

SCDC Planning Committee approves Rangeford's retirement care village and countryside park plans for Stapleford greenbelt

The District Council issues its verdict

On 8th Feb 2023, South Cambridgeshire District Council's Planning Committee met to debate Rangeford's 'reserved matters application' for a retirement care village and countryside park on land between Haverhill Road and Hinton Way. Residents will likely be familiar with this large-scale planning application on greenbelt in Stapleford, the principle of which was, against the wishes of SCDC and the Parish Council, approved on appeal by the Planning Inspector in Jan 2022.

SCDC unanimously approved the reserved matters and development will now shortly commence. Whilst we gain a new countryside park (with no dedicated parking provision), we also gain 147 residential units, 139 parking spaces (for retirement village residents, staff and visitors only) and a massive carbuncle of a central pavilion visible from Magog Down. But according to the Planning Inspector and now also SCDC, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Note that the countryside park will now be brought forward in two stages, with the approx. 25% of it which could end up being taken out by the CSET busway (pending a successful TWAO application) being deferred until 2026 to avoid abortive work.

And just in case anyone was thinking that the community might at least gain access to a new swimming pool, this opportunity – if it materialises at all – will, like Rangeford's other wellness facilities, only be open to over 55s.

The wheel of democracy turns slowly...

The planning process for such a large development proposal invariably takes an awfully long time. Over the past two years, the Parish Council has responded in full to the outline planning application and reserved matters application; provided information for parishioners wishing to submit their own comments to the planning process; met with Rangeford's operators and architect on multiple occasions; and sought advice from and shared opinions with our District Councillors. The final step in the process was a 3-minute speech (this is all that is permitted) by Cllr Flynn to the Planning Committee before it made its decision. This speech is reproduced below. You can view all relevant documentation at <https://staplefordparishcouncil.gov.uk/planning/>.

As your Parish Council, we have a statutory role to respond to planning applications for our area and to represent residents' views, and like many Stapleford residents we love and value our greenbelt location. This doesn't mean that we are anti-development but our rural setting, separate from Greater Cambridge, is essential to our village identity and character. So, it is pretty galling when this kind of application is approved against the wishes of much of the community. But we regroup and we carry on.

We always need more councillors to help with our work and (honestly!) most of our time is actually spent doing positive things for and around the village, not objecting to planning applications. If you'd like to know more and can give a few hours a month to your

community, please contact our clerk, Belinda, at clerk@staplefordparishcouncil.gov.uk and we can arrange a coffee and a chat.

Speech to the Planning Committee

“You know that the Parish Council objects to *many* aspects of the reserved matters application. Today, I’ll focus on just three issues:

1. the pavilion
2. parking
3. conditions of approval.

Pavilion

“We’ve described Rangeford’s pavilion as akin to a retail supermarket, with its full height glazing, box-like design and extensive flat roof. It has *no* design references to *any* building in Stapleford. It’ll be highly visible from Magog Down. It’ll be a contemporary and exposed eyesore in a rural setting. At the very least, removing the first floor to make way for a more traditional pitched roof is essential.

“We’re not alone in finding the pavilion incongruous. The Design Review Panel described it as “a huge building that requires reconsideration,” as “not of sufficiently high quality design” and recommends that an open courtyard or farmstead style would be more appropriate and resolve other problems with sustainability, character and community.

“We’re disappointed that Rangeford hasn’t listened to us or to the Design Review Panel. I’m asking you to look very carefully at *all* of the Design Review Panel’s recommendations and act upon them.

Parking

“Because the Council’s development plan has no directly applicable parking standards, there is a real danger that on-site parking for care village staff, residents and visitors will be wholly inadequate.

“The number of available spaces is at odds with Rangeford’s own Travel Plan, does not reflect our poor rural travel network or the unsuitability of our surfaces for mobility scooters, or indeed the role of car ownership in supporting older people’s independence. The dispersal of cars to Stapleford’s narrow, residential streets is an unacceptable solution to a lack of on-site car parking.

“Looking at the enormous popularity of Magog Down and Wandlebury, we are also bewildered that the new countryside park doesn’t merit any dedicated parking. You *cannot* assume that it will mainly attract non-motorised users. Magog Down has around 60,000 visitors annually, many of whom will be very keen to make use of the new space. Where will they park? The Down carpark is often full and too far for some people to walk from there to the new countryside park and back again, with the upshot that on-street parking will jeopardise safety and ruin the tranquillity of Stapleford’s roads.

Conditions

“If the Planning Committee is minded to approve the application, we ask that:

1. the pavilion is completely redesigned as a series of related buildings, all with pitched roofs

2. a safeguarding condition is applied to ensure that no overspill parking is permitted in residential streets in Stapleford or Haverhill Road
3. active travel routes are adopted as public rights of way to ensure permanent public access
4. HGV and other construction traffic should only access the site via the A1307 to Haverhill Road.

Summary

“So, to summarise: if you’re going to build something big on greenbelt land, create a new gateway to an established village, foreshorten significant views to and from Magog Down, and create somewhere people can live and be cared for in their last years, then what you build needs to be *really special*. And this plan is *not* good enough.”

Addendum

Anyone wishing to view the 277 documents pertaining to Rangeford’s reserved matters application can do so by typing 22/04303/REM into the search box at <https://applications.greatercambridgeplanning.org/online-applications/>.

The Design Review Panel’s comments can be accessed via the Planning Committee’s meeting agenda, which is currently available at <https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=9585&x=1>.

Cllr Jenny Flynn

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