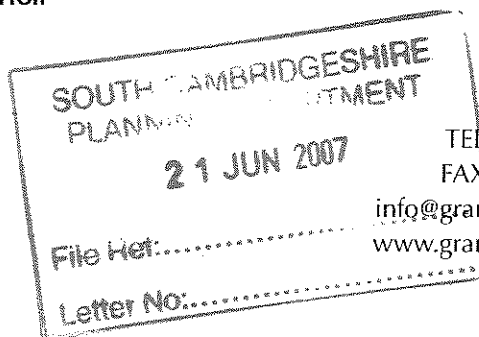




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19<sup>th</sup> June 2007



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Dear Gareth

**Hill Farm Gog Magog Way Stapleford - S/0520/07/F**

We write with reference to the application for planning permission to build flats and houses on the above site and would request that this letter be brought to the attention of the members of the committee prior to the planning meeting.

To give a brief background to the project, it is our understanding from the landowner that he was approached five or six years ago by the then Chair of the Council, George Elsbury, with a request for some land to be released for social housing, as there was no other piece of land available. Apparently, this situation has not changed, and the release of this particular land at Hill Farm is a rare opportunity to build much needed social housing on a largely brownfield site of 1 acre.

As far as the housing need is concerned the summary of the housing needs survey for Stapleford found that apart from the need for family housing there was a requirement for four two bed flats up to September 2007 with a further five being required up to 2010. However, the housing needs survey for Great Shelford (of which Stapleford forms a part) has a further requirement for six two bed flats up to September 2007 and another five up to 2010. There have been lengthy discussions with SCDC's Housing Department about housing need in this area and indications are that they are generally supportive of the unit mix suggested for this scheme.

It is expected that the S106 would set out clearly that the affordable housing will remain affordable in perpetuity. In order to support this aim those who purchase the shared ownership units will only be able to purchase further shares in the property until they own a maximum of 80% equity thus ensuring that they would not be able to buy 100% equity in the property and sell it on in the open market. Shared owners would also be required, if they wanted to



dispose of their share in the property, to give purchasers, nominated by the SCDC or their nominated agents, right of first refusal.

Although a biodiversity survey was carried out in Autumn 2005 we commissioned another one at the request of the Ecology Officer which was to find out whether the common lizard had a habitat there, and also to update the survey of the birds and bats. The site visits have established that there are no lizards on the site.

We should also like to set out the reasons why we think it is important for the Planning authorities to take viability into account when determining the above planning application particularly if there is any further suggestion for the number of units to be reduced.

As conveyed in previous discussions with you and Andy Moffat the viability of this project depends on the number of units we are able to provide on the site.

As you are aware most rural exception sites generally tend to be fields of little existing value hence the decision by South Cambridgeshire to issue guidelines to developers and affordable housing providers limiting the value that could be put on such sites. The current recommendation is £8,000 per plot for social rented units. The Local Authority has also accepted the principle that not all rural exception sites would be greenfield sites and there are occasions where brownfield sites of more significant value could be available for development as rural exception sites. Gog Magog Way is a case in point where the site had existing consent for B1 and B8 use from which the landowner had been receiving some income from tenants.

The land value derived from the original scheme for 25/28 units was established as what would be required to make it worthwhile for the landowner to dispose of the site for affordable housing as well as meeting the Housing Needs requirements for the village. That size of scheme also made it viable from Granta's point of view.

As you know the scheme has undergone some revisions with the resulting current proposal for 18 units. This was to address comments from Planning Officers, Members and the Parish Council. The revised scheme is now to be wholly developed on brownfield site. The 18 units achieved is in our view the minimum number that would be required for Granta to still want to proceed with the scheme and also maintain the landowner's willingness to dispose of the site for affordable housing. Rising build costs and reducing levels of grant funding all make it increasingly difficult for schemes of this nature to be viable. We will be happy to table in confidence detailed financial information to demonstrate the rather poor financial performance of the scheme. The reason Granta is willing to proceed despite the poor financial performance is because of the interest and support the Society has enjoyed from the Parish Council and ordinary residents of Stapleford who are keen for affordable housing to be provided in the village. The Society does not want to withdraw at this late stage and disappoint the local community.

The Society have also spent a considerable amount of money working up the design and commissioning a significant number of reports and investigations.

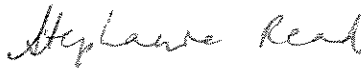
It is our current view that if the unit numbers were further reduced we will find it difficult to convince our Board to approve the scheme and therefore it will be very unlikely that we would proceed with the project.

However, Granta Housing Society has considerable experience of developing and managing affordable housing in rural communities. We currently have a number of rural schemes at various stages of development in South Cambridgeshire including one in Coton comprising 19 houses.

The Society has spent a considerable amount of time carefully engaging with all stakeholders in order to achieve badly needed social housing on a brownfield site on the edge of this village. We believe that the proposed housing and the landscaping will not only improve this adjunct to the village but will provide homes for local people that otherwise would be unable to rent or buy on the open market.

We hope that the Committee will look favourably on this proposed development.

Yours sincerely



Stephanie Read  
Development Manager

Cc Cllr Mrs. Pippa Corney  
Ray McMurray - Planning Dept.