

Town & Country Planning Act 1990

Appeal by Axis Land Partnerships Ltd

Against the refusal by South Cambridgeshire District Council of an Outline application 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 the provision of land for use as Countryside Park for public access

on

Land at between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, Stapleford, Cambridge, CB22 5BQ

LPA reference: S/02929/20/OUT

PINS reference: APP/W0530/W/21/3280395

Summary Proof of Evidence

of

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on behalf of

Axis Land Partnerships Ltd

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The Landscape Partnership is registered with the Landscape Institute and is a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment

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1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The appeal site is located to the edge of Stapleford and comprises a total area of 24 ha where 3.12ha is proposed for a Retirement Care Village, 1.79ha for structure planting and amenity land associated with the Care Village and over 19.1 ha for a Countryside Park that delivers landscape, biodiversity and access enhancements and benefits.
- 1.2 The local landscape is not designated for any landscape reason. The appeal site does not comprise a valued landscape. The local landscape in which the proposed Retirement Care Village would be located comprises gently sloping arable land running up to a typical suburban village edge. The location of the Countryside Park has a stronger character with marked undulations in landform and which allows for panoramic views.

Landscape Effects

- 1.3 Landscape character effects have been assessed a range of scales from the National to the Site based scale. The largest effects would be on the Site itself with a Major/Moderate Adverse effect at Year 1 through the introduction of the Retirement Care Home on the part of the site at the village edge. Moderate Adverse effects would also occur at Year 1 at the Local scale extending up to 1km. However, by Year 15 effects at the Site and Local level are considered to become Neutral as the structure planting matures to create a new soft edge to Stapleford that has similarities to the existing edge of village character. The landscape effects of the Countryside Park in Area B are Neutral at Year 1 but by Year 15 the proposed elements including copses, and chalk grassland would have established to bring positive change across the landscape with a Major/Moderate Beneficial effect. Considering the appeal site as a whole I consider the net effect at Year 15 will be Moderate Beneficial in landscape character terms at the site scale. These benefits would extend over many decades as the Countryside Park is provided in perpetuity.

Visual effects

- 1.4 The Visual effects of the proposed development would be most evident adjacent to the site on Haverhill Road along the frontage of the Retirement Care Village before the maturation of the proposed structure planting. There would be a number of built forms that would extend the village to the north with some Major/Moderate Adverse effects from this location. However, the perimeter planting around Area A would establish and assimilate the development within the settlement of Stapleford in the medium-term and maintain a clear distinction to the open landscape beyond the new well defined village envelope. Distant public views are limited in number but include a view from Magog Down at c 1km and along Bridleway S2 to the east of Stapleford. These locations would experience some noticeable adverse effects initially but would reduce over time as the structure planting establishes. Views to Countryside Park would be neutral initially but would in time add to

the visual amenity of the local area. From within the Countryside Park there would be a range of new views for residents and visitors, both across the undulating character of the site itself and also wider panoramic views to the Gog Magog Hills and across the Granta Valley.

Green Belt effects

- 1.5 The proposed Retirement Care Village would result in a loss of openness of the Green Belt. This would involve an adverse effect on the spatial dimension by the development of a medium sized area of land at 3.12 ha. In perceptual terms an overall moderate loss of openness would occur from a number of public locations, including from and along Haverhill Road, from the track to Stapleford cemetery, Bridleway S2 and from Magog Down. The perceptual loss of openness would be most apparent on completion and in the early years. However, over time loss of openness from all locations would reduce to limited as the structure planting establishes. The planting would visually contain the built forms within a vegetated perimeter and provide a sympathetic extension of Stapleford to over time limit awareness of the proposals from the wider landscape.
- 1.6 In terms of effects on the purposes of Green Belt I consider the proposed Retirement Care Village would result in some harm to one of the NPPF purposes namely, to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. In perceptual terms a moderate the level of harm at completion would progressively reduce to limited as the structure planting establishes by providing a clear separation from the remaining countryside and by relating the built development to Stapleford. I also consider there would be an effect on the comparable SCLP purpose which seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of Cambridge's setting. This would relate to a limited effect on the local setting of Stapleford and its adjacent countryside rather than on Cambridge city.

Effects on local landscape and settlement character

- 1.7 The existing edge to Stapleford largely comprises two storey residential development with intermittent planting within gardens and to perimeter roads. This provides a variably soft and suburban edge between village and the surrounding agricultural land, which is typical of many similar village locations.
- 1.8 There would be a be a clear change in character from the existing open rural landscape with the provision of the proposed development, which by its very nature would comprise a range of built forms to support a new community for the elderly residents. Buildings to the south of the site up to 12m would comprise the most notable structures from local and wider views. However, it is now formally proposed to reduce the upper height of these buildings to 9m to reduce the effects. The majority of the proposed buildings would at 7-8m be of a comparable scale to those within Stapleford.
- 1.9 The proposed structure planting around Area A would within the medium-term provide a robust soft edge to the proposed development adjacent to the retained countryside. In combination with a high

quality layout, to reflect both the local vernacular and best of contemporary design (to be appropriately considered at a Reserved Matters stage) the proposed structure planting as shown on the Parameter Plans would be able to create an attractive development and setting that is also sensitive to a newly defined edge to the village.

- 1.10 The proposed Countryside Park is six times the area of the Care Village and covers c 80% of the appeal site. The wide-ranging landscape, bio-diversity and public access proposals would bring substantial enhancements and benefits to the local landscape character which would not otherwise arise. These would bring substantive support to Policy CSF 5, which has hitherto realised minimal results on the ground.
- 1.11 Across the appeal site overall I consider there would be a net benefit on the local landscape character arising from the proposals within the medium-term measured at Year 15. This benefit would continue to increase over the full lifetime of the Retirement Care Village, which is likely to extend for over 100 years. This longer-term benefit derived from the Countryside Park should be set against the relatively short term adverse effects on landscape character. In this context the reason for refusal relating to a lack of enhancement to the local character is not justified.
- 1.12 The amended Land-use and Building Height Parameter Plan 008A limits the height of built form to the south of Area A to 9m. This would ensure that the scale and massing of all the proposed buildings would be directly comparable with the existing settlement. This benefit would thereby enhance the development's ability to integrate with the neighbouring settlement and local landscape.

Cambridge South East Transport Scheme

- 1.13 The alignment of the proposed Cambridge South East Transport Scheme between Cambridge and Babraham passes adjacent to and partly through the appeal site. The appeal proposals are independent of CSETS progressing. However, there are a number of related benefits that would arise if CSETS also went ahead including: providing sustainable access to and from the Retirement Care Village and wider access to the proposed Countryside Park.

Alternative Sites

- 1.14 An assessment has been made of eleven potential alternative sites in the Cambridge Green Belt for a Retirement Care Village. All these sites are undeveloped greenfield sites. The relative visual effects on openness have been considered and of the eleven, seven are considered to have a relatively lesser effect on openness. The evidence of Mr Belcher considers the availability of the sites.

Conclusion

- 1.15 In conclusion while there would be some adverse effects in landscape and visual terms from the Retirement Care Village in the short to medium term, I consider that proposals for the appeal site

when taken as a whole and including the Countryside Park would in the medium term and beyond result in a net benefit in landscape character terms to the site and local area.