Former Hepworths Refractory Site, Loxley: Exploring Sustainable Development Solutions Workshop Report
Thursday, 13 December 2018

Chair: Rob Murfin, Chief Planning Officer, Sheffield City Council

Attending
Mark Wragg, Bradfield Cricket Club
Jim Muirhead, Bradfield Village Hall
Trevor Bagshaw, Chair, Bradfield Parish Council
Andrew Wood, CPRE
Olivia Collington, E3P Ecology
Rachel Shaw, Langlands Garden Centre
Cllr. Stephen Bennett, Bradfield Parish Council, Planning Committee Chair
Cllr. Vickie Priestley, Local Ward Member, Stannington
Andrew Charlesworth, Loxley Farm
Jane Charlesworth, Loxley Farm
David Holmes, Loxley Valley Design Statement Group
Jan Symington, Loxley Valley Preservation Group
Paul Martin, Patrick Properties
Jordan Kennedy, Patrick Properties
Paul Gordon, Sheffield City Council, Planning Service
Rob Murfin, (Workshop Chair) Sheffield City Council, Planning Service
Lee Haykoop, Vice-Chair, Sheffield Civic Trust
Keith Tomkins, Sheffield Lakeland Partnership
Nicky Rivers, Sheffield Wildlife Trust
David Rudlin, URBED
Rob Thompson, URBED
Richard Woodford, GVA How Planning
Rob Southern, Local Resident and Mountain Biker
Martin Riley
1. **Introductions**

*Rob Murfin, Sheffield City Council*

The Government’s current approach to planning effectively prioritises housing provision over other considerations, yet at the same time has reinforced the importance of Green Belts. However, it does not see all Green Belt as equal, and in particular sees brownfield sites within the Green Belt as potentially acceptable sources of housing land supply (relevant extracts from the NPPF are included at Appendix A for reference).

Sheffield needs to supply 2,000 to 2,250 homes very year between now and 2035; and about 350 working age families are leaving the city every year, at least in part due to lack of suitable homes; so we need to be open and creative about how to meet housing need. Brownfield sites are an obvious preferential choice where they can be brought forward for development to address this need.

On the other hand, this site is fairly unique. The Norton Aerodrome site (in the south of the city) fits perfectly both with the Government’s expectations of what a suitable brownfield site is, and the public’s expectations of where housing should be provided. The Hepworth’s site, in contrast, is difficult to justify for major conventional housing development due to its much more remote rural location. In principle, the site is not a suitable housing site, and so the case in favour of developing it - for housing or for any other use - is to secure an appropriate future for the site.

In this context, Sheffield City Council will not be allocating the site for housing, because to do so would put it into the general supply for housing land, and this would open the door to a generic, volume housebuilder solution that would not be appropriate. Instead, the Council is insisting that the site be dealt with by a full planning application that specifically addresses the problems of sustainability, and so that all the unique considerations of the site can be fully considered. The Council’s position is that an application on this site that is worthy of granting permission would also be worthy of winning awards.

It is good practice for significant planning applications to have a consultation process built in to the pre-application stage, i.e. while the applicant is establishing with the Council what it is they should apply for. This workshop is actually a ‘pre-pre-application’ exercise: we’re finding out what the community’s overall aspirations for the site are before the pre-application process begins. The more views we can gather at this formative stage, the better the chances of getting an application in that the community will find acceptable and the Council could approve. But this doesn’t shortcut any of the normal consultation and evidence-gathering parts of the application process, so there will be full consultation as the proposals take shape.

*Paul Martin, Patrick Properties*

Change can be scary but it’s also inevitable, so the aim is to make it a change for the better. Our ethos is to leave places better than when we arrived, and we aim to create good, sustainable places; obviously we also have to make a profit for our shareholders. We acquired the site in July 2018. Please bear in mind that the previous history of the site, including any tensions the community may have had with Bovis, are now history and we’re starting afresh. We want to have a good relationship with the community, and this workshop is part of that. Where possible, we want to build consensus on what we can do. Clearly this means engaging a lot more people than are at this workshop - this is just the first step.
Bear in mind that two-thirds of the land within our ownership will never be developed for buildings, so a key consideration is what we can do to make that non-developable land work for the community and the environment.

**Andrew Wood, CPRE**

CPRE has been involved in the story of this site for a long time - our files on it go back to at least 1995. Our interest in the Loxley Valley goes all the way back through our 90 year history, including helping to set out the Green Belt in the 1930s and the National Park in the 1950s.

We’re in no doubt that this is a unique site that doesn’t fit the general category of ‘brownfield sites first’ for development purposes. In 2005, at the time of the Bovis masterplan, we put forward a manifesto for the site which called for significant ‘greening’ of the site, exemplary development and full community participation. We’re engaged now because we want to help give Patrick Properties and URBED their best shot at devising a scheme which we, and the community, are happy with. There may not be a perfect scheme, and some compromises may be inevitable, but we all need to do our best to try and get this right.

**David Rudlin, URBED**

URBED is a multi-disciplinary planning and design consultancy, and Patrick Properties have hired us to help prepare a scheme for a planning application. We haven’t drawn anything yet - this workshop is all about building our knowledge of the community’s aspirations before we start. Consultation on design ideas will begin in the New Year.

URBED did a study of growth potential for Sheffield in 2014, and didn’t see this site as fitting that picture; so we can agree that it sits outside the growth strategy for Sheffield, and we can’t pretend that it’s a well-connected site. But the brief is to come up with a commercially viable scheme; with about £10 million of remediation costs and very limited scope for grants or other investment mechanisms, then housing-led development is the only viable and realistic land use to secure a suitable land use.

With this in mind, URBED has looked at precedent for the kinds of housing solutions that might be appropriate (some examples are included at Appendix B). These could include custom-build housing, co-housing (ie alternative development models for the housing elements); and creative ideas for the natural areas, woodland etc. Ways of reducing the car-dependency of the scheme, and preventing cars from dominating space within the site, will also be important.

The site has many interesting features: millpond, fishery, river, woodland, diverse ecology, some architectural assets, community facilities. It also has big challenges: dereliction, asbestos, possible contamination to watercourse, some ground contamination, uncapped mine workings, antisocial behaviour. There are also still some active uses: 5 cottages and one business.

2. **Initial Questions**

Several participants were concerned that housing was a pre-conceived solution. Might this squeeze out other options, including recreational uses and economic activity? It might do so, though commercial uses might run greater risks of road traffic generation. Patrick Properties wants to bring forward a residential-led scheme so we have to explore whether
a scheme that includes housing, and/or is made financially viable by way of the housing elements, can provide a good outcome for the site.

Concerns were also raised about the need for flood resilience, and to consider the potential for the site to contribute to flood management for the wider valley/catchment.

3. Break-out groups

The themes that emerged from the break-out groups were as follows. Some of them inevitably overlap, but this summary attempts to structure the ideas and concerns that were raised. Copies of the notes taken by the break-out groups are included at Appendix C.

Sustainable housing/sustainable community

- Mixed Housing solution.
- Is the site suitable for family housing? Because of access to schools and other facilities?
- What’s the vision and intention? What is the community missing, that the site could help to deliver?
- Making somewhere special is good for all kinds of outcomes, eg attracting younger families to the area, graduate retention, Sheffield’s image as a green and forward-looking place.
- Existing community assets (eg pubs, businesses, sports clubs) in the Parish aren’t getting enough users, so bringing more and younger people in is really important. Lots of them are walkable from the site, so good linkages could bring the community to life.
- Is an on-site shop a good thing or a bad thing?
- How many homes? Fewer high value/more cheaper? (Sweet Spot). “The site will dictate the number of houses”
- “Desperate need for young families” - starter homes.
- Affordable Housing.
- Can affordable housing be done without compromising the quality of the development? Is this where innovation is needed, eg shared stuff
- Lots of suggestions for co-working spaces, a ‘hub’ for homeworkers. Potential if can get bandwidth
- Self-sustaining e-housing. Shared, multi-functional play spaces, easy to supervise so children are safe (and away from cars).
- Looking for a national exemplar/precedent of what can be achieved.
- What’s the lifestyle/approach we’re aiming for?
- Catalyst to take forward rural area rather than urban area
- Renovate Claremont House as community facilities? [Claremont House is outside PP’s ownership, but PP has spoken to the owner.]
- Running Costs for facilities.

Harnessing and enhancing the woodland character

- There is ancient woodland adjacent to the site.
- The site has a woodland valley landscape character.
- The woodland is quiet and has lots of wildlife - important not to lose the tranquility.
- Concerns about light pollution.
- Future woodland management is crucial - could the Wildlife Trust be engaged in this through a levy/endowment?
- Nature should be through the whole site, not just the woodland.
- Quiet - lots of wildlife

The river
- The flood risk is not typical or well-understood, because the reservoirs and flow dynamics of the valley create a lot of variables.
- Interpretation Centre? Part of footpath network. Flood mitigation impacts on design of non-developable space, open space.
- Opportunities for flood attenuation (eg floodable zones) to assist water management in the valley?
- Renewable Energy - Water Power - New Technology
- River must be protected from pollution; sustainable drainage scheme.

Recreation, tourism and active travel
- Recreation and Tourism Diversity
- Mountain Bike Hire.
- Dog Walkers
- Outdoor Education
- Tranquil footpaths (active)
- Sports facilities, walking linkages, spacing of pubs - a lot of potential for local sustainability
- There are so many facilities and assets in the valley - there’s a real opportunity to link them up through the site - potential for sustainable recreation.
- Bradfield itself is congested with recreational parking (walkers etc); - to relieve Bradfield.
- Car Parking - separate out cars from homes. Improve pedestrian access to Stannington.
- Catalyst for rural community and environment

Transport and traffic
- Deliveries ‘hub’ to enable efficient use of online shopping etc?
- Extend tram? - can’t get to tram
- Electric shuttle bus to Malin Bridge?
- Important to separate out the cars from homes
- Community infrastructure is ‘fragile’: not only are local schools full, but they’re all uphill. Bus 31a extension. Car charging points.
- Access arrangements might conflict with the adjacent farm.

4. Closing Remarks and Next Steps
Thank you to Langlands Garden Centre for providing an excellent venue. The leftover catering will be donated to the Cathedral Archer Project for the homeless.

The workshop’s success depended on the participants entering into the spirit of its purpose, to begin the process and hopefully set the tone for a collaborative approach to devising the scheme. Therefore the crucial next steps are to open up the conversation to the wider community and to those not attending the workshop; and to get community input into the draft proposals as they emerge.

On this basis, the report of the meeting will be first agreed by the participants, and then made public. From this, the Council will produce a menu of issues for the developer to address in their formal pre-application work, and there will be public consultation on the pre-application proposals.
Appendix A  
Relevant Extracts from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Chapter 11 - Making effective use of land

117. Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land 44.

118. Planning policies and decisions should:

a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside;

b) recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;

c) give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;

d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure)45; and

e) support opportunities to use the airspace above existing residential and commercial premises for new homes. In particular, they should allow upward extensions where the development would be consistent with the prevailing height and form of neighbouring properties and the overall street scene, is well-designed (including complying with any local design policies and standards) and can maintain safe access and egress for occupiers.”

44 Except where this would conflict with other policies in this Framework, including causing harm to designated sites of importance for biodiversity. 45 As part of this approach, plans and decisions should support efforts to identify and bring back into residential use empty homes and other buildings, supported by the use of compulsory purchase powers where appropriate.

Chapter 13 - Protecting Green Belt Land

133. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

134. Green Belt serves five purposes:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

141. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

143. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

145. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

   a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
   b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
   c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
   d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
   e) limited infilling in villages;
   f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
   g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
      – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
      – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

146. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

   a) mineral extraction;
   b) engineering operations;
   c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;

e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and

f) development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.
Appendix B
Precedent Images for Housing Solutions

ABODE, CAMBRIDGE

"GREEN LANES" VILLAGE

ABODE, CAMBRIDGE

RURAL REFERENCES
INSIDE-OUT PASSIVHAUS HOUSES, KENT

FOCUS ON WALKING

LOWER MILLS, COTSWOLDS

WATERSIDE HOUSES
FARM SHOP

FOREST PLAY
Appendix C

Notes taken by Break-out Groups

- How many homes? Fewer high value / more cheaper? (Sweet spot)
- Flood risk not typical due to reservoirs & dynamics of valley.
  → Flood mitigation impacts on design of non-developable space, open space.
- Businesses, cricket club etc, not getting enough people. Community assets are essential to placemaking. If it brings more & younger people.
- Visitor access, screened car parking to relieve Bradfield.
- Sports facilities, walking linkages, spacing of pubs → a lot of potential for local sustainability.
- Facilities for home-working ‘club’
  → Catalyst for rural community & environment.
- Is an on-site shop a good or bad thing?
- What is the community missing, that the site can help to deliver?
- Schools are full.
- Renovate Claremont House? (Outside PP)
  → “The site will dictate the number of houses”
  → “Desperate need for young families.” - Starter homes?
- Affordable housing → can it be done without compromising quality? → Innovative, shared stuff?
- Landscape character of The wooded valley.
- Flooding issue – protection site & also attenuation for wider area.
- Home working – potential if we can get bandwidth.
- Graduate retention – somewhere special.
- Interpretation centre? Part of footprint
- Affordable housing.?
- Is this suitable for family housing? Because of access to schools & other facilities.
- Access & conflict with the farm.
- Running costs for facilities.
Walking distance too far from a bus stop. There are car-based.

Sustainability issues
Zero carbon housing.

Make sure that promises are followed through.

Relationship with the farm.
- Recreation + Tourism
  + Diversity.
  - Renewable Energy - Water Power - New Technology
  - Self Sustaining 'e'-Housing
  - Shared - Co-Working Space
  - Affordable Housing
  - Mixed Housing Solution
  - Traffic Gridlock / Pollution → How Can The Development Not Make It Worse

- Flood Interpretation
- Mountain Bike Hire
- Extend Tram? - Can't Get to Tram
- Can Devt Provide Eco Shuttle Bus
- No Car Parking
- Create a national precedent.
- Ancient woodland adjacent to site.
- Outdoor education
  woodland sensitivity → loss of habitat.
  dog walkers →
  Quiet - lots of wildlife.
  light pollution...
- Tranquil footpaths - Active
- Separate out cars from homes.
- Fragile community infrastructure
  schools all uphill and unwalkable. If
  dangerous no street lighting.
- Protection to river
  SUDS schemes, protection from pollution.
- Management of woodland - Wildlife Trust
  workers club - Community Hub again.
- Create a national precedent.
- Ancient woodland adjacent to site.
- Outdoor education
  Woodland sensitivity, → loss of habitat.
  Dog walkers →
  Quiet, lots of wildlife.
  Light pollution...
- Tranquil footpaths → future
- Separate out cars from homes.
- Fragile community infrastructure
  1) Schools all uphill and unapproachable.
     Dangerous. No street lighting.
- Protection to river
  SUDS schemes. Protection from pollution.
- Management of woodland → Wildlife Trust
- Workers club → Community hub again.

→ Levy + endowment for management.
- BUS 31 EXTENSION - 1 in 4 an hour.
- CAR CHARGING POINTS.

- VISION AND INTENTION

- LIFESTYLE AND APPROACH.

- SUSTAINABILITY

- FEAR OF LACK OF CONNECTIVITY
  TRANSPORT FACILITIES.

- NATURE THROUGH THE WHOLE SITE
  (NOT JUST WOODLAND).