

OBJECTION TO THE EXCLUSION FROM THE GREEN BELT OF LAND AT HOLLIN BUSK, STOCKSBRIDGE  
Objection by Mr R D Boyd

510. The objection site covers some 44 acres and is used for grazing purposes (Plan F3). It was allocated for residential use in the draft Stocksbridge District Plan, but following public criticism of the proposal this allocation was deleted in the revised Plan (Document F1). At this stage the public gained the firm impression that the site was safe from the threat of development, at least for the next 10 years. This impression was fortified by a circular from the Education Authority (Document F6) which refers to the land being included in the green belt, the same information being publicised by the Stocksbridge Labour Party (Document F7).

511. At the local inquiry into the District Plan, Hollin Busk was not the subject of formal discussion; but because of strenuous opposition to development elsewhere in the town, the Inspector recommended that the City Council consider the possible development of the objection site for residential purposes (Document F2, paragraph 121).

512. It should be noted that local people were not able to make representations about this possibility at that public inquiry. In any case most of them were unaware that such development might be considered. It is not surprising that no one else lodged an objection to the present Plan in relation to this land. But a recent petition (Document F5) with 462 signatures of adults resident in about 384 households, shows the extent of local feeling in favour of including the land in the green belt.

513. The site merits inclusion in the green belt on 2 counts, either of which is justification in itself. First it acts as a buffer of open land between 2 communities of Stocksbridge and Deepcar, extending the open countryside into the built-up areas. Indeed the open land extends further north to include the playing fields either side of Bracken Moor Lane and linking through to the open space adjoining Bocking Hill. The 2 communities are therefore physically distinct and should remain so. The Church of England has recognised that these are separate communities by designating separate parishes.

514. Secondly, the land is of immense amenity value to both communities. Stocksbridge and Deepcar are built on a north-facing slope and have a generally dense pattern of development with very little internal relief in the form of useful open space. The objection site is enclosed by roads on 3 sides and Hollin Busk Lane provides one of the few level walks in the locality. Many people use the roads for walking, jogging, horse riding and cycling, and it is particularly attractive to older people and parents with young children. Because of its accessibility the area is much appreciated by local people. It represents an area of open country and has excellent views from it. The community cannot afford to lose any part of the site to development.

515. Moreover, it has potential for more intensive use for recreation. Although there is some informal use of the land itself, there is no public right of way across the site. It would be feasible and very beneficial to extend the footpath from the Fox Glen Recreation Ground south-westwards to follow the continuation of the valley across the site and to connect with Hollin Busk Lane.

516. Including the land in the green belt would also encourage its agricultural improvement, thus making its appearance more attractive.

517. The land is not required for residential development. In the District Plan Inquiry report, the Inspector accepted a maximum provision of housing land for

605 dwellings. But this was geared to an overall guideline which has since been reduced. Land for only 225 dwellings is required by the local population and land is available to accommodate this number even without taking the Townend Lane site into account. The additional allowance made for flexibility should be taken up elsewhere in the Stocksbridge Population Distribution Zone, in the vicinity of Oughtibridge and Worrall, where the demand for houses is much greater, being so much nearer to Sheffield itself. For this reason the objections to the tightness of the green belt in these areas are supported. The green belt there has been defined without the benefit of district plans having been prepared.

518. If further housing land is, after all, required in Deepcar, the Townend Lane site is more suitable than Hollin Busk. It does not have as great an amenity value, being seen from fewer points and being inaccessible to the public. It is more suitable for housing, as it is lower and less exposed, with fewer constraints on building. Both sites have been undermined, but the workings under the Townend Lane site are deep, whereas as those at Hollin Busk are very shallow; there have been examples of subsidence and walls falling and the problem would give cause for concern to anyone building or buying a house there.

Objection by the Stocksbridge Town Council

519. Again, in relation to the Hollin Busk site, the Town Council state that it should be included in the green belt provided there are no plans to build houses on it.

Council's Response

520. In the Stocksbridge Town Map of 1963, the objection site was not allocated for development, nor was it included in the area of Great Landscape Value. No change in relation to this site was made in the Green Belt Review of 1978.

521. In the Stocksbridge District Plan approved by the City Council in 1981, it was proposed that the site remain outside the Green Belt in order to provide long term flexibility to meet possible future housing needs in Stocksbridge. In any case, no development would take place before 1991 (Document F1, paragraph 3.2.8).

522. Following the public inquiry into the objections to the District Plan, the Inspector recommended that the possibility of a phased release of residential land at Hollin Busk be studied in consultation with the Regional Water Authority with a view to the allocation of land on the periphery for some 230 dwellings in the period up to 1991 if required and the reservation of land in the centre of the site as public open space (Document F2, paragraph 129d). The Council accepted this recommendation and a study (concentrating on the drainage aspects) is being set up with the Yorkshire Water Authority. In view of the evidence produced about possible subsidence problems, this aspect may also be investigated.

523. In these circumstances no modification of the Green Belt Plan as it affects the objection site would be appropriate at this stage. Depending on the outcome of the study, it may be appropriate to add the central area of public open space to the green belt at a later stage once the boundaries of the space are established.

524. It is not considered that the site taken as a whole fulfils an essential green belt function. It is too late to stop the merging of Stocksbridge and Deepcar, their independence of each other in physical terms having already effectively broken down. It is not even clear where the division might be; Mr Boyd sees it as running along Bracken Moor Lane, but Clough Dike (Fox Glen)

could also be seen as the boundary between the 2 areas. The value of these breaks could be retained without including the whole site in the green belt.

#### Inspector's Observations

525. In my opinion it would be a mistake to approach these objections on the basis that the sites should be included in the green belt if not required for housing. Such an approach is essentially negative. A positive approach is required, because a green belt can only be justified if it can be shown that every part of it is necessary to fulfil a valid green belt function. Otherwise a green belt is indiscriminate and therefore contrary to the approved Structure Plan (see the Secretary of State's letter of approval, paragraph 8.5).

526. On this basis, I do not consider that either site should be included in the green belt. The Townend Lane site is to a considerable extent separated from the landscape to the south-east by the wooded ridge on its boundary and it is of very limited importance as accessible open country. Although it is seen from across the valley, it is in my opinion not necessary to the green belt.

527. The Hollin Busk site is of greater value as open country, but mainly on account of views from Hollin Busk Lane and other roads on its periphery. I do not consider that the inclusion of the whole site in the green belt is justified on this account. Indeed it does not seem necessary for any part of the site to be included in order to ensure that the recreational potential of the central portion is developed; and in any case it would not be possible to define the boundary until the possible layout of the site had been considered.

528. I am not persuaded that it is important that Stocksbridge and Deepcar should be kept physically distinct as far as possible. The existing distinction between the communities is not clearly defined, nor is there evidence of any great contrast between them; if for instance, one were a conservation area, it would be a different matter.

529. None of these observations implies that either site should be developed for housing at any time; this is a matter to be determined in the context of the District Plan. As noted earlier in this report (paragraph 175) the preservation of farm land is not an appropriate basis for the inclusion of land in the green belt.

#### Recommendation (No. 34)

530. I recommend that no amendment be made to the Plan in response to the objection concerning land at Townend Lane and Hollin Busk.