

██████████
Chief Planning Officer
Scottish Borders Council
Newtown St. Boswells
Melrose
TD6 0SA



7th February, 2019

Dear ██████████,

RE: Proposed Netherbarns Development in Main Issues Report

The Abbotsford Trust is writing to make further points to object to the Netherbarns site being included in the LDP2. This letter should be read in conjunction with our correspondence of October 29, with the Reporter's recommendations in the 2009 and 2014 Public Hearings, and with the HES letter of 10th July 2009, all of which we concur.

We have based our objection on the National Planning Framework 3, which is reiterated in Scottish Planning Policy as:

138. 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 Abbotsford Trust objects to the development of the Netherbarns site because the associated light, sound and visual intrusions will impact adversely on its heritage assets, historic setting and the cultural landscape of Sir Walter Scott and the Scottish Borders. The Main Issues Report (MIR) puts forward a commentary which suggests that these adverse impacts can be mitigated by the screening of the site by trees.

The Abbotsford Trust strongly opposes the assumption that screening with trees will reduce the impact of the Netherbarns site: it believes that an adequate level of tree screening – one which protects the setting of Abbotsford from any new development – is unachievable on this site.

Furthermore:

1. The Historic Settings paper by the developer makes inaccurate and uninformed assumptions thereby misinforming the whole proposal and MIR. The most damaging claim is that the boundary of the designed landscape is the River Tweed. It is not – the boundary is the Northern edge of the Trust owned trees on the Northern bank of the River Tweed, which reaches to the roadside. Therefore at places the designated designed landscape is contiguous with the development site.
2. It is important to point out that the majority of the current screening is actually provided by tree regeneration on the disused railway, and that this land is neither owned nor managed by the Netherbarns site nor by the Abbotsford Trust, and therefore cannot be considered as playing a role in the screening of the site.

Patron: The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry KBE FRSE DL

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These photos show how the majority of the screen is provided by the trees north of the road, rather than the trees owned by Abbotsford.



3. The additional screening by trees on the site is presented by the developer without any reference to the layout of the houses themselves. This is misleading as the screen and its position in relation to the houses is central to the consultation.
4. The overall design and detail as found in the 'Design Code' document and the 'Design Response' document uses a language which is open to 'interpretation' and is not illustrated by relevant visual examples.
5. The proposal is for 45 houses to be placed on only half of the site. This allows for a potential doubling of the number of houses in the future. The fact that the developer submission is only for half the site is not made clear in the MIR.

A. Screening of the site by trees

- I. The current fragility and narrowness of The Abbotsford Trust's woodland on the north bank of the Tweed does not provide an adequate screen now, and it is one which is deteriorating year on year. For instance, on the 14th January 2019 a relatively weak storm broke the canopy of an oak opening up a sight line to the site.



Photos showing the deterioration of the screen where fallen trees have left gaps.



2. There are real challenges as to how to sustain continuous woodland cover on this banking:
 - a. The disused railway contains unmanaged, same-aged, and crowded trees which, lack the light, nutrients and space to grow to maturity. It will easily be affected by wind blow due to its poor growth. The woodland has not been actively managed for many decades and is in a poor state.
 - b. The options for woodland management are:
 - i. clear felling in sections or as whole
 - ii. thinning
 - iii. health and safety pruning only (current)
 - c. Gaps created by felling, wind blow or thinning increase the likelihood of further damage to neighbouring trees in subsequent storms – the damage becomes incremental and the gaps widen
 - d. Continuing a policy of health and safety pruning is a short term strategy, as it will not provide the conditions for the regeneration or replanting
 - e. Any woodland management would take decades to establish better screening, and it would never achieve a screen which would mitigate the adverse impacts of the proposed development.

3. The woodland screening in the visual analysis supplied by the developer in Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Brindley Assoc. July 2017) is misleading and is presented without an explanation. It relies on the screening provided by trees in the area of disused railway line between the Abbotsford Trust boundary and the Netherbarns site, and therefore should not be considered a part of the woodland screening which mitigates the development of Netherbarns as it is neither under the management nor influence of either owner. In contrast, Abbotsford’s screening is very weak, providing very thin cover compared to the trees beyond the road.



Three photos showing the weakness of the screen. The parked cars show the road, which is the boundary to the Abbotsford estate. The trees behind the row of cars are unmanaged.



4. The new tree screens on the Netherbarns site itself are totally inadequate for the height (2.5 floors), quantity (45 to start with rising to... 79?), density (unclear in proposal), arrangement (linear) and type of housing (townscape) proposed, and will not screen most of the details laid out in the Design Code supplied by the developer (fenestration, render, 'courtyards', orientation of buildings – for instance, if one side faces North West then the other faces South East – e.g. towards Abbotsford).
5. The new tree screens proposed will in themselves damage the historic setting of Abbotsford, as their character and makeup is at odds with the designed landscape, and they will never provide enough screening to mitigate the adverse effects of the proposed development, even if greatly increased:
 - a. they are too linear, too narrow, with too many straight lines
 - b. they contain an inappropriate mix of trees for the character of the setting
 - c. they are inappropriate to Scott's woodland compartments which have sinuous outlines, cover 50% of the ground, and are almost wholly deciduous
 - d. At best the proposed linear plantings might thinly grow to become incongruous in the designed landscape setting of Abbotsford and indeed in the field patterns of the Tweed valley generally, and provide little screening
 - e. At worst they will fail to establish and have no role in screening parts of the new development
 - f. Strips of trees, or even small clumps, cannot be managed over time for continuous cover woodland.
6. The effects of global warming on weather need to be taken into account as drought, rain, and winds directly adversely affect the lifespan and growth patterns of current and new trees. The reality of global warming is now upon us and needs to form part of the discussion for LDP2 and its use of trees as a mitigating factor.
7. The MIR uses an argument that the Abbotsford Trust is not active in winter so that the lack of a screen in winter does not matter:
 - a. it is inappropriate for the MIR consultation to assume that the Abbotsford Trust will not be undertaking core activities to draw visitors to the site in the winter or in darkness in the future; indeed, quite the opposite is true.
 - b. the designed landscape at Abbotsford is open to the public 24/7.
 - c. what are the precedents for protecting the setting of a schedule A historic site in some seasons and at some times of the day, but not others?

8. The submission by the developer fails to consider the setting of Abbotsford and the wider cultural landscape, and only considers the impact of the Netherbarns development via views from Abbotsford House.

In conclusion, the Abbotsford Trust objects to the inclusion of Netherbarns in the LDP2 due to the use of screening by trees being presented as the key mitigating factor. Tree screening does not and cannot in the future limit the intrusion of lights, sound and the adverse visual effects of a development on the individual assets (house, gardens and estate and all its associated built and designed features), the historic setting of Abbotsford, and on the wider cultural landscape.

B. Environment of Abbotsford has become a major public amenity

There has been 'material change' at Abbotsford since the Netherbarns site was dismissed from the LDPI, in the form of an extensive programme of woodland management in the designed landscape, which concluded in 2018. Due to neglect, the woodlands were not a healthy mix of ages which is desirable in order to retain the character of the landscape and to encourage biodiversity. The result of the woodland management (thinning, clear felling for new planting, eradication of rhododendrons) has been to open up a new path network throughout the site which affords new views through the woodland, across the Tweed, and to the landscape beyond, e.g. the Netherbarns site. This has come about through a combination of funding awarded to Abbotsford's Picturesque designed landscape from the Woodland In and About Town European Union fund, and private donors. All have recognised the extraordinary importance of the Trust owned land alongside the River Tweed (about 110 acres) for its bio-diversity, its public amenity, and its historic significance. They also recognise the Trust's commitment to the local community to enable meaningful engagement in the heritage landscape.

In addition, the restoration of the Picturesque landscape from the House down to the River Tweed has created a new woodland planting which will frame views from the North Terrace and main rooms of the House down to the Tweed and directly across to Netherbarns, reflecting closely the original intent of Sir Walter Scott to create a natural looking wooded landscape with interspersed grassy 'parks'.

As a result of these changes Abbotsford now attracts a greatly increased number of walkers, attracted to Abbotsford precisely because of its setting, views and tranquillity – a green reservoir on the fringes of an urban environment.

C. Scott's ideas on landscape and place were made manifest at Abbotsford and were central to the development of the cultural movement of Romanticism

1. The landscape, garden and house are as much a part of Walter Scott's artistic output as his novels, but they are unique and fragile. Scott recognised that 'his oaks would outlive his laurels', e.g. that the landscape would be more precious and loved in the future than his books.
2. Scott designed Abbotsford as a wrap round, immersive, world-within-a-world which displays all the core tenets of the Romantic movement.
3. He created a place designed for people to experience, to dwell in, and to discover, relying on the stimulation of sight, sound and scent to lead one into the wonders of nature.
4. Abbotsford was designed as a place of stories where people can find the roots of their cultural identity – from the Abbots Ford to Rhymers Glen to Turnagain.

5. At Abbotsford, Scott created a naturalistic landscape which was his inspiration and he wrote about the way in which the green space, with its sensory quietude, gave him a sense of wellbeing and an 'elasticity' of mind essential for his creativity.

The adverse impacts of the Netherbarns development will change the way in which nature is experienced at Abbotsford and will change Scott's legacy for ever. The Abbotsford Trust is currently exploring the profound impact that Abbotsford as a place can have on people in its 'Learning in a Heritage Landscape' project, which aims to help disadvantaged young people find a sense of self and the skills with which to propel themselves into a fulfilling future. The reduction in the quality of the historic setting of Abbotsford through the development of Netherbarns will undermine these aims to continue Scott's legacy of encouraging healthy, elastic, creative minds.

Abbotsford still evokes much of the atmosphere which Scott intended through his designs. Abbotsford is a rare and precious place which engenders in people peace, tranquillity, a sense of belonging, and a broader perspective on life: it needs to be protected.

Since the woodland restoration, Abbotsford has become an important community asset for Galashiels, Tweedbank and beyond. This is clearly evidenced in the huge uplift in numbers of walkers using the new path network and in the fact that over 1000 people visited Abbotsford on the recent open day in December 2018. The community clearly welcomes Abbotsford's efforts to show its relevance to their everyday lives, embracing the opportunities this extraordinary place affords.

D. Development will compromise approaches to Abbotsford by foot

The approaches to Abbotsford on foot are becoming increasingly well used by first time visitors to the site (as well as by the regular users of the site). However, there are regular comments made to the reception staff that the walk from Tweedbank Station to Abbotsford is disappointingly suburban in character. As a result, they are directed back to the station on the stretch of the Borders Abbey Way which runs along by the River Tweed to Lowood Bridge, a more attractive proposition for visitors escaping the city who crave green space and quietude and exercise of the mind and body. The designed landscape at Abbotsford is crossed by two increasingly important long-distance walking routes – the Borders Abbey Way and the Southern Upland Way.

1. In the case of the latter, a walker coming down from Gala Law will have the view of the Eildons in the distance and Abbotsford's designed landscape in the middle ground. As they descend the development of Netherbarns will be the foreground. The walker will have to negotiate the Western boundary of the Netherbarns housing development to get to the River Tweed.
2. South of the Tweed, the Borders Abbey Way takes two routes – one through Sir Walter Scott's named 'Constitution Hill' (mixed oak, birch and yew woodland) which leads down to the driveway and the house, and the other via the Doctor's Road to the ancient Abbot's Ford track and the Visitor Centre. Both routes afford views across Abbotsford directly into the site at Netherbarns, where on a good day the South sloping site is lit up by sun from morning to early evening.
3. Other walks from vantage points on the wider estate pick up on the same view into Netherbarns, such as the popular walk from Cauldsheils Loch on Path 11 of the Melrose Paths to the woodland policies of Abbotsford House.



A view into the Netherbarns site from the Borders Abbey Way.

E. Why the topography of the Netherbarns site is so detrimental to Abbotsford

The Abbotsford Trust is very familiar with the site at Netherbarns. Its topography slopes down towards Abbotsford from the A7, thus increasing the visual impact of every single unit which might be built.

1. Each house will be partially visible from Abbotsford because of this slope.
2. The topography of the slope and banking is mirrored on both sides of the Tweed. Thus, the windows of the houses at the lowest level of Netherbarns will be eyeball to eyeball with Abbotsford's windows.
3. The rest of the development will have the effect of bearing down on the historic setting.



*Photo illustrating the slope and its affect.
This photo is taken from the new woodland walks.*

4. Garden 'enhancements' are likely on a southerly facing sloping plot, including terracing, decks, paths, conservatories, ramps and steps and associated lighting and furniture. All would increase the visual and sound intrusion of the basic development on Abbotsford.

5. Reflections from glazing creating a daytime reminder of the suburban intrusion of a new development which can be seen through trees in summer or winter. The site faces SE and therefore all house windows, especially when opened at an angle in the summer and during low light in the spring and autumn will reflect back towards Abbotsford. The likelihood of this will be increased by new extensions, conservatories, greenhouses and solar panels and parked cars.
6. Noise intrusion on the setting of Abbotsford. It is not decreased by a woodland screen and is amplified by water, e.g. the River Tweed. Even though it cannot be seen, noise will gather force depending on the number of housing units built – cars, people, dogs, music and gardening equipment all will create a soundscape at Abbotsford which is suburban in character, which is inappropriate to Abbotsford's setting and to Scott's vision of a naturalistic, wooded setting.
7. Lighting intrusion on the setting of Abbotsford will come from many sources associated with development – car headlights, street lighting, porches, undraped windows but also security lighting to the back and front of properties. All lighting is visible through trees, whether in summer or winter.

And finally

These intrusions will adversely affect Abbotsford in the following ways:

1. Seriously damage the integrity of Abbotsford's setting, which will damage tourism in the Borders, with a long term adverse effect on bringing wealth and business to the area. It is the Borders' most outstanding and internationally important tourist attraction.
2. Undermine Abbotsford's fundraising abilities to protect and conserve the legacy of Scott, and thus adversely affect its importance to the Borders' tourism and economic wealth.
3. Impact on Abbotsford as an amenity for the local community. Recent grants have developed the estate for access, biodiversity, and to conserve its designed landscape (funded by Woodland In and Around Towns initiative). Currently Abbotsford's 'Learning in the Historic Landscape' project focuses on employability and skills for young people and is funded by Leader and the Heritage Lottery Fund for two years.
4. Adversely affect tourism and jobs in the Borders – Abbotsford is a key employer in the Central Borders and employs 38 staff, supported by over 100 volunteers, many of whom are volunteering as a springboard into employment.
5. Undermine the previous significant public investment in Abbotsford (£1.5 million by Scottish Borders Council itself) as a tourist destination with its new Visitor Centre and restoration of house. The gothic Pavilion in the Walled garden is attracting further investment to restore it by 2020, complementing the new 'all access' garden paths as a place for shelter and repose.
6. Critically weaken future plans for Abbotsford to be recognised as a World Heritage site.

Abbotsford is one of Scotland's most important cultural assets and should not be diminished by a development of houses at Netherbarns, which will impact on Abbotsford's house, gardens and designed landscape. It would be ironic if, as we approach Scott's 250th anniversary and with the eyes of the nation upon us, diggers were to greet visitors across the Tweed.

We hope that we can forestall the site's inclusion in future Local Development Plans by putting forward our case, now and forever, on the detrimental impact of a development at Netherbarns on Abbotsford, the jewel in the crown of the Central Borders.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

Chairman, Abbotsford Trust

CC:

[Redacted list of names]