

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

4<sup>th</sup> June 2008

**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director / Corporate Manager - Planning and Sustainable Communities

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**S/0558/08/F - Comberton  
Erection of 19 Affordable Houses at  
Land at The Valley for Northern Affordable Homes**

**Recommendation: Delegated approval/refusal,  
subject to Resolution of Shared Equity Housing Model**

**Date for Determination: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008 (Major Application)**

**Notes:**

**This application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the officer's recommendation conflicts with the recommendation of the Parish Council and because the application is for affordable housing as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the Local Development Framework.**

**Members will visit the site on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008.**

**Site and Proposal**

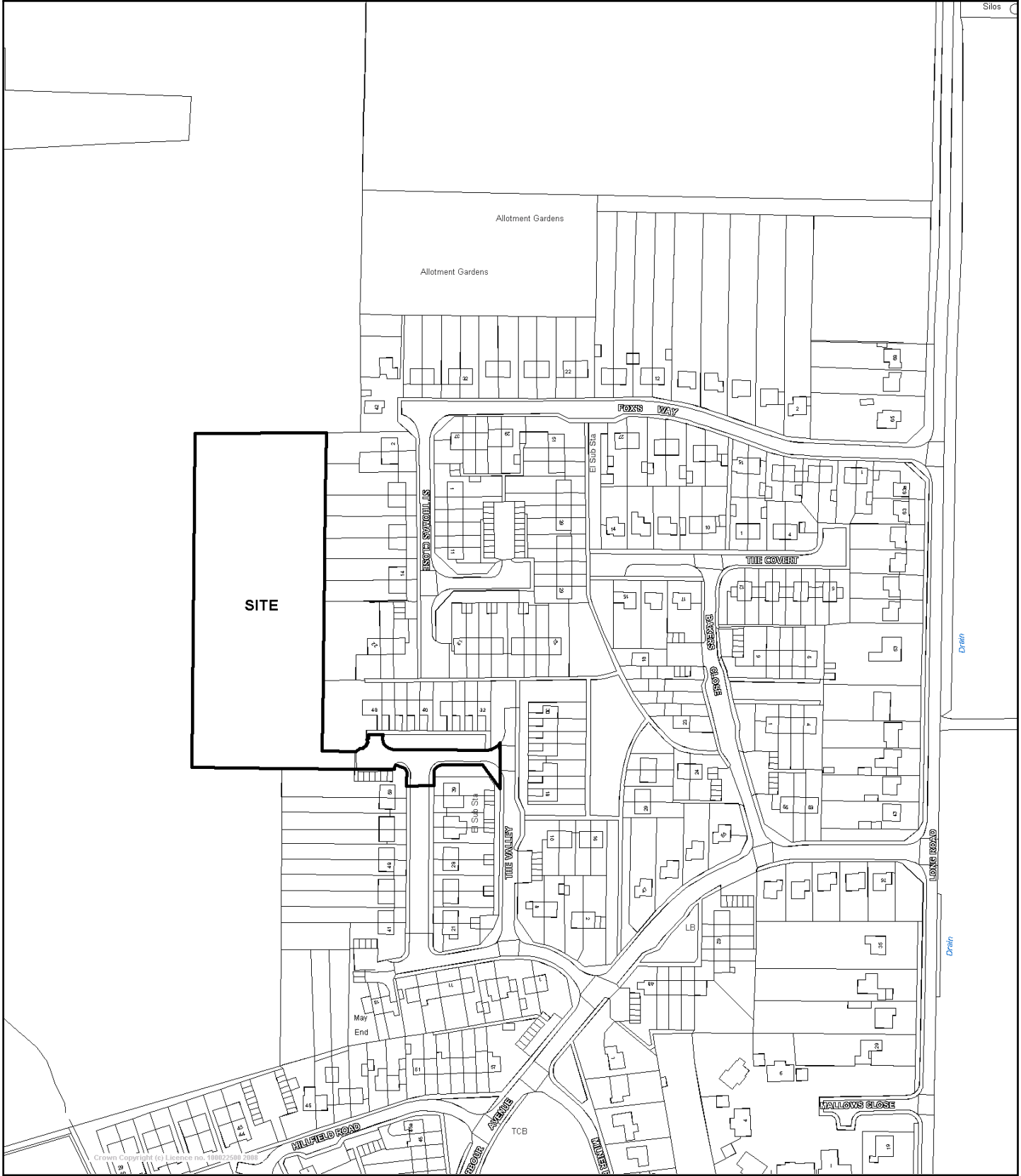
1. The 1.08 hectare site lies at the north eastern part of Comberton and west of gardens to existing dwellings that front St Thomas Close and The Valley. It lies entirely within the Cambridge Green Belt as do the rear portion of gardens to the St Thomas Close dwellings.
2. It forms open fields with no existing boundary definition on its northern, western or southern boundaries.
3. The full planning application, submitted 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008, proposes the erection of a 100% affordable housing scheme for 19 dwellings at a mix of 8 two- bed and 11 three-bed. The dwellings are to be arranged in a crescent facing an area of open space/children's play area of approximately 1,745m<sup>2</sup>. The dwellings will be arranged in 4 groups of 4 dwelling curved terraces and one terrace of 3 dwellings. The dwellings will be approximately 7.6m high. The density equates to 17.6dph
4. The site lies within flood zone 1 and outside of Comberton Village Framework.

**Relevant Recent History**

5. An application for 24 affordable dwellings on the same site was withdrawn in December 2007 following officer concerns in relation to the scale, layout and design of the dwellings.



Silos



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South  
Cambridgeshire  
District Council

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Scale 1/2500 Date 19/5/2008

Centre = 538653 E 256839 N

Planning Committee June 2008

## Planning Policy

### *Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003*

6. **P1/3 - Sustainable Design in Built Development** requires a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development, providing a sense of place appropriate to the location, efficient use of energy and resources and account to be taken of community requirements.
7. **Policy P6/1 - Development Related Provision** states development will only be permitted where the additional infrastructure and community requirements generated by the proposals can be secured.
8. **Policy P9/8 - Infrastructure Provision** identifies a coordinated approach to securing infrastructure improvements required to support development for the Cambridge sub-region. A programme encompassing for example, transport, affordable housing and education, amongst others is identified.

### *South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework 2007*

9. **Policy ST/6 – Group Villages** identifies Comberton and states that residential development and redevelopment up to an indicative maximum scheme size of 8 dwellings will be permitted within the village frameworks of Group Villages, as defined on the Proposals Map.
10. Development may exceptionally consist of up to about 15 dwellings where this would make the best use of a single brownfield site.
11. **Policy GB/1 – Development in the Green Belt** states that there is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Cambridge Green Belt as defined on the Proposals Map.
12. **Policy GB/2 – Mitigating the Impact of Development in the Green Belt** states that any development considered appropriate within the Green Belt must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt. Where development is permitted, landscaping conditions, together with a requirement that any planting is adequately maintained, will be attached to any planning permission in order to ensure that the impact on the Green Belt is mitigated.
13. **Policy DP/1 - Sustainable Development** states development will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that it is consistent with the principles of sustainable development, as appropriate to its location, scale and form.
14. **DP/2 Design of New Development** requires all new development to be of a high quality design and indicates the specific elements to be achieved where appropriate. It also sets out the requirements for Design and Access Statements.
15. **DP/3 Development Criteria** sets out what all new development should provide, as appropriate to its nature, scale and economic viability and clearly sets out circumstances where development will not be granted on grounds of an unacceptable adverse impact e.g. residential amenity and traffic generation.
16. **DP/4 Infrastructure and New Developments** requires that development proposals should include suitable arrangements for the improvement or provision of

infrastructure necessary to make the scheme acceptable in planning terms. It identifies circumstances where contributions may be required e.g. affordable housing and education.

17. **Policy HG/1 - Housing Density** is set at a minimum of 30 dph unless there are exceptional local circumstances that require a different treatment in order to make best use of land. Higher densities of 40 dph will be sought in the most sustainable locations.
18. **Policy HG/2 - Housing Mix** Affordable housing should be of an appropriate mix to respond to identified needs at the time of the development in accordance with HG/3
19. **Policy HG/3 - Affordable Housing** occupation will be limited to people in housing need and must be available over the long-term. The appropriate mix in terms of housing tenures and house sizes of affordable housing will be determined by local circumstances at the time of planning permission, including housing need and the achievement of mixed and balanced communities. In order to ensure sustainable communities, affordable housing will be distributed through the development in small groups or clusters.
20. **Policy HG/5 - Exceptions Sites for Affordable Housing** states
  1. As an exception to the normal operation of the policies of this plan, planning permission may be granted for schemes of 100% affordable housing designed to meet identified local housing needs on small sites within or adjoining villages. The following criteria will all have to be met:
    - (a) The development proposal includes secure arrangements for ensuring that all the dwellings within the scheme provide affordable housing in perpetuity for those in housing need;
    - (b) The number, size, design, mix and tenure of the dwellings are all confined to, and appropriate to, the strict extent of the identified local need;
    - (c) The site of the proposal is well related to the built-up area of the settlement and the scale of the scheme is appropriate to the size and character of the village;
    - (d) The site is well related to facilities and services within the village;
    - (e) The development does not damage the character of the village or the rural landscape.
  2. In the case of sites within the Cambridge Green Belt, before planning permission is granted for such development, the District Council will have to be assured that no alternative appropriate sites can be found for the scale and type of development proposed and that the scheme fulfils all the criteria set out in the Council's policies, including those relating to the impact of new development on local surroundings.
21. **Policy NE/1 - Energy Efficiency** states development will be required to demonstrate that it would achieve a high degree of measures to increase the energy efficiency of new buildings, for example through location, layout, orientation, aspect and external design.

22. **Policy NE/3 - Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development** states all development proposals greater than 10 dwellings will include technology for renewable energy to provide at least 10% of their predicted energy requirement.
23. **Policy NE/6 - Biodiversity** requires new developments to aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity. The District Council will refuse development that would have an adverse significant impact on the population or conservation status of protected species, priority species or habitat, unless the impact can be adequately mitigated by measures secured by planning conditions. Previously developed land will not be considered to be devoid of biodiversity. The re-use of such sites must be undertaken carefully with regard to existing features of biodiversity interest. Development proposals will be expected to include measures that maintain and enhance important features whilst incorporating them within any development of the site.
24. **Policy NE/9 - Water and Drainage Infrastructure** indicates that planning permission will not be granted where there are inadequate water supply, sewerage or land drainage systems to meet the demands of the development unless there is an agreed phasing agreement between the developer and the relevant service provider to ensure the provision of necessary infrastructure.
25. **Policy NE/12 – Water Conservation** states that development must incorporate all practicable water conservation measures. All development proposals greater than 1,000m<sup>2</sup> or 10 dwellings will be required to submit a Water Conservation Strategy prior to the commencement of the development to demonstrate how this is to be achieved.
26. **Policy TR/1 - Planning for More Sustainable Travel** states planning permission will not be granted for developments likely to give rise to a material increase in travel demands unless the site has a sufficient standard of accessibility to offer an appropriate choice of travel by public transport or other non-car travel modes. The amount of car parking provision in new developments should be minimised, compatible with their location. Developments should be designed from the outset with permeable layouts to facilitate and encourage short distance trips by cycle and walking. Safe and secure cycle parking shall be provided.
27. **Policy TR/2 - Car and Cycle Parking Standards** states car parking should be provided in accordance with the Council's maximum standards, to reduce over reliance on the car and to promote more sustainable forms of transport.
28. **Policy TR/4 - Non-motorised Modes** states the District Council will use its planning powers by ensuring that all new developments are designed at the outset to facilitate and encourage short distance trips between home, work, schools and for leisure.
29. **Policy SF/10 Outdoor Play Space, Informal Open Space and New Developments** requires all residential developments to contribute towards outdoor playing space, formal outdoor sports facilities and informal open space to meet the additional need generated by the development. Where appropriate, provision will involve all or some types of space within the development site. However, an appropriate contribution will be required for 'off-site' provision of the types of space not provided on-site.
30. **Policy SF/11 Open Space Standards** defines the minimum standards for outdoor play space and informal open space.

31. **Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 2 – Green Belts**  
Paragraph 3.4 states (in part): The construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for limited affordable housing for local community needs under development plan policies according with PPG3 (**now PPS 3**)
32. **Planning Policy Statement 3 - Housing** - encourages Local Planning Authorities to release sites solely for affordable housing, including using a Rural Exception Site Policy. These should only be used for affordable housing in perpetuity.

### **Consultation**

33. **Comberton Parish Council** recommends refusal It states:
- a) Any development should be phased to minimise impact during and after construction.
  - b) The development should be further south.
  - c) Plots 3 – 5 have excessively large gardens leading to ‘dead space’ that may be used for dumping or a focus of antisocial behaviour.
  - d) There is a suspiciously large gap between properties leading to the area mentioned in point C above leading to speculation that further development there is planned.
  - e) The basic design of the houses is acceptable but they will be noticeably small.
  - f) So-called ‘visitor parking’ intended as a sweetener for The Valley residents to park in is too far from those residents and won’t be used.
  - g) The bend in The Valley where residents currently park is to be grassed, it should be bricked.
  - h) It seems there are some fairly obvious design features in place to ensure the development can be extended in the future. Reversing the crescent shape would prevent this from happening and provide more public space.
  - i) There is an existing antisocial element in The Valley; this development does nothing to combat this.
  - j) How are gardens marked out? Chain link fences?
  - k) The permissive path is not a Right of Way and could easily be lost. Greater protection is required.

### **Affordable Housing Panel**

34. The panel met on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008. All aspects of the proposal were discussed including the comments of the Parish Council.
35. The Panel could not come to a single recommendation recognising that the Parish Council remains opposed to the proposal and officers are minded to support subject to the resolution of various delivery issues (see below).

36. It was noted that the needs survey results show that there are 51 households in need of affordable housing in Comberton and that 43 applications for affordable housing have been received.
37. An approximate 60/40 split rental/shared ownership was agreed.
38. It was also agreed that the officer recommendation should allow 3 months for outstanding delivery issues to be resolved but that any longer than this would not be acceptable due to local uncertainty concerns (see below).
39. The area within The Valley of the proposed shared surface needed some revision (see response to Parish Council point g below)
40. It was agreed that subject to the final confirmation of the Parish Council that pre allocating all of the units to persons with a specific Comberton need prior to development commencing would be an acceptable alternative to phasing to help overcome local concerns that the dwellings may not be taken up and hence would go to those without a Comberton connection.
41. It was agreed that the applicants should be asked to move the northern boundary of the site south by approximately 15m to help overcome the problems of large rear gardens to plots 3-6 and that these plots should be shared ownership (see below for further explanation)
42. The Housing Development Officer confirmed that the houses do comply with the Scheme Development Standards for affordable housing.
43. Front gardens should remain open and therefore unfenced. It was recognised that this can be controlled by condition.
44. It was recognised that there have been problems with the existing sewerage system and the Case Officer agreed to raise this with Anglian Water notwithstanding that Anglian Water has confirmed that capacity exists within the existing system to accommodate the additional flows from the development.
45. Additional comments made in relation to the specific concerns of the Parish Council are discussed below in my response to the Parish Council's comments.

#### **Housing Development and Enabling Manager**

46. "A Housing Needs Survey was commissioned for the village of Comberton, by the Parish Council and reported in March 2007. The survey was completed by Cambridgeshire ACRE.
47. The results from this survey clearly demonstrate a need for affordable housing to be provided within the village. The survey found that there were 51 households in need of affordable housing. The largest need was for rented units.
48. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager and the Development Officer at SCDC have met on several occasions with Northern Affordable Homes. Officers have expressed concern over the proposals related to this scheme and they are summarised below.
49. NAH have indicated that they will not be able to deliver any rented units and are prepared to offer 70% to an RSL to enable them to deliver the rented units. However

to date our local RSLs have been unwilling to enter into any formal agreement with NAH. Primarily this is due to the very complicated agreement that NAH would wish to enter into over the term of 999 year lease. RSLs would not be prepared to bind any leaseholder into a perpetuity rent of £20 per week, or any sum for that matter, which doesn't provide for an actual service.

50. A 100% Shared Ownership Scheme does not address the housing need of the village, meaning that any future schemes would have to redress the balance, which would mean a series of 100% rented schemes, which wouldn't be sustainable in tenure terms. A mixed tenure scheme is far more sustainable. Also, a 100% rented scheme would also have to rely on grant subsidy to make it work from the Housing Corporation, which in its own right would affect the deliverability and viability of such a scheme.
51. The units that are to be offered on a shared ownership basis are to be offered by NAH at 60% with no option to allow residents to staircase to a higher percentage if they so wish. This is against Housing Corporation guidelines which currently allow restrictions to staircase at 80% on exception sites. We consider this to be very restrictive and it does not concur with our current requirements from all other RSL partners. Most partners now offer a starting range from 30-50%, and sometimes a 25% stake where affordability is an issue. It is our understanding that NAH would not sell the property to anyone who could not afford the 60% entry requirement".

#### **Environmental Protection Team Leader**

52. "In the past I have had recourse to respond to complaints in respect of drainage overflowing at a development called Thornbury Comberton. This site is close to the location of the proposed development. I understand there is a high water table in this area and that problems associated with drainage have been identified in the past that has to be resolved by re-routing part of the drainage infrastructure.
53. Consequently, I recommend that if the application is successful, consideration be given to the provision of drainage and the Anglian Water be consulted in respect of the proposed development. I would also recommend that a condition be applied to any consent granted that requires the developer to ensure that the drainage to the site is capable of being effectively conveyed to the main sewer in such a manner so as not to cause foul waste to materialise at any residential property."

#### **Cambridge Archaeology Assistant Archaeologist**

54. Notes that the site lies in an area of high archaeological potential and states that the site should be subject to a programme of archaeological work, to be secured through the inclusion of a negative condition in any planning consent.

#### **Anglian Water**

55. Confirms that "the foul flows from the development can be accommodated within the foul sewerage network system that at present has adequate capacity. If the developer wishes to connect to our sewerage network they should serve notice under Section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991. We will then advise them of the most suitable point of connection."
56. The method of surface water drainage is not to a public sewer and the Environment Agency should therefore be consulted.



### **Environment Agency**

57. Confirms that standing advice in relation to flood zone 1 <1ha apply. These provide advice to the applicant in relation to good practice towards sustainable surface water management.
58. Additionally where soakaways are proposed for the disposal of uncontaminated surface water, percolation tests should be undertaken and soakaways should be designed to appropriate standards.
59. Additional advice for the applicants is given that can be included as informatives on any planning permission.

### **Police Architectural Liaison Officer**

60. "Generally the layout causes few problems with a number of dwellings benefiting from backing on to existing rear gardens and with active frontages overlooking the play area. Much of the parking is either effectively in curtilage or to the front of dwellings in positions where the space is either private or within view of routinely occupied rooms of the owners' dwellings.
61. However the car parking arrangements on either side of the access road between plots 15 and 16 do give cause for concern. There is in effect a car park for 13 vehicles divided by the road with limited levels of natural surveillance particularly at night. To the rear of plot 15 the parking takes the form of an internal parking court. Such an arrangement should be avoided due to the introduction of criminal access to the rear of plots 13-15 and No. 48 The Valley. Parking courts should be seen largely as private rather than public space, so that the provision of visitor parking is inappropriate. Indeed the Secured by Design requires such courts to be gated.
62. The shared pedestrian access between plots 4 and 5 should be provided with a lockable gate close to the parking area. However as it serves as many as 6 dwellings it might be difficult to manage adequate access control.
63. Planting associated with the play area should be designed to allow the houses opposite to have clear unobscured views, with low growing ground cover (max height 1m) and tree canopies not allowed to fall below 2m above ground level to maintain a clear visibility splay. The use of open branched or columnar species of trees may also assist natural surveillance.
64. Lighting to the road and parking courts should be by means of column mounted white down lighters to BS 5489: Code of practice for outdoor lighting."

### **Local Highway Authority comments**

65. "The applicant must show the proposed dimensions for the shared use road, this should be 6m wide with a 0.5m wide maintenance strip on each side.
66. The proposed car parking spaces should also be dimensioned; they should be 2.5m x 5m.
67. Please add a condition requiring that two 2.0 x 2.0 metres visibility splays be provided and shown on the drawings. The splays are to be included within the curtilage of the new parking spaces. One visibility splay is required on each side of the access, measured to either side of the access, with a setback of two metres from the highway

boundary along each side of the access. This area shall be kept clear of all planting, fencing, walls and the like exceeding 600mm high.

68. The applicant is clearly proposing works within the existing adopted public highway. However, plan number W505/0/VAA/001/B and 236/01/A do not correlate. Please request that the applicant clearly state which scheme they are proposing so an assessment can be made of their relative merits.
69. The red line for the site encloses areas of the adopted public highway. This in itself is not a problem; however, please draw the applicant's attention to the fact that they have no rights or duties over the adopted public highway.
70. Clearly the proposed development will increase the number of motor vehicles that use The Valley to access their properties, in particular in peak hours. These data proposed by the applicant though generic are nationally recognised as being appropriate and it is unlikely that Comberton is significantly at variance to national trends. Therefore, the traffic assessment can be accepted as demonstrating that the roads junctions will be able to cope with the proposed increase in vehicular movements."

#### **Ecology Officer**

71. The following enhancement opportunities exist and should be taken forward:
  - (a) Bird box provision in 50% of dwellings.
  - (b) Protection of existing hedge to rear of St Thomas Close – can we prevent the developer from erecting a close board fence which often requires the thinning out of hedgerows.
  - (c) Strengthening of existing hedge to create wildlife corridor at rear of gardens.
  - (d) The footpath link should be accompanied by a hedgerow along its northern side as this would provide a habitat linkage but not prevent the path from being shaded.
  - (e) The new hedge at the rear of the playing area should have a wildflower strip sown at the base of it for 2m width.
72. **Environment Operation Manager** comments are awaited.
73. **Landscape Design Officer** comments are awaited.
74. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue** comments are awaited.
75. **Waste Recycling and Minimisation Officer** comments are awaited.
76. **Cultural Services Manager** comments are awaited.
77. **Strategic Sustainability Officer** comments are awaited
78. **Countryside Access Team – Cambridgeshire County Council** comments are awaited.
79. **SCDC Legal Officer** comments are awaited.

80. The consultation period will have expired before the Committee meeting.

82. **Representations**

81. 48 letters of objection and 1 in support have been received from the occupiers of nearby dwellings. The following points of objection were made:

- (a) The Valley is already a very congested area. Changing it from a cul de sac to a through road will put pedestrians at risk particularly children and particularly at travel to/from school times.
- (b) There is insufficient parking available in The Valley and too many cars parked along it. Additional vehicle movements will exacerbate the problems. Parking that occurs in the current turning area will be lost.
- (c) The Valley is simply not wide enough to accommodate through traffic.
- (d) The proposed shared surface arrangement for The Valley will make matters worse as it will blur the distinction between footpath and road and will encourage higher vehicle speeds. It will significantly increase danger to pedestrians and especially children.
- (e) Additional vehicles will also impact on a wider area as cars will have to travel through the rest of the estate and use Harbour Avenue which is itself already congested.
- (f) The site and gardens to existing properties regularly flood. The development will mean that neighbour gardens will flood more frequently. The slope of the site will exacerbate this.
- (g) Alternative sites have not been fully been explored. Better sites exist.
- (h) Overlooking from rear facing windows, both upper and lower floor, to properties in St. Thomas Close and Fox's Way.
- (i) The scale of the development is unacceptable and cannot be described as 'small'. Smaller sites should be considered.
- (j) The existing sewerage system will not be able to cope with the additional dwellings.
- (k) Access should be from Branch Road or Green End.
- (l) The site does not pass the tests in HG/5. It is not well related to the village in the same way that existing housing in this location is not. The housing would not be integrated with existing housing and the community. The scale is inappropriate for a Group Village. It is not well related to existing facilities.
- (m) The footpath will be ploughed and is effectively useless.
- (n) The Parish Council has identified only a need for 8-10 affordable dwellings.
- (o) Proposed play area is adjacent to a road.
- (p) Insufficient parking has been provided for the new dwellings.

- (q) The northern part of the site is too large taking too much Green Belt land.
  - (r) Windows should be double glazed – this is not specified.
  - (s) Loss of view of fields and loss of property values.
  - (t) The plans allow for future development. The semi circular arrangement lends itself to a later circular development.
  - (u) Local facilities, including the schools and doctors are already under pressure and cannot cope with the additional influx of people.
  - (v) A private company cannot ensure the homes are affordable in perpetuity. Northern Affordable Homes are not an approved housing society.
  - (w) Problems with heavy vehicles during construction.
  - (x) 14 Great Crested Newts living in a pond in the garden to No. 53 migrate away from the water and are only 30ft from the development.
  - (y) Houses will not be affordable as people will not be able to obtain a mortgage unless they have saved in excess of £20,000 as a deposit.
  - (z) The development could be starter homes rather than affordable homes.
  - (aa) Comberton has no gas supply the energy options are therefore limited. Oil tanks may be unsightly, be an inconvenience and present a hazard where families with young children are concerned. A Section 106 agreement to provide for improved infrastructure to the village should be required. It should provide for a contribution to the funding of a public transport shuttle link to the Madingley Road Park-and-Ride site and contribution to the provision of a mains gas supply to the village.
  - (bb) Impact on peace and tranquillity of existing gardens that lie adjacent to the site.
  - (cc) Existing dwellings within the village should be purchased and converted to affordable homes.
  - (dd) Additional planting could result in existing gardens becoming dark.
  - (ee) Northern Affordable Homes do not illustrate on their plans the intention to tarmac green areas in The Valley, to destroy a private garden or demolish residents garages resulting in even more problems with road safety.
82. The letter in support states that the design is a real improvement on the first scheme submitted. My daughter and her family would love to move back into Comberton but she cannot afford to do so. There is a need and the homes have to go somewhere.
83. Two further letter have been received neither in support or objecting but seeking clarification on a number of points.

## **Planning Comments - Key Issues**

84. The key issues are:

Green Belt  
Size and numbers  
Need  
Impact on neighbour amenity  
Impact on the Cambridge Green Belt  
Alternative sites  
Highway safety and parking problems  
Design and layout  
Housing model

### ***General issues***

85. The proposal follows a withdrawn application, a public consultation exercise by the applicants, meetings on site and at the Council offices with the Parish Council, Planning Officers, the Local Highway Authority, Housing Development Officers, the Local Member and local residents attending and a public meeting held in Comberton. The revised application has reduced the numbers from 24 to 19 (21% reduction) and the design and layout of the scheme has been significantly revised.

### ***Cambridge Green Belt***

86. The proposal lies within the Green Belt. Notwithstanding that Policy HG/5 is an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the LDFDCP. The starting point for consideration is whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
87. As detailed above it is not inappropriate if development is for "limited affordable housing for local community needs". Limited is not defined but it must relate to the impact of such development on the purpose of including the land within the Green Belt. Of key relevance is the impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
88. Any built development will have some impact on openness. The proposed dwellings will clearly result in the loss of openness of approximately 1ha of Green Belt land adjacent to the village. The issue is whether or not this can be considered as 'limited'.
89. The present edge to the village is clearly visible from the surrounding countryside and particularly from the village recreation ground that lies to the south west. It is not well planted due largely to the obvious and understandable desire of the occupiers of St Thomas Close and The Valley to gain views of the open countryside to the west of their rear garden boundaries. This results in clear views of the back gardens of these houses with all of their associated residential paraphernalia. The scheme has been carefully designed to ensure that views from the surrounding Green Belt of this part of the village edge are made softer by overcoming the problem of westerly facing gardens, by largely keeping the mass of the development away from the Green Belt boundary (whilst also keeping a good distance away from existing dwellings) and through significant new planting along the north, west and south boundaries. In time I anticipate there will only be glimpses of the end gables of the houses on plots 1 and 19 available.

90. In addition, the location of the site to the west and north of existing gardens helps to limit the excursion into the greenbelt
91. Paragraph 4.19 of the LDFDCP states that the District Council will operate the 'exception' sites policy with caution for sites that are within the Green Belt.
92. I consider that in balancing the inevitable loss of openness of the Green Belt with the improvement to the setting of the village and the visual quality of the Green Belt in this location that the development can reasonably said to have a 'limited' impact.
93. I conclude that the development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt.
94. Policy GB/2 states that appropriate development must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt. Again I consider the proposal achieves this objective.

### ***Size and numbers***

95. Policy HG/5 requires sites to be 'small'. The previous withdrawn application proposed 24 dwellings. This scheme is on a site of approximately 1ha and is intended to accommodate 19 dwellings. No definition of 'small' in this context exists. At HG/5c the scale of the scheme is required to be appropriate to the size and character of the village. I believe it to be in character for reasons given below. In relation to scale, I believe it is in scale but perhaps at the upper end of what might be considered 'small'. I considered the previous scheme of 24 dwellings to be too large and advised that to be in scale a scheme would have to consist of less than 20 dwellings. My assertion is largely based on the Group village status of Comberton where within the village on suitable sites up to 15 dwellings could be permitted.
96. Whilst 19 is 4 dwellings more than might otherwise be permitted on a market scheme within the village I do not consider this to be materially greater particularly having regard to the balance necessary between restraint policies and the significance the Council and the Government places on the need to provide affordable homes and specifically to the need for 51 dwellings for local people that has been identified in Comberton.

### ***Need***

97. 'Exception' sites are limited to the people in need within specific villages such that this site is being considered to meet the needs of Comberton. Affordable housing that comes forward within the normal housing policies of the LDF is restricted to those in need but not necessarily from within that village.
98. A recent Housing Needs Survey found that there were 51 households in need of affordable housing in Comberton.
99. 43 applications for affordable housing (as of 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008) have been made. Of these, 21 have a current Comberton address and 22 though not currently living in Comberton nevertheless have a Comberton connection. All qualify for affordable housing.
100. Throughout the consideration of the proposal, the Parish Council has expressed its concern that the level of need identified by SCDC may be too high and it remains to be convinced that there will be no problem with the take up of the units by persons with a Comberton need fearing that the dwellings will then go to serve a more wider

need. For this reason it has suggested that any development of this scale should be phased. I have had sight of the list of names and addresses of those that are in need but I cannot divulge this information to the Parish Council for Data Protection reasons. Whilst I am satisfied that the need exists I understand the concerns of the Parish Council and have discussed this with the applicants. They are prepared to phase the development and have commented as follows:

“We do understand the Parish Council’s concern over the extent of the need and that you would not want to see houses built that are subsequently occupied by those from outside the village. We are therefore happy to enter into a legally binding undertaking with the SCDC not to commence the construction of the last 7 units until the first 12 units had all been allocated to local people in housing need.

In this case ‘allocated’ is the word that is in the legal documentation that describes the process of nomination and approval involving SCDC to ensure that the houses are only occupied (purchased or rented) as affordable houses by local people in housing need.

As I said we are more than confident that this small scheme will be heavily over-subscribed. This is confirmed by the information from SCDC about the level of need as well as our own research.

I hope that you will agree that this suggestion allows for certainty as to the uptake – without adding undue delay to the project if there is the strong and expected level of need”.

101. Phasing introduces some difficulties particularly in relation to the tenure mix throughout the scheme. The rental units would have to come forward in phase 1 yet there should not be separate blocks of rented and shared ownership. I have suggested that a better approach would be to ensure that all 19 dwellings were allocated prior to development commencing. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager has confirmed that this should not present any problems to either the Council or the applicants. Comberton Parish Council has commented:

“The Parish Council’s policy is that it “would support the development of a total of 15 - 20 affordable homes in Comberton, possibly on more than one site, but these should be built in phases to allow ongoing evaluation of the uptake and subsequent need.”

This policy reflected the Council’s concern that all such properties should go to people with an approved Comberton connection. If the advice of the Responsible Officer is that all of the 19 homes should be allocated to people qualifying with a Comberton connection before building commences then the Parish Council, in this instance, agrees to this condition. We feel this recognises the importance of all the properties going to households with a strong Comberton connection”.

102. Such an approach, including the controls to ensure the dwellings will provide for affordable housing in perpetuity, can be contained within a S106 agreement. Whilst I see no particular value in this, because I am confident that the local need is there for the 19 and more, I also see no reason why this should not be proposed as it may help to assuage local concern and the applicants find the suggestion acceptable.

### ***Neighbour amenity***

103. From the representations received there is clearly a lot of concern regarding the impact of these dwellings on the existing residents of The Valley.
104. Many have commented on the existing poor availability of parking provision and the problems of cars parking on footpaths etc. I have seen photographs showing how cars are being parked haphazardly up on kerbs and on green spaces once all available spaces on driveways have been filled and following a number of site visits I have seen the problems for myself. It appears that many residents are not using their garages for parking and in some cases, it has been alleged, households may have up to 5 cars per dwelling. This certainly appears to be a significant issue for the existing residents in terms of inconvenience (also regarding safety which is dealt with later).
105. Residents are concerned that attracting yet more cars will only exacerbate the problems.
106. There appear to be no controls to ensure that existing garages are used for the parking of cars and most garages are rather small. The planning system cannot retrospectively attempt to resolve these issues. I am therefore only concerned that the new dwellings, if approved, will not exacerbate this situation.
107. In this regard, the scheme provides an adoptable 6m wide shared surface highway with a turning head, one dedicated space per dwelling and 17 unallocated visitor parking bays resulting in 1.9 spaces per dwelling. Occasional short term parking will be available on the highway and clear of it in front of parking bays 1,2,11 and 12. Many of the visitor parking bays are located at the south eastern corner of the site making them more available for existing residents of The Valley if necessary.
108. I note concerns that by bringing the new road off the existing turning head this will result in the loss of the ability to park in the current turning head. However, parking should not be occurring here and the creation of the new parking areas close to The Valley will more than compensate.
109. In addition to the above the applicants have agreed, at their expense, to undertake highway improvement works along one section of The Valley by converting the existing road and footpath arrangement to a 7m shared surface which should alleviate some of the more haphazard parking, for example up on kerbs, that is currently occurring and generally improve the situation. This follows advice from the Local Highway Authority and can be secured through a S106 agreement.
110. In conclusion I consider the proposal complies with the Council's car parking standards and will not exacerbate the current parking problems in The Valley. Indeed I consider the proposal will improve matters with the change in surface and there may be some use of the additional spaces within the scheme by residents of The Valley.
111. With regard to any potential overlooking, the new dwellings will have their rear elevations in excess of 30m from the side elevation of the dwelling granted permission adjacent to No. 48, approximately 40m from the side elevation of No. 22 St Thomas Close and between 50-65m away from the rear elevations of Nos. 2-16 St. Thomas Close.



112. Such distances are more than adequate to ensure that the privacy of all existing residents is not adversely affected. In addition the proposed site layout plan shows that additional planting along the existing rear and side boundaries of these dwellings, i.e. the eastern boundary of the site, is to remain and be strengthened with new planting. This can be required as part of a landscape scheme to be submitted post decision. I consider such planting is unlikely to result in material darkening problem to existing gardens due to the length of the gardens.
113. The separation distances are also such that the scheme will not result in any overbearing impact or any material loss of light.

***Alternative sites***

114. Comberton is surrounded by the Green Belt with only a few small areas of 'white land' outside of the village framework that do not lie within it. None of these areas could accommodate the scale of development proposed.
115. PolicyHG/5 states that for sites proposed within the Green Belt that before planning permission is granted the District Council will have to be assured that no alternative appropriate sites can be found for the scale and type of development proposed. The need for 51 dwellings will not be met within the village as there is insufficient land available for market schemes such that 40% of such schemes amount to 51 dwellings.
116. Since Comberton is surrounded by Green Belt land with only modest areas of 'white land', that could not accommodate 19 dwellings, there is no option but to develop in the Green Belt in order to provide for the scale of the need for 100% affordable housing for people with a local connection.
117. Moreover if this proposal goes ahead it will still be necessary to develop additional land within the Green Belt if the full need is to be met.
118. The Parish Council has identified a number of possible alternative sites which I have asked the applicants to assess. The full assessment is contained within the applicants' Planning Statement at para 3.26-3.43 and at Appendix 7.
119. It appears to me that there may be additional sites that could accommodate a small number of dwellings and it is likely that these will be required in addition to the application site. Other sites that may be suitable are not known to be available at this time such as land east of Bush Close/south of Swaynes Lane and there may be potential access issues to resolve. If this land were to become available it may be a consideration for an additional site perhaps of a similar scale.
120. The assessment demonstrates that it will be difficult to accommodate the need for 51 dwellings in Comberton. If this scheme for 19 dwellings goes ahead then it is likely that two additional sites accommodating 16 each or perhaps one further site for 19 with 13 found on a combination of smaller sites will be necessary. In addition it is worth remembering that the sites identified within the village and any affordable housing that comes forward as part of market schemes within the village will not necessarily address the local Comberton need.
121. I conclude that there are currently no alternative sites outside of the Cambridge Green Belt that can accommodate the scale and type of development proposed and further that there are limited sites within the Green Belt that could also accommodate

the level of need in Comberton. I am satisfied that there are no better sites and that this site is appropriate and necessary if the need is to be met in the future.

### ***Highway safety and parking problems***

122. The Local Highway Authority (LHA) has been involved throughout the pre-application stage including a representative visiting the site with residents and members of the Parish Council, and giving a presentation and answering residents' questions at a public meeting.
123. The LHA does not consider the proposal will result in any material reduction in highway safety. It has stated that the parking problems in The Valley are unfortunate but very similar to many situations within Cambridge City. I consider that parked cars make manoeuvring more difficult and slow vehicle speeds. It was accepted that the existing arrangements of vehicles parking on pavements is somewhat undesirable but will not be made worse by this proposal though there would be a benefit to changing the worst affected section to a shared surface with the applicant's agreement.
124. I note the comments of the LHA. It is not objecting to the proposal, subject to conditions, and states that the traffic assessment can be accepted as demonstrating that the roads junctions will be able to cope with the proposed increase in vehicular movements.

### ***Proximity to services***

125. The site lies less than 500m from the village school such that children can walk to school. Many of the representations state that this is a common practise amongst existing residents at the moment. It is also within easy reach of other services within the village including a convenience store, newsagent, post office, pub, nursery school, doctor's surgery and village hall. I accept that other areas of the village are closer to such facilities but I remain of the opinion that the site is well related to facilities and services within the village.
126. There is an hourly bus service with stops within 550m.
127. Whilst there are no services in the immediate vicinity the site is within a similar distance to the centre of the village as the considerable number of existing houses in this location.

### ***Character of the village or rural landscape***

128. The character of this part of Comberton is typical of a 60s/70s planned estate with regular lines of houses set in a predominantly perpendicular arrangement.
129. The proposal retains this regularity but by introducing a curve adds interest to the streetscape.
130. Views from the surrounding countryside, including from the village recreation ground, should be enhanced due to the planned additional planting that should create a softer edge to the village in this location.

### ***Open space***

131. A scheme of this number and mix should provide a Local Area of Play (LAP) of 162m<sup>2</sup>, informal children's play space of 162m<sup>2</sup> and 162m<sup>2</sup> of informal open space in

accordance with the Local Development Framework Open Space in New Developments Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Draft April 2008 (OSSPD). The play area shown is approximately 1,745m<sup>2</sup>, well in excess of the requirement, and will be available to the occupiers of the new dwellings but also to the children of residents in the locality. Its position in relation to the dwellings gives excellent natural surveillance. The applicants intend to put in place their own measures for maintenance using a management company. The equipping and maintenance can be controlled through conditions and a S106 agreement.

132. In addition to the above the scheme will, according to the OSSPD, result in an additional 40-41 people being resident in Comberton requiring an additional need for outdoor sports facilities. Since 19 dwellings lies below the threshold for requiring such facilities on site a contribution will need to be made to the Parish Council of approximately £14,400 for provision and £3,700 for maintenance, secured through a S106 agreement.

### ***Mix***

133. Policy HG/2 states that affordable housing should be of an appropriate mix to respond to identified needs at the time of the development. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager has confirmed that the mix is appropriate to the housing need.

### ***Density***

134. This is approximately 18dph which is lower than the minimum 30dph referred to in Policy HG/1. However, I consider that any more than 19 dwellings on this site would start to move away from the criteria in HG/5 for 'exception' sites and could have a greater impact on the surrounding Green Belt. The site could be reduced in size to increase the density but in view of the considerable planting required along all site boundaries I do not consider there is much scope for this. I have requested the northern boundary could be moved south by approximately 15m for other reasons explained later but this will have the additional effect of increasing the density to 20dph. I do not consider it necessary to increase this further by further site area reductions as this may impact on the visual quality of the surrounding Green Belt.

### ***Education contributions***

135. These are not sought as part of an exceptions housing proposal.

### ***Design and layout***

136. The design of the houses is simple in concept and the layout focuses on the natural surveillance of the play area. It is a regular arrangement reflecting the regularity of existing housing in the vicinity but with the added interest of the crescent shape. Scope has been built in for significant planting to help assimilate the site into its surroundings and to provide a soft edge to the village. The two parking courts are small and located close to existing properties in The Valley to provide additional parking for those residents if desired.
137. I have some concerns, particularly that plot 10 has no rear access to its garden and therefore no bin storage and that the gardens to plots 3-6 are divided by a footpath. I understand the land to the rear of this path will be accessible through gates in the path and the land will be used as an extension to the garden areas perhaps as

orchards, vegetable gardens or simply an additional area of garden land. In addition the gardens to Nos. 15 and 16 are particularly small and need revision.

138. A revised plan addressing the above will be submitted shortly. Members will be updated at the meeting.

### ***Housing model***

139. Essentially the applicants buy the land, build the dwellings then transfer them on a shared ownership basis to qualifying persons to recover costs. Profit is gained from rent on the retained equity share portion. To ensure that a mix of tenures can be achieved they will also transfer to a RSL on the same basis for the RSL to then let to persons in need. This of course relies on a RSL being willing to take them on.
140. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager clearly has concerns regarding the applicants' model. One concern is that local RSLs have been unwilling to enter into any formal agreement with Northern Affordable Homes (NAH). There would have to be a mix of tenure and since NAH will not provide any for rental directly the success of the scheme depends on RSLs.
141. The shared ownership is on a fixed 60% basis with no staircasing which is against Housing Corporation guidelines and it does not allow people to come in at a lower stake.
142. Clearly such issues need to be resolved before planning permission can be granted.

### ***Tenure mix***

143. An approximate 60/40 split in tenure between rental and shared ownership is required such that 12 of the dwellings will be for rent and the remaining 7 shared ownership.
144. It is intended that units 3-6 will be shared ownership resulting in two each of the terrace blocks having a 50/50 split of rental and shared ownership. The remaining blocks will each contain one shared ownership property. This should result in a good integration between rental and shared ownership tenure.

### ***Renewable energy***

145. The applicants are relying on good construction techniques to make the dwellings energy efficient but do not demonstrate how at least 10% of the energy needs of the dwellings can be achieved through renewable energy. I have asked them to address this and Members will be updated at the meeting.

### ***Water conservation***

146. In accordance with Policy NE/12 a Water Conservation Strategy will be required prior to the commencement of any development. This can be required as a condition of any planning permission granted.

### ***Flood Risk***

147. The site lies within Flood Risk Zone 1 and not within an area of medium or high flood risk. However, I note the comments of the Chief Environmental Health Officer and local residents. At the Affordable Housing Panel meeting the Parish Council also confirmed that there are indeed issues in relation to drainage and foul sewage

disposal. The PC does not agree with Anglian Water that there is sufficient capacity within the existing system. I consider it likely that the problems with foul sewage are as a result of technical or maintenance problems that will need to be resolved by Anglian Water as it has confirmed that capacity exists but I will nevertheless seek further information on this point and Members will be updated at the meeting.

148. A condition to ensure that adequate measures for surface water drainage are put in place should satisfy the Environment Agency Standing Advice for such developments. This is confirmed by the Environment Agency comments.

### ***Construction traffic***

149. I have asked the Parish Council for advice on the most appropriate routes and times for construction traffic, especially HGV movements, having special regard to the movement of school children and their safety. Such times and routes if reasonable can be controlled through the use of a planning condition if Members are minded to approve the application. The Parish Council has stated:
150. “Meridian Primary School’s hours are 9am to 3.30pm – traffic is particularly busy in the Harbour Avenue area from 8.30 to 9 am and 3.15 to 4pm and we recommend that construction traffic should not be allowed to drive through the Village during these hours.
151. We recommend that this traffic should not use the Harbour Ave / Barton Rd junction at any time because of safety concerns outside the School and to avoid the 2 bends near the School and also the acute turn from the west end of Harbour Ave into the Valley. Comberton Village College hours are 8.20am to 2.50pm making Barton Road particularly busy immediately before and after these times.
152. Construction traffic should not start so early as to disturb residents’ sleep and a “Good Neighbour” policy of no construction traffic on Saturday afternoons, all day Sunday and bank holidays is requested. There should be no weekend working on site”.
153. I have yet to receive the comments of the applicants and Local Highways Authority with regard to these suggestions. Members will be updated at the meeting.

### ***Biodiversity***

154. I note the comments of the Ecology Officer. Other than comments in relation to the suggested footpath the matters can be secured through an appropriately worded condition.

### ***Street lighting***

155. It will be important to ensure that a scheme of street lighting, that will be necessary along the adopted highway, will be sympathetic to the location of the site adjacent to the Green Belt. This can be considered by means of an appropriately worded condition.

### ***Parking courts***

156. I note the comments of the Police Architectural Liaison Officer. However this parking helps to provide sufficient car parking for the scheme and attempts to alleviate some of the existing parking problems in The Valley I would therefore be reluctant to

suggest these spaces be omitted. The parking court is not in one single area, divided by the road, and there is some surveillance from the rear of the new dwellings on plots 14 and 15. I do not see any viable alternative within the constraints of the design of the scheme.

***Permissive path***

157. The applicants are proposing that a permissive path to the centre of the village be created to enable the new residents greater access across surrounding fields to the centre of the village. This is not a formal part of the planning application but would add something to the connectivity of the site to the centre of the village. I understand the land owner would not be prepared to allow a public right of way to be created.

158. ***Response to the comments of Comberton Parish Council***

- (a) The issue of potential phasing has been addressed. The Parish Council accepts the approach of pre allocation of all 19 units (see above).
- (b) I do not consider the development should be positioned further south. It will result in the site extending further into the Green Belt and as I consider the impact on neighbour amenity for the existing residents to the east of the site to be acceptable I do not consider there would be any benefit to be gained.
- (c) I have asked the applicants to move the northern boundary of the site further south which will reduce the size of this area. Gates are to be shown from the paths allowing access to these rear garden spaces. It is further considered that these dwellings on plots 3-6 should be shared ownership as experience suggests a greater level of maintenance and control can be achieved through this type of tenure. The areas will be used as additional garden space perhaps for home vegetable growing, orchard tree planting or just additional spaces to use as garden land.
- (d) I do not consider it would be desirable or feasible to locate dwellings to the rear of plots 3-6. The gap is not intended to allow for this in the future and in general developments should not be designed to prevent future development. Any such proposal would be considered on its merits if submitted. However, my opinion is that such a proposal would be unlikely to succeed in this instance.
- (e) The dwellings are of simple design which I consider appropriate. They are relatively low in height and small in scale which is appropriate to the Green Belt setting whilst according with the appropriate standards for affordable housing.
- (f) I agree that those in The Valley may not use the spaces but I consider they should remain available for such use and for use of the new residents in the context of the current and well known car parking problems that exist in The Valley.
- (g) At the Affordable Housing Panel meeting it was agreed that this area should be left as is. I have raised this issue with the applicants who are happy to agree to this.
- (h) I do not consider that handing the development site would provide more public space. I consider that it may even make this proposed area less accessible to

existing residents. As it is the area will be clearly visible from The Valley and will feel more a part of the area. Handing the site will tuck this area out of view. I also have serious concerns about moving the bulk of the dwellings closer to the western boundary as this will have a greater visual impact on the surrounding Green Belt.

- (i) The development cannot be expected to combat *existing* anti social behaviour problems.
- (j) The detail of garden boundaries would be a matter for consideration post decision. I would be happy to share proposed details with the Parish Council once submitted if desired. At the Panel Meeting it was decided that the front garden boundaries should remain open to ensure the green and open character of the development is retained.
- (k) The permissive right of way is not within the site boundary and is not a formal part of this application as stated above. The applicant has sought the cooperation of the land owner in providing this right of way and has confirmed that no formal footpath can be achieved. I consider that the offer of this right of way may help with linkages of the site to the main services within the village but the site is reasonably located in any case in the same way as the existing dwellings and I do not consider the lack of a formal link to be justification to refuse the planning application.

### **Conclusions**

- 159. There is clearly strong local opposition to this proposal but I consider it does not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and it complies with the requirements of Policy HG/5 of the LDFDCP. I believe there to be a significant need for affordable housing for those with a Comberton connection and I am not convinced that there are any alternative sites that are either better or available.
- 160. I do not consider there to be any material highway safety concerns or neighbour amenity issues. Flood risk will have to be carefully considered through the submission of an appropriate drainage scheme and appropriate landscaping will be key to the success of the scheme.
- 161. I have concerns that the applicant's model does not appear to be satisfactory to local RSLs and that the fixed equity approach will result in problems with affordability and staircasing. These issues must be resolved prior to consent being granted in order that the proposal is not allowed to remain undetermined for a long period. I therefore recommend that the applicants be given 3 months in order to satisfy these concerns of the Council's Housing Development and Enabling Manager and that if a satisfactory solution cannot be found the application be refused.

### **Recommendation**

- 162. Delegated approval/refusal subject to the submission of a revised plan addressing layout concerns and subject to a 3 month period to resolve delivery issues to the satisfaction of the Housing Development and Enabling Manager and subject to conditions to require the allocation of all of the units prior to development commencing, affordability in accordance with required tenure split and policy in perpetuity, open space infrastructure provision, scheme for the equipping and maintaining of the children's play space, Grampian condition to ensure highway improvements to The Valley prior to commencement, submission of a full landscape

scheme, landscape implementation, renewable energy scheme, water conservation strategy, materials – walls roofs and hard surfaces, retention of car parking spaces, street lighting, drainage and foul sewage disposal, boundary treatment, archaeology, keeping front gardens open, routes and time restrictions for construction traffic, highway conditions recommended by the LHA and biodiversity.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Planning Application File Ref S/0558/08/F
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies Development Plan Document 2007
- Local Development Framework Open Space in New Developments Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Draft April 2008

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