

# CURTIS COMMUNICATIONS

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Statement of Community Involvement

Buntingford West, East Hertfordshire

Countryside Partnerships

July 2023

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## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 A further consultation has been undertaken for Countryside Partnerships' new outline planning application for the land at Buntingford West

1.2 The consultation took the form of a leaflet which was delivered to the whole of Buntingford (approximately 3480 properties) by Royal Mail. This offered a website where residents could inform themselves about the proposals and provide feedback direct to the project team. Whilst Countryside will continue to receive feedback, the first two weeks of feedback led to 94 valid responses.

1.3 Whilst the balance of those responses was negative, there were a significant number who were either neutral about the proposals or were supportive. Many of those who expressed concern raised issues which will be addressed as part of the agreements which will accompany a successful application. There is also potential for many of the wishes expressed to be enabled as a consequence of Countryside providing facilities for a new community of 350 homes.

1.4 Countryside will continue to consult with residents and keep Councillors informed as they progress through to a decision and, potentially, beyond that to a Reserved Matters application.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 In May/June 2022 Vistry Homes carried out an online exhibition to better understand the views of local residents in relation to their proposed development of land at Buntingford West. The application was ultimately submitted to East Hertfordshire District Council and refused permission under reference 3/22/1551/FUL. An SCI was submitted as part of that application, this is still available for download on the Council's Planning Portal under the original planning reference.

2.2 Following on from that Vistry made the decision to submit a new planning application, this time through their sister organisation Countryside Partnerships as an outline only application with all matters reserved except means of access, which is proposed to be through a dedicated roundabout from the adjacent A10 bypass to the west of the town.

2.3 To complement this revised application a new online consultation was carried out, with an aim of revisiting residents' views, to explain the change to an outline application and to provide a more detailed analysis of local views to help to support the current application. But also, in the event that the outline planning application is approved, to enable a more focussed consultation about local facilities at Reserved Matters stage.

2.4 The consultation was carried out via a feedback form on a dedicated project website ([www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk](http://www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk)), but with an email address provided if residents did not wish to take part in the consultation. This Statement of Community Involvement provides an analysis of the feedback received between the period 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023, although we will continue to receive and analyse feedback after this date.

2.5 A total of 94 separate responses were received, with an additional 7 discounted because they were duplicates. Of these 94, 8 were received via direct email and 86 through the website feedback form. Many of these contained constructive feedback about infrastructure and the sort of community facilities that residents would like to see, including suggestions both related to the formal legal agreements that will form part of a successful planning application, and related to the facilities that Countryside would look to provide as part of the development of a 350 home community.

2.6 The comments have been received and analysed and will be used to inform the process going forwards.



### 3. Background

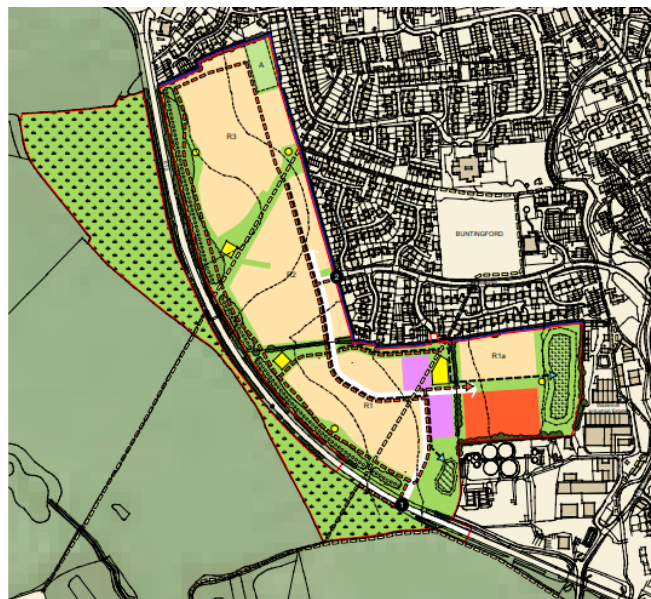
3.1 Countryside Partnerships, part of the Vistry Group, are proposing to bring forward a development on land to the west of Buntingford, with all of the built development sitting between the existing settlement of Buntingford and the A10 bypass to the west of the town.

3.2 Countryside Partnerships are always keen to consult with stakeholders, to make sure that their views are fed into the application process and to make sure that existing residents benefit from the proposals whilst also bringing forward a new community that thrives. In this case, stakeholders include local councillors, local businesses and local residents.

3.3 This Statement of Community Involvement sets out the consultation that has taken place in relation to Countryside Partnerships' proposals which, in this case, are seen to complement the consultation that took place in 2022, whilst clearly explaining the rationale behind the decision to submit an outline rather than a full application.

3.4 Curtis Communications Ltd, who specialise in community and stakeholder consultation, are appointed to carry out and monitor the latest consultation on behalf of Countryside Partnerships. This document sets out the consultation that took place and the outcomes from it.

3.5 The proposed built development sits to the west of Buntingford on a parcel of land between the existing town and the A10 which runs from north to south through the district of East Hertfordshire, with the road in its entirety running from Kings Lynn in Norfolk through to London. The parcel of land to the west of the A10 is being considered as green space to allow the developed area to sit in a parcel that provides a logical location for development without contributing to an unnatural urban spread.



3.6 In summary, the current proposals for the site are:

- 28.95 hectares of which 7.85 hectares is green space to the west of the A10 bypass and the developable part is 21.1 hectares
- Up to 350 homes
- 40% of homes will be for affordable housing
- Up to 4,400sm of employment use
- Up to 500sm Local Centre providing the opportunity for a variety of uses which could include a convenience store, café, a doctors' surgery, home working hub, gym and small business units.
- Green/blue infrastructure
- Open space including children's Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP), Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) and further green space next to the A10.
- Biodiversity net gain
- New trees and hedge planting
- Tree planting along the distributor road

- Social and community facilities

3.7 One purpose of the consultation with residents was to get a better understanding of the sort of community infrastructure they would like to see in the area, to see if there were matches between the needs of both the new and existing community.

3.8 Green infrastructure is predicted to occupy 44% of the site, providing significant opportunity for around a 20% gain in biodiversity and new usable space which will benefit both new and existing residents.

## 4. Community Engagement

### 4.1 Statement of Community Involvement

4.1.1 The Localism Act 2011 and the current version of the National Planning Policy Framework make it clear that developers are expected to consult with residents, with a clear request that this is carried out during the pre-application phase to enable issues to be resolved.

4.1.2 In addition to this East Hertfordshire District Council's Statement of Community Involvement says:

*“6.15 Pre-app consultation is not legally required for most types of development. It is however strongly encouraged that applicants involve the community in formulating their proposals as early as possible, particularly if the site is particularly sensitive or would have a significant impact on local communities. This is advised to assist in addressing any issues that may arise from the community and may help to avoid unnecessary objections during the consideration of a planning application.”*

The engagement that has taken place on this site fully meets with the requirements and expectations of both the Government and East Hertfordshire District Council.

### 4.2 Engagement

4.2.1 As well as engaging with the community, Countryside Partnerships have consulted with appropriate statutory bodies, including East Hertfordshire District Council and Essex Country Council, the details of which are outlined in the wider planning application documents.

4.2.2 Prior to launching the website and notifying residents of the proposals being brought forwards, an advance copy of the leaflet that was delivered throughout Buntingford was sent to Ward Councillors, with an offer to meet to discuss both the proposals and the responses from residents. This has been followed up and it is hoped to meet with Councillors prior to formal submission of a planning application and/ or immediately following submission of the planning application.

4.2.3 Following this, the leaflet itself, which is included as an appendix to this document, was sent to 3480 properties, which were both residential and businesses. This ensured that the whole of the town of Buntingford were able to comment and provide feedback. The distribution is shown by the properties marked in red on the map below.



4.2.4 This delivery coincided with the publication of the website ([www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk](http://www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk)) including the feedback section. A copy of the leaflet and website are included as appendices to this document.

4.2.5 The website included the following details:

- **Welcome Page.** Containing information about the proposals and about Countryside Partnerships, including explaining the stage the project is at
- **Council-led improvements.** Details about improvements that will be required as part of the planning process, including an explanation of issues such as drainage, biodiversity (including the green infrastructure plan)
- **Local Benefits.** An explanation of the sorts of benefits that might come from the development, such as a doctors surgery, green space and a local centre
- **The Environment.** Offering details about Vistry Group's approach to sustainability and the environment including details of their zero carbon homes development at Europa Way in Warwick.
- **About Countryside Partnerships.** Information about Countryside Partnerships, including a link to the Vistry Group website.
- **Feedback.** Providing the opportunity for residents to provide feedback about the scheme.

## 5. Website Feedback

5.1 A total of 101 responses were received to the website during the period 20<sup>th</sup> June to 4<sup>th</sup> July. 7 of these were discounted because they were duplicates. However, one email and one survey response from the same individual were included in the analysis. One survey response was received where the individual specifically requested that his responses to Questions 2,3 and 4 were not included. That request was complied with, so 85 responses to Questions 2,3 and 4 were included in the analysis.

5.2 Of the 94 responses that were analysed, 8 were received by email and 86 submitted the survey. The methodology used for the emails was to consider the comments within it, alongside the responses to Question 1 of the survey - where the comments were all reviewed, and a key word analysis was undertaken.

5.3 Responses:

**Question 1 - What are your thoughts about the proposals for the land?** This was a straight text box response that allowed residents the opportunity to give an honest view about the emerging proposals. It is usual for respondents for built environment surveys such as this to be returned by those who are most opposed to development so it is to be expected that the balance of comments would be negative. Whilst this was the case for this survey, the majority of the respondents who expressed a negative view did so because of existing infrastructure concerns. Examples of such comments included:

*“We do not want any more until the town has enough doctors and schools to support us who already live here.”*

*“The local infrastructure can't cope already.”*

*“Buntingford does not have the infrastructure to support more housing insufficient Health provisions insufficient school places especially at mid and senior insufficient public transport”*

The biggest concern raised was in relation to “road infrastructure” with 40 road related mentions and 74 mentions of “cars”. Some of this was in relation to the access off the A10, with some expressing support and others expressing concern about existing capacity.

The next biggest concern raised in response to Question 1 was in relation to health with 112 mentions of various aspects related to health, including the need for dentists, a new or expanded GP surgery, cottage hospital and pharmacy provision.

Insufficient active travel and public transport was also raised a number of times. There were 6 comments made about trains, including a desire for a Buntingford railway station, whilst others mentioned that existing facilities were not sufficient, with a particular concern made about what was perceived to be a poor local bus service (19 mentions of the word “bus” or “buses”).

The next concern was in relation to “children” with 35 mentions, this was primarily about the need to provide school places or the need to expand school places.

Whilst the majority of comments were negative, and related to existing infrastructure needs, there were numerous supportive comments, these included:

*“I am happy to see the plans of the proposed development, which would undeniably be of great benefit to the local area.”*

*“Happy for new houses to be built - but infrastructure needs to be put in place first”*

*“All very positive, but sadly as has happened on schemes before, the Doctor’s surgery gets dropped for 50 houses etc Affordable means what exactly?”*

*“On the whole would support the build, just slight concern re the traffic volume on that part of the A10 in the mornings - will anything be proposed to deal with this?”*

*“I am supportive of the need to supply housing and see expansion of the town as good for supporting the local economy. It must however be done in a way that enhances the environment and is sympathetic to the existing town. The plans seem to address environmental sustainability.”*

*“As long as you actually do what you say I think it’s a good idea. I think the local young community should have preference on the properties and the affordable homes go to people within a radius of 5 miles not people from non surrounding areas.”*

**Question 2 - Do you support the principle of ensuring vehicular access solely from the A10?** This question was responded to by selecting one of 5 options – Strongly Support, Support, Neutral, Oppose, Strongly Oppose.

The breakdown of responses received were as follows:

- Strongly Support – 18
- Support – 7
- Neutral – 15
- Oppose – 6
- Strongly Oppose – 39

The overall balance of this is that 45 respondents were negative towards the approach for the A10, whilst 40 were either positive or neutral.

**Question 3 - Do you support the proposed legal agreements to ensure that local facilities such as schools, public transport and roads can cope with the new residents?** This question had the same options as Question 2, with responses broken down as follows:

- Strongly Support – 25
- Support – 8
- Neutral – 14
- Oppose – 3
- Strongly Oppose – 35

This shows that a majority of respondents (47) were either supportive or neutral about the improvements to infrastructure that would be secured through a legal agreement as part of a planning permission.

**Question 4. Do you support the local benefits that are being proposed as part of the development?** This had similar response options to Question 2 and 3. The responses were as follows:

- Strongly Support – 11
- Support – 8
- Neutral – 15
- Oppose – 6
- Strongly Oppose – 45

Therefore, 34 respondents were either positive or neutral about proposed local improvements whilst 51 were opposed.

**Question 5 - Do you have any ideas for community facilities that we could deliver on our site?** As could be expected, the responses to this question were mostly a reflection of the concerns raised in response to Question 1. There were 41 mentions of the need for improvements to Health provision, with the vast majority of these asking for improvements to GP services. Examples included:

*“A new doctors surgery may well be needed in future, so I would support this.”*

*“Please please support a medical centre/ doctors surgery and or small cottage hospital for non urgent procedures.”*

However, the second largest mention was about the need for improved retail/leisure opportunities, with the majority of these mentioning shops, but a few related to restaurants and eateries.

*“More sport & recreation facilities for young people needed”*

*“More retail outlets and restaurants/bars to create work for locals and put some life back in the village not takeaway outlets”*

The next biggest response was related to children’s issues, such as the need for playgrounds and additional youth facilities. This included:

*“Facilities both for teenagers and the older generation”*

*“There isn’t anything much for teenagers in Buntingford. Perhaps a youth club to give them something to do instead of roaming the streets!”*

Another significant issue raised was about the use of green space, with the majority of these related to cycling and walking, including two that mentioned a desire for a greenway in the area:

*“I’d like to see a Buntingford Greenway that joins up all the walking/cycling routes around the town, similar to the Letchworth Greenway.”*

## 6. Analysis of Responses

6.1 Many of the concerns raised during the consultation timeframe analysed (20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023) relate to the need for infrastructure that will be delivered as part of the planning process. The major concerns raised when residents were asked for their thoughts on the proposals were roads, health provision, children (including school places) and public transport. Although planning is not in place to deal with existing pressures, but to deal with the impact of development, a development of 350 homes will, if needed, contribute to the provision of additional school places and Countryside Partnerships have already made clear that they are willing to explore the provision of a GP surgery as part of the local centre which is proposed as part of any development at Buntingford West, so this may help to alleviate existing pressures. A well-planned roundabout from the A10 will need the support of the highways authority, who will need to be convinced that it will not create additional pressures, but it is possible that it could help to ease existing traffic levels.

6.2 It is also clear that some residents consider that the proposed community facilities as part of the scheme might also benefit existing residents.

6.3 If the outline planning application is successful, Countryside Partnership have the opportunity to explore these further to make sure that the development that comes forward at Reserved Matters is something that works for the whole of Buntingford.

6.4 The responses also show that whilst there is concern amongst the community, there is also a level of support for the proposals. A well-designed development that deals with the priorities raised by residents has the potential to overcome many of the objections.



## 7. Next Steps

7.1 Whilst the application is going through the planning process, Countryside Partnerships will keep the website live, so that residents can continue to put their thoughts forwards to the project team.

7.2 We will also make sure that Ward Councillors are kept informed about the process and Countryside Partnership will remain open to any meetings and discussions that both statutory authorities and elected representatives may wish to hold.

7.3

Following a successful Outline application, Countryside Partnerships will then develop a framework that enables ongoing engagement so that stakeholders can be part of a process of delivering a development that works for both new and existing residents.

## Appendix 1

### Delivery Postcard



Dear Resident,

We are writing to let you know about the consultation for Countryside Partnership's proposals to bring forward land to the west of Buntingford for development. They are taking a slightly different approach to plans that came forward from their sister company, Vistry Homes last year, bringing forward what is known as an outline planning application which, if it is supported by East Herts District Council, will agree the principle of development and secure the means of access - which will be from a dedicated roundabout access from the A10.

This allows us to consult with the local population so they can let us know the types of facilities they want to see on site. That way we can provide a solution that suits both new and existing residents. In order to do this, we have just launched a website – [www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk](http://www.countrysidebuntingford.co.uk) – where you can find out about the early proposals, about Countryside's credentials in the area, and have your say in our first consultation.

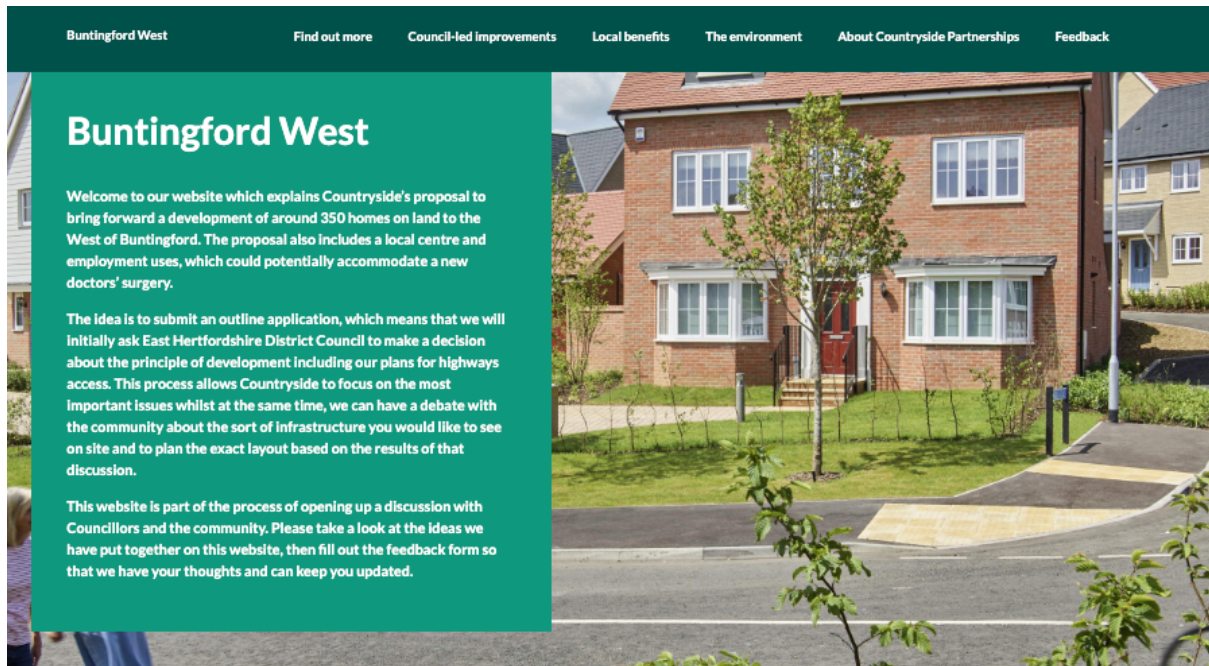
We would like as many residents as possible to visit the website and have their say so we know what you think. Our aim is to work with you to provide a development that benefits everyone. You can also let us have your views by emailing: [survey@countrysidebuntingford.co.uk](mailto:survey@countrysidebuntingford.co.uk).

Published by Curtis Communications. 31 Eastrea Road, Whittlesey, Cambs. PE7 1SG

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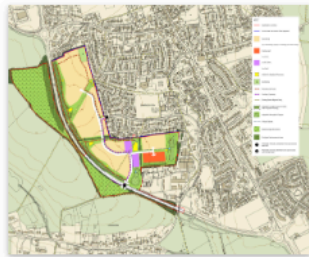
## Appendix 2

### Website



#### What is proposed?

The proposals are for around 350 homes, which will include 40% affordable housing. The average house price in Buntingford is over £440,000, resulting in a need for affordable homes to be available to people at preferential rates under a variety of possible schemes, giving local people access to housing that they might not otherwise have.



The proposed masterplan - click to enlarge

#### Who are Countryside?

Countryside Homes are an award-winning housebuilder and the only home builder to have received the prestigious RIBA Stirling Prize for a housing development. Countryside have received, once again, a five-star rating from the Home Builders Federation, following the industry's customer satisfaction survey results.

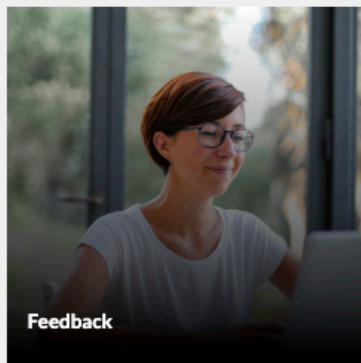
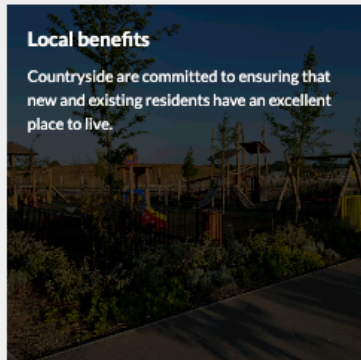
Within East Hertfordshire, Countryside has an excellent reputation for the quality of their housing developments, dating back to the 2000 Housing Design Awards for St Michaels Mead in Bishop's Stortford which was described as "a convincing piece of urban design with a proper sense of place". This high-quality design has more recently been seen at both St. Michael's Hurst and St James' Park both also in Bishop's Stortford. A new development at Sawbridgeworth is coming soon.

#### What stage is the project at?

Countryside proposes to submit what is known as an Outline planning application, which will lay out the principles for housing and detail how access will be enabled – including a new roundabout access off the A10.

Whilst Countryside is talking to the Council about these issues, they will listen to the community about the outline application; gaining a better understanding of the sort of facilities local people would like to see. This takes a step back from the detail included with the previous application that was submitted by Countryside's partner company - Vistry Homes. We will use the feedback to help us decide the final detail for the site, for when we submit a separate detailed Reserved Matters planning application to East Herts District Council at a later date.

Find out more and have your say:



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# Countryside Partnerships

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### Economic benefits

All development will provide economic benefits for the area by:

- Helping to sustain local services, such as buses
- Supporting town centre businesses
- Providing employment during construction phases

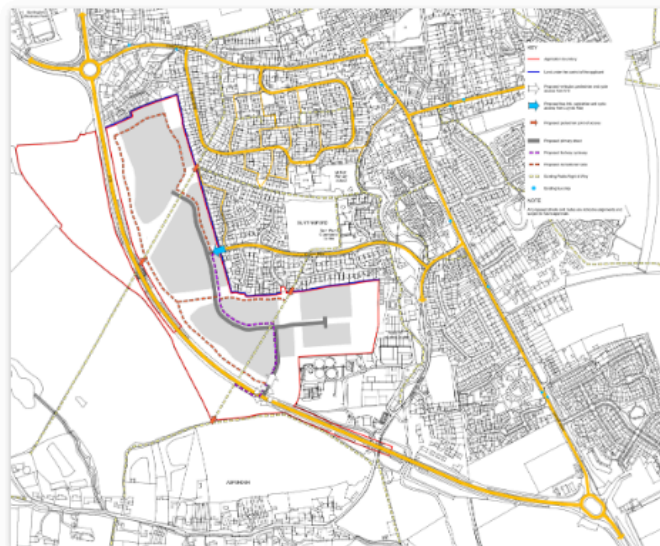
Countryside also proposes to set aside around 4,000sq.m. of the site for employment uses, which will provide accessible work to more people in Buntingford.

### Infrastructure development

Our aim is always to create developments that local people will be proud of. We know we will have to provide highways improvements and contribute towards school places. But there is more we could include. Please see the specific [Council-led improvements](#) and [Local benefits](#) pages for more information about this.

### Highways

The current proposals are for a vehicular access to be created off the A10, instead of Luynes Rise. We are currently working with the County Council's Highways Department to create a solution, as well as committing to a pedestrian, cycling and bus only route via Luynes Rise, this will ensure that the existing residents can access Buntingford Town Centre, supporting local businesses, whilst at the same time giving existing residents the opportunity to access the new facilities on the Countryside site.



The proposed access plan - [click to enlarge](#)

# Council-led improvements

Countryside are committed to ensuring that new and existing residents have an excellent place to live.



### Legal agreements

Countryside are committed to ensuring that new residents are settled into Buntingford West without any negative impact and that new and existing residents have an excellent place to live. To achieve this, they will commit funding through an agreement with the Council. We anticipate contributions towards:

- School places
- Public transport
- Highways

Our contributions in these areas would ensure that there is not a negative impact to the local community from our new development and we will work closely with the Council to make sure that the agreement is right for existing residents and to discuss other infrastructure requirements.

### Drainage

We will create a series of attractive swales across the site and an attractive wet area to the east of the site which will provide sustainable drainage whilst adding to the attractiveness of the development.

### Biodiversity

Countryside will be required to increase biodiversity on the site - making sure there is an enhanced habitat for wildlife after development. Examples of how this can be achieved include:

- Creating a network of open spaces, including a woodland buffer, and providing new green infrastructure on the land to the west of the A10 to create new grassland and woodland habitats.
- Using special bricks and nesting boxes in the new buildings which will provide homes for bats and birds.
- Using Countryside's existing partnerships and arrangements with organisations such as the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, the Bat Conservation Trust and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to bring species onto the open spaces created.



Green infrastructure plan - click to enlarge

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Green infrastructure plan - [click to enlarge](#)



## Local benefits

As well as committing towards the necessary infrastructure, Countryside wants to engage in a conversation with the community and Councillors about community facilities, so that when a detailed planning application is submitted at a later date, they can ensure that both new and existing residents' benefit.



### Our thoughts include:

#### Doctors surgery

We are aware that the existing Doctors Surgery is likely to end its lease in the coming years. We believe we can provide an alternative location that will accommodate existing and new patients.

#### Community orchards

We believe a community orchard will provide a pleasant green space for the whole of Buntingford to enjoy.

#### Green space

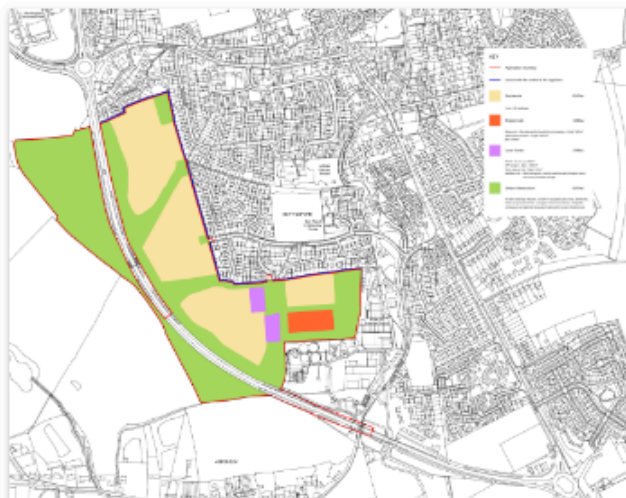
A significant part of the site will be made up of green space including, potentially a 2.5km cycling/running track.

#### Local centre

Countryside is proposing the creation of a local centre across an area of approximately 0.4 hectares, to include space for start-up businesses, a gym, pharmacy and cafes.



Public open space plan - click to enlarge





## The environment

Countryside Partnerships are part of the Vistry Group, who have a positive approach to the environment. Here are a few examples of their approach.



### Sustainability

- Vistry Group have a dedicated in-house sustainability team working to improve practices and materials across sites.
- Vistry have developed the 2025 housetype range to meet the new Part L and Future Homes Standard (FHS).
- By the end of 2025, Vistry Group will be diverting 100% of waste from its sites away from landfill, with an overall reduction of waste of 20% per plot compared to 2021.
- By 2025 Vistry are aiming to achieve a 75-80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>e (Carbon Dioxide equivalent, the metric measure used to compare emissions) compared to 2021.
- All schemes commencing the planning application process after 2024 will be designed to be electric only, with no gas appliances.
- Vistry are preparing all future sites to deliver a 10% bio-diversity net gain (BNG) in line with the Environment Bill.
- Vistry are committed to using modern methods of constructions (MMC) where possible, delivered via their in-house timber frame manufacturing plants around the UK.
- MMC reduces the amount of materials used by over 45%; reduces waste generation by over 50%; and reduces HGV movements at the construction site by over 40%; not to mention a reduction in the build time.
- By the end of 2025 Vistry will have passed 600 learners through their on-site skills academies which are set up on larger schemes.
- By the end of 2023 Vistry will have achieved '5% club' status, where 5% of the workforce is in 'earn and learn' positions including apprentices, trainees, and graduates.
- Vistry Group have strategic partnerships with the Hedgehog Preservation Society, the Bat Conservation Trust, and the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust.
- PV systems and hot water heat pumps will be worked up when bringing forward designs for the Reserved Matters phase of development.

### Zero carbon example development

An example of a successful Zero Carbon development delivered by Vistry Partnerships is Europa Way, Warwick.

The scheme comprised 54 new homes (2 & 3 bedrooms) with the first completions occurring in Autumn 2021.

The key features of the development include the use of high-performance fabrics; timber frames; air source heat pumps (ASHP); Solar PV panels; and Waste Water Heat Recovery (WWHR).

[Buntingford West](#)[Find out more](#)[Council-led Improvements](#)[Local benefits](#)[The environment](#)[About Countryside Partnerships](#)[Feedback](#)

## About Countryside Partnerships

Vistry Group was formed in 2020 and, with the partnership formed with Countryside Partnerships, in 2022, became the largest housebuilder in the country.



The Housebuilding business operates across 13 business units, each with a regional office, which are developing around 200 sites across England for the open market. Vistry Partnerships has combined with Countryside Partnerships to strengthen its position in the high-growth partnerships sector. The Partnerships business hard-earned reputation for delivery, quality, and sector knowledge across all housing tenures.

Partnerships operates across 19 business units. It works closely with Governmental bodies, housing associations and local authorities, as well as selling homes directly to customers on the open market, through its operating business units, each with its own regional office. Together, all the business units operate with a common Vistry purpose – to develop sustainable new homes and communities across all sectors of the UK housing market.

You can find more about Countryside Homes and Vistry Group [here](#).

## Feedback

Please complete the form below to have your say.

What are your thoughts about the proposals for the land?

Do you support the principle of ensuring vehicular access solely from the A10?

Neutral

Do you support the proposed legal agreements to ensure that local facilities such as schools, public transport and roads can cope with the new residents?

Neutral

Do you support the local benefits that are being proposed as part of the development?

Neutral

Do you have any ideas for community facilities that we could deliver on our site?

### About you





Your personal data is captured, held and processed by Participatr Limited and Curtis Communications for the purposes of this project only. Participatr Limited has created and launched this engagement platform on behalf of Countryside Partnerships and we, alongside Curtis Communications, collectively make decisions about how personal information is captured, held, processed and analysed, meaning that we are joint data controllers for the purposes of the General Data Protection Regulation.

Your name and email address is used to identify you as a single respondent and, if you have opted-in to receive updates, to send you news and information about this project. Your postcode is used to understand your broad location in relation to your comments, and will not be used to contact you in any way. All of your personal information is held in a secure database on a server located in the United Kingdom.

For more information about how Participatr Limited processes your personal data, please visit their [privacy policy](#).

For more information about how Curtis Communications processes your personal data, please visit their [privacy policy](#).

 Opt-in to email updates