

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

Proof of Evidence

of

JONATHAN MARK BILLINGSLEY

on behalf of

Axis Land Partnerships Ltd

November 2021

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 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 I am Jonathan Mark Billingsley. I hold a 1st Class Honours degree in Geography from the University of Oxford, and a BPhil degree in Landscape Design from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I qualified as a Landscape Architect in 1984 and am a Chartered Member of The Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 I have experience within local government, working between 1983 – 1985 as a Landscape and Forestry Officer with St Edmundsbury Borough Council and between 1985 – 1988 as a Senior Landscape Architect with Hull City Council.
- 1.3 In 1988, I joined The Landscape Partnership and was subsequently appointed Associate in 1989, Associate Director in 1996 and Director in 1999. I was Managing Director between 2012 and 2019. I retired as a Director in January 2020 and am now a Consultant to the practice.
- 1.4 I have a wide range of experience in Landscape Architecture and Landscape Planning. This has involved projects for both private and public sector bodies and making representations at Public Inquiries and Local Plan Inquiries. Commissions have involved residential, recreational, commercial, mineral, highway and renewable energy projects. Many of the projects have involved the suitability of development proposals in rural landscapes including Green Belt locations.
- 1.5 I have also been involved in producing a range of Landscape Character Assessments. These have included the National Mapping Project for the Countryside Commission – Eastern Region, in the mid-1990s which led to the Countryside Agency publications on Countryside Character (Volumes 6 and 4) originally referred to in PPG7. I was the Project Director for a number of district-scale Landscape Character Assessments including for Hertfordshire County Council, Peterborough City Council and Milton Keynes Borough Council.
- 1.6 I have undertaken a variety of other landscape planning studies, including green infrastructure strategies for Peterborough, Greater Norwich and Milton Keynes. Landscape sensitivity and capacity studies have also been carried out for a number of local authorities including North Hertfordshire District, Harborough District and Basildon. These sensitivity studies included assessing the suitability of land around villages and towns for development and have been tested as part of the councils' evidence base through Examination in Public stages of emerging Local Plans.
- 1.7 In the context of the appeal site at Haverhill Road, Stapleford I have been familiar with the study area for a number of years. Between 2006- 2007 I was project director for the first Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region produced for Cambridgeshire Horizons. The project included analysis, visioning and planning of green infrastructure facilities for the region and achieved a Landscape Institute Award for Strategic Planning.

- 1.8 The evidence I have prepared and provided for this Appeal - PINS reference: APP/W0530/W/21/3280395 is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my relevant professional institute and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my own professional opinions.

2 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 2.1 The Landscape Partnership (TLP) were initially instructed by Axis Land Partnerships Ltd (Axis) in August 2019 to advise on landscape and visual matters in relation a proposal on land between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, Stapleford to accommodate a new retirement village development together with landscape enhancements on associated land within the same ownership.
- 2.2 In March 2020 TLP produced a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)¹ to accompany the planning application that is now subject to this appeal.
- 2.3 In December 2020 TLP produced an LVA Addendum² in response to consultation comments made on application S/02929/20/OUT by officers at Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP).
- 2.4 I was the author of both the LVA and LVA Addendum and continue to rely on the analysis and comment within these two documents, unless specifically updated by clarifications or updates within the remainder of this proof of evidence.
- 2.5 I have visited the site and a range of locations with the study area on a number of occasions in both the winter and summer months appreciating the site and locality while trees and hedges are both in leaf and out of leaf.
- 2.6 Application S/02929/20/OUT was refused by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) at a Planning Committee held on 13th April 2021 for four reasons. Reason 1) relates to the development being in principle 'inappropriate' within the Green Belt. Reason 2) relates to the harm to the openness of the Green Belt and from encroachment by built development. Reason 3) relates to the effects of the proposals on the character of the village of Stapleford and the local landscape. Reason 4) relates the weight to be given to the collective very special circumstances in support of the proposal set against the harm that would occur.
- 2.7 This proof of evidence focuses on Reasons for refusal 2) and 3). Consideration of the need for the development of the retirement village and the lack of alternative sites is provided by the evidence of Jessamy Venables and Robert Belcher. The ecological and bio-diversity aspects of the proposals for the Countryside Park are set out in the evidence of my colleague Duncan Painter. Consideration of planning matters are covered by the evidence of Colin Brown including the weight given to relevant planning policies together with an assessment of benefits and adverse effects as part of the planning balance.
- 2.8 In the preparation of this evidence I have made reference to following documents:

¹ CD 1.7

² CD 2.4

- Design and Access Statement (DAS) by Carter Jonas for Axis March 2020
- Planning Statement by Carter Jonas March 2020
- Illustrative Masterplan -J00247450_005
- Parameter Plan – J00247450_008 Land Use and Building Heights
- Parameter Plan – J00247450_008A Land Use and Building Heights - updated October 2021
- Parameter Plan – J00247450_009 Landscape
- Parameter Plan – J00247450_010 Access and Movement
- 406.09693.00002.14.H011.2 Access Assessment Option 2
- LS1443-01 Tree Survey and Preliminary AIA by Land and Sculpture Design Partnership (Jan 2020)
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal by TLP
- Landscape and Visual Addendum by TLP
- Landscape Consultation Response by Carol Newell (17th Aug 2020, 21st Sept 2020)
- Urban Design Response (15th March 2021)
- Officer Report to the SCDC Planning Committee (13th of April 2021)
- Statement of Case by Axis
- Statement of Case by SCDC
- Statement of Common Ground between Axis and SCDC

2.9 This Proof of Evidence is structured as follows:

- **Section 3** – Relevant planning policies in the NPPF and Local Plan
- **Section 4** – Description of appeal site and local context
- **Section 5** – Description of proposals
- **Section 6** – Description of landscape character effects of the proposals
- **Section 7** – Description of visual effects of the proposals on receptors

- **Section 8** – Response to Reason for Refusal 2 - effects on Green Belt openness and on the purposes of Green Belt
- **Section 9** – Response to Reason for Refusal 3 – landscape character and settlement of Stapleford
- **Section 10** – Cambridge South East Transport scheme
- **Section 11** - Alternative Sites
- **Section 12** - Summary and Conclusions

3 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 A number of planning policies are relevant to the appeal and which are referred to in the reasons for refusal. I consider the main policies of relevance to the appeal in relation to my evidence are as follows.
- 3.2 South Cambridgeshire Local Plan
- Policy S/4- Cambridge Green Belt
 - Policy S/7 - Development Frameworks
 - Policy HQ/1 – Design Principles
 - Policy HN/2 – Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
 - Policy NH/6 - Green Infrastructure
 - Policy NH/8 - Mitigating the impact of Development in and Adjoining the Green Belt
- 3.3 Cambridge Southern Fringe Action Plan 2008
- Policy CSF/5- Countryside Enhancement Strategy
- 3.4 Sections of the 2021 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of relevance to my evidence are paragraphs 130 (Achieving well design places), 137- 138 and 146 (Green Belt) and 174 (Conserving and Enhancing the Natural environment).

4 APPEAL SITE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Site Description

- 4.1 A description of the appeal site and its surroundings are provided within the Statement of Common Ground (paragraphs 7.1- 7.7).
- 4.2 In addition to the Statement of Common Ground I also refer to the baseline description of the site and assessment of landscape value in the LVA (paragraphs 3.21 to 3.31) and also in relation to site features including landform, vegetation and land use (LVA paras 3.34 and Table 3.3).
- 4.3 Within the LVA and in this proof I make reference for both descriptive and assessment purposes to the two component parts of the appeal site namely Area A - the Retirement Care Village and Area B – the Countryside Park. These areas are shown on the Figures 01 to 05 in the LVA.
- 4.4 In summary the whole appeal site is of open agricultural character comprising the majority of a single 'L' shaped arable field (see LVA Figure 03). The shorter part of the 'L' shape comprises Area A and adjoins Stapleford village at the lowest part of the site backing on to Gog Magog Way at c 20m AOD. The land slowly rises at a gradient of c. 1 in 50 across Area A to the north to the 25m AOD contour. Part B comprises the larger part of the appeal site and 'L' shape extending between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way. Area B climbs more steeply at c 1 in 15 up to a high point c 46m AOD to the centre of the Area (see contours on Fig 6, Page 27 of the DAS). Vegetation is limited to hedges and intermittent trees on the site perimeter apart from a group of conifer trees forming part of a remnant plantation within the field to the north.
- 4.5 Area A is considered to be of relatively lower sensitivity as it has few distinguishing criteria of landscape value (see LVA para 3.23- 3.31) and is located on lower lying ground and adjacent to the existing built edge of Stapleford. Area B has a relatively higher landscape value but is of low sensitivity to the proposed change from arable to semi-natural open space.

Landscape context

- 4.6 The LVA provides a description of landscape character units at a range of scales from National to Local level (paras 3.1 to 3.20) to set the site in its local and wider context of the site. At the National level the appeal site is set within NCA 87 East Anglian Chalk³ which is an extensive area stretching from Letchworth to Newmarket.
- 4.7 At the District scale the site is located within LCA 3B Gog Magog Hills and close to the LCA 4B Granta Valley (see LVA Figure 02) as defined in the Cambridge Inner Green Belt Study⁴ (CIGBS – Figure 8).

³ CD 5.7

⁴ CD 5.4

However, Area A is located close to the edge of LCA 3B and shares few of the distinguishing characteristics or features of LCA 3B. Therefore while LCA 3B Gog Magog Chalk Hills as a whole, with its key characteristics (including chalk ridge, hill top copses and ancient monuments) has a high sensitivity to change from a Retirement Care Village, the part of the LCA in which Area A is located has a reduced sensitivity at Medium (as set out in Table 7.1 of the LVA). In this context, Area A is located within in an area of transition at the district scale by sharing similarities with the adjacent Granta Valley LCA.

- 4.8 My identification of the transitional character of Area A is also supported by part of the evidence base for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan namely the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment by CBA (Feb 2021)⁵ in which Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas have been redefined. Appendix 2 Figure 04 to my proof is an enlargement of Figure 4.1 from the CBA report and shows the location of the appeal site. In contrast to the CIGBS study (that forms part of the current Local Plan evidence base and on which the LVA was based) the CBA report locates the whole appeal site within LCA 3D - Cam and Granta Tributaries Lowland Farmlands. The landscape character of LCA 3D in the locality of Stapleford is still based on an underlying chalk geology but is relatively lower lying and is well settled. In the CBA study LCA 7B - Gog Magog Chalk Hills is located further to the north-east on the higher ground and is a landscape that is generally less settled.
- 4.9 The location of the character areas in the CBA study indicates that the appeal site reflects the key characteristics of a lower lying settled chalk landscape rather than those associated with a more elevated and unsettled landscape of the Gog Magog Chalk Hills. I agree with the changes to character area boundaries in the CBA study particularly as they relate to Area A which is lower lying and adjacent to Stapleford. Furthermore the CBA report finds that LCA 3D - Cam and Granta Tributaries Lowland Farmlands is of Moderate condition and Moderate strength of character, in contrast to the Gog Magog Chalk Hills which is noted as being of Good condition and Strength of character (see Figures 05 – 06 in my Appendix 2). This would also indicate that the appeal site and in particular Area A is of a relatively lower sensitivity to the Gog Magog Chalk Hills LCA which is focused on the higher ground to the north.
- 4.10 At the Local scale, i.e. within approximately 1 km the LVA provides a further scale of assessment. The local scale combines the lower slopes and fringes of the Gog Magog Chalk Hills, the character of Stapleford village and the open valley landscape of the Granta Valley. The sensitivity of the local landscape around Area A is considered to be Medium to the Retirement Care Village, while the sensitivity of Area B to the change to a Countryside Park is considered Low.

⁵ CD 5.10

Landscape Designations

- 4.11 As set out at section 5 of the LVA there are no national or local landscape designations based on quality or value directly affecting the site or within the study area. In my opinion, based on the lack of any designations and the relative merits of the site, in terms of relevant criteria used to assess landscape value (see LVA paras 3.23-3.30 and GLVIA⁶) the appeal site does not comprise a 'valued landscape' in accordance with paragraph 174 of the NPPF. This was also the opinion of SCDC as stated in the Committee Report (para 134).

Visual context

- 4.12 The visibility of the appeal site is reflected by a number of representative viewpoints A – M, which were agreed with officers at SCDC prior to carrying out the LVA (see Appendix 2 of LVA). The location of the views are shown on Figures 03, 05 and 06 of the LVA, described within Table 4.1 and paragraphs 4.3 to 4.8 of the LVA and illustrated by a range of photographs provided within Appendices 4 and 5 of the LVA. The selection of viewpoints indicates that the majority of closest and middle-distance public views of Area A are from Haverhill Road. Wider public views are present from three locations in the landscape notably: the access track to Stapleford Cemetery (Viewpoint F), from the part of Magog Down (Viewpoint J) and along Bridleway S2 (Viewpoint K). Views from residential properties are largely limited to properties either backing onto the site to the edge of Stapleford at Gog Magog Way, Haverhill Road and Chalk Hill, or from a few isolated properties to the north of Area B.

Green Infrastructure Context

- 4.13 The 2011 Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy provides part of the evidence base for the 2018 Adopted Local Plan and in particular Policy NH/6: Green Infrastructure. Appendix 1 of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (page 95) identifies on Drawing 2823_T13⁷ - the Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes Projects and Biodiversity Partnership's 50 Year Vision. This includes a number of projects and target habitats. Area B of the appeal site falls within The Wildlife Trust Living Landscapes Project No. 2. Gog Magogs for chalk and limestone grassland creation.
- 4.14 More recent work from the emerging evidence-base for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan includes the Greater Cambridge GI Opportunity Mapping Baseline Report (LUC 2020)⁸. Within this study the appeal site falls within the broad opportunity zones/areas of three of the six GI themes. These include:

⁶ CD 5.5 GLVIA3 Box 5.1 page 84 – pdf page 91

⁷ CD 5.2

⁸ CD 5.11

- 4.15 **Theme 1 - Landscape, cultural heritage and sense of place** (Figure 6.3 – pages 37- 38 – pdf pages 52 and 53) where the text supports under reference '1e' – Gog Magog Hills and South Cambridge Urban Fringe and states there is a, '*Key opportunity to expand high-quality GI to help accommodate growth and absorb recreational pressure, enhancing existing landscape features within the fringes of South Cambridge towards the Gog Magog Hills.*'
- 4.16 **Theme 2 - Biodiversity and geodiversity** – (Figure 6.7 – pdf page 78) where the text supports (page 62 – pdf page 76) under project '2e' the scope to capture the grassland, woodland and elements of parkland habitat to span from the urban edge out to the surrounding rural countryside and spanning key transport corridors.
- 4.17 **Theme 4 Access and connectivity** - (Figure 6.12 – pdf page 106 and text page 87 – pdf page 100) where under sustainable transport it is identified there are gaps in the existing public right-of-way and permissive access route network, resulting in limited access to several large accessible green spaces and the reliance on using a car to travel short distances. An example given is to Wandlebury and Magog Down, which fits within Project 4h shown on Figure 6.12.
- 4.18 The proposals for the Countryside Park on the appeal site would support and make substantive progress to the delivery of the existing and emerging GI strategies in relation to landscape, biodiversity and connectivity in the locality.

5 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The proposed development is described within the Statement of Common Ground (paragraphs 7.8 to 7.13).
- 5.2 In addition I refer to the description of the proposals within Section 6 the LVA together with the submitted Parameter Plans, Design and Access Statement and the Illustrative Masterplan. A description is provided below for both Area A- the Retirement Care Village and Area B – the Countryside Park.

Area A – Retirement Care Village

- 5.3 The proposals for the Retirement Care Village occupy the lower lying south-east corner of the site adjacent to Stapleford village and Haverhill Road. A Retirement Care Village needs a site area of a between 3.5-7.5 ha to provide for the integral range of required facilities and services. The retirement village would comprise a mix of facilities with a central care home and associated community facilities; up to 110 separate retirement apartments and bungalows in detached units at both two and single storey and areas of associate amenity areas. The total area of Area A is 4.91 ha which comprises 3.12 ha of the main development area, 0.73 ha of perimeter amenity areas and 1.06 ha of structure planting (based on Parameter Plans 008, 008A and 009). This means the area available for the residents excluding the structure planting is 3.85ha.
- 5.4 The heights and scale of the units within the development step down across Area A from the lower lying ground to south-west to the relatively higher ground to the north-east as shown on the Land Use and Heights Parameter Plan 008. All units are to be a maximum of two storeys.
- 5.5 The Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008 submitted with the application shows an upper limit of 12m to ridge on the southern area, an upper limit of 8m to ridge to the centre and an upper limit of 7m to ridge to the north. The proposals are for the main care building, apartments to the centre to be two storey and the units to the north to single storey.
- 5.6 However, as a result of ongoing discussions between Axis and potential care village providers it has been established that the main care buildings could be accommodated within an upper ridge level of 9m as opposed to 12m. It is considered that a reduction in 3m to the upper ridge height of built forms could bring a beneficial reduction of the effects of the proposals on both landscape and townscape character and visual receptors in the area. A replacement alternative Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008A was submitted to the Inspector for consideration in October 2021. The Inspector has requested a formal consultation to be carried out on this alternative. The process requires a 21 day consultation period and for this reason the findings of the consultation and the Inspectors ruling will not be known until after this proof of evidence is exchanged. For this reason the consideration of effects in the following sections is initially based the original Parameter Plan 008

but an additional comparison is then made providing comments on any differences that would arise from Parameter Plan 008A.

5.7 The landscape proposals for Area A are shown on the Landscape Parameter Plan 009 and Illustrative Masterplan and include:

- a. New structural woodland planting of trees and shrubs and amenity open space to the north west boundary (15-40m depth) north east boundary (15m depth) and along the Haverhill Road frontage (10-40m depth). This planting would help to visually contain the new built forms from adjacent roads, surrounding public viewpoints and the wider landscape. The planting measures would also support objectives 'i' and 'j' of the Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan (AAP) Policy CSF 5. The areas of tree planting on Haverhill Road would establish to form a new green gateway feature at the entrance to the settlement.
- b. Replacement of a section of existing hedgerow fronting Haverhill Road to be removed to form the site access and dedicated right turn land as shown on the submitted Drawing 406. 09693. 00002.14.H 11.2. The access proposals, although essentially unchanged, results in the loss of a greater length of the existing hedgerow being removed than was envisaged when the LVA was drafted (LVA 6.7). However, the submitted Tree Survey Drawing LS1443-01 stated there would be a loss of c 250m. The loss of existing hedgerow to form the proposed access would result in some increased visibility in the early years into the development site from Haverhill Road than anticipated in the LVA. However, a new hedge and areas of advanced nursery stock tree planting would be provided to the site frontage at Year 1 to provide early replacement and mitigation.
- c. Publicly accessible recreation routes into the site from Gog Magog Way (along the alignment of the existing field access route) to the south west and at the main vehicular access off Haverhill Road. Access would be for pedestrians by way of surfaced paths leading through the site and to the Countryside Park to the north.
- d. Properties backing onto the site at Chalk Hill and Gog Magog Way would be afforded suitable privacy with the proposed development being set back from the site boundary. This area of land would comprise a 10 m depth of structure planting together with approximately 15 m of amenity land and a potential location for a surface water attenuation feature. The majority of rear gardens on Gog Magog Way are 20m deep providing a total separation between facades of existing and new structures of c 45-50m.
- e. Internal amenity areas would be provided within the development combining both communal gardens and open space and private amenity areas close to individual properties. These features are indicatively shown on the Illustrative Master Plan but would be subject to later submissions for Reserved Matters

Area B- Countryside Park

- 5.8 The larger part of the site comprises over 19 ha of land and would extend from east to west between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way and connect to Area A to the south-east. The Area is proposed as a publicly accessible semi-natural Countryside Park. The Countryside Park would be managed by the Magog Trust who have direct experience of managing a similar area of chalk downland and woodland at the Magog Down, located less than 1km to the north-east. The intended layout for the Countryside Park is shown on the Illustrative Master Plan and also described at section 8.2 of the Design and Access Statement. The proposals would include the following elements:
- a. Extensive areas of species rich chalk grassland which are a priority habitat. This would support the objective 'g' of AAP Policy CSF 5.
 - b. New copses, on the higher ground with e.g. beech, lime and sycamore trees to form a destination and focal point and to frame panoramic views to the south and west. This would support objective 'f' of AAP Policy CSF 5.
 - c. A network of recreation routes within the site and linking between the development Site, Haverhill Road and Hinton Way. This would support the objective 'm' of AAP Policy CSF 5.
 - d. Infilling of gappy hedges. This would support objective 'k' of AAP Policy CSF 5.
 - e. Properties on higher ground with existing open views to the south-west e.g. Middlefield Cottage and Hillstead should have their outlook and privacy largely unaffected by avoiding tall planting to the site boundary and by discouraging pedestrian access near the properties.
 - f. Retention of the roadside hedgerow to Haverhill Road with minimal loss sufficient to provide a single pedestrian access point to the north east corner. Supplementary planting to benefit wildlife and amenity would also take place within the site including some areas of native scrub.

Proposed planting - size and growth rates

- 5.9 Notwithstanding the provision of Parameter Plan 009 as a drawing for approval at part of the outline appeal, details of landscaping including planting species, sizes and densities would form part of a later submission of Reserved Matters. However, it is worth setting out at this point the assumptions regarding the tree and shrub planting in the consideration of landscape and visual effects that follow in Sections 6-9 in my proof.
- 5.10 The LVA states at para 2.6 that it was assumed that the proposed native tree and hedgerow planting would growth at a rate of approximately 450mm pa, and that no growth would take place in the 1st year as plants adjust to their growing environment.

- 5.11 The assumption for the structure planting areas is that they would comprise a mix of trees and shrubs combining an informal grid at 1.5m centres of feathered trees at a height of 2.1m with understorey transplants at 0.9m height. Growth rates of 450mm pa would give rise to typical heights of 8.4m for feathered trees and up to 7.2m for transplant tree species by Year 15 and with lower heights for shrubs within the mix forming part of the understorey.
- 5.12 Adjacent to Haverhill Road the new hedging would comprise 0.9m transplants as triple rows at Year 1 which would establish to form a dense native hedge at 2.5m by Year 8 and similar to that along the remainder of Haverhill Road. Tree planting to the rear of the new hedge would comprise advanced nursery stock at c 3m height at Year 1 together with understorey dense shrub planting to provide quicker initial cover and reaching similar heights to the rest of the areas by Year 15.
- 5.13 Tree planting within the core of Area A would include a mix of advanced nursery stock, feathered trees and a range of ornamental shrubs. The location of this planting would be determined by the approved layout submitted at Reserved Matters stage.
- 5.14 Tree groups within the Countryside Park would largely be planted as transplants at a height of 0.9 m and have reached up to 7.2 m by Year 15.
- 5.15 It is recognised that growth rates would vary for different species. Pioneer species (e.g. silver birch, native cherry and Italian alder) would be quicker while climax species (e.g. oak and beech) would typically be slower. Growing rates would also depend on ground conditions, cultivation and maintenance. Growth rates would be optimised by the use of existing field conditions and a bare earth/ mulch approach to reduce competition from grasses in plantations. These aspects can be covered by a landscape management plan to be agreed by condition.
- 5.16 It is noted that there is an example of tree growth rates in the locality at Chalk Hill to the south-west of the site. The site was developed in c 2008 and planted trees have been in place for c 13 years. Trees are now at c 6-8m in height at a similar height to the houses. Therefore its considered reasonable that similar or improved rates of growth can be achieved on the appeal site in the structure planting areas and within the site.

6 DESCRIPTION OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The LVA that accompanied the planning application assessed the effects on landscape character at a range of scales (LVA Pages 25-30) from National to Site. Effects were assessed separately for Area A and Area B both Year 1 and Year 15. These effects were based on Parameter Plan 008. The findings are summarised below.

National Character Area 87 – East Anglian Chalk

- 6.2 The effect at the largest scale i.e. National Character Area (NCA) East Anglian Chalk -NCA 87⁹, is considered to be Negligible. This derives from a combination of a Very Low magnitude of change on the NCA overall and the NCA being of Medium sensitivity. The low level of change was due to the relatively large scale of the NCA stretching over 40 miles from Letchworth to Newmarket and the relatively small scale of the appeal site. The Negligible effect applies to both the 3ha Area A and the 19ha of Area B.

District Scale - Gog Magog Chalk Hills

- 6.3 The effect of the Area A development at the district scale character area of the Gog Magog Chalk Hills – LCA 3A (see LVA Figure 02) is considered to be Moderate Adverse at Year 1. This combines a Medium sensitivity to this part of the Gog Magog Chalk Hills and a Medium magnitude of change at the district scale LCA. By Year 15 the effect would reduce to Minor Adverse as the magnitude of change reduces with the containment of Area A by the new perimeter structure planting, which would relate the proposed built development more closely to Stapleford village and separate it from the more open landscape beyond.
- 6.4 The effect on Area B from the introduction of the Countryside Park is considered to be Moderate Neutral at Year 1 rising to Moderate Beneficial by Year 15. The proposals involve the replacement of a single monoculture arable field to a range of chalk habitats including wildflower meadows and hilltop tree groups. The establishment of the planting and grassland habitats would take a few years to achieve and therefore positive effects in character terms would only occur after a few years.

Local scale

- 6.5 The local scale is assessed within the LVA as extending to up to 1 km from the appeal site. The local scale landscape area is considered to be of Medium Sensitivity and would experience a higher magnitude of change at Medium/High at Year 1. This is due to the relative scale of the proposals and the smaller landscape unit being assessed (compared with the larger district scale units - LCA 3B and LCA 4B). The resultant effect would be at the upper end of Moderate Adverse. Area A occupies a location at the interface of Stapleford village, the Granta Valley and the lower slopes of the Gog Magog Chalk Hills and therefore comprises a transitional landscape at this point. The proposed

⁹ CD 5.7

Retirement Care Village within Area A would represent a notable change to the open arable landscape next to the village but together with the proposed structure planting works would form an extension of the village to the north-east. There would be a more limited appreciation of the development from Stapleford village with screening being provided by the existing settlement to the south and majority views focused along Haverhill Road. By Year 15 the proposed structural planting would further limit views from within the village and in particular soften views along Haverhill Road after the sections of replacement hedgerow planting and proposed structure planting have become established.

- 6.6 The effect on Area B is more extensive at the local scale occupying over 19 ha of local area with a Moderate Neutral effect at Year 1, before the planting and landscape measures become effective, but would increase to Moderate/Major Beneficial by Year 15. By this time the proposals would bring a number of landscape enhancements to the local area on an area of more elevated ground that is more widely visible than Area A, stretching between Hinton Way and Haverhill Road.

Site scale

- 6.7 Effects at the site scale involve the greatest level of overall effect with a Major/Moderate Adverse effect within Area A at Year 1. This involves a High magnitude of change resulting from loss of all the agricultural land and the introduction of the residential care village and new access from Haverhill Road with the loss of a length of c 250m of roadside hedgerow. The incorporation of structure planting to the perimeter of Area A would provide a framework for the assimilation of the proposals and while these would have a limited benefit initially, by Year 15 would establish to reduce effects to Moderate Neutral.
- 6.8 Proposals within Area B would be extensive at the site scale with a Moderate Neutral effect at Year 1 but increasing to Moderate/Major Beneficial by Year 15 as the various components of the Countryside Park become established as distinctive features in the landscape. It is noted that the Officer Report (para 281) considers the landscape mitigation measures within the Area B would by Year 15 be a 'Major Beneficial effect', with the change from arable to semi-natural grassland, trees and scrub and be more in keeping with the objectives for bringing landscape improvement and recreational and biodiversity benefits.

Balancing of effects from Area A and Area B.

- 6.9 The LVA describes the effects on Areas A and Area B separately since they are different in their character and type of effect. However, as the two parts of the application both fall within the red line there is a case to consider the overall net balance in landscape character terms, as discrete from the weighing of harm against very special circumstances as part of the overall planning balance. The balance in terms of landscape character is best considered at the site scale, where the levels of harm and benefit are at the greatest and most noticeable. This approach is set out within Section 3 of the LVA Addendum.

- 6.10 The effects of the Retirement Care Village on character are assessed as adverse in the early years due to the introduction of built form within an open site of 3.12 ha, albeit adjacent to the established village edge. However, over time the establishment of a strong landscape perimeter on a further 1.79 ha would help integrate and soften the development into its setting to appear as an extension of Stapleford. In association with a high quality architectural layout and design the combined proposals including the landscape proposals would result in a change that is different rather than necessarily adverse and hence are considered to comprises a 'Neutral effect' at Year 15. The benefits that arise from the Countryside Park to the local character are extensive covering over 19 ha of land and provide strong support in terms of enhancing landscape character, biodiversity and public access/recreation in accordance with Policy CSF5 and aspects of the existing and emerging Green Infrastructure Strategies.
- 6.11 In my judgement it is reasonable to consider, taking the appeal site as a whole, that there would be a Major/Moderate Adverse effect at Year 1 (combining a Major/Moderate Adverse effect on Area A and a Moderate Neutral effect on Area B). This would be a consequence of the Retirement Care Village being the most prominent part of the overall site at this time and that the perimeter structure planting to Area A and the wider enhancements to form the Countryside Park – Area B would be of limited significance within the landscape due to their lack of maturity. However, by Year 15 the overall balance on the site would change to a Moderate Beneficial effect (combining a Moderate Neutral effect on Area A and a Major/Moderate Beneficial effect on Area B). By this time the mitigation planting around the Retirement Care home would become relatively well established with reduced effects of the built form on the remainder of the site and with the establishment of the range of habitats and landscape features within the Countryside Park being more strongly read within the site and local landscape. Over the full lifetime of the development the net benefit of the proposals would continue to increase.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 6.12 Parameter Plan 008A includes the southern part of Area A at a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. There would be a consequential reduced effect on landscape character from this reduction in height. The level of change would be very limited at the National and District scale but greater at the smaller scale of landscape unit. It would be most noticeable at the Local and Site scale as the tallest buildings on the site would reduce in height by 3metres. This would be a clear beneficial change to the local area and in particular in relation to the townscape character of Stapleford. However, having considered the change in height of the southern part of Area A against the whole of the Area A development in terms of extent, height and mitigation I do not consider there would be enough of a change in size/scale to merit a reduction in the category of magnitude of change and significance from those in the LVA.

Conclusion on Landscape Effects

- 6.13 In conclusion landscape character effects of the proposed development are greatest on the Site itself with a Major/Moderate Adverse effect within Area A at Year 1 through the introduction of the Retirement Care Home on part of an open arable field at the village edge. Moderate Adverse effects would also occur at Year 1 at the Local scale up to 1km and within the host District scale landscape. 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. 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 will 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 on the site at Year 15 will be Moderate Beneficial in landscape character terms.

7 DESCRIPTION OF VISUAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSALS

Effects on visual receptors are set out within the LVA at pages 33-39 and illustrated by Viewpoints A-M in the LVA at Appendix 4 (summer and winter comparisons) and Appendix 5 (LI TGN 06/19 images). The Viewpoint locations were agreed with the SCDC (LVA 2 Appendix 2). It should be noted there is a typographical error in the table on page 38 of the LVA for Viewpoint J where the effect at Year 1 from Area A should be Major/Moderate, as correctly stated in the text at para 8.10 (and not Moderate as stated in the Table).

- 7.1 Effects from the Retirement Care Village (Area A) proposals are generally assessed as Adverse in nature, apart from a few Negligible effects. In most cases the effects are greater at Year 1 and reduce by Year 15. In contrast views of the Countryside Park (Area B) proposals are typically Neutral at Year 1 but with some beneficial effects by Year 15. These effects were based on Parameter Plan 008.

View from Haverhill Road and edge of Stapleford

- 7.2 The closest receptors to Area A are from Haverhill Road including Viewpoints D and G which are close to the south-east corner and north-east corner of Area A. There would be a High magnitude of change at and between both locations at Year 1 (slightly higher than recorded in the LVA due to the loss of a greater length of the existing roadside hedgerow) and a corresponding Major/Moderate Adverse effect, as there would be an open view into the Retirement Care Village for approximately 250 metres in the short term. However, the proposed hedgerow and tree and shrub planting along this boundary would establish so that by Year 15 effects would be at the levels assessed in the LVA of Moderate Adverse (Viewpoint D) and Minor Adverse (Viewpoint G). The greater effect at Viewpoint D is due to the closer proximity and scale of the main care home.
- 7.3 Effects at increased distance on Haverhill Road would be at Moderate Adverse at both Year 1 and Year 15 from Viewpoint C on the northern edge of the village as the main care home would still be visible beyond the existing houses and garages to Haverhill Road. However, establishing trees would largely mitigate the built forms along Haverhill Road by Year 15. From Viewpoint H to the north of the village effects are Moderate Adverse at Year 1 (as the roadside hedges would be retained along this section of the road) and reduce to Minor Adverse at Year 15 as the substantial areas of tree planting to the north of the site and within the Countryside Park would largely screen views of the built development.
- 7.4 Visual effects at even greater distance on Haverhill Road are represented by Viewpoints E (within the village) and Viewpoint I (from the rising ground leading from Magog Down). Effects are Minor Adverse for both locations at Year 1 and Year 15. Visual effects from public locations within Stapleford

are typically Minor Adverse or less at Year 1 and Year 15 as illustrated by Viewpoints A and B as existing housing and planting preclude most views into the site.

- 7.5 Visual effects of the Countryside Park from Haverhill Road and other public views from the northern edge of Stapleford are typically Negligible due to restricted views across Area A due to combination of the proposed structure planting and the presence of existing housing and established vegetation within the village. There would be intermittent views between existing hedges up to the Countryside Park along Gog Magog Way to the west of the proposed pedestrian access point.

Middle and distant views

- 7.6 Middle and distant views that would be affected within the context of the local landscape (up to 1 km) are illustrated by Viewpoints F, J and K.
- 7.7 Viewpoint F is from the access track to the Stapleford Cemetery and is approximately 600 m from Area A. From this location there are views across the edge of the village to the north-east with existing houses set within mature trees and gardens. The proposed development would be seen on the lower slopes particularly at Year 1 but then softening towards Year 15. From this location the presence of residential built form to the village edge is already a feature of these views and the proposed development would be broadly in character with open fields still to the middle distance. However, the relatively higher ridge height of the care home at 12m would appear above the closer existing houses on the edge of the village from this location with the remainder of the 8m housing areas being comparable to the existing properties. The more prominent higher ground towards Magog Down and the elevated land within the Countryside Park would still form the backdrop and skyline in these views. The visual effects are considered to be Moderate Adverse at Year 1 and Moderate/Minor Adverse at Year 15 from the changes on Area A.
- 7.8 Viewpoint J is the most elevated view of the appeal site from the Magog Down, an area of accessible public open space. Views from Magog Down to the south-west are largely contained by intervening woodland from most of the open space. However, distant views open out near Viewpoint J to the southern corner near Little Trees Hill. The viewpoint location includes two distant views, one to the south-west towards Stapleford and over the Granta Valley. The second long-distance view is to the north-west towards Addenbrookes and Cambridge. The proposed development within Area A would be visible to the south west in the middle distance in front of the existing built edge of Stapleford including at Chalk Hill and Gog Magog Way at c 1km distance. The development would be clearly noticeable at Year 1 with a Major/Moderate Adverse effect but seen in the context of the existing village behind to the left and right. The proposed structure planting to the perimeter of Area A would establish by Year 15 and would effectively break up and reduce the appearance of the Retirement Care Village to create a more wooded and vegetated edge to the village edge with a reduced Moderate Adverse effect. The appearance would be comparable to the existing soft edge of village

appearance albeit at a slightly closer distance. Areas of planting to the east of the Countryside Park would also be visible by Year 15, while other parts of the park would be hidden behind established intervening woodland from this location.

- 7.9 Viewpoint K is representative of the views from Bridleway Stapleford 2 which runs to the south-east of Stapleford and from where there are wide open views to 360° with those towards the site occupying part of the expansive panoramas and experience for recreational users along the route. Views towards Area A are to the north-west. The existing residential properties to the edge of Stapleford along Haverhill Road together with associated vegetation within gardens and on the field boundary provide a partially soft edge to the village from this direction beyond the foreground of open extensive fields. The proposed development on Area A would appear as an extension of Stapleford to the north east along Haverhill Road with the 12m to ridge buildings being the most conspicuous. In the context to the wider views along the bridleway this would result in a Moderate Adverse effect at Year 1 reducing to Minor Adverse by Year 15 as the planting associated with the perimeter of Area A establishes in locations adjacent to Haverhill Road, to the rear of properties on Gog Magog Way and to the interface with the higher land to the north. Views from Viewpoint K and Bridleway S2 also extend up to the higher ground to the north including the slopes within the Countryside Park and to Magog Down. At Year 1 the landscape proposals within the Countryside Park would not be discernible from this distance. However, by Year 15 the semi-mature tree groups within the open space would begin to show as features within the landscape.
- 7.10 Views from the north-west along Hinton Way are restricted into the site initially by hedgerows where the Countryside Park meets the road and then by rising ground which prevents any views over the majority of the Countryside Park or towards the Retirement Care Village and Area A.
- 7.11 Views of and from the Countryside Park would be most notable for future users. Residents and visitors would be able to appreciate views across the undulating site and of the range of habitats including chalk grassland, tree copses and area of native scrub. There would be views towards the Retirement Care Village, but this would be mitigated by Year 15 by the substantive structure planting to the north and west and the tree groups within the Countryside Park. In addition there will be panoramic and distant views over Stapleford and the wider Granta Valley (see Photograph C within Appendix 4 of the LVA for view from the high point on the site). This would be a net notable benefit for local residents and visitors enabled by the proposed access to the Countryside Park which was hitherto unavailable.

Residential views

- 7.12 The closest residential properties to the site are located on Gog Magog Way, Haverhill Road and Chalk Hill. Residents with the most direct outlook are those looking from the rear elevations and gardens of Gog Magog Way where it is likely there would be a High magnitude of change and some

Major Adverse effects at Year 1 particularly where there is limited existing planting in rear gardens. The closest buildings on the site are indicated at approximately 40-50m from the closest façade of the existing properties. Views from the bungalows on Haverhill Road and properties at Chalk Hill are generally more oblique in orientation. Structure planting to a minimum depth of 10 m would be provided to provide mitigation to the rear of these properties. This planting would help mitigate adverse effects over time.

- 7.13 A number of isolated individual properties are located to the north of the site including Middlefield Cottage and The House on the Hill. These properties would experience open views to the south firstly over the proposed Countryside Park, and then towards Area A which would be set against the backdrop of Stapleford. The built development would be in excess of 300 m from these properties with belts of structure planting the north of Area A providing mitigation in the medium-term.
- 7.14 The Officer Report considers the effects on residential amenity and concerns raised by local residents at paragraphs 204-210. The report concludes that *'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'*. I am in agreement with this conclusion in the Committee Report. Therefore, while there would clearly be some adverse visual effects on nearby residents there is no right to review and a suitable offset distance and provision for mitigation is included within the proposals. Furthermore there is no indication of unacceptable effects on residents in the Reasons for Refusal.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 7.15 Parameter Plan 008A includes the southern part of Area A at a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. There would be a consequential reduced effect on a number of visual receptors from this reduction in height. The level of change would be most noticeable for receptors at the closer views on Haverhill Road as illustrated by Viewpoints C, D and G. There would also be a noticeable benefit for residents on Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill that have a northerly aspect from their properties towards Area A. In the more distant views, including those on Haverhill Road (Viewpoints H, I and E) and from wider views at Stapleford Cemetery, Magog Down and Bridleway S2 (Viewpoints F, J and K) the replacement of any 12m buildings with an upper 9m building would be beneficial by bringing the height of the maximum building forms to be more comparable in scale with the existing houses to the edge of Stapleford. However, having considered the change in height from each of the viewpoints while there would be a benefit with a reduced level of effect, I do not consider there would be enough of a change in size/scale to merit a reduction in the categories of magnitude of change and significance below those identified in the LVA.

Conclusion on visual effects

- 7.16 In conclusion visual effects of the proposed development are therefore at the greatest directly adjacent to the site on Haverhill Road along the frontage of the Retirement Care Village and then in the early years before establishment of the proposed structure planting. The perimeter planting around Area A would help assimilate the development within the settlement of Stapleford in the medium-term and maintain the open landscape beyond the village envelope. The more distant public views that are available most notably from Magog Down and Bridleway S2 would experience some noticeable adverse effects initially, but these would reduce over time. Views to Countryside Park would be neutral initially from the representative viewpoints outside the park, but the proposals would in time add to the visual amenity of the local area. However, from within the Countryside Park there would be a range of enhanced views for visitors, both across the undulating character of the site itself and also through wider panoramic views across Gog Magog Hills and Granta Valley. The amenity value of the views would increase over time as the new woodland and chalk grassland habitats mature. Considering the appeal site as a whole I consider the any residual adverse effects at Year 15 following establishment of the structure planting to the Retirement Care Village would also be offset by the benefits to public amenity from access to the Countryside Park.

8 RESPONSE TO REASON FOR REFUSAL 2 - EFFECT ON GREEN BELT

8.1 Reason for Refusal 1 relates to Green Belt and that as the appeal site is located outside the development framework boundary of Stapleford and within the Cambridge Green Belt that the proposed Retirement Care Village part of the appeal scheme is by definition inappropriate development and therefore harmful to the Green Belt since the proposals do not fall within any of the exception criteria set out in the NPPF. In contrast the proposed Countryside Park is appropriate development. Matters relating to this reason refusal are covered by Mr Brown.

8.2 The Cambridge Inner Green Belt Study ¹⁰(CIGBS) 2015 forms part of the evidence base in the 2018 Local Plan and I make reference to the CIGBS below.

8.3 Reason for Refusal 2 states,

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 (now 137-138) 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.

8.4 Reason for Refusal 2 relates to effects of the Retirement Care Village on the openness of Green Belt and on the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It is noted that there is no reference in the reason for refusal to the Countryside Park component of the appeal site. However, I consider this integral part of appeal proposals that would not cause any harm to the Green Belt but rather provide positive enhancements in accordance with paragraph 145 of the NPPF, which states

'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;'

Openness

8.5 The NPPF states at paragraph 137, *'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.'* Openness is characterised by the absence of built form or other

¹⁰ CD 5.4

urbanising elements. Planning Practice Guidance (ID: 64-001-20190722) states that openness is capable of having both a spatial and visual dimension.

- 8.6 The proposals would occupy land within the Green Belt and would affect its openness from both a spatial and visual perspective. It is also assumed that the proposals would be permanent development. The spatial dimension relates to quantities including areas, volumes and distances. The visual dimension relates to how the land is perceived and seen within its context which is likely to be influenced by landform, vegetation, other built forms, accessible viewpoints and planned mitigation.

Spatial dimension

- 8.7 The appeal site occupies 24.37 ha of undeveloped Green Belt currently in agricultural use. The built development component of Area A – the Retirement Care Village proposals would occupy 3.12 ha of Green Belt equivalent to approximately 13% of the appeal site. An area of 1.79 ha approximately 7% of the appeal site would comprise structure planting and amenity land to the perimeter of the Retirement Care Village. The remaining 19.1 ha of the appeal site would be set aside for the proposed Countryside Park – Area B. These areas are shown on the Landscape Parameter Plan (drawing J0027450_009). Therefore the spatial effect on loss of openness would relate to some 3.12 ha.
- 8.8 The proposed upper limits of built forms and mass as shown on the original Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008 include a stepped arrangement from up to 12m to ridgeline on the lower lying ground closest to existing edge of Stapleford, up to 8 m to ridge height within the centre of the village area and up to 7m to ridge height to the north-east part of the Area A. The proposed amended Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008A has a reduced 9m (as opposed to 12m) to ridgeline to the south of Area A.

Visual dimension

- 8.9 The site for the proposed Retirement Care Village is currently open in character. Due to the presence of tall boundary hedges (c. 2.5m tall) to Haverhill Road and the built form on Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill to the south, public views of the ground surface of Area A are restricted at closer locations. From the middle distance there are public views from the track to Stapleford cemetery to the south west where parts of the field can be glimpsed. The most open public views into Area A are from the more elevated Magog Down but a distance of c 1km. There are also open views from the Area B part of the appeal site but this land is not publicly accessible.
- 8.10 While there are restrictions to seeing the site area at present from public locations there is currently an absence of built forms which would indicate a perceived openness in contrast to the housing to the south within Stapleford. The introduction of the proposed Retirement Care Village would result in a loss of perceived openness on the smaller part of the appeal site. This would be noticeable from public views in the locality, but be seen in the context of buildings on the edge of the village.

- 8.11 The proposed location and arrangement of the built form within the Retirement Care Village aims to reduce the perceptual effects within its context. The built area is located on the lower lying ground of the appeal site between approximately 20 and 25 m AOD and directly adjacent to the existing built edge of Stapleford to the south and Haverhill Road to the east. The proposals also include belts of structural landscape to all the perimeters of Area A which would reduce the awareness of the proposed built forms over time. The areas of structure planting as shown on the Landscape Parameter Plan are substantive in depth and area typically ranging between 15 to 40 m and these would serve to provide notable areas of woodland planting around the Retirement Care Village site at the edge of the village. As these tree and shrub belts establish the initial perception of loss of openness would reduce. This change is considered below in relation to various locations.
- 8.12 The greatest visual change would be experienced following completion of the development as seen from Haverhill Road, from locations leaving and entering (including LVA viewpoints C, D, G and H). The existing hedgerow fronting the care village would be removed to form the site access with new views into the proposed development for a frontage approximately 250m. This would appear as a northern extension of Stapleford village travelling along Haverhill Road when leaving the village or approaching from the north. This would result in a perceived loss of openness which would decrease with distance from the site entrance. However, a replacement hedgerow together with a belt of semi-mature trees and shrub planting behind would form part of the initial development along the road frontage. In addition deeper blocks of planting would be provided to the northeast and south east corners. These planted features would establish to largely contain the built form (apart from close to the road access point) from Haverhill Road by the medium term (Year 15). Overall this would result in a notable reduction in the perception of the loss of openness compared to Year 1 such that it becomes limited by Year 15.
- 8.13 In views from the south on Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill (LVA Viewpoints A and B) there are restricted views into the site, although in the winter months there would be some limited visibility of the built development from Chalk Hill (Viewpoint B) with a corresponding small perceptual loss of openness. By Year 15 with the establishment of the proposed structure planting to the southern boundary the built forms would largely be screened and result in a negligible perceptual loss of openness. From Viewpoint A views are towards the western perimeter planting belts and the visual change would relate to the introduction of additional planting over time rather than additional built form. In this respect there would be no effect on the perception of openness at Year 1 or Year 15.
- 8.14 From the track to Stapleford cemetery (Viewpoint F) there would be views to the proposed built forms at approximately 600 m distance with a perceptual loss in openness at Year 1. The proposed built forms would appear as a modest extension to the existing built edge of Stapleford. However, with the establishment of the structure planting on the western boundary over the medium-term the effect of the built forms on the visual dimension of openness would become limited from this location.

- 8.15 Views from the east are represented by those from Bridleway S2 (Viewpoint K) which is located between 600 to 1.7km to the south-east. The existing character is very open to all aspects of the bridleway. The addition of the built forms on the site would have an effect on the perception of openness at Year 1 but due to the distance involved and wider experience of openness from the route this would be limited in extent and nature. The development would appear as a modest extension to Stapleford and not overly affect the overall experience of openness. By Year 15 the proposed structure planting would largely provide visual containment of the built forms and further reduce the perceived effect on openness to become very limited.
- 8.16 From the north-east the proposed Retirement Care Village would be clearly identifiable at Year 1 from the Magog Down (Viewpoint J) at a distance of 1km as part of the wider panorama over Stapleford and the Granta Valley. There would be a loss of perceived openness from this location but due to the distance involved and that Area A occupies a small part of the wider view the loss of openness would be limited. As the proposed structure planting around the development and within the Countryside Park establishes to form a strong vegetated gateway to the village there would be a reduction in the loss of perceived openness by Year 15 from this location.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 8.17 Parameter Plan 008A includes the southern part of Area A at a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. The change to the building parameter would bring some benefits to both the spatial and perceptual aspects of effect on openness. The scheme would be measurably smaller in maximum height and this would also lead to a reduction in perception from a range of viewpoints. The structure planting would also more quickly reach the upper heights of the proposed structures to help assimilate the built forms into the local setting.

Conclusion on effects on openness

- 8.18 Overall I consider that the effect on the openness of the Green Belt from the proposals for the Retirement Care Village scheme would result in moderate loss of openness on the spatial dimension due to the development within 3.12 ha of land for built uses. This would apply at Year 1 and Year 15 as the quantum of development would remain the same. In relation to the perceptual dimension I consider that there would initially be an overall moderate loss of openness, most notably as perceived along Haverhill Road and from the viewpoint on Magog Down. However with the establishment of the structure planting to the perimeter of Area A the perceived loss of openness would considerably reduce to become limited from all aspects. In addition the proposals for the Countryside Park would provide some significant enhancements to the Green Belt in accordance with NPPF para 145.

Effects on the purposes of including land in the Green Belt

- 8.19 The NPPF para 138 identifies five purposes of Green Belt. I consider that only one of the five purposes of Green Belt are engaged with the proposed retirement care village namely, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. This is reflected at paragraph 105 of the Officer Report. However, SCDCs Statement of Case (para 5.8 and 5.29) and the Statement of Common Ground also refer to the purpose of checking unrestricted 'urban sprawl'. For this reason I will consider the potential effect on each of purposes of Green Belt as stated in the NPPF.

Purpose 1 – To check unrestricted sprawl of large built areas

- 8.20 For this purpose, reference is made to large built areas and their spread in an unplanned and conspicuous or irregular manner. The size of settlement comprising a 'large built area' is not defined in the NPPF or supporting guidance. However, Stapleford is a village and even if allowing for the connection to Great Shelford I do not consider it can be described as a large built area. The relevant large built area in this context is the City of Cambridge, which is located at its closest point approximately two kilometres to the north. Stapleford is not perceptually connected to the City of Cambridge from the environs of the appeal site. Rather the development of Area A of the site would be perceived as an integral expansion of Stapleford rather than unrestricted sprawl linked to Cambridge. For these reasons, I consider this purpose does not apply.

Purpose 2- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

- 8.21 For this purpose, reference is made to neighbouring towns, in the plural. As stated above I consider that Stapleford is a villages rather than a town. However, in any event development on the appeal site would not lead to coalescence or merging of any adjacent settlements. There are a number of individual properties including Middlefield and Fox Hill within the wooded and compartmentalised landscape to the north of the appeal site, but these properties are isolated in character and not villages. Furthermore, the provision of the Countryside Park would restrict any further built development taking place between the proposed Retirement Care Village and these properties. The other closest villages to Stapleford are Sawston and Babraham to the south-east and at distances in excess of 2 km with no existing visual connectivity to the appeal site. It cannot be said there would be any physical or visual coalescence or merging of towns or even smaller settlements by the introduction of the Retirement Care Village.

Purpose 3-To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 8.22 It is accepted that Area A, the proposed Retirement Care Village part of the appeal site would result in encroachment into the countryside into the Green Belt. In spatial terms this would result in an outward extension of built development from Stapleford of approximately 275 m to the north east

and a depth of approximately 155m to the west from Haverhill Road including structure planting areas) over an area of 3.12 ha of currently undeveloped Green Belt. This would represent a moderate scaled but proportionate extension to the settlement of Stapleford. In perceptual terms the presence of the development would also result in encroachment of the countryside with built form evident particularly in the initial years following completion and the larger buildings up to 12m to ridge being more noticeable. However, with the establishment of the structure planting to the perimeter of Area A there would be a limited sense of encroachment into the wider countryside with natural planting forming a clear boundary and interface with areas of open countryside and the proposed Countryside Park beyond. Tree planting is anticipated to reach 7-8m by Year 15 to provide meaningful enclosure. In addition the proposed Countryside Park would become established in perpetuity to safeguard further development to the north east.

Purpose 4- To preserve the city and special character of historic towns

- 8.23 The appeal site is located within the Cambridge Green Belt and Cambridge is a notable historic city. In spatial terms the appeal site is located some 2km from the southern edge of Cambridge. However, at the closest point between Cambridge and Stapleford the character of the Cambridge is not that of a historic town, but rather an urban area comprising a mix of urban uses including established suburban residential areas, the extensive Fullburn hospital site, research facilities and areas of new residential development and open space.
- 8.24 The Cambridge Inner Green Belt Boundary Study¹¹ provides a number of supporting figures which assist in understanding the context of the appeal site in relation to Cambridge. Figure 2 provides an assessment of sectors and subareas around the city edge. The appeal site is some distance from these assessment sectors. Figure 4 shows the presence of conservation areas. The appeal site is approximately 5 km from the historic core of Cambridge University and town centre. Figure 9 shows the approximate area of Green Belt from which Cambridge can be seen. The appeal site is located beyond this area. It is noted that one of the viewpoints towards Cambridge (P7) is from the Magog Down (LVA viewpoint J) but facing in a different direction to the appeal site with no intervisibility between the two orientations. Figure 11 provides an illustration of Townscape and Landscape role and function identifying the appeal site as being located within, 'Outer rural area of the Green Belt'. Based on the above analysis drawings I consider that the appeal site lies beyond the setting of Cambridge which helps to define its special character.

Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

- 8.25 The appeal site is fully located in Green Belt and does not involve the recycling of derelict or otherwise urban land. It is understood that the space required for a Retirement Care Village is not available within the existing urban area, so a greenfield site is required to meet the identified need. All

¹¹ CD 5. 4

greenfield land in the vicinity of Cambridge is within the Green Belt. Therefore this purpose does not apply.

- 8.26 In conclusion I consider there would only be an effect on one of the five purposes of Green Belt as set out in the NPPF, namely Purpose 3 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The effect is limited to a built development area of 3.12 ha, which represents a modest extension to Stapleford. The effect on encroachment is mitigated by the provision 1.79 ha of structure planting and amenity land to the perimeter of the built form and 19.1 ha of semi-natural public open space to form a significant Countryside Park.

Purposes of Green Belt in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan

- 8.27 The supporting text following Policy S/4 in the SCLP (para 2.30) identifies three established purposes of Cambridge Green Belt. These differ from those within the NPPF in terms of wording but cover similar ground and are set out below together with my opinion on the relationship with the NPPF purposes:

1. *Preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre;* I consider this is reflected within purposes 1 and 4 in the NPPF.
2. *Maintain and enhance the quality of its setting;* I consider this is reflected by purposes 1, 3 and 4 in the NPPF)
3. *Prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city.* I consider this is reflected by purpose 2 in the NPPF.

- 8.28 In relation to SCLP Purpose 1 the unique character of Cambridge would not be affected by the appeal proposals. As mentioned above the CIGBS places the site in the outer rural area and with no visual connections to the city centre. The compact character of the city and its thriving historic core would not be influenced by the appeals proposals. This purpose is not therefore relevant.

- 8.29 In relation to SCLP Purpose 2 there would be no effect on the immediate setting of the City of Cambridge with a lack of intervisibility between the appeal site and the City. In this respect the purpose is not relevant. However, the surrounding necklace villages which include Stapleford and the associated landscape (even when not visually directly related to Cambridge) can be understood to form part the wider setting of Cambridge. In this respect the appeal development is relevant to the purpose. This would relate to Area A through an extension of Stapleford to include the Retirement Care Village and to Area B by the provision of the Countryside Park. There would be a moderate effect on the setting of Stapleford in the initial years from the Retirement Care Village, although this would reduce over time with the establishment of the perimeter tree belts to effectively contain the built development in a manner sympathetic to other parts of the village edge such that the result

effect would be limited on the purpose. The proposed Countryside Park would make a positive contribution to the setting of both Stapleford, and the wider countryside around Cambridge. This would support the purpose.

8.30 In relation to SCLP Purpose 3 there would be no resultant coalescence between Stapleford and any other settlement or community. There are individual properties to the north of Area B, but these are individual houses and would be separated from Area A by the Countryside Park which is offered as a permanent open space in perpetuity. Therefore this purpose would not apply.

8.31 The SCLP also sets out at 2.31 a number of factors which define the special character of Cambridge and its setting. These are listed below, together with my own comments on the extent to which these factors relate to the appeal site:

- a. *Key views of Cambridge from the surrounding countryside;* - there is no visibility towards Cambridge from the appeal site.
- b. *A soft green edge to the city;* - there are no views to the city of Cambridge from the appeal site. However, the edge of Stapleford includes vegetation largely within rear gardens which provides a partially soft edge to the built form within Stapleford. A new soft edge would be created around the appeal site with the structure planting.
- c. *A distinctive urban edge;* - the edge of Stapleford is not particularly distinctive being formed in the main by mid-to-late 20s century residential properties of limited character and distinction.
- d. *Green corridors penetrating into the city;* - the appeal site is not form part of a green corridor that penetrates into the city.
- e. *Designated sites and other features contributing positively to the character of the landscape setting;* - there are no designated sites on the appeal site. There are few features that contribute positively to the character of the landscape within Area A. The more elevated and rising ground of Area B contributes more positively to the setting of Stapleford but not directly to Cambridge
- f. *The distribution, physical separation, setting, scale and character of Green Belt villages;* the appeal proposals would not affect the separation of villages around Cambridge. Area A is part of the immediate setting of Stapleford. Area B would be enhanced by the provision of the Countryside Park which would positively influence the setting Stapleford.
- g. *A landscape that retains a strong rural character* – the appeal site is undeveloped arable land with a rural character. This would be directly affected by the Area A development. However, Area A is located directly adjacent to Stapleford village and together with the proposed mitigation would help retain strong rural character to the remainder of the site (Area B) and the wider area.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 8.32 Parameter Plan 008A includes the southern part of Area A at a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. A reduction in the height would have a small beneficial effect on the sense of perceived encroachment into the Green Belt, NPPF Purpose 3, and on the SCDC Purpose 2 by considering the wider setting of Cambridge with a reduced effect on the edge of Stapleford.

Emerging evidence base

- 8.33 A more recent Green Belt study has been produced by LUC (Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment August 2021¹²) which forms part of the emerging evidence base for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This newer study follows a different methodology to the CIGBS in the assessment of Green Belt relating to openness, purposes and harm.
- 8.34 The LUC report includes the appeal site within Parcel GS8 (see my Appendix 3 for extract from full Green Belt Study). However, GC8 is extensive and includes additional land to the east of Haverhill Road and the whole of the field to the west up to Hinton Way a total area of 72ha, compared to the appeal site which is 24ha.
- 8.35 The LUC report concludes regarding GS8 that, *Parcel GS8 makes a relatively significant contribution to preserving Cambridge's compact character, a moderate contribution to maintaining and enhancing the quality of Cambridge's setting, and a moderate contribution to preventing communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging with the city. The additional impact on the adjacent Green Belt of the release of the parcel would be minor-moderate. Therefore, the harm resulting from its release, as an expansion of Great Shelford, would be very high.'*
- 8.36 The assessment of Parcel GS8 is on the basis of the contribution of the parcel as a whole. It does not consider or assess partial development of GS8, which is a much more likely scenario. Area A represents less than 5% of GS8 and is in one of only two locations adjacent to Stapleford. If the LUC methodology were applied to the extent of Area A only then there would be a lower contribution towards the purposes of Green Belt and a much lower level of harm, particularly after allowing for the mitigation proposals around Area A and within Area B.
- 8.37 This opinion is supported by the LUC study itself which identifies the land directly west to Area A, Parcel GS 9, with a Moderate/High harm rating from development (See Appendix 3 for plan of harm ratings). Also land to the east and rear of Haverhill Road, Parcel GS11, is given a High harm rating which protrudes equally as far into the open fields around the village . On this basis, the Very High

¹² CD 5.12

harm rating for Parcel GS8 cannot be justified for Area A in isolation and should in my opinion be classed as Moderate/High.

- 8.38 Therefore, I do not consider that the findings for Parcel GS8 cannot be uncritically applied to the appeal site. The findings are overstated for Area A and there would be no conflict from Area B. Furthermore, the LUC report has not been tested as either part of a consultation process or at EIP. On this basis its approach and findings should be given very limited weight.

Conclusion of effect on Green Belt

- 8.39 In conclusion I consider that 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 or land of 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 initial stages. However, over time loss of openness from all locations would reduce to limited as the structure planting established. The planting would visually contain the built forms within a vegetated perimeter and provide a sympathetic extension of Stapleford to limit awareness of the proposal from the wider landscape. The openness of the Green Belt would remain unaffected to three sides of Area A including from within the proposed Countryside Park.
- 8.40 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. This would also occur both spatially and perceptually. 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 the city itself. No other NPPF or SCLP purposes of Green Belt would be contravened by the proposals.

9 RESPONSE TO REASON FOR REFUSAL 3 - EFFECT ON THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

9.1 Reason for Refusal 3 states,

'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 (now 130 and 174) 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.'

9.2 The Reason for Refusal includes a number of overlapping aspects which I will address in turn under the following as follows: effects on the appeal site, effects on settlement of Stapleford and effects on the local landscape. It should be noted that the reason for refusal only mentions the Retirement Care Village part of the application proposals. There is no reference to the Countryside Park which forms an integral part of the application both within the site description and redline. The benefits that would arise from the Countryside Park – Area B should in my opinion be included and balanced in landscape and visual terms against the effects of the proposed built forms and development of Area A as discussed in section 6.

Effect on the appeal site

9.3 It is accepted that the proposals for Area A - the Retirement Care Village, on a site of 3.12ha of agricultural land would by its nature involve a marked change of use to the existing open character of the site. However, such a change would be an inevitable part of any built development (including a retirement care village) within the countryside and outwith an existing settlement. The change from the Retirement Care Village would be clearly evident in the initial stages on Area A due to the open character of the site and as a result of the range, number and scale of proposed built development, as shown on the Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008 and Illustrative Layout.

9.4 The LVA identified the sensitivity of Area A to a retirement village was Medium/Low. This was due to its proximity to the existing residential edge of Stapleford which was not particularly distinctive in character or built form at this point and that the rural landscape character of the site lacked the key characteristics described within the wider landscape character. However, the magnitude of change

- was considered to be High, as a result of the loss of agricultural land of rural character and the introduction of a residential care village. As a result the effect at the site scale would involve a Major/Moderate Adverse effect within Area A at Year 1.
- 9.5 In terms of effects on individual site features within Area A, the topography has a modest fall of 5m and typically at a slope of 1 in 50. The site is therefore well placed to accommodate the proposed Retirement Care Village with limited change to existing landform required such that the existing gentle rise to the north-east would remain unaffected. The Land Use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008 illustrates a reduction in the ridge heights with the built form stepping down from the edge of Stapleford towards the north-east, varying from a maximum 12m to ridge closest to the village down to 7m to ridge to the north-east where the ground is higher. This arrangement would help to reduce the presence of development to the north-east and provide a relatively sympathetic fit to the natural topography, with the upper level of built form on the higher ground being comparable with upper ridge height of the relatively large buildings on the lower ground.
- 9.6 There would be a Major Adverse change in land-use on Area A from agricultural land to the retirement village with a range of residential properties provided with associated landscape and infrastructure within the development area.
- 9.7 Vegetation on site relates to the existing woody vegetation. Hedgerows to the north-west boundary and trees and shrubs to the south-west boundary next to the existing properties would be retained. However, the existing hedgerow fronting Haverhill Road would be largely removed (as identified on Drawing 406.09693.00002.14.H011.2 Access Assessment Option 2). This would give rise to a Moderate Adverse effect on the site vegetation at Year 1 (compared to Minor Adverse as indicated in the LVA).
- 9.8 Reason for Refusal 3 refers to the '*sites sensitive edge of village location*' and that the proposed development would be a '*significant incursion into the landscape and soft rural edge of the village.*'
- 9.9 It is accepted that the development of Area A would result in an incursion into the rural landscape extending c 200m along Haverhill Road and c 275m at most to the north. However, I do not consider that the site's relationship with the village is particularly sensitive. The site's character is that of an arable field adjacent to established residential development. The rear gardens contain a number of established trees and mature shrubs which soften the interface between field and residential properties to a degree. However, there are no special features or characteristics at the interface between the village and arable land at this point, rather the interface is a typical arrangement found around much of Stapleford where the settlement it adjoins the agricultural landscape. There are currently limited public views onto Area A in the approach into Stapleford along Haverhill Road, being

largely contained by the existing tall roadside hedgerows. Therefore, Area A although close to Haverhill Road and Stapleford is not openly appreciated (see summer and winter views for Viewpoints C, D, G and H- LVA Appendix 4).

- 9.10 Furthermore, the proposed landscape measures as shown on the Landscape Parameter Plan 009 indicate how the development within Area A would over the medium term be contained by new structural planting to the east, north and west. These planting measures would create a new and improved soft edge for Stapleford, albeit further to the north-east along Haverhill Road. While the built development would initially result in some adverse effects on the character of the site the establishment of the structure planting measures would introduce a substantive green buffer around Area A which would form a northern extension of the village. This would ensure that the retained areas of the agricultural land to the west and east of the site and the land within new Countryside Park (Area B) to the north would be clearly distinct from the residential settlement of Stapleford. The existing edge of the village would be redefined and strengthened within a substantive belt of planting. The existing tree and hedge planting around the north east part of the village is largely dependent upon the presence of planting within private gardens. This planting is variable in nature and potentially vulnerable to sporadic removal or thinning by residents. In contrast the structure planting proposals for Area A, would be maintained by a management company to an agreed strategy (by way of a suitable planning condition) to provide a permanent and robust vegetative buffer to the north-east edge of the village.
- 9.11 The existing views approaching Stapleford from the north along Haverhill Road include some visibility to the rear of properties on Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill set beyond the roadside hedges (see LVA Appendix 4 Viewpoints G and H). The increased depth of planting proposed at the new entrance to the village along Haverhill Road would result in the creation of a new vegetated gateway to the village. This would include a woodland copse feature to the north-east corner of Area A and a replacement hedgerow to Haverhill Road set back from the visibility splays, together with a range of advanced nursery stock trees set behind the hedgerow to provide softening of views to the development from Haverhill Road. Areas of planting would also be provided by way of shelter belts and copses to the north-west, north-east and south-west boundaries. By Year 15 I consider that planting will have established to result in a Moderate Neutral effect within Area A as the structure planting provides meaningful enclosure to the site. The planting will mitigate both the new development and the awareness of the properties to the existing village edge.
- 9.12 The Officer Report (paras 143 and 144) sets out that the Landscape Officer disagrees with the LVA assessment in relation to Area A of a Major/Moderate Adverse effect at Year 1 and a Moderate Neutral effect at Year 15 (which applies to the site scale). The Officer Report (para 146) states that the effect from the Retirement Care Village would bring a be 'major change' but does not provide any distinction

between Year 1 or Year 15. Reference is made in the Officer Report (para 147) to the proposed mitigation but considers that it would not, *'completely mask the development from the public realm, as acknowledged in the LVA. Much reliance will 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 substantial built form would be significantly adverse.'* This comment indicates the council consider there would be a benefit from the mitigation planting in the medium-term in reducing effects of the Retirement Care Village, but that it may not be as great as that set out in the LVA. I consider that while the new structure planting may not entirely screen the development it would provide meaningful enclosure and one that would be more effective to that currently provided around residential development to most of Stapleford (particularly to the north and east) where the softening of the village edge is reliant on vegetation in rear gardens rather than wider managed tree belts. Based on the anticipated growth rates described above and in the LVA proposed tree planting should reach between 7 to 8 m in height by Year 15.

- 9.13 The reason for refusal refers to a *'significant incursion into the landscape and soft rural edge of the village'* and in the extract from the Officer Report above that the, *'harm to the landscape arising from the substantial built form would be significantly adverse'*. The use of the term 'significant' is primarily applied within EIA and not within an LVA. However, I consider that the term can also be used to identify the main effects that would arise to guide the decision maker. The LVA Methodology (Appendix 1 para 3.4.3) states that effects at Major or Major/Moderate significance would equate to significant effects. For the appeal scheme this would in my opinion include a Major/Moderate Adverse effect on the character of Area A at Year 1 and from some of the visual effects at Year 1, including Viewpoints D, G and J. I do not consider that there would be any significant adverse effects from the project by Year 15. However, I do consider that by Year 15 there would be a Major/Moderate Beneficial and significant effect in landscape character terms on Area B of the site and local area scale from implementation and establishment of the Countryside Park.
- 9.14 I also consider it is also important to balance the effects on Area A and Area B together since they are all part of a single application. As set out above I consider that by Year 15 there would be a Moderate Beneficial effect across the site as a whole.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 9.15 Parameter Plan 008A includes the southern part of Area A at a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. There would be a benefit in the reduction of the upper ridge heights to the south of the site on the site and its interface with the edge of Stapleford. The level of effect would remain as stated above since the extent of development and broad scope would not change but there would be a clear incremental benefit.

Effect on the settlement of Stapleford

- 9.16 The reason for refusal states that, *'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.'*
- 9.17 Area A of the appeal site is located directly adjacent to the edge of Stapleford. The closest extent of the Settlement Policy Boundary is some 60m to the south of the appeal site on Haverhill Road. However, despite being outside the Settlement Policy Boundary the existing houses at both Gog Magog Way and Chalk Hill back onto the site. In terms of village character (rather than policy boundary) the houses at both Gog Magog Way, Chalk Hill and the three bungalows fronting Haverhill Road all appear to form part of the existing village structure.
- 9.18 Stapleford is evaluated in townscape character terms in the CIGBS (Figure 7). Stapleford and Great Shelford are assessed together as one of the Necklace Villages around Cambridge. The analysis on Figure 7 differentiates between four categories of townscape character within Stapleford as follows:
- 'Historic Core'. This townscape type is reflected by the Stapleford Conservation Area (see LVA Figure 06),
 - 'Bespoke Houses, Colleges and University Buildings'. Within Stapleford this category principally relates to bespoke houses e.g. along Mingle Lane rather than college or university buildings.
 - 'Post-war Suburban Housing'. This latter category reflects the housing closest to and adjacent to the appeal site.
 - 'Green spaces and Green corridors'. These areas are contained internally within Stapleford village.
- 9.19 The growth of Stapleford over the last 140 years is illustrated by a number of historic OS plans (see Appendix 1 to my proof of evidence). Figure 01 illustrates the original core of the village from the 1888 to 1891 OS plan, with Stapleford Hall and Greenhedge Farm forming the two most notable properties to the north-east of the village. At this date the surrounding land to the north and east of the village is largely formed by open agricultural fields, with minimal woodland and extending up towards Little Tree Hill on the Gog Magog Hills.
- 9.20 Figure 02 illustrates the situation at 1938-1950 by which time residential properties have extended in a linear manner along Haverhill Road to the south-east of the appeal site and some individual

properties along the Gog Magog Way to the south-west of the site. Considerable development has also taken place along Hinton Way to the north the village with a number of individual houses following the linear alignment of road and further residential development closely associated to Hinton Way to the north. Also by this time a number of individual houses have developed (originating from the early 20th century) on the higher ground north of Area B around Fox Hill including Middlefield. These properties are largely set within large grounds and gardens which together with a number of shelter belts provide physical enclosure and visual containment from the wider area.

- 9.21 Figure 03 illustrates the situation by 1973 with considerably more infill development having taken place within the village including houses to the north of Gog Magog Way that back onto the appeal site and in a southerly extension of the houses to the east of Haverhill Road.
- 9.22 Subsequent development up to the present time in the vicinity of the site has included the development of Chalk Hill (c 2007-8) on the location of the former farm buildings of Hill Farm and as shown on LVA Figure 06 together with other more limited infill with the village.
- 9.23 Therefore, Stapleford has grown considerably over the last 140 years, but with a relatively limited outer expansion of the village within the last 50 years. Historically much of the growth has taken place along the roads leading out of the core of village most notably Haverhill Road and Hinton Way. This pattern of growth is also illustrated on Figure 7 on (page 18) of the DAS.
- 9.24 The term 'vernacular' is used in the reason for refusal, which is defined, 'a local style of architecture, in which ordinary houses are built¹³'. The term is typically used in relation to traditional/ historic buildings which are composed of locally sourced materials e.g. local bricks, timber, tiles and which in combination create a distinctive local sense of place. However, it would appear from the wording of the reason refusal that the term vernacular is more related to the adjacent buildings to the appeal site, which the townscape assessment on Figure 7 indicates are a mix of 'post-war suburban housing'. The houses present to the north-east edge of Stapleford village comprise a mix of brick and render semi-detached houses along Haverhill Road, brick link detached and detached properties on Gog Magog Way and Haverhill Road and link detached brick units brick on Chalk Hill. The majority of these houses are not distinctive or traditional to Stapleford nor do they use traditional local materials found within historic dwellings in Stapleford Conservation Area or this part of Cambridgeshire, but rather reflect a more ubiquitous choice materials and design typical of much of post-war suburban housing throughout the United Kingdom.
- 9.25 Therefore, I do not consider that the houses closest to the site display a vernacular that should be closely followed within the Retirement Care Village retirement village. However, I do consider that there is scope with the Retirement Care Village to create a distinctive design using a locally sensitive

¹³ Collins English Dictionary

appropriate pallet of materials. The Cambridge area also has a particularly strong tradition of innovative modern design, including for residential developments, that combine locally sourced materials with high quality architecture. However, in any event the application is in outline with all matters relating to design reserved. Therefore consideration of materials and appearance and comments about whether the proposals relate to the local vernacular are not considered specifically relevant to the determination of the appeal.

- 9.26 While the application is in outline, an Illustrative Masterplan (drawing number J00247450_005) has been produced which shows one way in which the proposed Retirement Care Village could be arranged spatially. The largest building shown on the Illustrative Masterplan comprises an equivalent 110 bed care home. This would be larger than other residential properties within the village and as the Land-use and Building Heights Parameter Plan 008 indicates could extend up to 12 m to ridge height. Such a central building would include a number of community facilities and form an essential component of the Retirement Care Village and a new feature of the village. This building would be located closest to Stapleford on the relatively lower lying line part of the site. It is understood that while the parameter plan indicates the whole of southern area extending up to 12m to ridgeline, ongoing discussion between Axis and the potential developers/operators have highlighted this is highly unlikely to be the form of development that would take pace. Parameter Plan 008 indicates that the up to 12 m to ridge zone would also be restricted to two-storey development, which would typically be limited to c.5m to eaves. It is therefore unlikely that a corresponding roof for a two-storey building would extend a further 7m in height. The appearance and architectural articulation of the care home would be subject to a subsequent Reserved Matters Application with the detailed elevations, materials and massing to create a high quality design responding to both its purpose and its location. This is likely to include a built form that is visually and physically disaggregated into smaller component parts and elements to reflect its village context and residential function.
- 9.27 The other properties shown on the Illustrative Masterplan would comprise a further 110 smaller units and include two-storey and single-storey buildings typically semi-detached or link detached. These properties would be located on the relatively higher ground and within the majority of the site and extend up to 8m and 7m to ridge height. These properties would appear comparable to other houses both within and around the edge of Stapleford in terms of mass and form. In combination with the proposed structure planting the proposed two and single-storey houses would in my opinion fit in sympathetically with the existing edge of the village character.
- 9.28 The reason for refusal states the proposals would be 'incongruous' with the local vernacular and appear as an 'extensive urban form' on the village edge. The taller southern section of the proposals would at 12m be higher than other structures nearby and based on the illustrative masterplan considerably larger in footprint. This aspect would therefore potentially be incongruous with the closet part of the village. However, the larger built forms would still be limited to two storeys, which

is the same as most of the adjacent properties and would further be mitigated by a generous offset from the closest properties and the inclusion of structure planting. The majority of the site to the centre and north would comprise a scale of units that is in keeping with the scale of houses in the village, which includes a mix of detached and semi-detached houses and bungalows in small to medium scale residential estate and individual houses. In this respect the mass and scale of the majority of the development would not be incongruous with the village. The total development area at 3.12 ha would comprise a moderate scale development in the context of Stapleford and should not be classed as an extensive urban form. The development would be located on the village edge, but this is also the case for many properties around the village perimeter. There has not been much development to the village perimeter in recent years, but over past decades the village has expanded in linear form along local roads e.g. Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, and this previous development now sits comfortably as part of the landscape and village. In the context of the overall proposals for the site including the structure planting and Countryside Park I consider this could also be achieved on the appeal site.

- 9.29 In relation to fitting with local vernacular, I do not consider that it is necessary or appropriate to follow the design styles of the nearby houses. Positive aspects of the true local vernacular could be included within a reserved matters application that combine the best of contemporary thinking and a place sensitive design.
- 9.30 Despite the concerns expressed within Reason for Refusal 3, I consider that aspects of design could be suitably addressed at the Reserved matters stage, and would be under the control of SCDC, such that the proposals would be compliant with Policy HQ/1 of the SCLP and para 130 of the NPPF. It is noted that para 130 states at bullet c) that developments should be, *'sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).'* A Retirement Care Village includes a number of different features but would require such innovation within the local context of Stapleford, such as the relative increased densities provided by the main care home. I considered that, there is good scope to respond to the local character and also as required by bullet b) of para 130 *'to provide appropriate and effective landscaping'*.
- 9.31 A number of more detailed comments were made in respect of design within the Urban Design Officers Comments (15/3/2021). These related to matters including, building orientation, tree shading, location and provision of parking areas and location of and design of central amenity areas for residents. Most of these detailed aspects could also be covered as part of a later Reserved Matters Application and are not considered to specifically relevant at outline stage.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 9.32 Parameter Plan 008A includes a reduced upper height to ridge of 9m compared with 12m. Based on this change it is considered that there would be a reduced effect on aspects of the scheme both within the site and local area. The height and scale of the whole of Area A would be more directly comparable to properties within the remainder of Stapleford including those close to the appeal site. This would respond to concerns raised by the Urban Design officer in relation to height and density (Policy HQ/1 a), d), e) and n) and similar concerns from the Landscape Officer that a 12m building would appear overbearing and incongruous in its location. There would also be a relative reduced magnitude of visual change from a number of viewpoints including those on Haverhill Road. This would be a clear beneficial change in terms of townscape character.

Effect on the local landscape

- 9.33 Reason for Refusal 3 raises concerns that, the Retirement Care Village would *'do little to respect, retain or enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape'*. The Reason for Refusal does not specifically state the units of landscape being considered referring simply to 'local'. The planning application was accompanied by an LVA that assessed the sensitivity of the landscape character at a range of scales (see LVA Pages 25-30 and Section 6 above) to the proposed magnitude of change that would arise assessing the change both at completion – Year 1 and following establishment of the proposed mitigation Year 15.
- 9.34 Specific reference is made within the Landscape Officer response and the Officers Report to the landscape units at the national level, in the East Anglian Chalk – NCA 87¹⁴. Although national character areas are typically very large in scale the approach by SCDC is consistent with Policy NH/2: Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character which states, *'Development will only be permitted where it respects and retains, or enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and of the individual National Character Area in which is it located.'* It should be noted that the NCA profile has a focus on rural landscape management at the strategic scale with limited guidance relating to development.
- 9.35 The Officer Report discusses landscape matters from paras 133 to 151. At para 134 the report accepts that the site does not fall within any national or local designations and therefore does not fall within paragraph 174 of the NPPF such that the site could be considered to be a valued landscape. I agree with this statement. The LVA provided an assessment of the site in relation to 'value' at pages 10-11 and found that the appeal site overall has a Medium-Low landscape value and with Area B being relatively higher than Area A.

¹⁴ CD 5.7

- 9.36 The Officer Report at paras 135 -142 refers to various site features and aspects of the proposals together with parts of the LVA findings relating to site features and views.
- 9.37 The Officer Report (para 144) states that the proposals would be contrary to a number of the Statement of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) from NCA 87 (pages 15-18). I accept that the introduction of Area A - the Retirement Care Village would be contrary to aspects of SEO1 by the introduction of built development on a small area of agricultural land. However, this would be the same for any development within NCA 87 by affecting agricultural land. There would also be some relatively localised changes to parts of the views within the chalklands towards the development which relates to aspects of SEO3.
- 9.38 However, the adverse effects on Area A (which is the considerably smaller part of the appeal site) would be offset by the conversion of agricultural land to a semi- natural Countryside Park within Area B (which comprises the much larger part of the appeal site). These changes would support other aspects of the Statements of Environmental Opportunity including SEO1 by providing a greater assemblage of semi-natural grasslands to enhance biodiversity and landscape character and under SEO4 by providing increased recreational opportunities for nearby residents including those to the south-east of Cambridge. These positive aspects of the proposals on the Statements of Environmental Opportunity for NCA 87 are not commented on by the Landscape Officer in this part of the Officer Report and should in my opinion be factored into the landscape benefits of the appeal proposals that offset adverse effects on Area A.
- 9.39 The Officer Report (para 145) indicates that the topography of the site would be elevated above existing development to the south and would be visible from the wider public realm. However, Area rises gently at 1 in 50 to a maximum of 5 m above the existing settlement, and only rises more steeply beyond Area A within the Countryside Park. While the proposed development would be clearly visible at the early stages, mitigation planting would help to offset this relatively modest difference in level to the north of Area A, with tree planting projected to grow to c 7-8 m by Year 15, a height comparable to the majority the units across the centre and north of the site. Existing public views across Area A towards the elevated undulating chalk to the north are relatively limited at present with more open wider views e.g. from Stapleford Cemetery to the north and from Haverhill Road to the north-east towards Little Trees Hill being unaffected.
- 9.40 The Officer Report (para 148) makes reference to the Cambridge Fringe Area Action Plan acknowledging that Area A is located within this priority area for landscape enhancement, although the Officer Report only refers to the Retirement Care Village part of the appeal site and how it would conflict with the Policy to improve the landscape. However, Area A includes significant measures for planting to the perimeter of the development that would deliver new mixed woodland and shelterbelts

and therefore this would be in accordance with criteria i) of Policy CSF/5. Furthermore the provision of the Retirement Care Village provides the mechanism to deliver the wider Countryside Park over the majority of the site – Area B. The reality is that without the development of Area A the Countryside Park would not come forward. The 2008 Area Action Plan has not led to the delivery any material proposals within Policy Area CSF/5 on the ground. In contrast, major landscape enhancements have taken place closer to Cambridge at Trumpington West and at Hobson’s Park open space corridor east of Trumpington Meadows. These enhancements have been delivered as part of the planning gain from the related extensive built development. This indicates that there is typically a symbiotic relationship between the delivery of strategic scale landscape enhancements and one or more ‘enabling’ projects. I recognise that some adverse effects would occur on the landscape character, particularly in the early stages from the introduction of the Retirement Care Village. However, when seen as a whole the appeal proposals would deliver a positive strategic benefit for the local landscape which would otherwise not take place.

- 9.41 The provision of open space on the appeal site through the Countryside Park (19.1ha) is almost 6 times the area of the Retirement Care Village (3.12ha). This is a very generous provision and unprecedented in my experience in terms of relative areas.
- 9.42 The Reasons for Refusal only refer to the Retirement Care Village. However, the Landscape Officers Response (13th December 2020) and the Report Officers Report (paras 269-285) make specific and positive reference to the Countryside Park delivering enhancement to the local landscape character (para 278), clear and significant environmental benefits (para 284) and that the benefits of the Countryside Park should be given significant weight (Para 285).
- 9.43 The Reason for Refusal 3 states that 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 local character and distinctiveness of the Local landscape’*. I accept that the development of Area A would comprise an extension into the countryside and localised loss of rural land. However, I consider that the appeal site should be considered as a whole and in this context that the Countryside Park makes a major contribution towards the landscape character, biodiversity and recreational value of the local area and a major contribution to the delivery of Area Action Plan Policy CSF5.
- 9.44 The proposals for the Countryside Park within Area B represent over 19 ha of countryside improvements and together with 1.8ha of structure planting and amenity space associated with Area A would support the following parts of the Policy CSF/5 (2) benefiting landscape character, biodiversity and recreation:
- *New copses on suitable knolls, hilltops and scarp tops* – new tree groups are proposed on the areas of highest ground.

- *Management and creation of chalk grassland* – extensive areas of chalk grassland would cover the majority of the Countryside Park
 - *New mixed woodland and shelter belts* – areas of woodland both to the perimeter of Area A and planting within the Countryside Park.
 - *Reinforcement and planting of new hedgerows* - existing hedges would be strengthened and new hedges planted.
 - *New footpaths, cyclepaths and bridleways creating routes through the area and linking to Wandlebury Country Park / The Magog Down* - the proposals would bring access between Hinton Way, Haverhill Road and Gog Magog Way allowing for circular walks from Stapleford. There are currently very few rights-of-way in the Area Action Plan boundary and therefore the proposal would be a major step forward connecting settlements and other recreational destinations.
- 9.45 The proposals for the appeal site and in particular Area B would also support Policy CSP/5 (3) which seeks integrated landscape, biodiversity, recreation and public access improvements. Provision is required under Policy CSP/5 (3) for maintenance and long-term management. The applicant has an agreement that the management of the site would be undertaken by the Magog Trust who have a proven track record of managing similar semi-natural recreation sites at the nearby Magog Down to the north-east. The close proximity of the Proposed Countryside Park and Magog Down would provide an efficient basis for the establishment and long-term management of the proposed Countryside Park.
- 9.46 The above enhancements would support NPPF para 174 b) by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and bringing wider benefits natural beauty. The 3.1 ha of Area A would bring built development, but this should be set against the over 20 ha of landscape enhancements and wider benefits.
- 9.47 The LVA assesses that the proposals within Area B result in a Moderate Neutral effect at Year 1 and a Moderate Beneficial effect at Year 15.
- 9.48 The ecological assessment of the Countryside Park is that there would be a substantial Net Biodiversity Gain which would support NPPF para 174 d). A fuller consideration of biodiversity benefits are included in the evidence of Mr Painter.

- 9.49 I also consider that proposals for the Countryside Park would support the objectives 2, 3 and 4 of Policy NH/6 Green Infrastructure of the SCLP and is likely to have minimal adverse effects on existing features.

Conclusion of effects on local landscape and settlement character

- 9.50 I accept that there would be a Major/Moderate Adverse effect on Area A of the appeal site in the initial years through the implementation of the Retirement Care Village. There would 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 viable and attractive community for the elderly residents. Buildings to the south of the site up to 12 m in height would comprise the most notable structures from local and wider views. The majority of the proposed buildings would be of a comparable scale to those within Stapleford.
- 9.51 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 edge between village and the surrounding agricultural land, which is typical of many similar village locations. The proposed structure planting around Area A would within the medium-term provide a more robust and permanent soft edge to the proposed development adjacent to the retained countryside compared with the existing edges around the majority village. 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.
- 9.52 The local landscape is not designated for any landscape reason. The appeal site does not comprise a valued landscape. The appeal site has few distinguishing features. This is particularly the case for Area A which comprises gently sloping arable land running up to a typical suburban village edge. I do not consider that Area A is a distinctive landscape. There would be some harm to the existing rural character with development of Area A on land areas closer to the village. However, the proposed structure planting would provide effective mitigation in the medium term and create a new robust soft edge to Stapleford village.
- 9.53 The higher land of Area B has more features by virtue of the steeper slopes and undulation. The proposed Countryside Park covers the majority (c. 78%) of the appeal site. The design of the Countryside Park would bring substantial enhancements and benefits to the local landscape character which would not otherwise arise.
- 9.54 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 set against the short term adverse effects is a material consideration for this appeal. In this context the reason for refusal relating to a lack of enhancement to the local character is not justified.

Differences with Parameter Plan 008A

- 9.55 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.

10 CAMBRIDGE SOUTH EAST TRANSPORT SCHEME

- 10.1 The appeal site is located close to the proposed alignment of the Cambridge South East Transport Scheme (CSETS) Phase2 route from Cambridge to Babraham. CSETS is a guided bus route being promoted by Greater Cambridge Partnership.
- 10.2 At the time the application was submitted a 15m corridor was shown on the Parameter Plans for the guided bus route. The alignment of the corridor at the time the application ran between Area A and Area B. Halts are proposed on the CSET route at a number of locations including at Hinton Way to the north-west boundary of Area B and also at Haverhill Road close to the south-east of Area B/north-east of Area A.
- 10.3 The CSETS scheme was considered at paragraphs 233 -234 of the Officers Report noting there was a holding objection from the Greater Cambridge Partnership due to the potential conflict between their latest date alignment route and the Parameter plans. However, it was noted that the potential route was not at a stage where it should have a significant bearing on the assessment of the application and therefore limited/no weight was given to the alignment of the potential route at the time. Mr Browns evidence included further information about the alignment of the CSETS in relation to the appeal site and representations by on behalf of Axis.
- 10.4 The appeal proposals are independent of and not reliant on the CSETS. However, there are a number of associated benefits from both the appeal proposal and CSETS progressing:
- The close proximity of the CSETS route to the Retirement Care Village – the route and the Stapleford halt would provide a close access point from and to the CSETS for residents, workers and visitors.
 - Connecting the gap between Stapleford village and the CSETS route- the Retirement Care Village would provide a functional and logical link between the existing settlement of Stapleford and the CSETS halt for the village.
 - The close proximity of the CSETS route to the Countryside Park – wider sustainable access to the proposed semi-natural open space and other strategic open spaces in the locality including Magog Down and Wandlebury Country Park would be provided from the two halts on the CSETS at either end of the Countryside Park.

11 ALTERNATIVE SITES

- 11.1 In the lead up to the Public Inquiry a communication was received from PINS that stated,
- 'The Inspector, having reviewed the material on file, notes that the appellant's Alternative Site Assessment of April 2020 excludes sites that have not been previously developed that are within the Green Belt. Without the benefit of the Council's observations on the Alternative Site Assessment the Inspector has not reached a conclusion on its arguments but, in any event, considers that he would benefit from hearing evidence on whether there are, or are not, other previously undeveloped Green Belt sites available which would have less effect on Green Belt openness than the proposed development of the appeal site.'
- 11.2 The Inspector's request related to alternative Green Belt sites that were 'available' and would have 'less of an effect on Green Belt openness' in comparison to the appeal site.
- 11.3 Mr Belcher's evidence provides a response to availability issues. I have carried out a review of potential alternative sites from a Green Belt openness perspective. The 2020 Alternative Site Assessment submitted with the application had a site search range of between 3.5 - 7.5ha. This reflected the size of site considered necessary to provide the facilities and range of accommodation for a Retirement Care Village.
- 11.4 A number of the sites considered in the 2020 ASA have subsequently been taken out of the Green Belt or are currently under development and have therefore been omitted from the current shortlist. I have considered the effect on Green Belt openness for a list of 11 alternative sites in comparison to the appeal site. The findings are provided in tabular form at my Appendix 4 to my proof and with a corresponding aerial photograph of each site at my Appendix 5 of my proof.
- 11.5 The approach I took was a desk top review informed by the following sources:
- The Greater Cambridge 2021 HELAA¹⁵ returns for each site, with a focus on Landscape and Townscape and Green Belt data.
 - The Greater Cambridge 2021 Green Belt Study by LUC¹⁶ and in particular the level of harm (Low- Very High) assigned to Green Belt parcels for each village/parish in relation to the corresponding HELAA sites.
 - Google Earth imagery including aerial photography and Street View to gain an impression of the likely visibility and site features.

¹⁵ CD5.16

¹⁶ CD 5.12

- OS mapping and public rights of way information.
- My pre-existing knowledge of the character of the area in which the sites are located.

11.6 The review considered the relative effects on Green Belt openness that would arise from the provision of a Retirement Care Home on each site. It was assumed that the scale of the development would be the same in terms of site area and height as for the appeal site. Buildings would be no more than two storeys. The spatial dimension of Green Belt openness would therefore be the same on each site.

11.7 In relation to the visual dimension of openness all the sites are undeveloped with land use currently comprising either, arable, grassland or allotments. There are no structures on the sites with the exception of allotment holder sheds on a small part of site 4047 at Great Shelford. Therefore the assessment of the visual dimension of openness is a relative comparison of the sites in the context of the existing land use of all sites being undeveloped and open.

11.8 The visual dimension of Green Belt openness would vary between the sites and would be influenced by a combination of a range of factors including: site characteristics and features (including landform, land use, vegetation and built form) adjacent land uses and character, boundary features and enclosure, opportunities to view the site from public locations (roads and rights to way) and the scope for mitigation to reduce the perception of loss of openness over time.

11.9 The comparison of effects on openness in Appendix 4 did not include for any wider landscape and/or visual benefits that may arise outside the main Retirement Care Village area, such as the proposed 19ha Countryside Park that forms part of the appeal site proposals.

11.10 The findings are summarised below:

Table A – Summary of relative effects on Green Belt openness

Site	HEELA Site Ref	J Billingsley – comparative assessment of effect on openness from Retirement Care Village	Comparison with Appeal site
Appeal Site	51758	Moderate/High	NA
Land south of Oakington Road, Cottenham	40296	Moderate/Low	Less effect on openness
Bird Farm, Cambridge Road, Fulbourn	40286	Moderate/High	Similar effect on openness

Site	HEELA Site Ref	J Billingsley – comparative assessment of effect on openness from Retirement Care Village	Comparison with Appeal site
Land north east of Moores Meadow, Great Shelford	40407	Moderate	Less effect on openness
Land at Royston Road, Harston	40476	Moderate/High	Similar effect on openness
Land on the south side of Cambridge Road, Waterbeach	40071	Moderate/High	Similar effect on openness
Land between Hinton Way and Mingle Lane, Great Shelford	OS216	Moderate	Less effect on openness
Land off Cambridge Road, Great Shelford	40413	Low	Less effect on openness
Land off Long Road, Cottenham	40261	Moderate/High	Similar effect on openness
Land east of Bush Close, Comberton	40501	Moderate/Low	Less effect on openness
Land west of Birdlines, Comberton	40310	Moderate	Less effect on openness
Land north of White Field Way, Sawston	40341	Moderate/Low	Less effect on openness

11.11 Sites with a lower assessed effect on Green Belt openness are considered by Mr Belcher in his evidence by reference, in particular, to the additional factors that may influence the capacity of these sites to meet the required need.

12 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 12.1 The 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.
- 12.2 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

- 12.3 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

- 12.4 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

- 12.5 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.
- 12.6 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

- 12.7 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.
- 12.8 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.
- 12.9 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.

- 12.10 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.
- 12.11 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.
- 12.12 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

- 12.13 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

- 12.14 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

- 12.15 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.