

MY FILE

YOUR FILE

DATE

H790AS

AGALA029

22 January 2021

Forward Planning Team,
Scottish Borders Council,
Council Headquarters,
Newtown St Boswells,
MELROSE, TD6 OSA

Dear Madam / Sir:

Re: Abbotsford
Local Development Plan Proposals

We refer to the above matter and to the article appearing in *The Scotsman* on 6 January 2021 referring to a proposed amendment to the local development plan which would allow for the construction of around 45 new homes on the Netherbarns site adjacent to the Tweed Conservation Area and overlooking the site of Abbotsford.

We wish to add our formal objection to the making of this change into any step which would allow for planning permission to be given for the alteration of the use of the Netherbarns site to anything other than agricultural land, or for the construction of residential homes of any sort on this site.

Our grounds of objection are as follows:

1. The proposal fails to take into account National Planning Framework 3 ("NPF3"). This NPF3 recognises the contribution made by our cultural heritage to the economy, cultural identity, and quality of life. The making and enforcement of planning decisions have important rôles to play in the maintenance and enhancement of distinctive and irreplaceable historic places. Such decisions are also an important resource for the tourism and leisure industry.
2. The proposal is based on incorrect information set out in the supporting Full Site Assessment of the Netherbarns site (at page 252), which 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) ... 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"

This is incorrect in that it ignores the fragility of the tree screening on which the proposal is dependent, and which was made clear in the Abbotsford Trust's previous objection in February 2019. The screening effect provided by woodland is, of necessity, variable over time and it is highly likely that sight lines to the development will be created as mature trees fall naturally or are felled as part of necessary active woodland management.

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3. The screening effect is not only variable over long durations, but also varies with the seasons. Abbotsford House is not closed in winter. In addition recent refurbishment of the estate footpaths has meant increased visitor traffic walking along these paths. This has been the case since 2014. Even assuming screening effect of the woodland referred to in the preceding paragraph remains unchanged, the screening effect is greatly lessened by the lack of leaves on deciduous trees in winter. In addition in winter months, light pollution from homes and street lighting on the developed Netherbarns site would be particularly noticeable.
4. The proposed changes do not take into account Netherbarn's impact on the contribution to the region by the Abbotsford site. We understand that paying visitors have (prior to the current Covid 19 pandemic) increased by 82% over the preceding five years. We further understand that this has contributed a total £7.4m to the local economy, and supports 148 jobs, as well as creating an additional 35 new jobs at Abbotsford. Surely these matters are more important than the transient profits of developers who have no permanent connection to the locality?
5. Further to the preceding paragraph, and although it is not strictly a planning matter, economics must weigh upon the mind of the decision-makers. It is unlikely that any increase in Council Tax revenue from the development, when seen properly after setting it against the increased costs of service provision by the Council, will provide the sort of income that will serve to replace the income (supportive of the community) that may be diminished by the making of the proposed changes. This is of course putting aside entirely any proper considerations under NPF3, which *are* matters to be considered.
6. Any development activity would interfere with the celebration of Sir Walter Scott's 250th anniversary which will shortly occur. The gaze of not only Scotland, but the rest of the United Kingdom, and the world over will be turned towards the Scottish border and above all to the cynosure of Abbotsford.
7. There has been no consideration of the effect of the proposed changes on the natural environment and the habits and habitat of protected species such as birds and bats in the area.
8. There is no proven necessity for additional housing in the area that could not be fulfilled by the development of less culturally and naturally sensitive areas. Given the comparative stability of the population it must be assumed that any increased demand for housing in the area is based on economic migrants from other parts of the United Kingdom seeking to take advantage of lower living costs and land prices.
9. The proposed changes and development would have an adverse effect not only on the area around Abbotsford but those using the A7 to visit the Eildon and Leaderfoot National Scenic Area, and to walkers along the footpaths in the Designated Scenic Area.
10. We submit that the proposals for change are subject to procedural challenge on the basis of an apparent bias, almost amounting to advocacy, on the part of those preparing the suggested alterations. These may be seen from the egregious errors in the Full Site Assessment which, we would contend, are not merely simple errors, because they have been drawn to the attention of your

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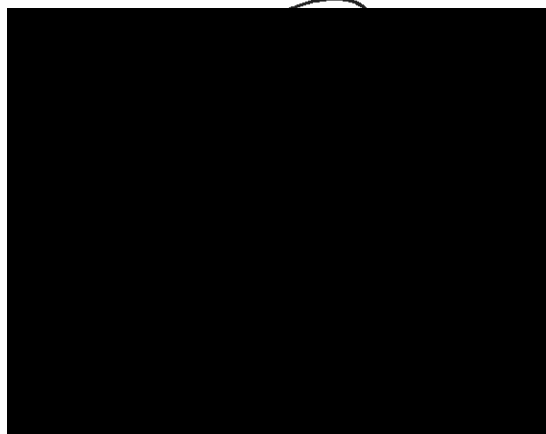
officers in previous objections (*vide supra* ¶2).

11. There are further procedural irregularities. This matter has been previously considered and rejected a number of times. For example, a public enquiry held in 2015 considered that Abbotsford should remain "... free of the impact and of the suggested allocation in any subsequent development of Netherbarns." With all of the current emphasis on the virtues of democracy and due process, it seems incongruous that those proposing this change are taking a leaf out of the Brussels playbook by repeatedly putting forward a proposal (even after a decision has been given) until the desired result is obtained. This is surely inappropriate.

We have no objection to the publication of our objection in connection with this matter nor the inclusion of our names and address in any list of persons objecting to the change.

We commend the foregoing objections to your attention, and

We remain,



Gina Vivien Ramsay

onique B. van Broekhoven