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Statement of Community Involvement

Land at Tollgate Road

Colney Heath, Hertfordshire

Prepared for Vistry Group

June 2022

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Executive summary

Vistry Group is committed to consulting with the local community regarding the proposals for its vision to deliver development on land at Tollgate Road, Colney Heath.

Residents and stakeholders were given the opportunity to give feedback regarding the proposals via a host of different channels. A website, freephone information line, and project email address were all made available throughout the process for interested parties to receive further details and to provide feedback.

Pre-application consultation offered virtual or telephone meetings with local stakeholders and third-party groups to introduce the team and outline the proposals. A wider two-week engagement was then held from **Monday 13 June** to **Sunday 26 June 2022** which featured a virtual exhibition, providing an opportunity for respondents to view the proposals from the comfort of their own home and submit their comments.

Paper copies of the plans as well as feedback forms with prepaid return envelopes were available on request, to ensure the consultation was inclusive.

During the consultation period, we received a total of **33** responses. It comprised **27** online feedback forms, **three** emails, and **three** phone calls. The positive feedback received included recognition that affordable housing for local families was required, and support for promoting biodiversity and sustainability.

Constructive feedback was received in the form of comments, concerns, and suggestions, which included Colney Heath having insufficient infrastructure to accommodate new homes and concerns about the loss of greenfield site.

The project team has carefully reviewed all the feedback received to date, and the main comments raised have been addressed within this document and the wider material submitted as part of the application.

Vistry Group is committed to engaging with the local community and, following the submission of the application, will ensure that interested parties and key stakeholders remain informed and updated regarding the proposals. For example, at the time of writing, a follow-up meeting was being arranged with Colney Heath Parish Council to support this process. This document provides a chronological account of the pre-application consultation undertaken and a review of the feedback received.

1. Introduction

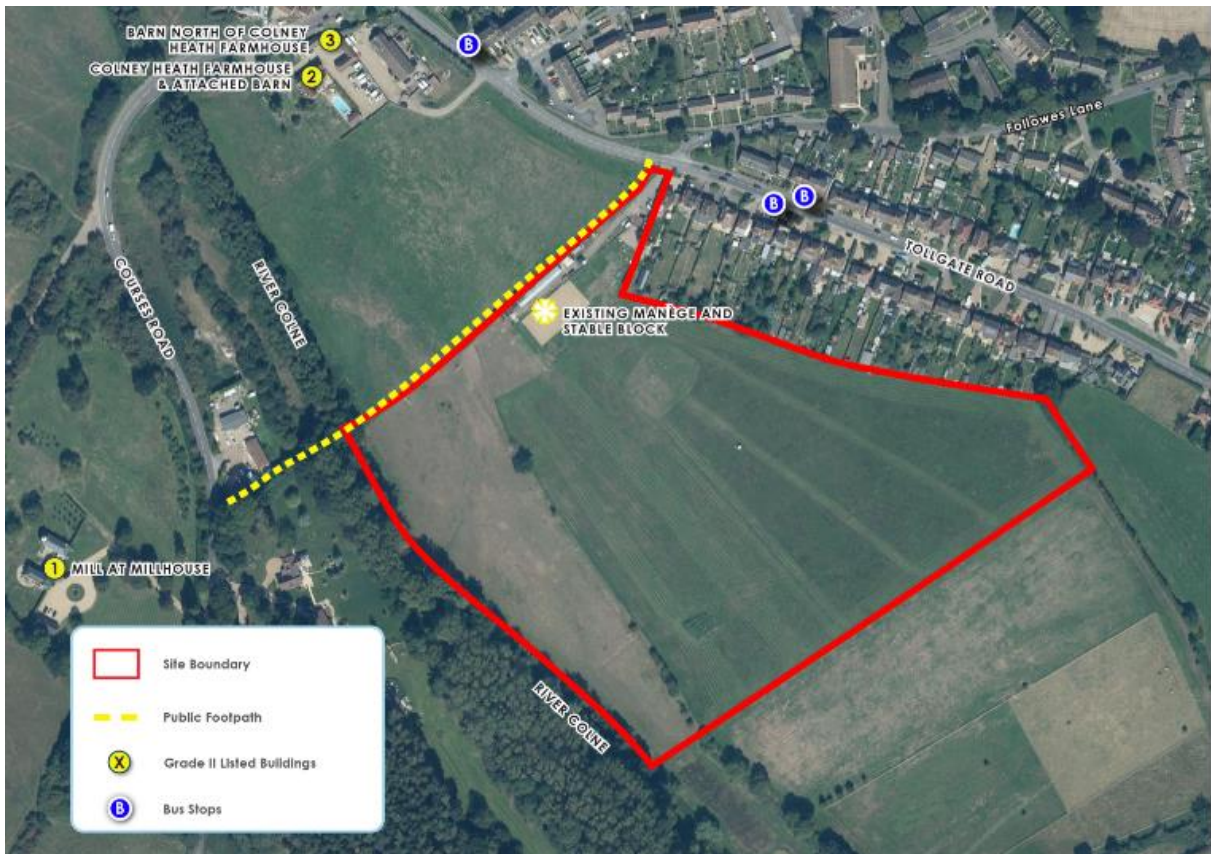
- 1.1 Vistry Group is bringing forward proposals to develop land at Tollgate Road, Colney Heath. It is bounded by existing homes and Tollgate Road to the northeast, with countryside on the other sides, except the southwest boundary, which is formed by the River Colne.
- 1.2 Vistry Group is committed to consulting local stakeholders with regards to its proposals. The stakeholders have included locally elected councillors, businesses, residents, and third-party groups.
- 1.3 This document has been produced to clearly and concisely detail a chronological account of the community engagement undertaken by Vistry Group in respect of its proposals.
- 1.4 To assist with the community engagement, Vistry Group appointed BECG, a specialist communications consultancy, to form part of its project team for the proposed development.
- 1.5 All feedback received is accounted for and represented within this document.

2. Background

2.1 Proposal site

2.1.1 The proposal site is located on land at Tollgate Road, Colney Heath, Hertfordshire. It is bounded by existing homes and Tollgate Road to the northeast, with countryside on the other sides, except the southwest boundary, which is formed by the River Colne.

2.1.2 The site lies towards the southeast of the village of Colney Heath, which comes under the catchment of St Albans City & District Council. Colney Heath is part of the M25 corridor and within easy reach of London, which lies to the south.



The proposal site outlined in red, which lies south of Tollgate Road in Colney Heath

2.2 Proposals

2.2.1 Vistry Group is seeking to deliver a high-quality scheme on land at Tollgate Road, Colney Heath with much-needed new housing including affordable homes, infrastructure improvements, a net gain in biodiversity, and new public open spaces.



The proposed layout of the development on land south of Tollgate Road, Colney Heath

2.2.2 The consultation sought feedback relating to a scheme of up to 155 homes, of which up to 35% will be affordable housing, helping St Albans City & District Council to meet its targets.

2.2.3 The scheme will also feature infrastructure improvements to promote cycle and walking and other forms of green travel. Vehicular access to the development would be provided from a new junction with Tollgate Road on the northern boundary of the proposal site.

2.2.4 New public open spaces would also be created, and the environmental improvements would be designed to deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

3. Community Engagement

3.1 Statement of community involvement

3.1.1 The Localism Act 2011

Section 122 of the Localism Act 2011 outlines that a person proposing to make a planning application on land in England should carry out consultation on the proposed application. This should include publicity considered likely to bring the application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.

3.1.2 National Planning Policy Framework (2012, amended 2018, 2019 and 2021)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's policies for England and outlines how these policies should be applied.

3.1.3 Vistry Group has had regard to the NPPF at Paragraph 39 when it states that *“early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.”*

3.1.4 The NPPF goes on to highlight at Paragraph 40 that *“Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.”*

3.1.5 Paragraph 41 outlines that the Local Planning Authority should encourage other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage, noting that *“the more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits.”*

3.1.6 St Albans City & District Council

St Albans City & District Council adopted its current Statement of Community Involvement in November 2021, which outlines the expectations the authority places on developers during the planning process.

The relevant sections of the document are reproduced overleaf:

6.2 The Council cannot compel developers to discuss their planning proposals before they submit a planning application. However, discussion between planning officers, applicants, and expert groups (for example highways officers at Hertfordshire County Council) are welcomed via the formal pre-application service. From experience, such discussions can resolve problems with applications and avoid public objections at a later stage. The Council charges a fee for holding these discussions. Details of our fees can be viewed online: <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/pre-application-advice>

6.3 During the coronavirus pandemic, it is currently not possible to hold face to face meetings with applicants or their agents. Council officers will use other forms of communication where possible. These include phone calls, emails, and online meetings via "Microsoft Teams". Face to face meetings will only happen when it is safe to do so.

6.4 The Council encourages all people wishing to apply for planning permission to discuss their proposals ahead of submission. For householder applications, we advise that applicants discuss their proposals with their neighbours. For larger schemes being brought forward in the district, we will advise developers of the largest schemes to consult local communities before submitting certain planning applications. The Council will take account of the responses they have received.

Therefore, in conjunction with developing the plans, Vistry Group undertook a detailed programme of community engagement, as outlined in this document.

3.2 Engagement with statutory bodies

3.2.1 Before the proposals were shared with the community, appropriate steps were taken to discuss the principle of development with statutory bodies and experts. The detail of this is included as part of the planning application's wider document pack.

3.3 Initial stakeholder meetings

3.3.1 Vistry Group felt it was important to engage proactively with key stakeholders regarding its proposals for land at Tollgate Road, Colney Heath, for example, local councillors. As a result, the project team approached them for their views ahead of the wider public consultation commencing.

3.3.2 Ahead of the wider engagement process, an invitation letter was emailed to local stakeholders shortly before the virtual exhibition was officially launched. The following were invited to discuss the application with the project team ahead of the wider consultation to receive a briefing on the proposals and address any specific points:

- Leader of St Albans City & District Council
- Relevant Cabinet Members of St Albans City & District Council
- Ward Member for Colney Heath on St Albans City & District Council
- Division Member for Colney Heath and Marshalswick on Hertfordshire County Council
- Colney Heath Parish Council

3.3.3 The initial correspondence outlined the proposals for the development of the site and the wider consultation process. It also included a copy of the invitation letter which was set to be posted to residents and other stakeholders near the site, which is covered in more detail in section 3.5.

3.4 Dedicated website

3.4.1 A website was set up displaying information about the proposals for the duration of the virtual public consultation. The website is hosted at <https://colneyheath.consultationonline.co.uk>.



A screenshot of the project website

3.4.2 The website address was printed on the newsletter and any other relevant correspondence.

3.4.3 During the virtual exhibition (see Section 3.5) the website included:

- An overview of the proposals
- Details about Vistry Group
- More detailed information on design, landscaping, and sustainability
- Benefits of the proposals
- An online feedback form

3.5 Virtual public exhibition

3.5.1 Following the Covid-19 pandemic, Vistry Group recognises that the manner in which community consultations are carried out has fundamentally changed, and hosting a virtual exhibition is now considered a vital component of any such exercise.

3.5.2 As a result, a virtual public exhibition regarding the proposals was hosted on the project website. This allowed the local community to explore the proposals in detail and respond to them with their views, comments, and suggestions.

3.5.3 The virtual public exhibition was open for comments on the project's website between **Monday 13 June** and **Sunday 26 June 2022**.

3.5.4 To promote the engagement process, an invitation newsletter was sent to the nearest 527 local households and businesses on Monday 13 June advising them of the proposals and the virtual public exhibition.

3.5.5 The map shown below illustrates the area selected for the invitation newsletter:



A map depicting the virtual consultation invitation distribution area – the centre of the proposal site is marked with the red 'x'

3.5.6 The following stakeholders were also invited to view the virtual public exhibition:

- Leader of St Albans City & District Council
- Relevant Cabinet Members of St Albans City & District Council
- Ward Member for Colney Heath on St Albans City & District Council
- Division Member for Colney Heath and Marshalswick on Hertfordshire County Council
- Colney Heath Parish Council

3.5.7 The invitation newsletter contained the following:

- Background to the site

- An overview of the proposals
- Details of how to access the virtual consultation and leave feedback
- Information about Vistry Group
- Details of the project team’s freephone information line and email address

3.5.8 A copy of the invitation newsletter can be found in the Appendices.



An example of a virtual consultation, on which the Vistry Group consultation was based

3.5.9 The virtual public exhibition displayed details about the proposal, which included information about:

- Welcome and purpose of the consultation
- Details about Vistry Group
- Background information about the site
- Details about the proposed plans
- Details about landscaping and public realm enhancements
- Information about transport, access, and ecology
- Key benefits of the scheme
- How to provide feedback

3.5.10 Residents could provide feedback by submitting the feedback form on the project website, emailing our project team via feedback@consultation-online.co.uk with comments or questions, or calling the freephone information line on 0800 298 7040.

3.5.11 To ensure that as many members of the community could provide feedback as possible, the project team also offered for the virtual exhibition materials and a feedback form to be posted alongside a pre-paid envelope to provide comments on the plans.

3.5.12 A copy of the feedback form is included within the Appendices.

3.6 Dedicated project email address

3.6.1 A dedicated project email address – feedback@consultation-online.co.uk – was made available up receive feedback and answer any queries both during and after the consultation period.

3.7 Freephone 0800 comment facility

3.7.1 During and after the consultation, access to a freephone telephone information line was offered to those who wished to find out more about the proposals, or to register their comments via the telephone.

3.7.2 The telephone number used (**0800 298 7040**) was in operation Monday-Friday between the hours of 9.00am and 5.30pm. A message facility was available for voicemails to be left and responded to at the earliest opportunity to ensure information was readily available and that queries or concerns were addressed.

4. Community Engagement

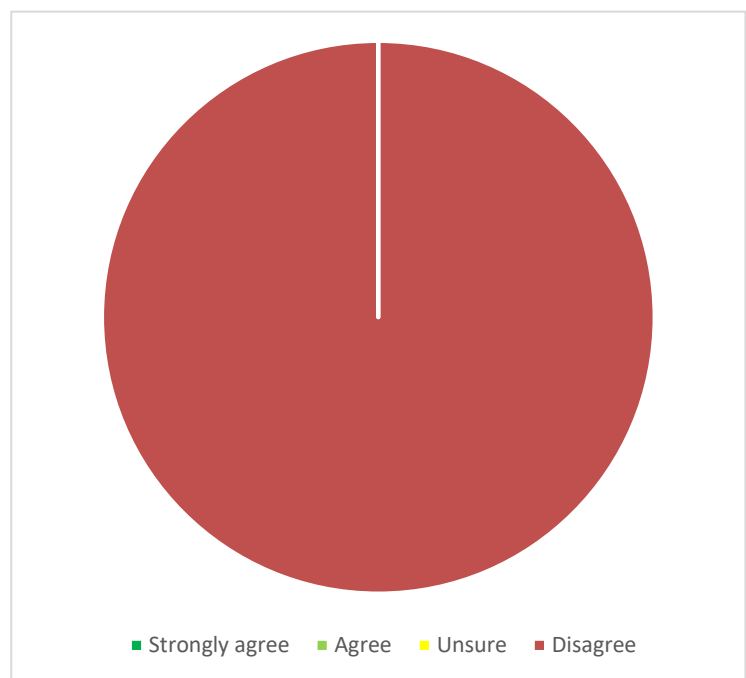
4.1 Virtual exhibition

A virtual consultation was held from Monday 13 June to Sunday 26 June 2022. During this time, the project team received **27** online feedback forms. Responses were recorded for each of the four questions asked, and the data is presented within this report along with all the issues that were raised by respondents.

Question 1: Would you agree the proposal site is suitable for development?

Strongly agree:	0	0%
Agree:	0	0%
Unsure:	0	0%
Disagree:	27	100%
Total replies:	27	

As can be seen from the data, it is clear that all respondents were against the principle of the site being developed. It is perhaps not surprising, as Vistry Group recognises that greenfield developments are often controversial, but they can also deliver significant local benefits such as affordable homes, public open space, and infrastructure upgrades.



Focusing further on Question 1, the project team analysed the responses in greater detail, and a sample of their comments is included in the table below:

Comment	Location
I and many others will strongly oppose this development. We are a rural village and we do not need yet more houses.	High Street Colney Heath
This village is under attack from developers – that is the only way that I can describe it. We do not have the infrastructure for more people.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
We already have a development approved for 100 houses. Please explain to me where the children of your householders are meant to go to school.	Meadway Colney Heath
Colney Heath does not have the infrastructure to support this application. The increase in traffic would have a catastrophic impact on the village.	Bullens Green Lane Colney Heath

This land is in the Green Belt so it shouldn't be built on anyway. It will be destructive to the area.

Franklin Close
Colney Heath

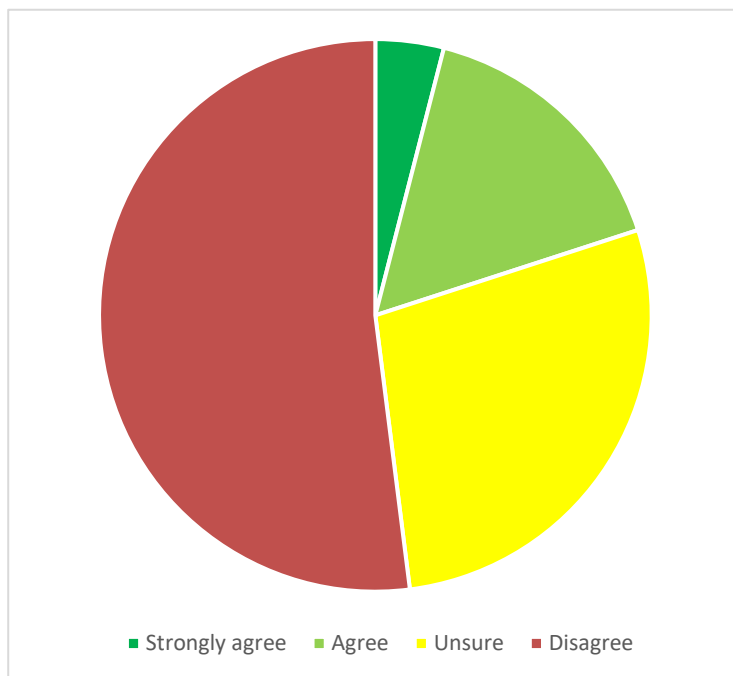
Further analysis of the Question 1 responses was then carried out, and the frequency which various issues were raised is included in the table below:

Issue	Frequency of being raised
Colney Heath does not have adequate infrastructure	11
Concerns over a lack of school places	10
Opposed to building on the Green Belt	8
As permission has already been granted for around 100 homes in Colney Heath, another scheme is not needed	5
The site is unsuitable because it floods / concerns that existing nearby homes will flood if the scheme is built	5
Concerns over a lack of places at doctors' and dental surgeries	4
Proposals are motivated by greed / profit	4
Opposed to the loss of agricultural land	3
Opposed to the site being developed in principle	3
Concerns that traffic levels will increase	3
The character of Colney Heath will be harmed	3
Bus services are inadequate	2
There is already too much development proposed in Colney Heath	2
Calls to use brownfield sites instead	1
Criticism of the consultation process	1
Concerns about creating a new junction in Tollgate Road	1

Data was then analysed regarding the second question.

Question 2: Are you in favour of providing more affordable homes for local families?

Strongly agree:	1	4%
Agree:	4	16%
Unsure:	7	28%
Disagree:	13	52%
Total replies:	25	



Regarding Question 2, 'Disagree' was the largest single group, accounting for just over half of the responses. More than a quarter of the respondents were 'Unsure', whilst those who agreed or strongly agreed accounted for one-fifth (20%) of the replies. The question was left blank by two of the 27 respondents who completed feedback forms.

Focusing further on Question 2, the project team analysed the responses in greater detail, starting with those who agreed or strongly agreed with the need for affordable housing.

Comment	Location
These homes need to be sensibly affordable. There are a high number of residents' children who will be requiring housing in the next few years.	Fellowes Lane Colney Heath
It needs to be in the right location where children can go to school, and families have access to public transport and health facilities.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
Providing affordable housing might be unrealistic as they would have to be around £200,000 for a three-bedroom house and £75,000 for a one-bedroom flat which I don't think you would be willing to build.	Fellowes Lane Colney Heath

Regarding additional analysis of the Question 2 responses of those who were unsure or opposed affordable housing, a sample of their comments is included in the table below:

Comment	Location
"Affordable" homes are not really "affordable", given the house prices in the area.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath

There are already 100 homes planned in the village and we cannot take any more.	Admirals Close Colney Heath
This is not a great site for families as the infrastructure is poor for children.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
Colney Heath is not a suitable location for people who need “affordable housing”.	Bullens Green Lane Colney Heath
This is a small village which is not suitable for local families as there are no facilities and no more school places. Local families do not need all these houses. This development seems to be for outsiders.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath

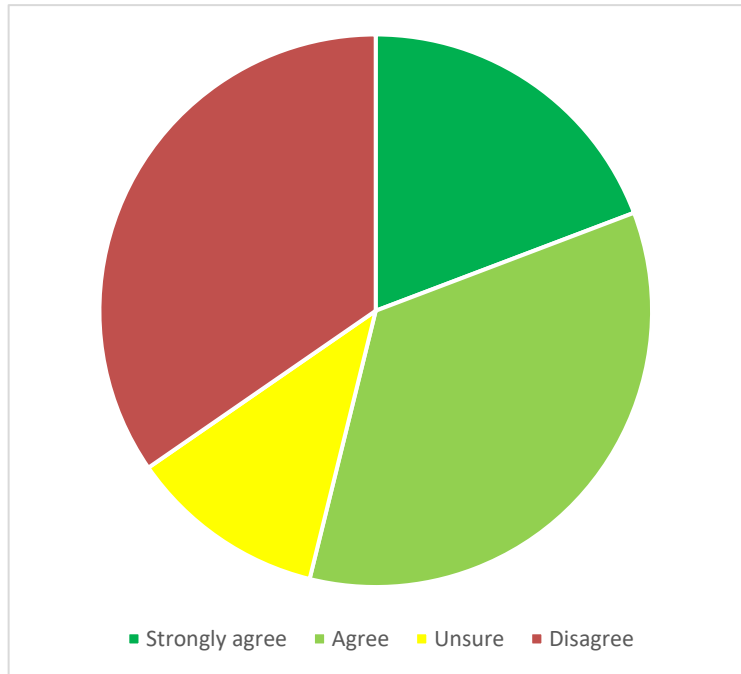
Further analysis of the Question 2 responses was carried out, and a sample of the comments is included in the table below:

Issue	Frequency of being raised
Concerns that “affordable” homes will not be affordable	7
Colney Heath is not a suitable location for affordable homes	4
Colney Heath does not have adequate infrastructure	4
Would prefer brownfield sites to be used for housing	3
Affordable housing needs to be near shops and services	3
Affordable homes will not go to local families	2
Local families need affordable housing	2
Protecting the environment is more important than providing affordable homes	2
Criticism that the question is “loaded”	1
The proposed development is too large	1
Colney Heath cannot accommodate any more development	1
New housing will lead to congestion and flooding	1
The development is driven by profit	1

Data was then analysed regarding the third question.

Question 3: Do you feel it is important to include measures to promote sustainability and biodiversity in our vision?

Strongly agree: 5 (19%)
Agree: 9 (35%)
 Unsure: 3 (11%)
Disagree: 9 (35%)
Total replies: 26



As can be seen, the two largest groups were ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’, each receiving 35% of the responses. Three of the respondents were ‘unsure’ and five said they ‘strongly agreed’. It should be noted that when combining those who said they agreed or strongly agreed, this comprised more than half (54%) of the feedback received. One of the 27 respondents to complete a feedback form opted to leave this section blank.

Focusing further on Question 3, the project team analysed the responses in greater detail, and of those who said they agreed or strongly agreed, a sample of their comments is included in the table below:

Comment	Location
Delivering sustainability and biodiversity improvements must be achievable.	Fellowes Lane Colney Heath
It is always important to promote sustainability and biodiversity. Unfortunately, a new development is bad for biodiversity and wildlife.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
Sustainability and biodiversity are vitally important, but I’m not sure how you can claim that you will deliver a biodiversity net gain by building 155 houses.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath

Regarding additional analysis of the Question 3 responses of those who were unsure or raised concerns about the plans, a sample of their comments is included in the table below:

Comment	Location
How can building over the top of Green Belt fields and the flood plain be anything other than destructive to the environment?	Tollgate Road Colney Heath

Leave the land as it is. That will help.	Park Lane Colney Heath
The best way of maintaining the biodiversity of the area is not to build houses on Green Belt agricultural land. There is no way building housing will improve the situation for biodiversity.	Franklin Close Colney Heath
Leave the countryside alone!	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
I do not understand how building 155 houses on Green Belt land is increasing biodiversity.	High Street Colney Heath

Further analysis of the Question 3 responses was carried out, and a sample of the comments is included in the table below:

Issue	Frequency of being raised
Keep the proposal site the way it is	6
Biodiversity will reduce if the homes are built	5
Development is bad for the environment	4
It is important to deliver a biodiversity net gain	3
Concerns about developing a Green Belt site	3
The proposal site is prone to flooding	2
Biodiversity mitigation measures will not be enough	2
Development would harm the environment because there would be more car trips	2
Colney Heath cannot accommodate more housing	1
Hope the scheme will be rejected	1
Against the loss of agricultural land	1
Would prefer to see brownfield land developed	1
Biodiversity figures would be based on "biased stats"	1

The survey also included a fourth question which was as follows:

Question 4: Is there anything further you would like to add about the proposals?

Given the open-ended nature of the question, respondents were not asked if they strongly agreed with the statement or any of the other options available for the previous three questions. Instead, it gave residents and stakeholders an opportunity to provide more general comments and share their ideas. In total, **22** responses were received, while the question was left blank on **five** of the returned forms.

A sample of the comments received is included in the table that follows:

Comment	Location
It is utterly inappropriate to develop open Green Belt land which has never previously been built on.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
Colney Heath is a small village; trying to build estates on open Green Belt land is appalling and needs to be stopped.	Franklin Close Colney Heath
Adding 150 houses to the rear of existing properties along Tollgate Road is ridiculously overdeveloping a site and adding horrifically to existing traffic issues and major environmental concerns.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath
Please take your money somewhere else and build there. You are not wanted here.	Admirals Close Colney Heath
Colney Heath is not able to sustain further development. The continued decimation of the Green Belt is negligent and is destroying the village.	Tollgate Road Colney Heath

Further analysis of the Question 5 responses was carried out, and a sample of the comments is included in the table below:

Issue	Frequency of being raised
Local infrastructure will not cope	7
Colney Heath cannot accommodate more housing	4
Concerns about the loss of a Green Belt site	4
The proposal would harm the character of Colney Heath	4
Opposed to the principle of developing the proposal site	3
Bus services are inadequate	3
Proposals are driven by profit / not designed to benefit the existing population	3

The proposal site is prone to flooding	3
Not enough local school places	3
The development would harm the environment	3
Concerns about the proposed new junction with Tollgate Road	2
The local highways network is already too busy	2
Criticism of the consultation process	2
Too many homes are being proposed	1
Doctors' surgeries do not have enough spaces	1
Proposals are causing "stress" in the village	1
Colney Heath does not have a railway station	1
The development site falls outside the boundary of Colney Heath	1
Homes should be built elsewhere, not in Colney Heath	1
Expect that the feedback will be ignored	1

4.2 Project email responses

In addition to the feedback received via the consultation website and the paper copies received by post, the project team also wanted to provide a single point of contact via email for any residents or local stakeholders who didn't wish to complete a form, but still wanted to engage with the project team and register their views.

A total of **three** emails were received during the consultation period. Of these, one was from a resident requesting printed copies of the website materials, which were duly sent by first class post. The second was from Colney Heath Parish Council in response to our initial communications, asking if the project team wished to meet its members. This offer was accepted, and the meeting was being arranged as this report was being produced.

The final email was from a resident in Tollgate Road who raised the following points about the scheme:

- Opposition to the loss of a Green Belt site
- Concerns about Colney Heath having adequate infrastructure
- Opposed to the plans on principle
- Speculation that if the number of responses received was low then the actual level of opposition against the scheme was probably higher but some people had chosen not to engage with Vistry Group

4.3 Phone messages

3.1.1 To provide residents and local stakeholders with as many channels to contact the project team as possible, a free telephone line was provided – **0800 298 7040** – where they could leave messages and feedback.

3.1.2 It transpired that most respondents preferred to engage online, and only **three** phone messages were received.

3.1.3 All three of these phone calls were requests for printed copies of the website materials, which were sent to the respondents' specified addresses using first class post.

4.4 Response to comments

- 4.4.1 All comments received during the process have been reviewed and the project team has attempted to respond to the most recurring themes that have been raised.
- 4.4.2 During the consultation feedback review period, Vistry Group's project team responded directly to a number of specific enquiries and questions relating to the proposals and individual responses were drafted and issued.
- 4.4.3 Vistry Group's project team values the feedback that has been supplied by residents and stakeholders and has taken full account of the comments in terms of shaping its final proposals.

5. Next steps

5.1 Ongoing stakeholder engagement

5.1.1 Vistry Group will seek to ensure information continues to flow through existing channels to interested parties. Those who requested further information by telephone, letter or email will be responded to in the most appropriate manner.

5.2 Online engagement

5.2.1 The project website continues to be hosted at <https://colneyheath.consultationonline.co.uk> and provides details about the proposed development and Vistry Group.

5.3 Letters to interested parties

5.3.1 We intend to notify the following groups and individuals by email to inform them that the application has been submitted:

- Leader of St Albans City & District Council
- Relevant Cabinet Members of St Albans City & District Council
- Ward Member for Colney Heath on St Albans City & District Council
- Division Member for Colney Heath and Marshalswick on Hertfordshire County Council
- Colney Heath Parish Council

6. Appendices

- Copy of the virtual exhibition invitation letter

8 June 2022

Re: Development of land south of Tollgate Road, Colney Heath

Dear Resident,

I am writing to you to introduce **Vistry Group**, and its vision to provide new housing on land south of Tollgate Road in Colney Heath.

We are proposing to deliver up to 155 homes on the site, with access for vehicles provided opposite the existing junction of Tollgate Road and Fellowes Lane.

We would seek to deliver **35% affordable housing throughout the scheme**, making a significant contribution to housing targets in the St Albans district and allowing local families seeking new homes to remain in the area.

Our proposals would also include new public open spaces, improved access for pedestrians and cyclists to promote greener travel, sustainable drainage systems, and delivering a net gain in biodiversity. Jobs would also be created during the construction phase, and the scheme will deliver economic benefits to the local area and wider district.

We have now reached the point where we are able to share our vision for the site with the local community and will be holding a consultation regarding our proposals.

We will be arranging a virtual exhibition which will run for two weeks starting on 10th June and it will be hosted at colneyheath.consultationonline.co.uk

The online exhibition will allow residents and other important local stakeholders to view our proposals and submit feedback.

For those without internet access, we will be happy to post the exhibition materials in paper format on request. These will be supplied with a feedback form so that everyone in the local area is able to view the plans and submit comments, regardless of whether they have internet access or not.

If you would like further details or wish to request a paper copy of the online exhibition, then please contact our project team on **0800 298 7040**. Alternatively, you can send an email to feedback@consultation-online.co.uk.

Yours faithfully,

Miles Willshire,
For and on behalf of Vistry Group