

**DRAFT OBJECTION LETTER TO PLANNING APPLICATION – 21/04271/F
ON BEHALF OF THE SIBFORD ACTION GROUP
Erection of 6 one storey age restricted dwellings (55 years) for older people with
access, landscaping and associated infrastructure - Land South of Faraday House
Woodway Road Sibford Ferris – Blue Cedar Homes Limited**

Dear Mr Campbell,

I am writing as a local resident to **strongly object** to the above planning application.

Summary of Objection

In summary, I firmly believe that the proposal constitutes unnecessary, inappropriate and unsustainable development extending beyond the built up limits of the village into the attractive open countryside surrounding Sibford Ferris. Its layout, form, design and location for older people is unsuitable and would produce an incongruous and cramped form of development, which fails to respond to local character, landscape and surrounding context and should be refused as harming the visual and rural amenities of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996, Policy Villages 2 and Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011- 2031 Part 1 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Design Guide.

Background

The village is under threat from development following the granting of planning permission on appeal for 25 houses at Hook Norton Road in November 2019, when the Inspector regrettably overturned the Council's refusal. This appeal decision overlooked the relative isolation, aged infrastructure, limited capacity, lack of facilities and poor accessibility of Sibford Ferris. The Parish Council is trying to remedy this through the review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2040 but it would be too late if further unsympathetic and inappropriate development is approved. The appeal at Hook Norton Road should not be *carte blanche* for developers to do what they please, damaging the rural nature, character and attractive qualities of our historic village and its beautiful surroundings on the edge of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The reasons for objection are because the proposal will be:

1. Contrary to the Local Plan;
2. Unsustainable;
3. Generate extra traffic on unsuitable roads;
4. Harmful to the landscape; and
5. Of poor layout and design contrary to the NPPF and National Design Guide.

1. Contrary to Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031

The Local Plan housing quotas for rural villages in Cherwell have already been met so this proposal is not necessary.

Whilst we are told by planning and councillors regularly that the number is not a cap or ceiling for development it should be taken into consideration that since 2014 a total of 1,062 dwellings have been identified for meeting the Local Plan, Policy Villages 2 requirement of 750 dwellings. The Policy Villages 2 requirement has therefore already been exceeded by 312 dwellings, 749 have been built or are under construction and there is an appeal for 43 homes at Station Road, Hook Norton, which could lead to substantially more. This is with 9 years to go to the end of the Plan period. At close on 50% more than the 750 dwellings requirement, this proposal would add to a material exceedance of the policy figures.

This – and other proposals that are threatened to follow - would further undermine the Local Plan housing strategy of directing most growth to Banbury and Bicester, where there is access to shops, services, jobs and other facilities and opportunities to travel other than by car. This helps avoid commuting, congestion, pollution, climate change and harming the environment. The District Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency, but none of these environmental objectives will be achieved by repeating the same mistakes and approving more and more homes in attractive but inherently unsustainable villages like Sibford Ferris.

This is a poorly conceived scheme on a unsuitable site in an unsustainable location and should be refused.

This is also clearly a phase 2 style extension of the Hook Norton Rd site, with a phase 3 development site also put forward as part of the Local Plan review.

Why was the village not informed at the outset so that these sites would yield the most affordable homes and advantages for the village?

The Gade Homes development started with an approval for 8 homes and is now 25 homes with 9 affordable /rental properties. Considering that Blue Cedar homes have access approved, what is to stop them securing planning and then returning with an application for a larger number of homes?

2. Unsustainable development

Sibford Gower and Sibford Ferris are wrongly treated as one Category A village in the Local Plan.

This is not a true reflection of the community, geography, topography and location of its sparse facilities.

Sibford Ferris only has a small shop, which often does not have even the basics of milk or vegetables. The few public amenities there are lie in Sibford

Gower and Burdrop, only accessed by narrow roads with poor, incomplete footpaths, limited lighting and congestion caused by parked cars. The two villages are separated by a deep valley (Sib Brook) and have poor accessibility for anyone, let alone older persons, without a car.

The bus service has more than halved in recent years. It is reliant on subsidy from Warwickshire County Council, has a very limited service to Stratford and Banbury at inconvenient times and has no direct services to Hook Norton or Chipping Norton.

The proposed development is unsustainable for older persons. Government advice on the location of housing for older people states that factors to consider include the proximity to good public transport, local amenities, health services and town centres. None of these apply in this instance.

In the vicinity, there are already several retirement-specific developments, including - but not limited to - accommodation at Tadmarton Park, Godswell Park at Bloxham, and a new McCarthy & Stone development at Chipping Norton. Each of these sites are more appropriately located for easy access to amenities.

3. Extra Traffic on Unsuitable Roads

In this location, occupants of the proposed dwellings, being older, less mobile and less likely to walk or cycle, will be highly reliant on the use of private cars. This was accepted by the Inspector on the Hook Norton Road appeal. It is underlined by the double garages and two parking spaces for each bungalow.

This would lead to extra traffic using an access opposite the main entrance to Sibford Friends School, which is already busy at peak times, due to a lack of pavements and narrow roads, where in places it is difficult for two vehicles to safely pass each other. Therefore, the site is not an appropriate location for the development proposed, would result in an increase in private vehicular usage, lead to extra traffic and environmental harm.

Blue Cedar homes website states "our retirement-living scheme will generate far fewer road traffic movements particularly at peak times. This means that the proposed development is likely to have a negligible impact on the local highway network."

I find it hard to believe that this will be the case, whilst they can only be purchased by people over 55 they cannot guarantee that all of the residents will be retired, so cannot say that they will generate less traffic at peak times, even if they are retired, what is to stop retired grandparents doing a school run. I find this statement a little out of touch with the actual state retirement age and disagree with it.

As a resident of Sibford Ferris who works in Sibford Gower I walk daily between the villages and have to negotiate my way along roads that are poorly lit, poorly maintained and dodge between cars that are parked on the street so cars can pass me by as there is little in the way of pavements at varying points through the village. I also have to allow my children to contend with the same issues in order for them to catch their school bus, which quite often struggles to get through the village due to the traffic bottlenecks of parked cars. How can this be a suitable village for a development aimed at older people?

4. Landscape Impact

The proposal would lead to compact, built development on greenfield, agricultural land beyond the physical extents of Faraday House and the building line of the Hook Norton Road development to the south into the attractive countryside surrounding the village. This would have an adverse visual impact on the landscape, resulting from the extension of the village and encroachment of built development all the way up to Woodway Road, which has an unspoilt, rural character. The development would be clearly visible at short and more distant range from highways and public rights of way extending out into the countryside and the Cotswolds AONB. This would harm the rural character and appearance of this attractive landscape to the west of the village.

5. Design

The design, incorporating large bungalows with a variety of roof pitches, timber boarding and other uncharacteristic features is contrived and takes no design cues from the established and historic character of its surroundings.

The bungalows are sited close together, have very small private amenity spaces and would appear cramped and out of character with their immediate surroundings and the quality of development in the village, which is designated as a Conservation Area.

Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states:

'Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes.'

The proposal is clearly **not** well-designed, does not respond to existing local character and surrounding context and should be refused.

In addition, despite being described as for older people, the proposal is to all intents and purposes open market housing, fettered only by the not particularly demanding requirement for the occupiers to be 55 years of age. Whilst it is true that an ageing population has particular housing needs, comprising various forms reflecting the correlation between increasing age and dependency, 'retirement bungalows' in this location with a negative effect on the character and appearance of the area do not warrant any particular pre-eminence.

For all of these reasons we urge the Council to **refuse** this application.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Evans