustrative” or “indicative”.
- Parameter Plan: Land Use and Building Heights (J0027450\_008).
  - Parameter Plan: Landscape (J0027450\_009)
  - Parameter Plan: Access and movement (J0027450\_010)
68. An illustrative masterplan (J0027450\_005\_Rev A) has also been submitted to support the application to illustrate how a development of the nature proposed

could be delivered within the site in line with the parameters set out in the Parameter Plans.

69. Part 16 of the Application Form cites the development of 17,825sqm of floorspace under use class C2-Residential Institutions.
70. The key issues to consider in the determination of this application relate to:
- Whether the proposal would represent inappropriate development in principle in the Green Belt;
  - Whether the proposal would result in any other harm in terms of
    - i. Countryside Impact
    - ii. Green Belt: openness and purposes
    - iii. Character and Appearance of the Area
    - iv. Landscape
    - v. Biodiversity
    - vi. Trees
    - vii. Highway Safety and Parking
    - viii. Flood Risk and Drainage
    - ix. Heritage Assets
    - x. Residential Amenity
    - xi. Renewables / Climate Change
    - xii. Contaminated Land
    - xiii. Loss of Agricultural Land
    - xiv. Other Matters; and,
  - Whether there are any very special circumstances that would clearly outweigh harm through inappropriateness and any other harm identified to justify the development.

### **Principle of Development**

71. The site is located outside of the development framework boundary of Stapleford, in the Green Belt and open countryside.
72. Policy S/4 of the Local Plan sets out that that a Green Belt will be maintained around Cambridge that will define the extent of the urban area. New development in the Green Belt will only be approved in accordance with Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
73. Chapter 13 of the NPPF deals with protecting Green Belt land.
74. Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
75. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF sets out that the Green Belt serves five purposes:
- 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.
76. Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
77. Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
78. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. '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.
79. Paragraph 145 of the NPPF states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
  - b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
  - c) 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;
  - d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
  - e) limited infilling in villages;
  - f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
  - g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
    - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
    - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.
80. Paragraph 146 of the NPPF states that certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- a) mineral extraction;
- b) engineering operations;
- c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

81. The existing site comprises relatively open arable agricultural land bound by mature hedgerows, situated on the northern edge of Stapleford. The site is formed from an L-shaped parcel of land coving an area of approximately 24.37 hectares between Hinton Way and Haverhill Road with land levels rising to the north. The site is greenfield; no part of the site could be considered brownfield land.
82. The application seeks outline planning consent for the development of land for a retirement care village comprising housing with care, communal health, wellbeing and leisure facilities, public open space, landscaping, car parking, access and associated development and public access countryside park.
83. Although the application must be considered as a whole, there are two distinct elements to consider in Green Belt terms; the development of a retirement care village and the development of a countryside park.
84. Paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF clearly define development that should not be regarded as inappropriate within the Green Belt. The retirement care village would not align with any of these definitions and would therefore comprise inappropriate development.
85. The creation of a countryside park would represent appropriate development, in line with paragraphs 141 and 146(e) of the NPPF.
86. The proposal therefore constitutes inappropriate development.
87. The NPPF makes it clear that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The NPPF is also clear that, when considering any application, planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate why permission should be granted, and the NPPF sets out that that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other material considerations.
88. It is therefore necessary to consider whether the development of the retirement care village results in any further harm, in addition to that caused by inappropriateness.

## **Countryside Impact**

89. Policy S/7 of the Local Plan states that outside development frameworks, only allocations within Neighbourhood Plans that have come into force and development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses which need to be located in the countryside or where supported by other policies in this plan will be permitted.
90. No Neighbourhood plans are in force that would be applicable to this application.
91. There are no other Local Plan policies which would support the development of a retirement care village outside of a development framework boundary.
92. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy S/7 of the Local Plan.
93. A key objective of Policy S/7 is to ensure that the countryside is protected from gradual encroachment that would result in urban sprawl and urbanisation of the countryside. The impact of the development on the countryside is explored more fully below.

## **Green Belt Openness and Purposes**

### Openness

94. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence (NPPF, paragraph 133).
95. There is however no specific definition of “openness” in the NPPF. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) states that openness can have both spatial and visual aspects.
96. When considering the impact on the openness of the Green Belt, this is not affected by natural screening (i.e. trees and hedgerows) as these are not permanent features; openness means the absence of buildings or development. When openness is reduced, harm takes place regardless of whether it is visible or witnessed. Measures in mitigation can never completely remove the harm since a development that is wholly invisible to the eye remains, by definition, adverse to openness.
97. The application is in outline only with all matters reserved apart from access. The application does not provide full details of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale associated to the retirement care village for approval at this stage. Nonetheless, there are several supporting plans and documents which provide some context to the proposed retirement care village.

98. The application is supported by a Parameter Plan for Land Use and Building Heights (J0027450\_008). The Parameter Plan, which is not marked “illustrative” or “indicative”, shows a 3.12-hectare area of built development for the retirement care village with a further 1.8 hectares of associated amenity open space. Within the area of built development, the plan sets out three scales to the buildings within the complex comprising 2-storey (ridge height up to 12m), 2-storey (ridge height up to 8m) and single storey (ridge height up to 7m).
99. The application is also supported by a plan titled ‘Illustrative Masterplan with Countryside Park’ (J0027450\_005\_Rev A). Although illustrative only, the plan provides a sense of how the development could be accommodated on the site.
100. Part 16 of the application form cites the development of 17,825sqm of floorspace under use class C2-Residential Institutions. The Planning Statement submitted in support of the application sets out that the indicative scheme presented suggests that the scheme could provide a central care home of up to 110 bed spaces/rooms/units with associated facilities, up to 110 retirement dwellings with care link packages, with up to 17,825sqm proposed floor space overall.
101. Notwithstanding the fact that the application is in outline form with details of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved, it is evident that the proposed development of a retirement care village would introduce a significant amount of built form onto a site currently absent of buildings or development. By virtue of the introduction of a built development on undeveloped land, the retirement care village would inevitably reduce openness which the NPPF describes as an essential characteristic of the Green Belt.
102. The proposed retirement care village would have a substantial and detrimental impact on the openness of the site in both a spatial sense, through the introduction of a significant built form of development, and a visual sense, through the loss of greenness and the sight of a substantial urban form.
103. Officers consider that the spatial and visual harm to openness would constitute significant harm to the Green Belt, in addition to inappropriateness.

#### Purposes

104. As defined by paragraph 134 of the NPPF, the Green Belt serves five purposes: (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.
105. Fundamentally, the development of a retirement care village would have a significant urbanising effect on the site that cannot be said to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. Thus, the development of a retirement care village would be in direct conflict with the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment by replacing an open and undeveloped site with

a significant and extensive built form of development. Accordingly, the proposal would result in the expanse of buildings sprawling across the site which is currently absent of buildings or development providing further conflict.

106. Officers consider that there is clear and significant conflict with Green Belt purposes, in addition to inappropriateness.

#### Conclusion

107. The development of a retirement care village would result in a substantial loss of openness and would conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt.
108. The development would therefore be contrary to accord Policy S/4 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

#### **Character and Appearance of the Area**

109. The site is located on the north eastern edge of the village of Stapleford, detached from the development framework boundary, in the Green Belt and open countryside.
110. The site is formed from an L-shaped parcel of agricultural land between Hinton Way and Haverhill Road, bound typically by mature hedgerows, with the topography of the site rising to the north.
111. The area is distinctly rural in character with wide open views of the countryside readily available from the public realm. The existing agricultural and undeveloped nature of the site contributes positively to the rural setting and character of the edge of Stapleford village.
112. The residential development towards the village edge is generally more spacious, predominantly two storeys in scale, within a setting that forms a strong visual tie between the surrounding open farmland / countryside and the village of Stapleford. The existing development presents a relatively soft rural edge to the village which does not significantly interrupt wide open views of the surrounding countryside, largely maintaining the vast rural vista that is available on the village edge; these aspects all contribute positively to the rural character of the area.
113. There are residential properties immediately to the south of the site which comprise a terrace of three single storey properties to the west of Haverhill Road. Development along the northern edge of Gog Magog Way comprises a mix of two storey detached, semi-detached and terraced properties, with two storey terraced properties forming the development on Chalk Hill. These properties are located outside of the development framework boundary of Stapleford and largely within the Green Belt. These properties were developed as rural exception sites (a form of development principally considered appropriate development in Green Belt terms).



114. The areas rural character is enhanced further by the presence of Stapleford recreation ground, allotments and Greenhedge Farm located to the south of the site beyond Gog Magog Way, adjacent to existing residential development. This central area of open space forms a relatively open and undeveloped parcel of land covering an area of approximately 9.25 hectares that is lined by mature trees and low-level post and rail fencing. A portion of this area is allocated for open space under Policy SC/1(1a) of the Local Plan to meet local need for open space as an extension to the existing recreation ground (approximately 1.42 hectares).
115. The buildings within Greenhedge Farm are predominantly single storey buildings of an agricultural form and appearance, with a central two storey residential building. Stapleford pavilion, a single storey building, is also located within this area. None of these buildings are particularly prominent within the wider area of open space or from the surrounding public realm.
116. It is notable that the Green Belt encompasses this area of open space, which acts as a 'green lung' into the village and a positive characteristic to the softer rural edge and character of the village. Were it not for the development of the two rural exception sites to the north of the recreation ground, which are relatively modest in the scale, siting and proportion, the Green Belt and countryside would sweep uninterrupted into the village. Nonetheless, the appreciation of the open countryside beyond the northern and eastern boundaries of the village is clear.
117. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Urban Design Officer, who raises objection to the proposed development. Officers also acknowledge the objections of Stapleford Parish Council and third-party representations where objection is raised to the impact of the development on the character of the area. Officers note that the objections raised begin to pick up details which are reserved at this stage.
118. While the application is in outline form, the NPPG details that information about the proposed use or uses, and the amount of development proposed for each use, is necessary to allow consideration of an application for outline planning permission (Paragraph: 034 Reference ID: 14-034-20140306). Officers are therefore guided by the supporting information that has been submitted with the application, which is taken to be a fair representation of how the development could be accommodated, in order to assess the retirement care village and its potential impact on the character of the area.
119. The Planning Statement sets out that the retirement care village would comprise a central care home of up to 110 bed spaces/rooms/units with associated facilities and up to 110 residential dwellings with care link packages, with up to 17,825sqm proposed floor space overall; this floor space is reflected in Part 16 of the Application Form.
120. The Parameters Plan for Land Use and Building Heights, which the Planning Statement details would provide the framework for subsequent reserved matters applications, sets out how the development would be likely be arranged

over a 3.12 hectare area of built form across three scales comprising 2-storey (ridge height up to 12m), 2-storey (ridge height up to 8m) and single storey (ridge height up to 7m), with the larger buildings towards the southern portion of the site. The concept is visualised on the illustrative masterplan which gives a strong sense of the likely development, although officers note that this plan is for illustrative purposes only.

121. In terms of density, the development of up to 220 units over an area of 3.12 hectares would equate to 70 units per hectare, not including any associated facilities which would also form part of the retirement care village.
122. In the context of adopted policy, Policy H/8 of the Local Plan sets out that housing developments should achieve an average net density of 30 dwellings per hectare, which may vary where justified by the character of the locality, the scale of development, or other local circumstances. Although the development is not for C3-residential use, adopted policy provides some context for the likely density of development proposed when considering the character of the area, albeit the arrangements of up to 110 care home units (i.e. bedrooms) heightens the density being provided as a care home building (or buildings) rather than individual units with their own private amenity space.
123. Officers consider that the retirement care village would result in a dense urban development on the edge of a rural village. It cannot be said that a development of that nature would be justified by the character of the locality and that the development would therefore be at odds with its wider surroundings and significantly out of keeping with the character of the area.
124. The supporting information indicates that development is also likely to be significant in terms of its scale and form. The Parameter Plan indicates ridge heights ranging from 7 metres up to 12 metres. Despite the Parameters Plan quoting a '2-storey' scale, officers strongly question whether a ridge of up to 12 metres could be considered two storeys and whether 7-metres would constitute 'single storey'.
125. The existing development to the south of the site is predominately of a two storey scale with ridge heights estimated to range between 7 and 8.5 metres (based on a review of nearby historic planning consents). The arrangements set out on the Parameter Plan would therefore likely eclipse the scale of existing development in the surrounding area, noting that topography of the site rises to the north.
126. Officers acknowledge that the matters of scale and layout are reserved. However, given the specific reference to 17,825sqm of floor space in the Application Form, it is difficult to see how the development could be accommodated on the site in a manner that departs significantly from the details set out on the Parameter Plan(s) submitted in support of the application. Again, officers note that the Planning Statement details that the Parameter Plans would provide the framework for subsequent reserved matters applications (i.e. these are likely expected to form approved plans as part of any consent).

127. Clearly the retirement care village is a 'major development' and by its nature would comprise a considerable amount of built form, noting how such a development would operate. Consequently, there would be a marked difference between the character of the development, which would likely be of a substantial urban form, and that of its surroundings, creating a significant and harmful contrast with the rural character of the village.
128. Although landscaping measures are proposed around the retirement care village, noting that landscape is also a reserved matter, they would not completely mask the development from the public realm, as acknowledged in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal submitted in support of the application (considered in more detail later in this report).
129. Officers consider that the retirement care village would result in a significant visual intrusion into the rural edge of Stapleford village that would fail to be compatible with its location, resulting in an urbanised site which would be out of step with its wider surroundings.
130. Overall, the development of a retirement care village on the site is not considered to reflect or respect the strong rural characteristics of Stapleford or respond to the sites sensitive edge of village and countryside location. In particular, the development would inevitably introduce a distinctly urban and substantial form of development on land which is currently open, absent of built form, and contributes positively to the rural character of the area. The development would be out of keeping with the local vernacular, appearing as an uncharacteristically dense, incongruous and extensive urban form of development to the village edge.
131. The retirement care village would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
132. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies HQ/1 and NH/8 of the Local Plan and NPPF guidance.

## **Landscape**

133. The site is located outside of Stapleford development framework boundary, in the Green Belt and countryside.
134. The site is not situated in an area with any national or local designations and as such does not fall within the scope of valued landscapes under Paragraph 170 of the NPPF.
135. The site is located within the National Character Area '87. East Anglian Chalk'. The area has a strong rural character with a distinctive landform of smooth rolling chalk hills and gently undulating chalk plateau with settlement focused in small towns and in villages. Villages in the area typically have strong historic linear forms abutted by fields or woodlands that contribute to the rural character of the area.

136. The site is used for arable agricultural uses and as such there is little existing vegetation within the site, aside from a small area of tree planting towards the sites northern edge. Most of the boundaries are formed by mature hedgerows with occasional trees. The topography of the site rises to the north.
137. The application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) (The Landscape Partnership, March 2020). Although the application is in outline form only, the LVA sets out in 'Part 6 Proposals', that the submitted Parameter Plans and Illustrative Masterplan which support the application provide the basis for the scheme that has been assessed as part of the LVA.
138. The LVA sets out in paragraph 6.6 that the heights and scale of the units within the development step down across the site from the lower lying landform to the south-west up the relatively higher north-east part of the development. The main care home is therefore located to the lower ground and would be up to 12 metres in height, two storey apartments are located to the centre of the site at up to 8 metre heights while one and a half storey apartments and bungalows up to 7 metres in height are located to the naturally higher parts of the site.
139. Paragraph 6.7 of the LVA details that the retirement care village would include new structural woodland planting to help visually contain the new built forms of development, publically accessible recreation routes into the site from Gog Magog Way and vehicular access off Haverhill Road. There would be retention of the majority of the roadside hedgerow to Haverhill Road aside from the point of access with supplementary tree planting to take place within the site and landscaped areas between the development and adjacent properties.
140. In terms of the effects on site features, the LVA concludes that the retirement care village would result in limited change to the topography of the site, that there would be minimal loss of existing vegetation as this largely comprises hedges and occasional trees to the site perimeter and that there would be a complete change from the arable land use.
141. For the impact on visual effects, the LVA concludes that near to the site the proposed development would be clear from Haverhill Road above the hedges and at the new site entrance. At closer locations there would be up to a major/moderate adverse effect at year 1, reduced to moderate/minor adverse depending on locations as the proposed structure planting matures. There would be no views of the retirement care village from Hinton Way due to the containing landform and vegetation, while views from Stapleford are limited, where the maximum levels of effect even at year 1 are considered minor adverse.
142. The LVA details that the development would be clearly visible looking north-west from a right of way to the south-east of the site, extending the village limit to a degree and resulting in a moderate adverse effect at year 1 then reducing to minor adverse by year 15 with the growth of trees on the site. There would be an elevated view of the development from an area of accessible open space, Magog Down to the north-east. Receptors at this location are assessed as being high sensitivity and there would be a medium magnitude of change at

year 1 with a major/moderate adverse effect, reducing to moderate adverse by year 15 with the establishment of the woodland blocks proposed within and around the site.

143. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Landscape Officer who raises objection to the retirement care village. Officers also acknowledge the objections of Stapleford Parish Council and third-party representations where objection is raised to the impact of the landscape.
144. The Council's Landscape Officer disagrees with the assessment of the LVA that the development with landscape mitigation measures after a 1-year period would be major/moderate adverse effect and after a 15-year period would be moderate neutral with reference to development of a retirement care village on agricultural land being contrary to the Statement of Environments Opportunity (SEO) as outlined within National Character Area 87. These include:
  - SEO 1: Maintain sustainable but productive agricultural land use, while expanding and connecting the chalkland assemblage of semi-natural grasslands, for example by sensitive management of road verges and extending buffer strips along field margins, to benefit soil and water quality, reduce soil erosion, strengthen landscape character and enhance biodiversity and pollinator networks., while expanding and connecting semi-natural.
  - SEO 3: Conserve and promote the landscape character, geodiversity, historic environment and historical assets of the chalklands, including the open views of undulating chalkland, large rectilinear field pattern and linear ditches, strong equine association and the Icknield Way prehistoric route. Improve opportunities to enhance people's enjoyment of the area while protecting levels of tranquillity.
  - SEO 4: Conserve the settlement character and create or enhance sustainable urban drainage systems and green infrastructure within existing and new developments, particularly in relation to the urban fringe and growth areas such as south-east Cambridge, to provide recreation opportunities, increase soil and water quality and enhance landscape character.
145. The topography of the site would be elevated above existing development to the south. Due to the undulating nature of the site's surroundings, together with the in fact that the development would inevitably introduce a distinctly urban and substantial form of development on land which is currently open, the development would be visible from the wider public realm, particularly from the south east and north east.
146. The retirement care village would result in a major change to the existing landscape character, particularly upon the edge of the village, by virtue of the permanent removal of an open agricultural field and the introduction of a new and prominent urban feature in the landscape. Such a development would do little to conserve and promote the landscape character, including the open

views of undulating chalkland (SEO 3) or to conserve the settlement character (SEO 4).

147. Although landscape mitigation measures are proposed around the retirement care village, again noting that landscape is a reserved matter, such measures would not completely mask the development from the public realm, as acknowledged in the LVA. Much reliance would be placed on the boundary vegetation to screen the development and soften the juncture between the built form of development and the agricultural fields and countryside beyond. Even with landscape mitigation measures officers consider that the harm to the landscape arising from a substantial built form would be significantly adverse.
148. Officers also acknowledge the context of the Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan which identifies the area in which the application is located as an element of the southern fringe landscape and is designated as an area of improved landscaping. The development of a retirement care village would clearly conflict with the intent of an area of improved landscaping.
149. Officers consider that the retirement care village would result in a significant visual intrusion into the landscape and soft rural edge of the village which would do little to respect, retain or enhance the local character and the distinctiveness of the local landscape.
150. The retirement care village would result in significant adverse harm to landscape character.
151. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies S/7, HQ/1, NH/2 and NH/8 of the Local Plan and NPPF guidance.

## **Biodiversity**

152. The application is supported by an Ecology Report (MHE Consulting, March 2020) and an Ecology Response document following initial comments from the Council's Ecology Officer (MHE Consulting October 2020).
153. The report sets out that the retirement care village would result in the loss of predominately arable land, with minor losses of hedgerow, and that the application site is generally low in ecological value (as the vast majority is arable). The report notes that this element of the site is unsuitable for amphibians, lacking permanent cover. Integrated swift boxes are to be incorporated into the buildings on the retirement village site while sparrow terraces will be erected under the eaves of ancillary buildings within the retirement complex.
154. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Ecology Officer who raises no objection to the proposed development following the response document to address initial concerns/queries, subject to three conditions.

155. The first would require the submission of a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP) prior to, or concurrently with, the submission of the first reserved matters application, to protect existing habitats and protected species on site and to enhance the site for biodiversity. The CEcMP would require the submission of details including a risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities, practical measures to avoid or reduce impacts during construction, the location and timings of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features and the use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs if applicable.
156. The second would require the submission of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) prior to, or concurrently with, the submission of the first reserved matters application, to provide habitat for wildlife and enhance the require the submission of details including aims and objectives for management (including how a minimum of 10% in biodiversity net gain will be achieved) and ongoing monitoring and remedial measures.
157. The final condition would require a lighting design strategy for biodiversity to be submitted prior to occupation of the development in order to clearly demonstrated that areas to be lit will not disturb or prevent the species (i.e. bats) using their territory or having access to their breeding sites and resting places.
158. Officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of conditions requiring a CEcMP, LEMP and lighting design, the development of a retirement care village would be acceptable in terms of its impact on biodiversity.
159. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy NH/4 of the Local Plan.

## **Trees**

160. The application is supported by a Tree Survey & Preliminary Arboricultural Impact Assessment Plan (drawing number LSDP 1443.01, Land & Sculpture Design Partnership). The Plan highlights the general absence of any significant planting within the site, aside from a small area of tree planting towards the sites northern edge, and that most of the boundaries are formed by mature hedgerows with some trees. The Plan illustrates a section of hedgerow along the eastern edge of the retirement care village adjacent to Haverhill Road which would be removed / cut as part of the development, along with several areas of root protection.
161. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Trees Officer who raises no objection to the proposal, noting that there are no trees on or adjacent to the site that have any statutory protection and that there are hedgerows on or adjacent to the site which may qualify as 'important hedgerows' under the Hedgerow Regulations (1997) and/or have no statutory protection.
162. The Council's Trees Officer provides a list of recommended documents that would be required to support any reserved matters application with further

guidance on what these documents should incorporate through several queries raised to the proposal. Officers note from the information provided that additional tree planting would be incorporated into the development, full details of which would be provided as part of any reserved matters application.

163. Based on the information provided to support the outline application, officers are satisfied that the proposed development would not result in harm to trees.
164. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy NH/4 of the Local Plan.

### **Highway Safety and Parking**

165. Access is a matter included within the outline application for consideration.
166. The application is supported by a parameter plan for access and movement (drawing number J0027450\_010). The plan illustrates a single main vehicular access to the retirement care village from Haverhill Road and a pedestrian access from Gog Magog Way. The application is also supported by a Transport Assessment and Framework Travel Plan (SLR, March 2020) and Technical Note (SLR, November 2020).
167. Access to the site would be taken directly from Haverhill Road on a section of the public highway that is subject to a 40mph speed limit. There is an informal footway running along the eastern side of Haverhill Road which extends from the edge Stapleford village north as far as the junction to Magog Down.
168. Drawing number 406.09693.00002.14.H011.1 (Access Assessment Option 2) contained within the Technical Note (SLR, November 2020) illustrates how the development would achieve the visibility splays required, being 2.4 metres by 160 metres from and along the highway boundary. The drawing also illustrates a new footway to link to the existing footway on the northern edge of the village and an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing facility across Haverhill Road to tie into the existing footway on the eastern side of the highway to the north of the proposed access.
169. As set out in the Transport Assessment and Technical Note (SLR), the TRICS database has been used to predict the multi-modal trip generation of the retirement care village. The data forecasts that the retirement care village would generate 31 two-way movements in the AM peak, 38 vehicular movements in the PM peak and 575 movements in a 24-hour period. It is also forecast that most of the traffic would route to/from the north via Babraham Road A1307 / Haverhill Road junction and the development is unlikely to have any detrimental impact on the operation of local junctions.
170. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Local Highways Authority who raise no objection to the proposal, subject to conditions for visibility splays, radius kerbs, access construction details and a traffic management plan.



171. The application has also been subject to formal consultation with the Transport Assessment Team who raise no objection to the proposal, subject to conditions for a Travel Plan and the creation of further accessibility link onto Gog Magog Way to the south of the site.
172. Officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of the conditions for visibility splays, radius kerbs, access construction details, a traffic management plan, creation of further accessibility to the south of the site and a Travel Plan, the development of a retirement care village would be acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety and the highway network.
173. The proposal would therefore comply with Policies TI/2 and TI/3 of the Local Plan and paragraph 109 of the NPPF.

### **Flood Risk and Drainage**

174. The site falls within flood zone 1 and is therefore at a low risk of flooding. There are some small areas of surface water flooding identified adjacent to Chalk Hill, Gog Magog Way and Haverhill Road.
175. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment and Sustainable Drainage Strategy (MTC Engineering, March 2020).
176. The assessment considers all sources of flood risk and concludes that there are no significant risks of flooding to the site. A low risk of surface water flooding in small areas of the site is identified, however, they can be dealt with through appropriate design and therefore do not give rise to any significant flooding concerns. The assessment also sets out that no specific flood resistant or resilient construction methods are required although flow paths will be maintained across the site in a southerly direction to mimic the existing situation and finished floor levels designed to ensure that water will not pool or enter buildings. The assessment details that the proposed development can be entirely drained by infiltration in line with the drainage hierarchy preference and that adequate treatment will be provided to all surface water prior to discharge by the SuDS systems.
177. The application has been subject to formal consultation with Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, the Lead Local Flood Authority and the Council's Sustainable Drainage Engineer and no objection is raised, subject to conditions.
178. The Lead Local Flood Authority note in their comments that the assessment submitted demonstrate that surface water from the proposed development can be managed through the use of permeable paving with subbase attenuation, allowing surface water to infiltrate into the ground and that swales will also be considered for surface water conveyance.
179. Both the Lead Local Food Authority and the Council's Sustainable Drainage Engineer recommend conditions to require a surface water drainage scheme for the site prior to works above slab level and details for the long-term maintenance arrangements of the surface water drainage system prior to

occupation. The conditions would ensure that the proposed development can be adequately drainage and that there is no increased flood risk on or off site resulting from the proposed development along with satisfactory maintenance of systems that are not publicly adopted, in line with policy guidance.

180. Officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of conditions requiring a surface water drainage scheme and associated maintenance as part of any consent, the development of a retirement care village would be acceptable in terms of flood risk and surface water drainage.
181. In terms of foul water drainage officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of a condition requiring a foul water drainage scheme as part of any consent, the development of a retirement care village would be acceptable.
182. The proposal would therefore comply with Policies CC/7, CC/8 and CC/9 of the Local Plan.

### **Heritage Impact**

183. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 requires decision-makers to pay “special regard to the desirability of preserving the (listed) building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”.
184. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 requires decision-makers to pay “special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area”.
185. Chapter 16 of the NPPF focuses on conserving and enhancing the historic environment.
186. In considering the potential impacts of development, paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation with paragraph 194 of the NPPF detailing that any harm to, or loss of, significance should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 195 of the NPPF sets out that where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to a designated heritage assets consent should be refused, unless that harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Paragraph 196 of the NPPF details that where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
187. Paragraph 197 of the NPPF requires the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage to be taken into account. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
188. Policy NH/14 of the Local Plan sets out support for development proposals when they sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets, including

their settings, as appropriate to their significance and in accordance with the NPPF. Policy HQ/1 of the Local Plan also requires development to conserve or enhance important historic assets and their settings.

189. The application is supported by a Heritage Statement (John Selby, March 2020).
190. The statement identifies that the site lies close to the northern edge of Stapleford conservation area while to the north lie the listed buildings of Middlefield and Pinewood along with Fox Hill, which may be a non-designated heritage asset. The statement highlights that the Edwardian mansions are set in the former Foxhill Plantation, built to be exclusive, away from the main settlement, with spacious grounds and secluded surroundings; this setting is of high significance.
191. The statement further details that the scheduled ancient monuments in the north of Stapleford parish are of the highest significance, forming part of a wider prehistoric landscape of national significance. The statement sets out that within this setting are several archaeological sites which are collectively of high significance.
192. The statement concludes, with reference to the findings of the supporting Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA), that views from the conservation area towards the site are across the arable fields towards the proposed countryside park. The statement further details that the development of the retirement village will not impinge on the setting of the conservation area, given the limited intervisibility between them.
193. In terms of the listed buildings and their settings, the statement sets out that the sylvan setting of the Edwardian mansions on Foxhill remain unaffected with views to and from this group of buildings, disrupted only by planting within the proposed countryside park. The retirement village is on the village edge and therefore does not cause harm to the setting of these listed buildings.
194. The statement does identify harm to the significance of the scheduled ancient monument to the north of the site, specifically Little Trees Hill, which forms part of a group of scheduled monuments in the north of Stapleford Parish, including Roman Road, Wandlebury and Wormwood Hill.
195. There are elevated views towards the site from part of Magog Down, accessible to the public, including the southern area to the south-west of the copse on Little Trees Hill. The statement recognises that the application site forms part of a panorama to the south-west which includes the existing village which is relatively well contained within existing trees and vegetation, noting that the LVA identifies that the development will have a moderate adverse impact on this view.
196. The statement concludes that the proposed development impinges on this wider view and the retirement village element will cause some harm to the appreciation of the setting. However, the statement considers the harm to be

less than substantial harm (and in this case the level of less than substantial harm is low to medium) which would therefore need to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, with the statement noting there to be several which carry considerable weight in this instance.

197. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Historic Environment Team and Historic England, who raise no objection to the proposal and do not identify any harm that would arise from the development of a retirement care village.
198. Officers are satisfied that the retirement care village would not result in harm to Stapleford conservation area or the setting of nearby listed buildings given the separation between the designated heritage assets and the proposed built form of development, along with their limited intervisibility, and concur with the conclusions of the submitted Heritage Statement.
199. Officers note that the Heritage Statement submitted does identify less than substantial harm to the to the setting of Little Trees Hill, a scheduled ancient monument, albeit no such concern has been raised by the technical consultees.
200. Nonetheless, in line with the provisions of the NPPF, whilst considerable weight must be given to any harm to designated heritage assets, it would need be weighed against the public benefits from the scheme. In this instance, there are wider benefits to the proposal (set out later in this report: see very special circumstances) that are considered to outweigh the less than substantial harm identified within the Heritage Statement, again noting the lack of objection from the Council's Historic Environment Team and Historic England.
201. In terms of the developments potential impact on archaeology, the application has been subject to formal consultation with Cambridgeshire County Council's Historic Environment Team who raise no objection to the proposal, subject to a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work to be secured in accordance with a written scheme of investigation.
202. Officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of a condition requiring a programme of archaeological as part of any consent, the development would be acceptable in terms of its impact on archaeology.
203. Overall, the proposal is considered acceptable in heritage terms and to comply with Policy NH/14 of the Local Plan and national guidance.

### **Residential Amenity**

204. The application is in outline form with matters of scale, layout and appearance reserved. Therefore, the final layout of the retirement care village and the scale and appearance of the development (i.e. fenestration details) are not known at this stage.
205. The Parameter Plan for Land Use and Building Heights indicates where the built form of development would be contained, along with maximum ridge heights, in

relation to the existing residential properties to the south west of the development. The Illustrative Masterplan provides a sense of how the layout of the retirement care village could be accommodated on the site in relation to existing residential properties to the south.

206. The Parameter Plan indicates that the edge of the retirement care village would be at least 24 metres (approximately) from the southern edge of the application site boundary at least 14 metres (approximately) from the south-western site boundary.
207. Officers acknowledge the concerns which have been raised locally with respect to a potential overbearing impact, loss of privacy and loss of light from the proposed retirement care village.
208. Given separation between the proposed built form of development and existing residential properties, officers are satisfied that the retirement care village is unlikely to result in an unduly overbearing mass, significant loss of light, severe loss of privacy or unacceptable increase in the level of noise and disturbance to occupiers of the adjacent properties.
209. However, these matters would be considered further at the reserved matters stage.
210. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy HQ/1(n) of the Local Plan.

### **Renewables / Climate Change**

211. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Sustainability Officer who notes that the Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement submitted in support of the application fail to include any detail relating to sustainable construction, energy efficiency or renewables and low/zero carbon technology.
212. Local Plan Policies CC/1, CC/3 and CC/4 require development to demonstrate and embed the principles of climate change mitigation and adaptation, that the carbon emissions of the development are at least 10% lower than that of a standard development and all new residential developments to achieve as a minimum water efficiency equivalent to 110 litres per person per day.
213. The Council's Sustainability Officer raises no objection to the proposed development, subject to conditions requiring an Energy Statement (to demonstrate a minimum of 10% reduction in carbon emissions) and water efficiency specifications. The Sustainability Officer also comments that if commercial premises are included with the development and the layout of these is 1,000sqm or greater then it is possible that other non-residential policies may apply. Officers are satisfied that this matter could be dealt with through suitably worded conditions to cover such an eventuality.

214. Notwithstanding the lack of information at this stage officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions, the proposal would comply with Policies CC/1, CC/3 and CC/4 of the Local Plan.

### **Contaminated Land**

215. The application is supported by a Phase 1 Desk Study and Preliminary Risk Assessment (Geosphere Environmental, June 2019). While there are no historical uses likely to give rise to contamination the report sets out that there are several potential contaminant sources and pathways to sensitive receptors and recommends that a targeted Preliminary Intrusive Ground Investigation is undertaken, in order to determine the risk to the proposed development from the identified source (the chalk bedrock).

216. The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Contaminated Land Officer, who raises no objection subject to conditions requiring a detailed desk study and site walkover, risk assessment, remediation method statement, verification report and identification of additional or unexpected contamination.

217. Officers are satisfied that, subject to the imposition of conditions requiring the details noted above, the development would be acceptable in terms of contamination.

218. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy SC/11 of the Local Plan.

### **Loss of Agricultural Land**

219. Policy NH/3(1) of the Local Plan states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would lead to the irreversible loss of Grades 1, 2 or 3a agricultural land unless (a) Land is allocated for development in the Local Plan or (b) sustainability considerations and the need for the development are sufficient to override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land.

220. The retirement care village would be located entirely on land which is classified as Grade 2 (very good) agricultural land.

221. In this instance, there are wider benefits to the proposal (set out later in this report: see very special circumstances) which would likely override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land.

222. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy NH/3 of the Local Plan.

## Other Matters

### Affordable Housing

223. The retirement care village would fall into use class C2 (residential institutions). Consequently, the development is not required to provide affordable housing in the same manner that a C3 development (dwellinghouses) would be required. Officers note that no objection has been raised by the Council's Affordable Housing team in this regard who comment that C2 use is unlikely to require affordable housing.
224. The retirement care village model proposed comprises the combination of a full care facility and retirement accommodation with care linkages, often referred to as 'assisted living' or 'extra-care'. The Extra Care model enables the elderly to buy in care packages to suit their needs rather than paying the fixed costs of a nursing home or residential care home.
225. The 'affordability' of the retirement care village would be down to the operator and the market demand / need, noting the concern raised locally about the cost of the accommodation or it being for 'high-end' occupants.
226. The development would not conflict with Policy H/11 of the Local Plan as officers do not consider that Policy H/11 is engaged.

### Alternative Sites

227. The application is supported by an Alternative Site Assessment (Carterwood, April 2020). The assessment sets out that the study endeavoured to identify all suitable, available and achievable sites for the proposed development within South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge local authority boundaries. The research was based on publically available planning policy documents (each local authority's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment), local commercial and residential agent research, national healthcare property agent enquiries, the local authority estates department, and planning and property websites. A filtering process was undertaken in order to ascertain any sites identified as potentially suitable for the elderly care facility and therefore requiring further assessment.
228. The Assessment concludes that initial research identified a total of 109 potential sites within the area of the two local authorities. These were assessed against elderly care facility operator requirements and excluded those sites that had not been previously developed within the Green Belt as they are not preferable to proposed Green Belt site. This identified three potential sites that required further investigation, as they fulfilled all or part of the initial desktop site assessment process (Former Marley Tiles, Sawston; Grove Road/West Way, Sawston; Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne). The three sites were not considered suitable for the proposed elderly care scheme.
229. Officers note the supporting text to Policy SC/5 of the Local Plan, which deals with community healthcare facility provision, states in paragraph 9.21

“proposals within the Green Belt would have to demonstrate very special circumstances, in particular why they were unable to locate outside the Green Belt”.

230. Officers acknowledge the findings of the Alternative Site Assessment and raise no strong objection to its contents, noting that the majority of the 109 sites assessed were rejected at an early stage due to their inadequate site size for the proposed end use.
231. However, clearly it is not possible to definitively conclude that there are no non-Green Belt sites within the two authority areas on which a retirement care village could be developed – there is no specific functional or operational requirement for a retirement care village to be located exclusively within the Green Belt.
232. Nonetheless, that consideration does not constitute additional harm or a specific reason for refusal and the application is therefore assessed on its own merits against relevant planning policy.

#### Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM)

233. The holding objection from / on behalf of The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) is noted. The development acknowledges the potential Cambridge South East Transport scheme (CSETS) route as part of the proposed development, which is shown on several of the Parameter Plans. There is a potential degree of conflict between the route shown on the Parameter Plans that support the application and that proposed by GCP.
234. However, the potential route is not at a stage of development where it can have a significant bearing on the assessment or determination of the outline planning application which has been submitted; therefore, limited / no weight can be afforded to the potential route at this time.

#### Health / Lighting / Noise Impacts

235. The comments of the Council’s Environmental Health Officer are noted.
236. Officers are satisfied that conditions could be imposed as part of any consent to restrict / require details of hours of works, driven pile foundations, spread of airborne dust, comprehensive construction programme, burning of waste, scheme for protecting proposed dwellings from noise from Haverhill Road, external lighting, waste management and minimisation strategy and assessment of noise impact of plant or equipment. Such conditions, or an overarching Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and/or a phased Construction Method Statement / Strategy (CMS) would ensure adequate protection of neighbouring properties and the potential future occupiers of the site, in line with adopted policy.
237. Informatives relating to any noise insulation scheme condition, noise attenuation schemes and the Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction



Supplementary Planning Document could also be included for the information of the applicant.

### Sustainability

238. The site is located on the edge of Stapleford, albeit slightly detached from the development framework boundary, which is classified as a Rural Centre under the Council's settlement hierarchy under Policy S/8 of the Local Plan. Rural Centres are the largest, most sustainable villages of the district. They have good access to a secondary school (either within the village or accessible by good public transport), employment opportunities, a variety of services and facilities and have good public transport services to Cambridge or a market town. For development within framework boundaries there is no limit on individual schemes, provided that adequate services, facilities and infrastructure are available or can be made available as a result of the development.
239. The retirement care village would be approximately 1.1 kilometres from the nearest centre of services along London Road, Stapleford and 2 kilometres to the centre of services in Great Shelford (Woollards Lane). In terms of distance from existing public transport, the retirement care village would be approximately 1.3 kilometres from Great Shelford train station, approximately 80 metres from the nearest bus stop (albeit a relatively infrequent service) and approximately 1km from the nearest bus stop with a regular service (every 20 minutes).
240. Officers accept that the retirement care village would be located on the settlement edge, a reasonable distance from the main services and facilities within the village. However, these facilities, including public transport, would be reasonably accessible from the site. It is also noted that given the nature of the development, several key services / facilities would be integrated into the development itself, although such detail would be provided at reserved matters stage, mitigating some of the need to access services within the village.

### Third Party Comments

241. The comments made in third-party representations are noted, with many points already considered in the report. The remaining points, which are not applicable to the consideration of the very special circumstances, are addressed below.
242. Concern is raised that the general location has already been assessed and dismissed for development within the 'last local plan'. Officers have reviewed the 'Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment' (SHLAA, 2013) which is one of a range of evidence base and supporting studies produced / commissioned to inform the adopted Local Plan. A review of the Great Shelford and Stapleford Village Sites map does not indicate that the application site was specifically put forward for consideration, aside from a small north-western corner of the wider site adjacent to Hinton Way, which was a rejected site.
243. Officers note that as part of the Council's new Local Plan the retirement care village has been submitted through the 'Call for Sites' (2019) and has been

denoted as a 'mixed-use' site. The countryside park element does not appear to have been submitted through the 'Call of Green Sites' (2019), although the entire Cambridge Green Belt has been put forward. No weight can be attached to the review of the new Local Plan at this stage.

244. Several representations raise concern that the approval of the application could set a precedent for future development within the Green Belt. Officers do not consider this to be the case. The proposal is assessed on its own merits, as would any other application within the Green Belt, with due consideration of any very special circumstances in each case. A precedent would not be set.

### **Very Special Circumstances**

245. In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the retirement care village is also considered to result in harm by virtue of the loss of openness of the Green Belt, conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt, detrimental impact on the character of the area and an adverse impact to landscape character. It is therefore necessary to consider the justification put forward by the applicant's agent in support of the proposal and the extent to which these amount to 'very special circumstances'. This justification is set out in summary below, taken from table 3 of the Planning Statement.

246. Need for specialist older people's housing in the area:

- There is identified to be a rapidly ageing population within the both the Country and the District. There is significant identified need for new care and extra care provision for older people within the District and the market catchment area in the vicinity of the site.
- Government guidance on the provision of housing for older and disabled people is very clear; "The need to provide housing for older people is critical" (NPPG: 63-001-20190626)
- Very significant weight should be given to the provision of such housing in this instance.

247. Release of general housing stock into the market:

- The provision of specialist accommodation for older people as proposed will mean that existing general housing stock is released into the market as older people sell or relinquish their houses and move into the specialist older people's accommodation.
- It is likely that the proposed retirement village will attract older people from outside of South Cambridgeshire or even the sub-regional housing market area. Similarly, not all new residents would necessarily relinquish an existing house. As such it should not be assumed that there will be a one for one release of housing stock. However, even if the ratio of release were to be a conservative 1 in 3, this would yield a significant

release of general housing stock into the area.

- In an area of substantial housing need and critical affordability issues such as South Cambridgeshire, this should be judged as a significant benefit of development.

#### 248. Creation of 19-hectare countryside park:

- The Countryside Park will provide a significant public recreational amenity space and will be free for the public to use and will be of substantial benefit to existing residents in the area and beyond.
- Due to its location, the countryside park will be accessible to the public by both foot and cycle from its opening. Should the Cambridge Autonomous Metro be delivered as predicted then it will be accessible via these sustainable means and will provide links other similar assets manifestly increasing the amenity benefits of the provision.
- Paragraph 91c of the NPPF is clear that planning decisions should enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure.
- Significant weight should be given to the provision of a circa 19 hectare countryside parking in this instance

#### 249. Biodiversity Benefits:

- The scheme will result in a significant Biodiversity Net Gain at the site. Habitat losses are restricted in the main to arable land of low biodiversity value. The new habitats proposed include chalk grassland, retention and infilling of existing boundary features, establishment of permanent and suitably planted pond features, species-rich mixed native species planting, bat and bird boxes, and creation of habitat piles.
- The NPPF makes clear at paragraph 175d that development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- The significant biodiversity net gain should be afforded significant weight.

#### 250. Economic Benefits:

- The development will provide significant investment in the local area during its construction, estimated at this early stage to be something in the order of £15 million.

- During the construction phase the project is estimated to generate in the order of 190 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs.
- Once operational the retirement village facility is estimated to generate in the order 70 FTE jobs. This estimate is drawn from data provided by retirement village operators of a size commensurate to that proposed.
- The proposals would naturally generate increased spend in local area, benefiting local services and facilities
- The scheme would potentially include a number of on-site services and facilities including; dining facilities, communal gardens, hairdresser, swimming pool and wellness facilities. A number of these facilities would be available for use by the wider community – this would boost the self-sufficiency and sustainability of the village.
- Paragraph 80 of the NPPF makes clear that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. In this context the economic benefits of the proposals are not the principal objectives of the scheme and should be given moderate weight in the balance.

251. Social Cohesion and wellbeing benefits:

- The proposed retirement village will increase local housing choice and allow more older people to stay close to existing friends and family in the community.
- Communal facilities proposed will draw the wider community into retirement villages thereby increasing integration. The proposed countryside park will similarly be free for use by the community as a whole and will provide access to the countryside and nature.
- Paragraph 91a of the NPPF states that new development should promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other.
- Paragraph 96 of the NPPF states that Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities

**Officer Assessment of the ‘Very Special Circumstances’**

Need

252. The NPPG offers the following guidance concerning housing for older and disabled people:

Why is it important to plan for the housing needs of older people?

The need to provide housing for older people is critical. People are living longer lives and the proportion of older people in the population is increasing. In mid-2016 there were 1.6 million people aged 85 and over; by mid-2041 this is projected to double to 3.2 million. Offering older people a better choice of accommodation to suit their changing needs can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems. Therefore, an understanding of how the ageing population affects housing needs is something to be considered from the early stages of plan-making through to decision-taking.

Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 63-001-20190626

Revision date: 26 June 2019

What factors should decision makers consider when assessing planning applications for specialist housing for older people?

Decision makers should consider the location and viability of a development when assessing planning applications for specialist housing for older people. Local planning authorities can encourage the development of more affordable models and make use of products like shared ownership. Where there is an identified unmet need for specialist housing, local authorities should take a positive approach to schemes that propose to address this need.

Paragraph: 016 Reference ID: 63-016-20190626

Revision date: 26 June 2019

253. The application is supported by a Planning Need Assessment (Carterwood, February 2020). The Assessment looks at demand, currently supply and planned supply.
254. The care home assessment adopts a market catchment area broadly based on a five-mile radius from the site (based on previous analyses of distance travelled by residents into a care home). The extra-care assessment also adopts a market catchment area broadly based on a ten-mile radius (based on national research to calculate distance travelled by extra care housing residents from their last place of residence). For both end-uses the Assessment sets out relevant sites that have been granted planning permission and sites which were pending decision at the time of the Assessment. These sites are then illustrated on each catchment area map to show proximity to the site and whether they fall within the identified catchment areas.
255. The Assessment sets out that the balance between the increase in demand, due to demographic pressures, and a reduction in bed demand, due to alternatives to residential care, will be dependent upon a host of national variables, as well as site-specific factors, and is, therefore, impossible to predict with absolute certainty. The analysis illustrates the need assuming the existing

provision remains equal and that all the planned units are developed. As a result, the analysis is stated to overestimate the supply as it considers that several the planned schemes are unlikely to be developed (based on comparable research).

256. For care home need, the Assessment concludes that at 2022 there is a need for 301 market standard bedspaces within the market catchment area, assuming all planned beds are delivered. Should the demand for care home beds remain at the same rate in the future this need will increase to 444 bedspaces in 2027 and 687 bedspaces in 2032.
257. For extra care need, the Assessment concludes that at 2022 there is a need for 667 private extra care units within the market catchment area, again assuming all planned units are delivered. The analysis estimates that the indicative need will rise to 875 units in 2027 and 1,039 units in 2032.
258. The Council's Local Plan is not silent on the issue. The Local Plan acknowledges that there is an ageing population within the district with growth forecast between 2001 to 2021 of 95% for the 60-74 age group and 108% for those 75+ (paragraph 7.3 Key Facts). The supporting text to Policy H/9 (Housing Mix) also details in paragraph 7.38 that the population of the district is ageing, and often older people need or prefer smaller properties that are easier to manage than their original home, with people often looking to 'downsize' to a smaller property. Paragraph 7.39 further details that alongside a range of models that can play a part in providing specialist accommodation for older people, such as retirement communities, such accommodation should be located on sites in new settlements or within larger villages.
259. Although the adopted Plan does not allocate specific sites for such uses, there are policies which would support applications of this nature, subject to their scale and location.
260. Policy S/7 of the Local Plan supports development within framework boundaries that is appropriate to its location and there is the necessary infrastructure capacity to support the development. As noted above, Policy H/9 of the Local Plan has specific reference to specialist accommodation for the elderly.
261. Policy SC/5 of the Local Plan deals with community healthcare facility provision and details that proposals for such facilities will be supported within development frameworks.
262. The supporting text in paragraph 9.21 of the Local Plan further details that community healthcare facilities provide a range of care services designed to support patients in the community and who might previously have been treated as inpatients or day patients in hospital. The Council would be supportive of appropriately located and scaled proposals which will be assessed using relevant Local Plan policies. Proposals within the Green Belt would have to demonstrate very special circumstances, in particular why they were unable to locate outside the Green Belt.

263. The Council is preparing the evidence base for its new Local Plan, which will include a study looking at housing for the elderly as part of one looking at various types of housing. However, that study has not yet been published and the Plan review is at an early stage such that relevant policies or allocations are not known at this time. As noted above, the retirement care village site has been submitted through the 2019 'Call for Sites' but has no status at this time.
264. Officers acknowledge the concern raised locally that there are / may be vacancies in existing facilities nearby and that there is already a planned retirement complex in Great Shelford, along with an existing one. While information on vacancies is not available, the Needs Assessment submitted has considered existing and planned facilities as part of its evidence base.
265. Officers also acknowledge the concern raised locally that the facility would cater for many residents who have no connection with Stapleford or Great Shelford and therefore does not meet local demand. There is no policy requirement for the retirement care village to cater specifically for the needs of Stapleford or Great Shelford, in the same manner that a rural exception site for affordable housing would (Policy H/11 of the Local Plan), or indeed the District itself. Nonetheless, the Planning Needs Assessment clearly sets out its methodology which considered the need within a five-mile radius for care home need and a ten-mile radius for extra care need.
266. Until such time that the Council's own housing study is available, it is difficult to confirm the precise extent of need for older people's accommodation in the area or robustly rebut the evidence put forward in the Planning Needs Assessment submitted. However, officers do not dispute that there is an identified need for specialist older people's housing in the area, noting that the Council's Affordable Housing Team comments that there is a need to provide accommodation for older people in the District. Officers also acknowledge of the content of the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy (2019 – 2023) which has relevance to issue of need and references exploring the potential for a retirement village, although no site is specified.
267. Considering the likely shortfall in C2 accommodation, there can be no doubt that the development could make a very significant contribution towards meeting local need based on the evidence available and to the health and well-being of the future occupiers of the development.
268. Officers consider that significant weight could be given to the provision of specialist housing in this instance.

#### Countryside Park: Environmental Benefit

269. Chapter 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
270. Paragraph 170 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decision should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (criterion a) and minimising impacts on and providing net

gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (criterion d).

271. Paragraph 175(d) of the NPPF states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles ... development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.
272. Officer also note that, in respect of Green Belt (NPPF chapter 13), paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
273. At a local level, Policy NH/4 of the Local Plan states that development proposals where the primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity will be permitted. New development must aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity. Opportunities should be taken to achieve positive gain through the form and design of development. Policy NH/6 of the Local Plan states that the Council will aim to conserve and enhance green infrastructure within the district and will encourage proposals which reinforce, link, buffer and create new green infrastructure.
274. The Cambridge South Fringe Area Action Plan identifies the area in which the application is located as an element of the southern fringe landscape and is designated as an area of improved landscaping.
275. Policy CSF/5(2) sets out that a Countryside Enhancement Strategy will be prepared for the area bounded by the Cambridge City boundary, Babraham Road, Haverhill Road, and the edge of the built up area of Great Shelford and Stapleford. The Strategy will comprise (f) new copses on suitable knolls, hilltops and scarp tops; (g) management and creation of chalk grassland; (h) management of existing shelter belts; (i) new mixed woodland and shelter belts; (j) creation of a landscape corridor along Hobson's Brook; (k) reinforcement and planting of new hedgerows; (l) roadside planting; (m) new footpaths, cyclepaths and bridleways creating routes through the area and linking to Wandlebury Country Park / The Magog Down.
276. Policy CSF/5(3) states the Countryside Strategies will include integrated proposals for landscape, biodiversity, recreation and public access improvements, which will be compatible with long-term agricultural production to create enhanced gateways into the City. Provision will be made for maintenance of landscaping and replacement of diseased, dying and dead stock for a period of 10 years, and details of long-term management thereafter.
277. Further to adopted planning policy, in February 2021 South Cambridgeshire District Council adopted its 'Doubling Nature' Strategy, which sets out an



approach to increasing wildlife-rich habitats and the tree canopy and improving access to green spaces. The vision is to double nature in South Cambridgeshire by 2050 and by doing so, enable wildlife and people to thrive and business to prosper, meaning more wildlife-rich habitats, and increase in tree canopy cover and better accessibility to green space.

278. Clearly the provision of a countryside park would comply with a suite of national and local planning policies and other wider objectives. The countryside park would restore local habitat, significantly increase tree cover and result in a significant biodiversity net gain, alongside an enhancement to the local landscape character.
279. No objection has been raised by technical consultees to the countryside park, with the Council's Ecology Officer and Landscape Officer supporting proposal.
280. In terms of biodiversity enhancements, which would have significant ecological benefit, the countryside park would create an extensive area of predominantly chalk grassland and habitat. The National Trust report that more than 80% of the UK's chalk grassland has been lost since the Second World War, mainly due to changes in land use from traditional low-level animal grazing; intensive farming with the use of herbicides and fertilisers changes the nature of the soil so the traditional chalk grassland species cannot grow. The countryside park would provide a mosaic of habitats in which chalk grassland will be an important element.
281. The Council's Landscape Officer sets out that landscape mitigation measures after a one year period would be major neutral effect and after a fifteen year period would be major beneficial effect; this area will change from arable to seminatural grassland and trees/scrub and would be more in keeping with objectives for landscape improvement and recreational / biodiversity benefits.
282. Officers acknowledge the concerns raised locally that the countryside park would be a 'sweetener' and is not enough to warrant the loss of Green Belt land to the retirement care village.
283. The application proposes the development of a countryside park, which is specifically referenced in the description of development, contained within the red line application boundary and shown on the Parameter Plans and Illustrative Masterplan which support the application. The countryside park forms part of the development proposals and must be considered as such, forming part of the planning balance.
284. The countryside park would deliver clear and significant environmental benefits.
285. Officers consider that significant weight should be given to the environmental benefits of the countryside park.

#### Countryside Park: Social Benefit

286. Chapter 8 of the NPPF focuses on promoting health and safe communities.

287. Paragraph 91(c) of the NPPF states that planning policies and decision should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.
288. Paragraph 96 of the NPPF states that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.
289. The accessibility to green space provisions of paragraph 141 of the NPPF, Local Plan policies, the objectives of the Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan and the Council's Doubling Nature Strategy are all noted and of relevance to this aspect of the development.
290. Officers acknowledge the concerns raised locally that there is no identified need for a countryside park, noting the proximity to Wandlebury Country Park and Magog Downs Countryside Site, the viability and absence of a parks partner to take on management of such a site and the accessibility of the park in relation to the existing village.
291. In respect of 'need' officers acknowledge that there is no specific provision or allocation with the Local Plan. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that an application for a countryside park would be rejected given its compliance with a broad suite of planning policies and wider objectives as noted above. In addition, the proposed countryside park would form part of a larger network of open spaces in the area. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to open space. In their representation to the application, the Magog Trust comment in respect of the increased use of green spaces and pressure those have been put under because of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is difficult therefore to say that there is no need for a countryside park.
292. In terms of viability or parks manager, the developer has indicated that the countryside park would be transferred to the Magog Trust, whom reflect this in their own comments, along with a financial contribution to cover maintenance of the park. The Trust currently manages public access areas locally.
293. The location of the countryside park in relation to the existing village is noted. The countryside park would be accessible from three points, one from Hinton Way to the north west, one from Gog Magog Way to the south (through the retirement care village) and one from Haverhill Road to the east, all pedestrian/cycle access only. The points of access from Hinton Way and Gog Magog Way are closely related to the edge of Stapleford village and easily accessible. The point of access from Haverhill Road would be further from the edge of the village but would nonetheless be reasonably accessible and closely related to other tracks/routes to the east of the site. The area within the countryside park would provide for road-free connectivity between Haverhill

Road and Hinton Way, making a large circular walking route around the village possible. Officers raise no significant concern over the accessibility of the Countryside Park.

294. Alongside the clear environmental benefit of the countryside park, there would be strong social benefits to its provision through the provision of a significant amount of open space that would be accessible to the public, noting that the existing site is not currently accessible.
295. Officers consider that significant weight should be given to the social benefits of the countryside park.

#### Release of Housing Stock

296. Officers acknowledge that the provision of specialist accommodation for older people would result in existing housing stock being released into the market as those properties are sold or relinquished.
297. The retirement care village would not necessarily be occupied solely by residents of Stapleford or indeed the authorities of Cambridge City of South Cambridgeshire as it would likely attract older people from wider areas. The Planning Statement has suggested that even if a conservative ratio of 1 in 3 were applied this would yield a significant release of general housing stock into the area.
298. Noting that the development is for 'up to 220' units overall, officers' question whether the release would be 'significant'. Applying the Planning Statement's ratio of 1 in 3, the development would release approximately 73 existing residential units into the market. This is not considered to be a substantial release. Furthermore, the Council is currently able to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and therefore while there may be a housing need in the area, the adopted Local Plan(s) provide enough sites to meet that requirement.
299. Officers consider that limited weight should be given to the release of housing stock, also noting that the release of housing stock is intrinsically linked to addressing the issue of need.

#### Economic Benefits

300. The retirement care village is estimated to generate 70 full time equivalent jobs, as set out on the Application Form and Planning Statement. It has also been estimated that construction phase of the project would generate around 190 full time equivalent jobs. There may also be some increased spend in the local area potentially benefiting the local services and facilities.
301. Officers acknowledge the provision of the NPPF in terms of economic development. Chapter 6 of the NPPF focuses on building a strong, competitive economy and paragraph 80 of the NPPF sets out that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

302. However, as acknowledged within the Planning Statement, the economic benefits of the proposals are not the primary objective of the scheme. Officers recognise the importance of job creation, including the temporary construction roles. Nonetheless, given the overall size of the development, the benefits of the on-site job creation for the local and national economy would not be substantial, certainly in the context of a Green Belt site.
303. Officers consider that limited weight should be given to the economic benefits of the development.

#### Social Cohesion and wellbeing benefits

304. Officers acknowledge the Planning Statement presents 'social cohesion and wellbeing benefits' as a very special circumstance, citing increased local housing choice, older people staying close to existing friends and family and the use of the countryside park.
305. These benefits have already been considered and therefore no further weight is applied to this consideration as a separate entity.

### **Planning balance and conclusion**

306. The proposed development would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
307. The NPPF is clear that, when considering any application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. '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.
308. In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the retirement care village is also considered to result in harm by virtue of the loss of openness of the Green Belt, conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt, detrimental impact on the character of the area and an adverse impact to landscape character.
309. Substantial weight is given to the harm caused to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. Significant weight is given to the harm caused to the loss of openness to the Green Belt while significant weight is also given to the harm caused to the conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt. Substantial weight is accorded to the overall harm to the Green Belt.
310. Officers attribute significant weight to the harm to the character and appearance of the area and significant weight to the adverse harm to landscape character arising from the development of a retirement care village.
311. The determination of whether very special circumstances exist is a matter of planning judgement, based on a consideration of all relevant matters. However,

very special circumstances cannot exist unless the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, as set out in paragraph 144 of the NPPF. Consequently, for the development to be supported, the overall balance would have to favour the proposal, not just marginally, but decisively.

312. Officers attach significant weight to the contribution that the development would make to the need for specialist older people's housing in the area, including the health and well-being benefits for the future occupiers of the development.
313. Officers attach significant weight to both the environmental and social benefits that the countryside park would bring.
314. Officers attach limited weight to the economic benefits of the scheme and afford no weight to the 'social cohesion and wellbeing benefits' advanced as a standalone circumstance as these benefits have already been considered as part of other circumstances.
315. In conclusion, despite the merits of the proposed development, officers consider that given the inherent conflict with national and local policies with regard to harm to the Green Belt (inappropriateness, openness and purposes), character and appearance and landscape character, the very special circumstances presented, taken collectively or individually, do not clearly outweigh the harm as required by paragraph 144 of the NPPF.
316. For the reasons set out in this report, the application is recommended for refusal.
317. Should the application be approved following members conclusion that the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the application will need to be referred to the Secretary of State under The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009. There would also be a need to agree a full list of conditions and the requirements of any Section 106 agreement.

## **Recommendation**

318. Officers recommend that the Planning Committee refuses the application for the following reasons.

## **Reasons**

- a) The site is located outside of the development framework boundary of Stapleford, within the countryside and Cambridge Green Belt. The proposed development would represent inappropriate development that is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt in policy terms as the retirement care village does not fall within any of the exception criteria within paragraphs 145 or 146 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy S/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 and paragraphs 143,

144, 145 and 146 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 that seek to resist inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

- b) In addition to harm caused by inappropriateness, the proposed retirement care village would have a substantial and detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt through the introduction of a substantial built form of development and urbanising effect on the site that cannot be said to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, which would undermine the purposes of the Green Belt and including land within it. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies S/4 and NH/8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 and paragraphs 133 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 which set out that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- c) The proposed retirement care village, by virtue of the introduction of a substantial built form of development on land which is currently open, would fail to reflect or respect the strong rural characteristics of Stapleford or respond to the sites sensitive edge of village location. The development would be out of keeping with the local vernacular, appearing as an incongruous and extensive urban form of development on the village edge. Furthermore, the retirement care village would result in a significant incursion into the landscape and soft rural edge of the village which would do little to respect, retain or enhance the local character and the distinctiveness of the local landscape. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies S/7, HQ/1, NH/2 and NH/8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 and paragraphs 127 and 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 which seek to protect the countryside from encroachment, preserve or enhance the character of the local rural area and protect or enhance valued landscapes.
- d) The application has failed to provide very special circumstances which, taken individually or collectively, demonstrate why the harm by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt and other harm identified, is clearly outweighed by these considerations. The application therefore fails to satisfy the requirements of paragraph 144 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019.

## **Background Papers**

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website and / or an indication as to where hard copies can be inspected.

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
- Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan 2008
- South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)
- Planning File References: 20/03141/SCRE, S/0520/07/F, S/0442/06/F, S/1672/91/F, S/0211/91/F.

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