

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 22 January 2021 18:53
To: localplan
Subject: Housing development opposite Abbotsford AGALA029

CAUTION: External Email

I wish to contribute a comment on the proposal to build 45 new houses opposite Abbotsford, next door to Netherbarns. I should declare that I am a former Trustee of Abbotsford, having served in that capacity for 9 years until retiring in the summer of 2019.

The possibility of a large housing development opposite Abbotsford has been hanging over this historic house for about 2 decades. In my opinion it is entirely the wrong place to locate houses and I think I am correct in saying that there have so far been 4 public enquiries which have reached the same conclusion. Abbotsford is of huge importance to Scotland as a whole and to the Borders in particular, not only for the house itself and its setting, but also as a memorial to one of Scotland's most famous sons, Sir Walter Scott, who did so much to shape the country in which we now live.

As Trustees, we worked incredibly hard, first, to raise the funds needed (£15 million when I last checked), then effectively to re-build the house and construct the new Visitor Centre; then to build up visitor numbers which, by 2019, exceeded 50,000. At least as important as what is in the house are the gardens and the external setting, offering woodland walks and access to the banks of the River Tweed. All of this aspect will be greatly impoverished by the arrival of a new housing estate 'in your face', as it were, on the opposite side of the Tweed. Abbotsford needs every visitor it can get and it has been fortunate to date to receive rave reviews from its visitors, who are overwhelmed by what it has on offer, especially outside. Please do not put this visitor experience in jeopardy.

In the early 19th century, the Great Man was already very keen to purchase the land opposite the new mansion he was building and managed to purchase the strip of land along the opposite river bank which remains in Abbotsford's ownership today. The point is that Sir Walter understood perfectly, even 200 years ago, the absolute importance of the view, which he intended to be preserved as a rural one; but he bought only a strip and the view as a whole has always been threatened by developments further up the hill. No-one can pretend that he would have in any way endorsed what is being proposed by the Local Plan. In fact, he must be tiring in his grave.

I am of course aware that it is proposed to plant trees which in due course will lessen the visual effect of the development, but these will never be properly effective and in any event will provide better cover at some times of the year than at others. What you are suggesting strikes me as being cultural vandalism of the worst kind, on a par with the decision in the 1960s by Liverpool Council to knock down the Cavern Club where The Beatles honed their skills. The sensible course of action is to abandon this lunatic and short sighted idea, look elsewhere for site to build the requisite houses and allow Abbotsford to do what it does best, which is to attract visitors to the Borders and to inform future generations about the life and work of one of the world's most influential writers.

John Scott

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