A Response from Friends of Hollin Busk to new Heritage and Ecology Reports submitted by the applicant : Hollin Busk 17/04673/OUT.

This application for urban expansion into open countryside is contrary to Local Planning Authority policy. FOHB have outlined in previous documents how the site has been safeguarded and why it cannot be considered for residential development. This present document focuses specifically on the new submissions from the applicant made in January 2020. Previous objections still apply irrespective of the recent reduction from 93 to 85 houses.

1. Heritage.

The Heritage Report gives a misrepresentation of the development of the local area and its industrial heritage. There are major inaccuracies that display a poor understanding of the area and lack of local knowledge.

1.1 Steel Production.

A case in point is the inaccurate description of recent steel production at Stocksbridge. Paragraph 3:14 of the applicants report states “the 20th century saw the slowing down of production at the steelworks”. This is totally incorrect and an example of a lack of local knowledge. At the end of the 20thC steel production had expanded to around 500,000 tonnes of special steel and the works was developing new profitable aerospace business. Today, in the 21stC, the steelworks is owned by Liberty Steel and is a very significant world producer of special steels and in peak times supplies around 1/5th of the world’s aerospace steel. This is a significant manufacturing asset providing important employment in the area.

1.2 Distinctiveness of Stocksbridge/Deepcar/Bolsterstone.

The report seeks to portray Stocksbridge and Deepcar as one continuous urban development, and by inference, that the application is merely infilling any green spaces. For example para 1.6 “the two merge to form an urban-scale residential backdrop” and para 1.10 “merge to form a continuous band of development”. The filling-in of every green space to produce continuous urban sprawl is old fashioned thinking and not in line with current Sheffield Council Policy of Green Networks and interconnecting green links.

The original historical landscape was of open green fields with farms at regular intervals along the hillsides of which Royd Farm is a good example. Subsequent industrial development for coal, ganister, textile mill (later to become the steelworks) saw housing and communities develop in the valley adjacent to the works and main routes of access. Urban development occurred in the valley bottom with the hillsides remaining open green spaces until the present day. Stocksbridge, Deepcar and Bolsterstone are individual communities separated by green fields and green links.

1.3 The Green Network.

Sheffield, the outdoor city, has adopted a policy CS73 The Strategic Green Network which states: “within and close to the urban areas, a Strategic Green Network will be maintained, and where possible enhanced, which will follow the rivers and streams of the main valleys including a. Upper Don”. “These Green Corridors will be complemented by a local network of more local Green Links and desired Green Links”.

Stocksbridge and Deepcar are separated by a green link up the hillside that includes the fields at Wood Royd, that lead in to the Local Wildlife Site of Fox Glen, that in turn leads to the open green fields of Hollin Busk and on to the Green Belt at Bolsterstone and the Peak Park. The applicant has submitted 2 applications to build houses on 2 separate sites, one on green fields at Wood Royd and the application in question on green fields at Hollin Busk, thus destroying the existing green link between Stocksbridge and Deepcar and totally isolating the LWS at Fox Glen. This is contrary to the NPPF which seeks to protect green spaces, and contrary to existing LPA Policy.

There is strong local feeling and local people want to retain this green link that contributes to the open countryside appearance and distinctiveness of the area. The open green fields of Hollin Busk around Royd Farm are an important part of local heritage that are enjoyed by all.

1.4 Royd Farm Heritage.

Royd Farm is believed to date from the 17th century, with a later addition built on in the 18th century. It farmed the surrounding fields including those to the West which include the land which is the subject of the application. The barns have been converted into 3 further dwellings, Bennewell, The Boskins and Glen View. Royd Farm itself has a paddock that now contains a vegetable garden and fruit trees and has two distinguished and well preserved pig styes. The original entrance to the 17thC part of Royd Farm is now an internal doorway within the building. See appended photographs which include a view across the green fields of Hollin Busk.

1.5 Royd Farm and its Setting.

Royd Farm is identified by name on Ordinance Survey maps and is a commonly known landmark in the area. It is one of the oldest buildings in the area and was one of the original farms that are located at regular intervals along the hillside. It is surrounded on three sides by green fields that were previously under its ownership and define its setting. There are open views of the countryside to the South, West and North – the sunsets in the West can be tremendous. It is part of the open heritage landscape that was in existence before the town of Stocksbridge or the industrial buildings in the valley bottom were built.

UDP BE15 states “Buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest which are an important part of Sheffield’s heritage will be preserved…. Development which would harm the character or appearance of listed buildings…. will not be permitted”.

UDP DR5 Development in Open Spaces states “development in open spaces will not be permitted where (e ) it would harm open space which forms the setting of a listed building or other historic building or is needed to maintain an important view or vista”.

Royd Farm by its very nature and reason for existence is associated with open green fields; to “box it in” on 3 sides by proposed housing, close to its boundaries, will totally destroy its setting. This is an inappropriate location for new housing that is in contradiction of LPA policy to regenerate brownfield sites first, which is exemplified by 1000 new houses being built in the Upper Don valley below. The proximity to open space and green fields is important to the overall rural agricultural setting of Royd Farm and the proposed development would cause substantial harm to this setting. All views of Royd Farm from Hollin Busk Lane would be eliminated and conversely Royd Farm would have no views across open countryside to the South and West.

The applicant’s proposal to provide “screening by careful planting” is no mitigation as this also destroys the link with open countryside and would harm the setting of Royd Farm. Reference to existing scrub to the SE of the site again displays lack of local knowledge as this is simply poor grassland management and the dumping of domestic rubbish by the current field owner that has become infested with brambles such that this part of the field cannot be cut for hay.

The mitigation that the Scheme provides “very significant public benefits” is dubious. These will already be provided by 1000 new homes in better and more sustainable locations planned in the Upper Don valley. Local people want to retain the green fields and green links that contribute to the open countryside appearance of Hollin Busk and do not want continuous urban sprawl.

The setting of Royd Farm is strongly linked to its surrounding green fields with a highly visible connection between the farmhouse and the surrounding countryside. To totally isolate and surround a Grade 2 listed farmhouse with modern housing will destroy its historical setting and will cause major harm to this heritage asset.

1.6 Comments from an Experienced Archaeologist on the Heritage Statement 2020 by Orion.

Much of Section 3 Historical Background is largely irrelevant and a desk-based exercise. 3.6 Bolsterstone cannot be called a “medieval town” and it is misleading (if within the given timeframe) to call Stocksbridge and Deepcar post medieval (3.7) – they are most certainly modern.

I conclude from this report that attempts are being made to show that the setting of listed buildings is not being compromised, but unconvincingly in my opinion as many of the arguments are incorrect. Clearly to convert the fields linked to a historic farm complex to a housing estate does significantly compromise the setting.

Dr Ruth Morgan, BA Hons Archaeology, Secretary to the Hunter Archaeological Society.

2. Ecology.

The Ecology Report is mainly a review of earlier documents and provides very little additional information of any substantial value. It does provide an Updated Habitat Survey but this was undertaken on the 7th January 2020 and this is not within the required window of April to September, as much flora and fauna would be in hibernation or not visible in winter. It is therefore of limited value.

The key ecological issues are listed below.

2.1 Fox Glen.

Fox Glen is a Local Wildlife Site that was gifted to local people and is the responsibility of Sheffield City Council. It is used for nature study by local schools and is also part of a Willow Tit project that is being managed by Steel Valley Project. The bottom end of the Glen contains a small children’s play area but the top end of the Glen, which is also known as Clough Dyke, is a quiet wildlife sanctuary. This more sensitive area is directly downstream of the proposed housing development and the proposed new public access point. The Ecology Report does not address this issue.

2.2 Green Links.

Fox Glen is part of the green corridor that separates Stocksbridge from Deepcar which also includes the fields at Wood Royd and the fields at Hollin Busk that then lead on to open countryside. This green link has not been recognised by the applicant. The proposals will severe this green link and will totally isolate Fox Glen and have a significant effect on its ecology.

2.3 Flooding and Water Management.

At the end of 2019 there was significant rainfall and Fox Glen was inundated and houses were flooded on Wood Royd Road. The boardwalk and bridge across Clough Dyke were wrecked. Water management in the Glen has been a continuous issue over the years. The extent of local concern has not been recognised by the applicant and no reference made to the recent local flooding problem.

The suggestion that the proposed SUDS drainage will “complement” the willow tit project by helping with leaky dams is questionable. The proposed houses are located directly at the top of Clough Dyke and a change in surface water drainage, polluted with road salt in winter, could have a significant effect on the sensitive ecology at the top of Fox Glen.

3. Conclusions.

The new Heritage and Ecology Reports contain many errors and inaccuracies and show a considerable lack of local knowledge. LPA Policy for the maintenance of a Green Network with Green Links is totally ignored. The Heritage Report seeks to argue that there will be limited harm to the setting of Royd Farm when in fact the opposite is true and surrounding this Grade 2 listed building with housing, and severing the link with the green fields that are part of its heritage will cause significant harm to its setting.

The Ecology Report is a summary of previous reports, brings virtually no new information, and misses the key issues that are: destroying a green link, isolating a Local Wildlife Site from access to open countryside, and a potentially serious issue of water management through a sensitive LWS.

Hollin Busk is protected open countryside and this application is in contravention of many existing LPA Policies. It should be refused.

Friends of Hollin Busk 7th Feb 2020

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Photographs of Royd Farm.

A house covered in snow

Description automatically generatedA house with bushes in front of a building

Description automatically generatedAn old stone building

Description automatically generatedA picture containing building, wall, stone, grass

Description automatically generatedA house with trees in the background

Description automatically generated

A view of a building

Description automatically generatedA wooden door

Description automatically generatedA picture containing cabinet, indoor, ceiling, kitchen

Description automatically generatedA piece of wood

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