

Planning Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/21/3280395

November 2021

**Land Between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way,
Stapleford,
Cambridge**

**Alternative Site
Proof of Evidence**

Robert J Belcher

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Robert Belcher. I have been a consultant at Carterwood, specialist advisers dedicated to the care home, older people's housing and care village property sectors, since 2016.
- 1.2. I qualified in 1984 as an Incorporated Valuer and Auctioneer, and subsequently as a Chartered Surveyor. Before retiring from GVA in 2016 and setting up a private property consultancy, I was a director in the Bristol office of GVA (now Avison Young), having set up their South West regional healthcare team in 1996, which specialised in healthcare valuation, healthcare property consultancy, acquisitions and disposals of healthcare sites and businesses.
- 1.3. I have acted as an expert witness in civil litigation actions. I have attended planning appeals as an expert in relation to planning refusals for care home and care village development. I retired as a Fellow from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in 2021.

2. Scope of Evidence

- 2.1. My evidence specifically relates to alternative sites and my proof relates to the Alternative Site Assessment April 2020 (ASA) for Axis Land Partnerships, which formed part of the appeal submission.
- 2.2. I am familiar with the report and inspected the relevant identified sites within the ASA on 27 October 2021.
- 2.3. With specific reference to the ASA and my subsequent updated research in appendices A and B, I consider the:
 - site size;
 - identified alternative sites and their current status, in relation to their suitability, availability and achievability;
 - sites in the Green Belt;
 - appeal decisions that have regard to the methodology adopted in determining alternative sites for care provision and, separately, development in the Green Belt.

3. Site Size

- 3.1. The proposed elderly care development will provide up to 17,825 sq. m of C2 built space. I am advised that the total area of the subject site of 24.37 ha includes a proposed countryside park and the proposed care development extends to approximately 4.85 hectares.
- 3.2. In order for a site to be suitable for the proposed scheme, care village operators and developers typically require at least 3.5 ha, up to 7.5 ha. The site search criteria adopted utilises a range of 3.5 ha to 7.5 ha, in order to incorporate sites well above and below the subject site area. The Council acknowledged the findings of the ASA in their Statement of Case, page 17 paragraph 5.27.
- 3.3. An important part of the proposal is the inclusion of a countryside park, which will provide a substantial enhancement for the residents of the development as well as the wider community. Such opportunities to provide a countryside park rarely form part of a development proposal.

4. Alternative Sites

- 4.1. The 2020 ASA identified all suitable, available and achievable sites for the proposed development within the South Cambridgeshire District Council (DC) and Cambridge City Council (CC) local authority boundaries, none met all three criteria.
- 4.2. The 2020 ASA was based on research in publicly available planning policy documents (each local authority's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - SHLAA), local commercial and residential agent research, national healthcare property agent enquiries, the local authority estates department, and planning and property websites. This resulted in a site filtering process in order to ascertain any sites identified as potentially suitable for the elderly care facility and therefore requiring further assessment.
- 4.3. The three main tests for development are that the sites are suitable, available and achievable for the development of the subject elderly care facility.
- 4.4. Where sites are outside the size range detailed at paragraph 3.2, albeit in order to be robust the site size assessment was based on sites smaller and larger than the appeal site, they have been filtered out, as they are either too small for the development of the appeal scheme or in excess of what is typically required. The minimum site size for the development is required to develop an operationally efficient sized care village scheme as proposed. Sites above the range are larger than what is required. The development of larger, mixed-use sites, even with compatible uses, fall beyond a 3-year achievable timescale.
- 4.5. It is my experience that in order for operators to provide a successful and comprehensive care development, such as that proposed and which covers, inter alia, the needs of the residents, their well-being and social interaction, the development must be provided on a site within the search size range adopted, albeit the proposed care village development extends to approximately 4.85 hectares. The success of such developments is dependent upon the full range of facilities, as proposed, on one contiguous site and any disaggregation of the facilities across a number of sites would make the scheme unworkable and unsuccessful both at a human and economic level. Smaller sites will not provide the range of facilities required and operators will not consider smaller sites for developments such as the subject appeal.

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- 4.6. I have provided at Appendix G and H letters from Rangeford Villages, Cinnamon Retirement Living, both well-established care providers in the elderly care sector, which set out typical site requirements of operators of developments similar to the appeal site.
- 4.7. In a recent appeal in respect of a continuing care retirement community development, APP/G2245/W/21/3271595 (Appendix D, page 44, paragraph 60) Kent and Surrey Golf and Country Club, Crouch House Road, Edenbridge TN8 5LQ the inspector accepted that there is a minimum number of units and site area that would be likely to be required to support the retirement village concept and “the viable provision of shared on-site facilities for residents”. Furthermore, the “availability” of sites was constrained by the Green Belt.
- 4.8. In relation to suitability, a number of factors require consideration as to whether a site would be suitable for an elderly care development, which include, inter alia, level topography, reasonable accessibility and complementary adjoining land uses that would not have a detrimental impact on the residents.
- 4.9. As the Need Assessment and evidence has shown, there is a current unfulfilled need for the forms of care and accommodation proposed by the appeal scheme and alternative sites must be available immediately or in the short term as prospective residents would typically have a more immediate requirement to enter an accommodation with care setting than those in the general population considering a change of residence.
- 4.10. In relation to achievability, if a site is considered to be not realistically capable of being developed for the appeal scheme and ready for occupation within a 3-year timescale, then I have classed it as not achievable, as the need is current. Factors to consider include, inter alia, implementable relevant planning permission, legal / title restrictions, access creation, obtaining vacant possession of existing tenancies, multiple ownerships and the potential relocation of existing businesses / occupiers.
- 4.11. In relation to availability in order to identify any available properties, research has been undertaken with the estates department at the relevant councils, property agents, property websites and site visits.
- 4.12. This research identified a total of 109 potential sites within the area of the two local authorities. The report assessed all 109 sites against elderly care facility operator
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requirements and excluded those sites that have not been previously developed that are within the Green Belt (which covers a large proportion of the local authority area) as they were not preferable to the subject undeveloped Green Belt site in this regard. This identified 3 potential sites that required further investigation: Former Marley Tiles (Dales Manor Business Park), Grove Road / West Way, Sawston, CB22 3TJ; Site at Grove Road / West Way, Sawston, CB22 3TJ; and land at Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne Road, Cambourne, CB23 6DP.

- 4.13. These 3 sites were not suitable for the proposed elderly care scheme.
- 4.14. In the appeal decision for an extra care development within the Green Belt, APP/H2265/W/18/3202040, Land to the rear of 237-259 London Road, West Malling, Kent ME19 5AD (Appendix E, pages 66-67, paragraphs 38, 39), the inspector accepted that extra care developments need to be of a sufficient size to support the shared facilities. The Appellant submitted a “sequential site assessment” “to support their view that there were no “sequentially preferable sites” available to come forward in the short term. The appellant indicated that for “viability” reasons it rarely succeeds in obtaining suitable larger sites when in competition with general housing developers, and normally seeks out sites that are less attractive to such developers because of some policy or other constraint. The Inspector accepted that the retirement village concept requires a minimum number of units and minimum site area in order to support the viable provision of shared on-site facilities for residents, furthermore, the Inspector commented that this development aspect, of itself, would limit the choice of suitable sites, including where there were extensive areas of Green Belt, as is the case with the subject appeal site.
- 4.15. Research undertaken as described above for the ASA found that no sites identified in the planning system met all criteria for suitability, availability and achievability.
- 4.16. The ASA concluded that the land between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, Stapleford, was the only site that was suitable, available and achievable in the South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City local authority areas for the subject proposed scheme.
- 4.17. The Council have not disagreed with my methodology.
- 4.18. On site visits, I have looked for evidence that the site is being marketed by the presence of a sale board or any other physical indication that it may be available for

acquisition. Any site owner who is seriously looking to sell is very likely to have appointed a marketing agent and advertised the fact, or one of the many residential, commercial or healthcare agents we have researched would be aware of it.

- 4.19. When researching alternative sites, in the event that a site could be considered a suitable alternative site for the appeal site and that site also meets the achievable timescale criteria of 3 years, as part of the assessment process, it is my practice to make contact with the land owners or their agents. There were no sites that met both the criteria of being suitable and achievable, so no approaches to land owners have been made.
- 4.20. The appeal decision in APP/B1930/W/19/3235642, Land to the rear of Burston Garden Centre, North Orbital Road, Chiswell Green, St Albans, AL2 2DS (Appendix F), was for a retirement community including a care home and 125 assisted living bungalows. Whilst the Inspector dismissed the appeal, she noted that with regard to the alternative site assessment, it was a robust exercise (Appendix F page 91, paragraph 76). The Inspector only raised comment over the availability test regarding the three sites that I identified as being suitable and achievable, in so far as no direct approaches to the land owners of those three sites were made. This is not the position at this appeal as neither of the three sites referred to in paragraph 4.12 in my proof, nor any sites in the additional research included in Appendices A and B, meet both the criteria of suitability and achievability.
- 4.21. As part of the update to the ASA, further research was undertaken on potential sources of sites, which included the Brownfield Land Register of Greater Cambridge, Neighbourhood Plans within South Cambridgeshire of Cottenham, Great Abington Former Land Settlement Association, Histon and Impington, and Foxton, and the Greater Cambridge Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2021 (HELAA).
- 4.22. Appendix A is a schedule of further research since the ASA, based upon the documents and publications referred to in paragraph 4.21 herein. Appendix A contains 166 sites, although it should be noted that some of these 2021 HELAA sites also appeared in the 2013 SHLAAs used in the ASA 2020 report. As the reference number has changed and some of the address wording has altered, I have not sifted out those that were previously considered, instead leaving all sites

on the list to ensure that they are captured. The annotation adopted follows the same methodology used in the ASA, namely:

- Red Site area outside required size; sites must be between 3.5 and 7.5 ha.
- Pink Green Belt and Not Previously Developed (but within size range).
- Black Outside required timescale - development process cannot be achieved in a 3-year timescale (but within size range).
- Orange Already under development or developed (but within size range).
- Green Sites that require further investigation.

- 4.23. As with the ASA, no sites identified at Appendix A were established as meeting all criteria. Of the 9 sites in Appendix A that required further investigation (green traffic light), two would not be suitable for a care village as they are close to railway lines. The other 7 sites are in remote, rural locations that would not be suitable for a care village due to the problem of accessibility for staff and visitors, unlike the subject site at Stapleford, which is closer to Cambridge and more accessible. Furthermore, the development of these rural sites is not achievable within a 3-year timescale due to the time needed to achieve planning permission to develop peripheral green field sites outside the development framework that are relatively large compared to their village locations.
- 4.24. Appendix B is the planned provision as set out in the ASA and updated as at 4 October 2021. This Appendix is common to Mrs J Venables' proof of evidence on need.
- 4.25. I have undertaken site inspections of the former Marley Tiles, Grove Road/West Way, Sawston, the site at Grove Way/West Way, Sawston and land at Cambourne Road, Cambourne, as described in the ASA pages 15-19. All 3 sites remain unsuitable alternatives for the appeal development. Both sites at Sawston are in an established busy and noisy business park, which is not a suitable location for a residential care development, and are no longer available as they are being redeveloped and marketed for warehouse uses. The Cambourne Business Park site is now no longer a possible alternative as the local authority have entered into a joint venture to develop housing on the site.
- 4.26. I have updated the online search of the commercial agents and healthcare agents listed in the ASA Appendix B thereof, together with buyacarehome.com, Rightmove

and the major marketing agents. None of these enquires identified any alternative sites

- 4.27. In the recent appeal decision for a proposed care home development APP/B1930/W/20/3259161, Chelford House, Coldharbour Lane, Harpenden AL5 4UN (Appendix C, page 24, paragraph 37) the Inspector accepted my approach, which reflects the same approach and methodology I have used in this proof, around suitability, availability and achievability. In particular, the Inspector commented,
- 4.28. *“Under the ASA, a key availability criterion is that sites can be developed within 3 years which is based on the appellant’s experience and need to meet an acute need. For suitability, a fixed plot size has been used which excludes smaller and larger sites. Smaller sites would necessitate less bedrooms or an additional fourth floor resulting in considerably greater building costs. Once operational, greater staffing costs would also be incurred because of the need for proportionately more staff due to more floors. For larger sites, negotiations with other parties would also inevitably delay the timeframe for development. The ASA’s methodology does not follow the approach for assessing housing and economic land availability in Housing and Economic Land Availability section in the Planning Practice Guidance, but nor should it have to, as this relates to housing supply. Overall, the ASA is comprehensive, well-reached[researched] and demonstrates the difficulties of finding alternative sites which lends further weight in favour of the proposal”.*

5. Green Belt Sites

- 5.1. The green field, Green Belt sites within our size search range and identified (pink traffic light) and rejected in our 2020 ASA report, and further site research subsequently undertaken as shown in pink in Appendix A of this proof of evidence, were discounted as they were other green field, Green Belt sites that were not preferable to the subject site in this regard.
 - 5.2. However, in additional research in relation to the impact of development on openness of the Green Belt, a desktop review undertaken and forming part of Mr Billingsley's proof, indicates that only 7 of those sites would have a lesser effect on openness.
 - 5.3. Five of those sites I have discounted, namely:
 - 5.3.1. Land north east of More's Meadow, Great Shelford, CB22 5LS (3.55 ha, already has C3 residential planning permission and is likely to fall below our size search range due to the need to re-provide allotments and incorporate public open space). (Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021 ref: 40407).
 - 5.3.2. Land off Cambridge Rd, Great Shelford, CB22 5JJ (3.99 ha, under option for C3 residential development by residential developer Hill). (Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021 ref: 40413).
 - 5.3.3. Land east of Bush Close, Comberton, CB23 7EG (4.82 ha, under option for C3 residential development by residential developer Hopkins Homes). (Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021 ref:40501).
 - 5.3.4. Land between Hinton Way and Mingle Lane, Great Shelford, CB22 5BG (6.14 ha, site currently being acquired by C3 housing developer). (Greater Cambridge HELAA ref: OS216).
 - 5.3.5. Land west of Birdlines / west of South Street, Comberton, CB23 7DR (6.12 ha, under option for C3 residential development by residential developer Scott Properties). (Greater Cambridge HELAA ref:40310).
 - 5.4. The two remaining sites whose development could have a lesser effect on openness than the subject site, are:
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- 5.4.1. Land to the south of Oakington Rd, Cottenham, CB24 8AD (4.18 ha green field site outside the development framework to the south west periphery of the village). (Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021 ref: 40296).
- 5.4.2. Land north of White Field Way/ north of Mill Lane, Sawston, CB22 3BY (7.16 ha green field site outside the development framework to the western periphery of the village). (Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021 ref: 40341).
- 5.5. I am of the opinion that development could not be achieved on these two sites within 3 years, using the test of achievability, not least due to the lengthy planning application process for a green field, Green Belt site outside the development framework in the countryside, given that the need is now.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The three main tests for alternative sites are that the sites are suitable, available and achievable for the development of the subject elderly care facility. The initial research identified a total of 109 potential sites within the area of South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City. Carterwood assessed all these sites against elderly care facility operator requirements and excluded those sites that have not been previously developed that are within the Green Belt, which covers a large proportion of the local authority area (ASA, page 10), as they are not preferable to the subject undeveloped Green Belt site in this regard. This identified 3 potential sites that required further investigation, as they fulfilled all or part of our initial desktop site assessment process.
- 6.2. Having undertaken detailed assessments of the 3 sites, I have visited these sites and dismissed them as explained in my comments are contained in paragraph 4.25 above.
- 6.3. Furthermore, none of the sites identified in the planning system met all the criteria for suitability, availability and achievability (ASA, pages 21-25).
- 6.4. The further research and analysis to update the ASA is contained in Appendix A (the entirety of the HELAA 2021 was reviewed for robustness, although some sites have previously appeared in the 2013 SHLAAs, albeit with a different reference number and sometimes updated address) but none of these sites meet the criteria of suitable, available, achievable
- 6.5. Further research following the ASA in relation to green field, Green Belt sites showed two sites that could have a lesser effect on openness than the appeal site. However, I am of the opinion that development could not be achieved on these two sites within 3 years, using the test of achievability, not least due to the lengthy planning application process for a green field, Green Belt site outside the development framework in the countryside, given that the need is now.
- 6.6. I am satisfied that Carterwood and I have employed an extensive and robust research approach in identifying and analysing sites that could be considered as potential alternative sites to the subject site. I have included sites above and below the site size allocated for the subject proposed scheme, but excluded those which, like the subject site, are previously undeveloped within the Green Belt.
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- 6.7. It is my conclusion that the land between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way, Stapleford is the only site that is suitable, available and achievable in the South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City local authority areas for the subject proposed scheme.

7. Statement of Truth

- 7.1. I confirm that I have made clear which facts and matters referred to in this report are within my own knowledge and which are not. Those that are within my own knowledge I confirm to be true. The opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinions on the matters to which they refer.

Appendices (separate document)

- A. Further Site Research as at November 2021.
- B. Table of Details of Planned Provision as at 4th October 2021.
- C. Planning Appeal APP/B1930/W/20/3259161, Chelford House, Coldharbour Lane, Harpenden AL5 4UN.
- D. Planning Appeal APP/G2245/W/21/3271595, Kent and Surrey Golf and Country Club, Crouch House Road, Edenbridge TN8 5LQ.
- E. APP/H2265/W/18/3202040 Land to the rear of 237-259 London Road, West Malling, Kent ME19 5AD.
- F. APP/B1930/W/19/3235642 Land to the rear of Burston Garden Centre, North Orbital Road, Chiswell Green, St Albans, AL2 2DS.
- G. Correspondence from Rangeford Villages regarding their site requirements.
- H. Correspondence from Cinnamon Retirement Living regarding their site requirements.