**A Response from Friends of Hollin Busk to the Case Officers report on Application Hollin Busk 17/04673/OUT**

FOHB fundamentally disagrees with the Case Officer’s Report. It is misleading, gives incorrect interpretation of current policies, omits to consider important parts of planning policy, on some points is in error, and is a misrepresentation of the true situation. It does not support both current National and Local planning policy.

1. Government Policy.

The Government has recognised that there is a housing crisis in the country and has launched initiatives to build more houses. The Housing White Paper : Fixing Our Broken Housing Market, and, revisions to the NPPF outline how this is to be achieved, and recognises that this needs to be “the right homes in the right places”.

Two key objectives were identified –

* To provide more homes of the right type in areas that are sustainable
* To provide stronger protection for the countryside, including Green Belt, and areas of local importance.

The need for accelerated house building is not to be considered in isolation from protection of the environment and valued landscapes.

2. Sheffield City Council Policy.

SCC recognises the need for new housing and has adopted a policy of the regeneration of brownfield sites first rather than expansion on to green fields. In June 2019 there was a full Council vote to reinforce this policy. This is a policy that we all think is sensible as there are a significant number of brownfield opportunities in Sheffield to meet new housing requirements. Post-industrial regeneration is underway in a significant part of the Upper Don Valley.

The Hollin Busk application was not part of the original plan to increase housing in the Upper Don Valley but is an opportunistic proposal to build on green fields designated as protected open space. This application is in direct contradiction to current City Council Policy. The applicant’s claim that the need for new housing outweighs the loss of green land is spurious and ignores the significant number of new homes (around 1000) being built in the area. The application is a speculative attempt to get the City Council to surrender protected open countryside and is in conflict with the wishes of the local people.

3. Much-Appreciated Protected Open Space.

The green fields at Hollin Busk have tremendous views across the valley and are valued as a much-appreciated amenity by local people. Previous attempts to develop this land have failed and the last one was dismissed on appeal by the Secretary of State. Subsequently, the land was designated in the existing Sheffield Core Strategy as ”protected open countryside” and is specifically mentioned by name in CS72. CS72 also states “protection of the area makes a significant contribution to the character and distinctiveness of Stocksbridge”.

There is considerable feeling in the local community with over 500 submitted objections to this application. These include our MP, Stocksbridge Town Council, CPRE, and Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust. This is in stark contrast to recent housing applications at Fox Valley, Deepcar Station Road, and Oughtibridge papermill, as local people understand the need for housing in our area and recognise that these are in the right places, providing regeneration not expansion, in line with the city wide growth strategy.

Local people feel let down by the Case Officer’s Report on Hollin Busk and there is overwhelming community opposition.

4. Sheffield Core Strategy.

The land at Hollin Busk is protected under existing policies CS72 and G6A and is designated as protected open countryside. Until the new Sheffield Plan is produced, these policies are still current and an attempt in the Case Officer’s Report to give them very limited weight is incorrect. The NPPF clearly states (para 213) that local policies are not to be considered “out of date” simply because they predate the NPPF. The existing policies are still valid. The report states that in the absence of a 5 year housing land supply existing planning controls have limited weight. The NPPF is clear that the weight that can be attached is dependent on the degree of conformity of the policy with the new NPPF requirements. Local policies such as CS72 which conform to NPPF still carry full weight.

The NPPF puts communities at the heart of the planning process and encourages developers to engage with communities to deliver proposals with local need and support. This has not happened, there has not been thorough engagement with the local community and no engagement with Stocksbridge Town Council. 500 objections is a good barometer of the level of local feeling in the community.

5. Five Years Housing Land Supply.

The applicant has argued that Sheffield cannot meet a 5 year housing land supply and therefore ascribe a lower weighting to current planning policies. A new figure of 5.04 years was declared in early 2019 and incorporated into new planning applications in February and March. Thereby eliminating any “tilted balance” argument supporting the Hollin Busk application. The 5.04 figure was then abruptly withdrawn “for recalculation” and Hollin Busk suddenly deferred, at the last minute, from the impending Planning Committee meeting. There has been no detailed explanation for this decision, leading to uncertainty and suspicion that unknown influences are being applied.

In June 2019, halfway through the year, a new figure has still not been published. The old 2018 figure (18 months out of date) is now being used but there is no confidence in the accuracy of this figure. Surely controversial applications like Hollin Busk should not proceed until the correct figure is known.

6. Case Officer’s Report.

FOHB have major concerns about the quality and thoroughness of this report. It is misleading and the interpretation of planning policy is incorrect. In particular it ignores many of the facts that demonstrate that this planning application is not sustainable. It does not adequately address the planning concerns raised in the 500 objections. Some illustrative examples are given below.

* CS72 is a fully valid, current, policy that protects Hollin Busk. It is supported by NPPF through protection of the environment. NPPF para 213 explains why existing local policies should not be considered out of date.
* G6A is fully valid and only allows development that does not harm the character of the rural landscape. A large housing development does not conform to this policy.
* The drive for new housing does not mean that policy protecting green spaces can be ignored. The suggestion that current policy can be ascribed very limited weight is incorrect. Protection for green spaces is given in the NPPF.
* An accurate figure for housing land supply needs to be finalised as this has a bearing on this application.
* The statement regarding easy access to shops and local amenities by walking and cycling is incorrect due to the distances involved and the topographic location ie. up a very steep hill.
* The local bus service provision is significantly overstated as it is inadequate for commuting purposes. Bus stops are a long way down the hill and 1km below in the valley bottom.
* The predominant mode of transport will have to be private vehicles to join the main access routes in the valley bottom on Manchester Road. This impacts on an already congested traffic situation at peak times particularly at the proposed new access which would be adjacent to the local school, and also joining Manchester Road. This has not been adequately addressed in the report and is an important sustainability issue.
* The report supports a claim for sustainability by providing a publically accessible open space. The true situation is that this is just a small piece of grass, and in reality the development would sever the green link of Fox Glen (a local wildlife site gifted to the local people) from access to the Green Belt and hence is contrary to SCC Policy G2 on Green Corridors and associated green links.
* The report has failed to address the potential ecological harm to Fox Glen Wood and does not challenge the applicant’s limited ecological study. In particular Fox Glen is already subject to flooding and the proposed development, at the head of Clough Dike will significantly affect surface water flows into Fox Glen which is the location for current ecological projects by Steel Valley Project and for schools visits.
* The report’s claim for a sustainable development is factually incorrect and this is supported by the points above. This is an inappropriate development in an inappropriate location.
* This is an outline application for the land area and access road only. Any illustrative detail provided so far may not become the reality. There is much local concern that people do not have a full picture of what type of development is being proposed. Reserved matters are incorrectly described in the Case Officer’s report as real, actual examples, but this is not the case.
* The site adjoins and surrounds, on three sides, Grade 2 listed buildings at Royd Farm and the report acknowledges that harm would be caused to their setting. The report then goes on to mitigate this harm by reference to “extra spending power of residents” and “new construction jobs”. This spurious dismissal of the harm is misplaced. Harm to local heritage is irreversible.

7. Summary.

FOHB believe the Case Officer’s Report is not balanced, lacks thoroughness, is misleading, has missed good evidence, and in some parts is wrong. The application:-

* Does not conform to current planning controls and is an inappropriate application in an inappropriate location.
* Does not conform to Sheffield City Council’s Strategy for Future Growth.
* Is not sustainable in a planning context.

Sheffield is the outdoor city, let us not spoil our protected open spaces by building on green fields appreciated by local people.

Friends of Hollin Busk July 2019