



Re proposal AGALA29 Netherbarns in the Local Development Plan

We object to this proposal on the following grounds.

Please accept our agreement with all points made in the enclosed piece in Private Eye 23 Oct – 5 Nov 2020 as grounds for objection. From this article we also note the recognition of the value of Abbotsford by the Scottish government ministers by rejecting the proposal for housing opposite Abbotsford House in the past and by contributing financially to the Abbotsford project. We trust, therefore, that the council members of the Scottish Borders Council would now follow Holyrood’s example in rejecting this Netherbarns development.

We object on the grounds that the assertion that “any development would be mostly hidden by trees in summer, during peak tourist season” does not hold any weight. There is no assurance that the present tree screen would continue. From personal experience we know that in the Scottish Borders even a preservation order on trees cannot prevent reasons to be found for cutting them down once a development is up. Trees need to be managed and do not have infinite life cycles so future tree fall and management will alter the current tree line and allow sight of the development, which cannot be planned for in advance.

Because Abbotsford is a many faceted facility, use is high throughout all months of the year with, therefore, a 12 month tourist season: 13,000 visits were recorded in December 2020 alone. These high figures reflect the Covid-19 restrictions to travel, showing how important Abbotsford is to local use. The woodland walks and outdoor leisure of this already well used winter facility would support the Scottish Borders Council local 2024 plan which specifically mentions a need to provide for a growing older population, healthy and active. To say that there is a “peak” tourist season ignores the effect the development would have on enjoyment of Abbotsford and the all year round use of its facilities.

There are varying heights on the Abbotsford site, including the high level of windows from the house, which look directly across to this development. We object because there can be no guarantee that any of these views would remain as of pre development. A suggestion that a thin screen of trees would hide the development of 45 houses is also untenable. We object strongly to this development on the grounds that it could never be hidden from Abbotsford.

Noise and light are an unavoidable and uncontrollable feature of housing development. We object to the Netherbarns development because the restriction of invasive noise or light is not possible once the development is up. Both noise and light travel long distances, especially in a rural and hilly location. From our experience, Abbotsford provides many opportunities for “tourist” use, from midsummer theatre in the gardens to weekend

meetings in a busy Ochiltrees restaurant with many voices from across the world enjoying the wide balcony views. These activities would be compromised by the development because there cannot be control over noise from lawn mowers, cars and so on, which is especially prevalent at weekends, coinciding with a high level of visits to Abbotsford; and in the evening in summer and in the early evenings of winter, what control is there over the increasing fashion for overly bright external lights in individual properties.

We object to this development because there is no possibility of controlling or negating the effect of 45 households in this sensitive, Tweed Valley location. Opposite those 45 houses you have a resource which provides many special experiences for the local Borders community. The garden, woodland and river areas have been developed with thought and care to provide safe outdoor experiences for all age groups and abilities. There are volunteering opportunities which cover many interests and provide friendship and a chance to learn new skills. The shop is an outlet for local businesses as well as Scottish products from further afield.

Further, Abbotsford House and its River Tweed location is a national and internationally renowned resource which brings interest and money into the region. In the current world of social media, I wonder how those attracted to the celebrations of Sir Walter Scott's 250th anniversary in 2021 – 22 would report a building site opposite a resource of worldwide renown and how those reports would reflect long term on the draw of other tourist opportunities in the Scottish Borders? Following the international experience of coronavirus that would be a missed chance to use Abbotsford's potential to attract visitors eager for a renewed enjoyment in life and a future interest in the attractions of the Scottish Borders.

We strongly object to this proposal for its deleterious effect in all its stages on this sensitive natural, historical and cultural environment which has been managed and developed with such care and professionalism by the Abbotsford Trust to serve local and international visitors in a safe and informative way, to create local employment, to bring income into the Borders region and to provide an attractive venue for literary, outdoor and many other experiences for all.



Adrian and Ronia Crisp

HOOKS and CORNERS

CHURCH NEWS



THE Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published its report on the Church of England two weeks ago, sending a chill wind up many a cassock.

It found that "the church's neglect of the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people in favour of protecting its reputation was in conflict with its mission of love and care for the innocent and the vulnerable". The church duly pre-empted the report with a flurry of announcements designed to, er, protect its reputation. Besides establishing a fund to help survivors, it launched a "Safe Spaces" helpline to counsel victims – which was first promised in 2014, has been endlessly delayed ever since but was somehow magically ready for lift-off in the very week the IICSA report was published (*Eye* 1511).

Alas, the course of true reputation management never did run smooth. The survivors' support fund was agreed under the name Pilot Interim Survivors Support, until someone pointed out the unfortunate acronym. It was also announced before there were any mechanisms or criteria for claiming – and before any actual funds were available to draw on. The Safe Spaces helpline, which is only funded for another 18 months anyway, went live this month with broken links, untrained staff and an answerphone message saying that the service would be up and running in September. Some calls to the live phone line on the launch day went unanswered.

Meanwhile Archbishop Justin Welby reacted to the IICSA report by issuing the customary press release saying he was even more appalled/ashamed/determined to do better than he had been the last time he was appalled/ashamed/determined to do better, and the time before that. But although it is Welby who fronts the apologies, behind the scenes the ecclesiocrats in Church House are directed by a shadowy figure unknown to most church members and even most clergy – William Nye, who became secretary-general of the Archbishop's Council in 2015 after four years as Prince Brian's PPS. The publicity-shy ex-courtier, who used to run the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, now earns north of £170,000 plus bonuses, well over twice Welby's wad, though staff say he would struggle to organise a consecration in a cathedral. The church's management of safeguarding has descended into chaos, but spending on it has ballooned from £50,000 to around £20m, without a single penny of redress being delivered to survivors of abuse.

Nye recently survived a complaint about the leadership of the church's safeguarding, but there is pressure for a full review of its governance. The Archbishop's Council, which he leads, is currently being investigated by the regulatory compliance division of the Charity Commission.

CHRIST CHURCH, Oxford, has written to alumni and supporters pleading for contributions to its Covid-19 Student Support Fund. The college needs to raise £90,000, "at a time when there is enormous demand on the institution's finances... Should you be able to help support our students during this very challenging time, we encourage you to help make a difference now."

How reassuring to know that student welfare during the pandemic is such a high priority, but heartbreaking to realise that the college can't afford £90,000 and so has to pass round the begging bowl. Clearly this can't be the same Christ Church, Oxford, that has funds of more than half a billion quid stashed away (£588m in 2018/19, up by £23m from the previous year) – and that has so far spent £2m on legal bills in a failed attempt to sack its dean (*Eyes passim*).

GLASGOW's historic architectural landscape continues to be threatened by the prospect of overbearing new buildings in sensitive areas.

In Sauchiehall Street, one of the city's great thoroughfares, Edinburgh-based developer Consensus Capital wants to build a large apartment block filling the "missing tooth" site near Charing Cross.

The gap, in what Historic Environment Scotland describes as an "idiosyncratic streetscape feature with striking sculpture-embellished elevations", was created by demolition of the former National Bank of Pakistan, a small plain-fronted building in sandstone with a diaper pattern and green marble base designed in the early 1980s by local architects Elder and Cannon.

Plans have yet to be lodged with the council but the developer's "artist impression" (pictured) has appalled conservationists. Iain Wotherspoon, chair of Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland Strathclyde Group, says the drawings suggest a block "grossly out of scale" with neighbouring buildings, dominating the adjacent A-listed Albany Chambers to the west and B-listed Royal Highland Fusiliers museum/former T & R Amman studio, and Genting casino/former Locarno ballroom to the east.

The frontage of a listed former piano showroom, with torch-bearing caryatids and a winged figure playing pipes, appears to be awkwardly incorporated into the corner of the new building.

"A proportionate development would be welcomed but what's being proposed fails markedly to respond," said Wotherspoon. The council has form in nodding through schemes enabling developers to build big. Last year, it let London developer Osborne and co demolish rotting blocks of Grade B Victorian buildings in Argyle Street to make way for a 14-storey office tower (see *Eye* 1508).

MEANWHILE, at St Vincent Crescent, one of Glasgow's finest residential streets, an old battle has reignited to stop developer Nixon Blue (NB) building a block of 36 flats on the bowling green opposite.

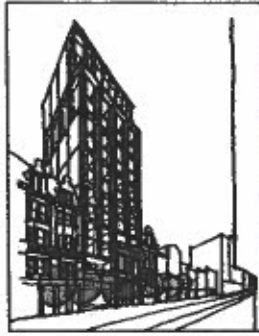
Built in the 1850s, Alexander Kirkland's sweeping crescent is a long serpentine tenement terrace, with fine stonework and detailing. It is one of the most important developments of its kind in Scotland and one of the longest outside Bath.

The terrace overlooks a bowling club, which closed in October 2017. When NB first pitched the scheme two years ago, the council gave it short shrift. Besides ruling that it breached planning policy on several grounds, the council decided the green was a protected open space and that the bowling club site contributed to the conservation area, which would be spoiled by scale of the proposed flats.

NB is back with a scheme a little smaller than the un-loved original. Friends of St Vincent Crescent conservation area say the proposed seven-storey structure is still "of unsympathetic scale and massing".

The plan includes demolishing the bowling clubhouse, to the dismay of St Vincent Crescent Minerva and Corunna Street residents' association, which believes it is in good condition and could serve as a venue for meetings, recreation and sports. Nor are

residents impressed by promises of a new public garden and open space, which they say will be unfit for multi-functional use, while its north-facing aspect, shaded by the proposed seven-storey structure for most of the day, would make it cold, stark and unwelcoming.



Sauchiehall Street and its 'missing tooth' proposal

● **DESPITE** multiple rulings by Scottish government ministers to protect the landscape around Abbotsford, the spectacular home built by novelist Sir Walter Scott, it is again under threat from housing developments.

The forerunner of the Scottish Baronial revival movement in the early nineteenth century, Abbotsford and its carefully created "picturesque" surroundings are regarded by Historic Environment Scotland as "among the most significant designed landscapes in Scotland".

It is a huge tourist draw for Galashiels and the Tweed valley; and as the late Piloti noted several times in this column, it is one of the few historical buildings the Scottish government has been willing to plough significant amounts of money into.

Astonishingly, Scottish Borders council has just approved a local development plan earmarking the nearby Netherbarns site as suitable for 45 homes. Similar plans for Netherbarns have been thrown out repeatedly following planning applications, appeals and Scottish government investigations in the past 15 years, because of the importance of the Abbotsford setting.

Those in favour of extra housing argue that any development would be mostly hidden by trees in summer, during peak tourist season. But protected landscapes are supposed to be protected all year round.

GOOD NEWS CORNER

GOOD news from Mapperley in Nottingham, where the former Majestic cinema building has been given grade II-listed status by Historic England and now hopes to continue screening scary movies for years to come.

Despite closure in the mid twentieth century, the 1920s cinema, by architect Alfred Thraves, retains much of its decorative interior, thanks to spending many years as a showroom for a design studio, which won an award for the restoration of the plasterwork.

The current owner, The Haunted Museum, put a twist on its original use, running a spooky-themed cinema and tearoom, which came under threat last year from a proposal to demolish the building and build new flats on the site (*Eye* 1497). Listing now makes that fate far less likely.



"Don't worry, our family's fortune didn't come from slavery – it was made from sending children down mines"

M. Byrne