



Forward Planning,  
Council Headquarters,  
Newton St. Boswells,  
Scottish Borders, TD6 0SA

21 January 2021

Dear Sir,

**Objection to proposal AGALA029 Netherbarns in the Local Development Plan (The Proposal)**

I am writing to state my objection to the proposal **AGALA029 Netherbarns** (hereafter The Proposal) in the Local Development Plan, which would see 45 new houses built on the Netherbarns site, opposite historic Abbotsford House, renowned world-wide as the home of Sir Walter Scott. My objection is based on both Planning and Development information and on my own observations as a member of the Scottish public.

The National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) recognises the contribution made by our cultural heritage to our economy, cultural identity and quality of life. Planning has an important role to play in maintaining and enhancing the distinctive and high-quality, irreplaceable historic places which enrich our lives, contribute to our sense of identity and are an important resource for our tourism and leisure industry.

The proposed Netherbarns development, within the Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) states: 'These proposals confirm the site will not be visible from Abbotsford House during the Summer months and in the Winter months (when Abbotsford House is closed to the public) photomontages have shown that only fleeting views of very small parts of the site could be seen, but proposed housing (i.e. this would be a low density development of 45 units) would not be located within these visible locations.'

With reference to the above and the Council's documents supporting The Proposal:

**1. Contribution to our economy**

1.1 Abbotsford's significant contribution is not fully acknowledged. The Council must be fully aware of the facts: over 160,000 paying visitors in the first 5 years of operation (July 2014-2019); a total of £7.4m contributed to the local economy; supporting 145 jobs and creating 35 more at Abbotsford. These achievements should be publicised, emulated and supported: LDP2 does not do this.

1.2 Neither LDP2 nor supporting documents make reference to the Abbotsford Trust Strategic Plan (2019) which includes the following objective: 'Our place in the Community: We will be a catalyst for improving the life of our region by creating opportunities to positively affect direct and indirect employment, skills and employability, mental health, social isolation, learning and sense of identity.' The long-term targets required to achieve this – improving visitor experience and year-round visitor numbers, which will also increase income for the local economy - are both critically linked to the target of safeguarding Scott's landscape, which has always been an integral part of the Abbotsford experience. Scott himself was inspired by and devoted to it.

1.3 See also below: 2.1; 2.3; 2.5

**2. Cultural identity**

2.1 Abbotsford has been synonymous with Scott for over two centuries, as the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations this year will remind everyone – worldwide. Scottish Government, the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and VisitScotland have acknowledged Abbotsford's pivotal role in this by giving active support to Abbotsford's anniversary initiatives. Abbotsford and Scotland will welcome visitors from far and wide, with a great variety of interests and associations. The Proposal would put Scotland to shame, replacing the famous, tranquil view across the Tweed - which many will come especially to see - with the noise and visible tearing up of landscape on the Netherbarns site.

2.2 The anniversary celebrations bring together 54 international organisations, with Abbotsford as lead. This is not emphasised in The Proposal, nor does The Proposal respect the UNESCO (2003) definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This is defined as 'The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and **cultural spaces associated therewith** – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural Heritage.'

2.3 The Proposal, and the destruction of the historic Abbotsford/River Tweed landscape, will deprive Indian visitors in particular of a cultural experience which can never be replaced. The Council will no doubt be aware of Scott's interest in India; of his three novels set in the period of the Mysore Wars; of the links between Abbotsford, Ayrshire, Bangalore and Mysore. These associations have the potential for exciting and current cultural initiatives and exchanges. In economic terms, however, no-one from India will be encouraged to come to Abbotsford if its famous landscape view has been destroyed by houses. India has many millions of such broken landscapes of its own. In cultural terms, Scott's novels and his life have been studied in India for two hundred years. The view across the River, without houses, is as much part of those studies as are Scott's well-known characters and tales. To destroy this landscape would be to destroy the unique Scottish setting which anchors Scott so famously to the Scottish Borders.

2.4 The Abbotsford landscape has been enjoyed by individuals, visitors and the local community for generations. The view from Abbotsford of the proposed 45 houses at Netherbarns will not be fully or adequately screened by the trees mentioned in The Proposal. These trees will take many years to mature, and in the longer term, they will fall or be felled. Are visitors to Abbotsford expected to wait while wind or rain subsides and 'only fleeting views' of the 45 houses are visible? Branches are living elements, and will not obligingly comply with what LPD2 requires.

2.5 LPD2 is wrong to state that the 'fleeting views' will be a summer problem only. In winter, the trees will scarcely provide any screening for the 45 new houses. Abbotsford Visitors Centre is open all year round and has been since 2014. Abbotsford is now open annually in December. Surely The Borders Tourism and Development know this? In December 2020 alone, 13,000 people enjoyed walking the paths at Abbotsford, and a total of 84,000 people have done so since logging visits with a people-counter began mid-July 2020.

### 3. Quality of life.

3.1 The existing Abbotsford landscape is – and always has been- and integral part of the Abbotsford experience, both from inside the house and for visitors walking outside. Scott himself believed that 'his oaks (i.e. the Abbotsford landscape) would outlast his laurels (i.e. his books)'. The Proposal would utterly destroy the Abbotsford context and its very existence. A short-term cash-in on 45 houses would deprive all future visitors of that landscape – for ever.

3.2 As a direct consequence: no tourist, no Scot, no scholar, no student or schoolchild, no book-reader or historian, no potential sponsor, would ever again be able to see the Abbotsford view as Scott knew it: as Borders country beside the Tweed, with NO houses. How could any Corporate, including the Local Council, claim justification for depriving so many communities of a view which has enhanced and inspired so many lives for so long?

3.3 The unavoidable sight of 45 houses at Netherbarns will certainly not be a 'catalyst for improving the life of our region by creating opportunities to positively affect ..... mental health, social isolation, learning and sense of identity.' The Council have as much of an obligation to promote well-being for the widest community as do the Abbotsford Trust, who state this objective in their strategic plan.

3.4 In addition, to this visible intrusion, the landscape will certainly be further polluted by sound. The occupants of 45houses, including children, and pets and the coming and going of cars cannot exist in silence. There will be light pollution also, and this would still be visible, even if a very thick tree screen were in place. This would be particularly evident in winter months – and 30% of November and December visits are in dusk.

I hope that these objections will encourage the Council to withdraw the proposal AGALA029 Netherbarns, and not to construct any houses or other buildings on that site or any adjacent site within view of Abbotsford House.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs A. Norman