

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

---

**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008

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

---

**S/1592/08/F - Comberton  
Erection of 11 Affordable Dwellings  
at Land at The Valley for Northern Affordable Homes**

**Recommendation: Approval**

**Date for Determination: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008 (Major Application)**

**Notes:**

**This application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the application is for affordable housing as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the Local Development Framework.**

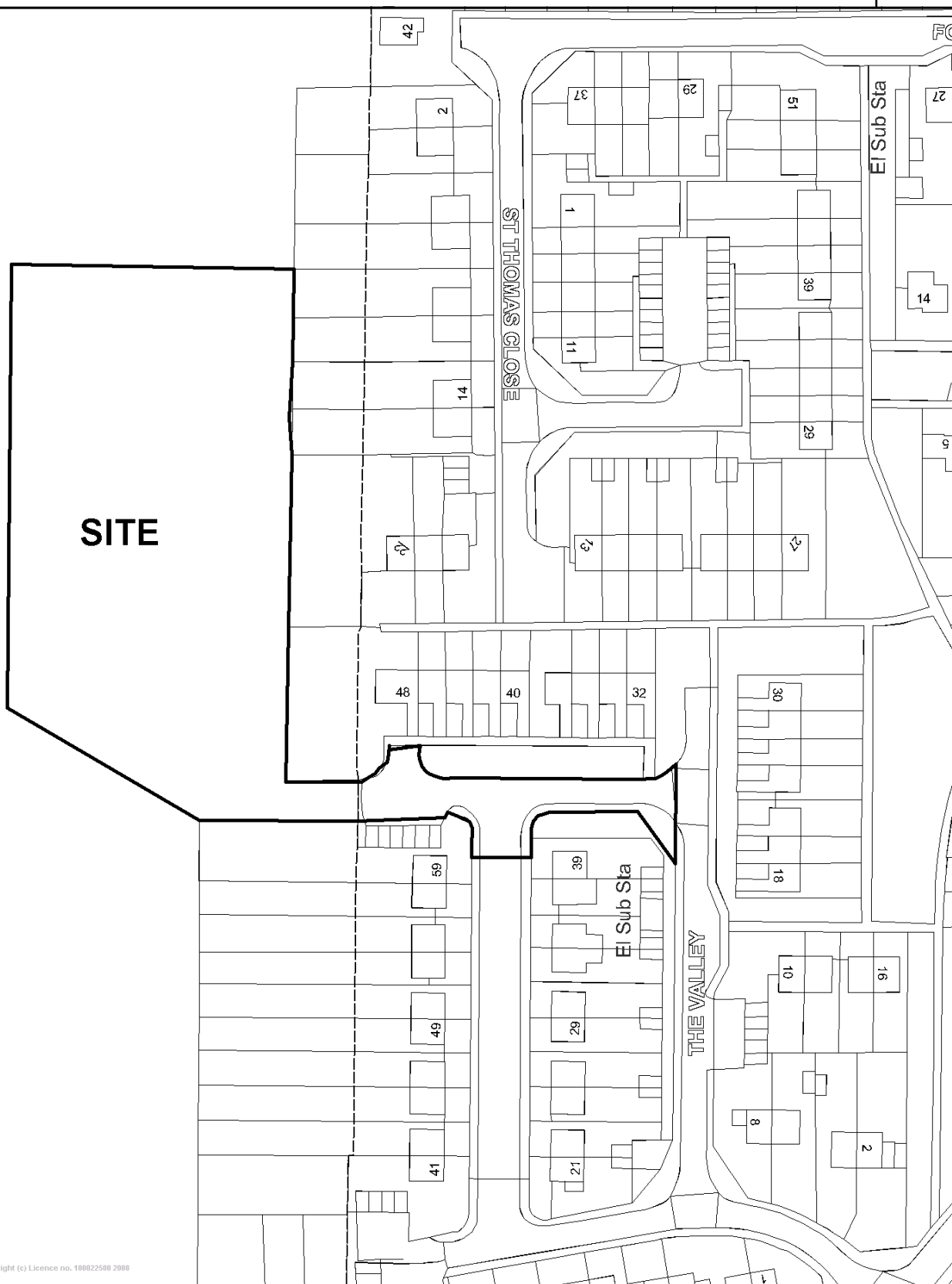
**Site and Proposal**

1. The 0.645 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 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008, proposes the erection of a 100% affordable housing scheme for 11 "Intermediate" affordable dwellings at a mix of 4 two- bed and 7 three-bed. The dwellings are to be arranged in a crescent facing an area of open space/children's play area of approximately 1,510m<sup>2</sup>. The dwellings will be arranged in 2 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 dwellings per hectare (dph).
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 An application for 24 affordable dwellings on a slightly larger site was withdrawn in December 2007 following officer concerns in relation to the scale, layout and design of the dwellings.
6. An application for 19 affordable dwellings on a slightly larger site was refused at the June 2008 Planning Committee meeting (report attached as appendix 1) for the following reasons:

"The scale of the proposal at 19 dwellings, and its location, served from an existing cul-de-sac, is such that traffic movements along The Valley and its



Crown Copyright (c) Licence no. 100022500 2008



Reproduced from the 2008 Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's stationary office (c) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.

Scale 1/1250 Date 19/11/2008

Centre = 538590 E 256791 N

December 2008 Planning Committee

approach roads will be significantly increased exacerbating existing congestion problems. The additional vehicle movements and increased congestion will unacceptably harm the amenities of local residents both of The Valley and of the wider area such that it outweighs the need to provide affordable housing in this location. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies DP/2 and DP/3 of the Local Development Framework Development Control Policies Development Plan Document 2007 in that, respectively, it is not compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale in relation to the surrounding area and that the development would have an unacceptable adverse impact on residential amenity from traffic generated.”

## **Planning Policy**

### *Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003*

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 approval. It states:

“The Parish Council notes that this application is for 11 dwellings and that this is a considerable reduction in the proposed number of dwellings as the first application was for 26 dwellings.

Given this and mindful of the identified need for affordable housing in Comberton the Parish Council supports in principle the application. It welcomes in particular the provision of 2 parking spaces per dwelling and the additional parking spaces that will be provided for residents of The Valley to use. Further clarification is required on the exact number that will be enabled via the access road. The Parish Council has some concern at the small size of the rooms in the properties and recommends that the housing should meeting environmental targets in terms of the size of the rooms, their heating and insulation. The Parish Council has expressed concern regarding drainage at the site before and reiterates this concern.

If approved by the District Council the permission should be subject to a S106 Agreement and the Parish council wishes to be a co-signatory on this. As is usual the Parish Council expects that all its reasonable legal costs associated with the S106 agreement should be covered by the applicant.

The S106 should ensure the homes are in perpetuity for those with strong connections to Comberton and are to remain affordable. The mix of housing is also important and the District Council needs to ensure that the homes are the correct mix of both rental and also shared equity as identified in the recent housing needs survey undertaken by Cambs ACRE in partnership with the Parish Council.

While it is expected that the housing association, which will take on the housing, will also take on responsibility for the public open space and play equipment provided by the applicant the Parish Council expects the S106 to include a sum of money to be spent at the Parish Council's discretion for recreation provision elsewhere in the village.

Arrangements need to be made for the street lighting on site. Care should be taken with the type allowed as this site is adjacent to open countryside and also arrangements need to be secured with CCC to take on ownership and ongoing maintenance responsibilities.

The Parish Council reserves the right to name the roads within the development.”

34. **Affordable Housing Panel:** The panel will meet on 25<sup>th</sup> November. Its findings will be reported verbally at the meeting.

35. **Housing Development and Enabling Manager:** Comments are awaited.
36. **Environmental Protection Team Leader:** Comments are awaited, however, commenting in relation to S/0558/08: "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.

Consequently, I recommend that if the application is successful, consideration be given to the provision of drainage and that 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."

37. **Cambridge Archaeology Assistant Archaeologist:** 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.
38. **Anglian Water:** "We are obliged under the Water Industry Act 1991 to provide water and wastewater infrastructure for domestic purposes for new housing and employment developments within our area when requested to do so. To effect this the applicant will have to make a request to us under the appropriate section of the Water Industry Act."

"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."

"The foul drainage from this development will be treated at Haslingfield Sewage Treatment Works that at present has available capacity for these flows."

39. **Environment Agency:** 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.

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.

Additional advice for the applicants is given that can be included as informatives on any planning permission.

40. **Police Architectural Liaison Officer:** Comments are awaited.
41. **Local Highway Authority:** Comments are awaited.
42. **Ecology Officer:**

"The following enhancement opportunities exist and should be taken forward:  
1) bird box provision in 50% of dwellings

2) 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.

I welcome the overall proposals for native hedging to enclose this development.

It has been reported previously that a nearby garden pond provides habitat for the great crested newt. Natural England has previously expressed a view on this matter and should be re-consulted.

I accept the fact that the garden pond near to the site is providing a breeding site for great crested newts, especially if it has been surveyed by the local amphibian group. However, the fact that the plot of land proposed for the development itself is active farmland leads me to believe that by removing cultivation and ultimately providing more garden land it will actually result in a habitat gain for the local newt population - subject to strict protection measures being put in place during the construction phase and no unnecessary barriers being permanently erected (such as fencing/walls that go flush to the ground and kerbing where not entirely necessary - does the adoptable highway have to have kerbing?).

In this particular case I am satisfied that it is appropriate to use a condition requiring further survey work and subsequent mitigation scheme given that the population of newts is low, the development site is not actually on the known newt habitat and furthermore that the development site is currently active farmland where newts are likely to be transient and less likely to come to harm. The greatest risk to any great crested newts is likely to be during the construction phase when materials may be stored on the development site.

A license to disturb the habitat of great crested newts will most likely need to be secured by the developer. The license will require further ecological assessment of the pond and the production of a detailed mitigation scheme. We will need to secure the scheme of mitigation via an appropriate condition. Further habitat measures can be included within the landscaping of the scheme. No development or site preparation or clearance will be allowed to commence until such scheme has been approved by NE and myself."

**43. Landscape Design Officer comments:**

"I have no objections to this layout. The proposed planting will provide a suitable edge to the development and utilising the open space to act as a buffer is to be commended. I should like to see a detailed landscape plan in due course. My only suggestion would be that the planting around the roadside parking should be set approximately 2m back from the kerb of the parking bays so that a verge of grass can be maintained, enabling car passengers to get out of the cars easily, while still allowing the planting to have some depth. The suggested permissive footpath towards the recreation ground is an excellent idea and would help to connect this part of the village better. I assume that the proposed shrub planting to define the parking areas at the entrance to the development will be maintained by the housing association. If it is to be adopted by the parish council then it might be better for it to be naturalistic planting that will accommodate a more relaxed level of maintenance. Given that the recreation ground is close by for ball games, the play area could contain hazel copse and slight changes of levels to provide some informal play opportunities for younger children. I should like to see a management plan as part of the landscape condition so that the long term objectives of the planting can be achieved and the regular and occasional maintenance required is



set out for future managers and contractors, and possibly the parish council. I am happy to discuss this with the applicant's landscape architect in due course."

44. **Strategic Sustainability Officer** comments are awaited

45. **Countryside Access Team – Cambridgeshire County Council** states:

"The Countryside Access Team have no comments to make on the development, but note that the developer intends for there to be a permissive path from one corner of the development to the recreation ground. The Team recommends that this be formalised by way of Permissive Path Agreement with the County Council. This will serve the dual purpose of allowing the path to be shown on the County Council website as a Permissive Path, ensuring that public will know where they can legitimately walk AND protect the landowner from a future claim for a definitive path over the route."

46. **SCDC Legal Officer** comments are awaited.

52. **Representations**

47. 29 letters of objection 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) (Existing traffic problems identified by the Local Highways Authority will be exacerbated by increasing the volume of through traffic and need for parking.
- (c) Children will not be able to play outdoors due to safety concerns with the extra traffic.
- (d) Increased risk of accidents from increasing the number of vehicles on the roads particularly at the start and end of the working day and at weekends.
- (e) Further congestion will make it extremely difficult for the emergency services to access properties.
- (f) Additional wear and tear on the road which is already in a poor condition.
- (g) The additional parking spaces to be provided for residents in The Valley will not make any difference.
- (h) The Valley is simply not wide enough to accommodate through traffic.
- (i) 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.
- (j) 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.
- (k) The site is not well related to facilities, services and bus stops within the village.

- (l) The development will not stop at 11 dwellings. The applicants will want to apply for more in the future.
- (m) The assessment of local need is out of date.
- (n) 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.
- (o) Alternative sites have not been fully been explored. Better sites exist.
- (p) The site is Green Belt and no development should be allowed to take place.
- (q) Detract from the character and setting of the village.
- (r) Village infrastructure cannot cope with the additional dwellings. The Village College is at capacity and the surgery has a full quota of patients and would struggle to take on more.
- (s) The existing sewerage system will not be able to cope with the additional dwellings.
- (t) Children will have to be driven to school rather than walk as at present due to the additional traffic and safety hazards.
- (u) 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.
- (v) The footpath will be ploughed and is effectively useless.
- (w) Insufficient parking has been provided for the new dwellings.
- (x) Loss of view of fields and loss of property values.
- (y) 14 Great Crested Newts living in a pond in the garden to No. 53 and also newts may exist in the garden of No. 48.
- (z) Development too large in scale. SCDC policy states "In order to ensure sustainable communities, affordable housing will be distributed through development in small groups or clusters, typically of 6 to 8 units."
- (aa) Comberton Parish Council identified only a need for 8-10 affordable homes.
- (bb) Increase in children taking short cuts through the fields increasing litter and vandalism and spoiling privacy of gardens.
- (cc) 97 out of 98 people at a public meeting into the previous planning application voted against supporting it.
- (dd) The traffic assessment was not done at the busiest times of the day i.e. when the Meridian School and Comberton Village College students use the junctions.

- (ee) Comberton has no gas supply and 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.

### **Planning Comments - Key Issues**

48. 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***

49. The proposal follows a refused application, 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 numbers of dwellings has reduced from 24 to 19 and now to 11.

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

50. 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.
51. 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.
52. Any built development will have some impact on openness. The proposed dwellings will clearly result in the loss of openness of approximately 0.6ha of Green Belt land adjacent to the village. The issue is whether or not this can be considered as 'limited'.
53. 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. The impact of the end gables of the houses on plots 1 and 19 in the previous scheme has been reduced as the built form is now set further away from the western boundary of the site.

- 54. In addition, the location of the site to the west and north of existing gardens helps to limit the excursion into the Green Belt
- 55. 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.
- 56. 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.
- 57. I conclude that the development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt.
- 58. 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***

- 59. Policy HG/5 requires sites to be 'small'. The previous withdrawn application proposed 24 dwellings. The previous scheme was for 19 which I considered met the "small" criteria. This scheme is on a reduced site of approximately 0.6ha and is intended to accommodate just 11 dwellings. No definition of 'small' in the policy 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. I considered the first 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.
- 60. 11 dwellings is actually 4 fewer than might otherwise be permitted on a market scheme within the village. With 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 I consider the scale of the development to be wholly appropriate.

### ***Need***

- 61. '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 Local Development Framework (LDF) is restricted to those in need but not necessarily from within that village.
- 62. A recent Housing Needs Survey found that there were 51 households in need of affordable housing in Comberton.
- 63. 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.

64. I note the Parish Council is now supporting this scheme. In the scheme for 19 dwellings it had requested that phasing be considered to ensure that the need was real before all 19 dwellings were constructed. Now that the Parish is in support and the numbers have been reduced significantly I do not consider there to be any need to consider this further.

***Neighbour amenity***

65. From the representations received there is clearly a lot of concern regarding the impact of these dwellings on the existing residents of The Valley.
66. 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).
67. Residents are concerned that attracting yet more cars will only exacerbate the problems.
68. 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.
69. In this regard, the scheme provides an adoptable 6m wide shared surface highway with a turning head, one dedicated space per dwelling and 11 unallocated visitor parking bays resulting in 2 spaces per dwelling (a slight increase from 1.9 in the previous refused application). Occasional short term parking will be available on the highway and clear of it in front of parking bays 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8. 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.
70. 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.
71. 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.
72. 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.

73. 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.
74. The separation distances are also such that the scheme will not result in any overbearing impact or any material loss of light.

### ***Alternative sites***

75. 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.
76. 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.
77. Since Comberton is surrounded by Green Belt land with only modest areas of 'white land', that could not accommodate 11 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.
78. 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.
79. The Parish Council has previously 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 3.26-3.45 and at Appendix 6.
80. 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.
81. The assessment demonstrates that it will be difficult to accommodate the need for 51 dwellings in Comberton. If this scheme for 11 dwellings goes ahead then it is likely that additional sites accommodating similar or larger numbers will be required.
82. 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***

83. 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.
84. The LHA comments are awaited but it did not consider the earlier proposal for 19 dwellings would 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.
85. I note the previous comments of the LHA. Members will be updated at the meeting but I anticipate it will not be objecting to the proposal, subject to conditions, and as before, would consider 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***

86. 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.
87. There is an hourly bus service with stops within 550m.
88. 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***

89. 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.
90. The proposal retains this regularity but by introducing a slight curve adds interest to the streetscape.
91. 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. This is improved over the previous scheme as mentioned above.

### ***Open space***

92. A scheme of this number and mix should provide a Local Area of Play (LAP) of 96m<sup>2</sup>, informal children's play space of 96m<sup>2</sup> and 96m<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 1,241m<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.

93. In addition to the above the scheme will, according to the OSSPD, result in an additional 24 people being resident in Comberton requiring an additional need for outdoor sports facilities. Since 11 dwellings lies below the threshold for requiring such facilities on site a contribution will need to be made to the Parish Council of approximately £8,488 for provision and £2,165 for maintenance, secured through a S106 agreement.

### ***Mix***

94. 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 had previously confirmed that the mix in the earlier scheme was appropriate to the housing need. Members will be updated at the meeting with regard to the current proposal.

### ***Density***

101. This is approximately 17dph which is lower than the minimum 30dph referred to in Policy HG/1. However, my previous view was 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 do not consider it necessary to increase the density further by site area reductions as this may impact on the visual quality of the surrounding Green Belt.

### ***Education contributions***

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

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

96. 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 slight 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.

### ***Housing model***

97. 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.



98. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager comments are awaited but previously clearly had 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.
99. 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.
100. Clearly such issues need to be resolved before planning permission can be granted.

#### ***Tenure mix***

101. As before, an approximate 60/40 split in tenure between rental and shared ownership is required such that 7 of the dwellings will be for rent and the remaining 4 shared ownership.

#### ***Renewable energy***

102. The applicants have submitted a renewable energy statement with the application. This states that they recognise the need to provide for 10% of the energy requirements on site but that "...given the nature of the scheme, providing 100% affordable housing, it is very difficult to see that the overall costings for the project will allow for the use of significant amounts of renewable energy sources to be incorporated." They go on to suggest that information regarding renewable energy will be passed on to future occupiers to enable them to make informed decisions on their options for incorporating renewable energy generation in their properties.
103. I do not find this approach acceptable and suggest that if Members are minded to approve the application a condition requiring a scheme to be submitted, agreed and carried out is necessary.

#### ***Water conservation***

104. 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***

105. 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 regarding the earlier proposal and local residents. At the earlier Affordable Housing Panel meeting the Parish Council also confirmed that there are indeed issues in relation to drainage and foul sewage disposal. The PC did 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. I note that Anglian Water has a duty to provide the necessary infrastructure.
106. 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***

107. Times and routes of traffic can be controlled through the use of a planning condition if Members are minded to approve the application. The Parish Council has previously stated:
108. "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.
109. 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.
110. 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".

### ***Biodiversity***

111. I note the previous comments of the Ecology Officer. Other than comments in relation to the suggested footpath the matters can be secured through an appropriately worded condition. Any change to this position as a result of any revised comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.

### ***Street lighting***

112. 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, as specifically referred to by the Parish Council. This can be considered by means of an appropriately worded condition.

### ***Permissive path***

113. 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. I note the comments of the Countryside Access Team which can be passed on to the developer.

### ***Conclusions***

114. There is clearly strong local residents 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.
115. 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.

116. 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 before development can commence. I believe that an appropriately worded condition can ensure that a scheme of affordable housing be submitted and agreed, in consultation with the Housing Development and Enabling Manager, that will most likely take the form of a Section 106 agreement, that can address these concerns. If no such solution can be found the proposal would not go ahead and the permission would die after the 3 year implementation condition expired.

### **Recommendation**

117. Approval subject to conditions to ensure 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 Files Ref S/1592/08/F and 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

**Contact Officer:** Nigel Blazeby – Development Control Team Leader  
Telephone: (01954) 713165