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Forth Open Letter to Simon Vincent Service Manager

Strategic Planning Service City Futures

Sheffield City Council

Date: 4th February 2024

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your correspondence dated: 2nd January 2024.

You may remember I had a conversation with you at the S H E F F I E L D C I T Y C O U N C I L South East Local Area Committee Meeting held 11 January 2023 <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/minutes%2011012023%201900%20South%20East%20Local%20Area%20Committee.pdf>

I was the second Questionnaire: I asked many questions regarding the reintroduction of site F to the draft Sheffield Local Plan. I also made my objections.

<https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/PlanningObjections12thJanuary2023.pdf>

Extracts from 11th January 2023 Meeting: “(Michael Meredith) – So the inspector at the planning inspectorate, I suggested that Avant homes move its thing to Norton Aerodrome. Sheffield City Council’s barrister said that he thought it was a good idea. I explained that there was already funding from the government for Owlthorpe from natural England for the Owlthorpe Heritage nature trail and also there is funding to redevelop the Norton Aerodrome. Sheffield City Council’s barrister thought it was an extremely good idea.”

I had a conversation with you after the meeting 11th January 2023. I explained that I had suggested to Planning Inspector O S Woodwards regarding moving the project from Owlthorpe to the Norton Aerodrome. I explained that the MOD may be responsible for removing asbestos from the site. Roland Bolton, Strategic Planning Research Unit, Mrs Stephens, Sheffield City Council and Mrs Hull, Sheffield City Council proclaimed that Norton Aerodrome is a greenfield site so Avant Home could not transfer to that site. I disagreed. Reported in Sheffield Star March 29 2021 “Demolition finally gets underway at former air base.” Buildings have now been removed, so there was no reason why Avant Homes could not have removed their project to the Aerodrome at Norton. At the meeting you explained that Norton Aerodrome has now been introduced to the Sheffield Local Plan with a proposal to build 270 new properties. I believe that Norton Aerodrome is an excellent choice for building purposes.

Extracts from 11th January 2023 Meeting: 9. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS 9.1 The Chair advised that questions had been submitted in writing from Mr Michael Meredith. Mr Meredith would receive answers to these questions in writing. Mr Meredith advised that he still awaited written answers to previous questions submitted. The Chair assured Mr Meredith that answers would be provided in writing.

The only correspondence I have had from Karen McGowan Chair Sheffield South East Local Area Committee is this one <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/emailfromKarenMcGowan.pdf> this is my reply to Karen McGowan: <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/ReplytoKarenMcGowan.pdf> at the end of my communication, I formally request that the topic of Building in Owlthorpe is scheduled for a meeting as early as can be arranged. I have every confidence that you will notify all residents of Owlthorpe in advance of such a meeting. Thank you. Kind

Regards

Michael Meredith. Dated:4th February 2024 no such meeting has been arranged. Shame on you Karen McGowan.

At the planning Inquiry Held on 12-15, 19, and 21 January 2021 Site visit made on 20 January 2021 by O S Woodward, I explained to the inspector, Roland Bolton, Strategic Planning Research Unit, Mrs Stephens, Sheffield City Council and Mrs Hull, Sheffield City Council that in my opinion Sheffield (LPA) had prioritized building student accommodation instead of building Residential homes.

Under the freedom of information act I have asked many questions, and received answers, of the following organisations

[Secretary of State Environment](#) --- [Parliamentary Ombudsman](#) --- [Planning Inspectorate](#) --- [Coal Authority](#) --- [Natural England](#) --- [Environment Agency](#) --- [Forestry Commission](#) --- [Secretary of State Housing](#) --- [Clive Betts MP for Sheffield South East](#) --- [Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust](#) --- [Sheffield City Council Local Planning](#) --- [Sheffield South East Committee](#)

We have not received answers to the Questions asked in our correspondence to you dated:25th September 2023 + we have more questions for you:

<https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/ThirdOpenLettertoSimonVincent.pdf>

Please can you answer the following questions under the freedom of information act.

The Questions have Health and Safety implications.

Question 1: There have been several sinkholes appearing in Sheffield. When engineers investigate, they state that the problem has occurred because of rotting pit props from old mine workings. I have asked the Coal Authority Question 3. Regarding flooding, what effect does flooding have on the timber props that hold the roofs up in old mine workings that run under Owlthorpe? Coal Authority answers "We do not hold information on timber props used in old mine workings or the effect that flooding may have on them." I understand that Sheffield (LPA) holds mining records of the mines that run under Owlthorpe. We understand that millions of tons of coal were extracted from under Owlthorpe and delivered to the power station at Meadowhall. Residents of Owlthorpe have a right to know how safe the mines are that run underground. In the Reports from Lithos Consulting; Probe hole Log 18 Strata Wet between **14.2m and 18m, heavy water inflow** below 14.8 metres depth, much nearer the surface than 60 meters, reported by the Coal Authority. This problem may be caused because the land dips away from the header waters of the Ochre Dyke standing at 197.5 Metres above sea level. To Site C and D standing at 81 Metres above sea level a difference of 116 Metres. Pit head of Birly woods pit stands at 138 Metres above sea level, a difference of 57 Metres above sea level. Pit head of Moorhole Colliery stands at 116 Metres above sea level, a difference of 35 Metres. **Can you please make records of mine workings that run under Owlthorpe available on line so residents of Owlthorpe can see them?**

Question 2: Can you supply information on the state of pit props after being subject to water inflow on pit props in Owlthorpe?

Question 3: The Coal Authority and the Environment agency explain that Sheffield City Council are responsible for the Ochre that poured out of the disused mine working that runs under Owlthorpe as seen in this video. <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/Ochredyke2.mp4> Ochre deposits were found on farm land from Beighton all the way down to Fishlake. **Question 3: What are the outcomes of Ochre on the food chain?**

Question 4: In an Appeal Decision, Inquiry Held on 12-15, 19, and 21 January 2021 Site visit made on 20 January 2021 by O S Woodward BA(Hons.) MA MRTPI an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State Decision date: 2 March 2021 Quote: "**MAIN ISSUES 7. The principle of development is not in dispute between the main parties. The site is one (Site E) of three sites (Sites C, D and E) in the Owlthorpe area which have been allocated for residential development for some time, as set out in Policy H13 of the Unitary Development Plan 1998 (the UDP), and in detail in the Housing Sites (C, D, E), Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief, November 2017 (the Brief).**" Please read <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/PlanningObjections12thApril2023.pdf> At the Inquiry Richard Sager Barrister for Avant Homes belittled the <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/ecologicalsurveys.html> provided by Derek Whiteley 2010,2011 and 2012. Records added to Sheffield Biological Records Centre RECORDER database. He said that they were out of date. Derek Whiteley thought that funds had dried up and so did we. But now we find out in **Roger Marsh's petition dated: 5th October 2023 that Sheffield City Council deliberately stopped funding surveys because they wanted to develop plot C, D and**

E. <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/Printed%20minutes%2005102023%201830%20South%20East%20Local%20Area%20Committee.pdf>

Extracts from Roger Marsh's petition: "The agreement that we had with SCC was that we would be supported in this environmental work on the understanding that we would not carry out any work or object to the building of houses on Sites C, D, and E."

"SCC agreed to Celia Jackson's petition and accordingly removed Site F as housing land from the current Local Plan. Subsequently I lobbied SCC to get the release of outstanding Section 106 monies (retained by the builder of Woodland Heights housing development at Owlthorpe for 10 years). Once the £67,455 Section 106 monies had been released, we completed many planned environmental projects."

"Phase 2. We also carried out Dry Stone Wall Restoration Projects and Hedgerow Planting and Laying Projects. A large proportion of this work was paid for by grants from Sheffield South East Ward Pots."

At the planning inspector's enquiry Sheffield (LPA) were happy to put plot C, D and E up for sale. **Question 4: Can you explain why Sheffield (LPA) has allowed the deforestation of Plot E and the building of new houses. Yet plot E had the same ecology value as plot C and D?**

Question 5: Sheffield City Council put the plots of C, D and E up for sale. E has been developed. The planning inspector is expecting plot C and D to deliver 150 new properties. By removing plot C and D from the local plan has left a deficit in the local plan of 150 new homes. **Question 5: Has Sheffield (LPA) reintroduced plot F to save face with the Planning Inspectorate?**

Question 6: Facts Matter, you say that "The Council's Ecology Unit has assessed Site F as part of the site selection process and it is very different in value to the 'Owlthorpe Fields' area (Sites C and D), which are to be protected in the Local Plan as a Local Wildlife Site and Local Green Space. The Plan includes conditions on the site allocation to protect the **hedgerows and other ecologically valuable areas.**" The problem with your statement is that evidence supplied by Natural England under the freedom of information act shows that the hedgerows/ditches of very high environmental value are nowhere near site C or D. The orchard is also nowhere near plot C and D. Geography counts. <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/HigherLevelStewardshipAgreementMap.pdf> Although Sheffield City Council has received funding for many years for the maintenance of Owlthorpe the area has been neglected, the wetlands opposite Edenthorpe are completely overgrown and the Hedgerows look more like poplar trees. After so many years of neglect last year, Sheffield Countryside Conservation Trust have hosted a class on orchard pruning, they also ran a class on Hedge Laying. I was invited to observe the Hedge Laying class. These are the GPS coordinates of the hedge laying 53.337349, -1.378872 if you type into any google map you can see exactly where they are. The Hedge Laying class took place on Phase one of the Grassland grazing project, not on-site C, or site D. I have never seen any Hedgerows on site C. Can you explain where they are. **Question 6: Can you explain why you have removed site C and D and replaced them with site F without consultation with residents of Owlthorpe who know the geography of Owlthorpe, and are aware of the funding from both Sheffield City Council in the construction of our Oasis also the government funding support from Natural England for the maintenance?**

Question 7: The document supplied by Howard Baxter Sheffield (LPA) to the inspectorate bears no resemblance to the content of the Planning and Highways Committee Meeting 2nd June 2020 I observed. I made complaints to the Planning inspector. Sheffield City Council Barrister Guy Williams investigated on my behalf and arranged with Lucy Bond, Area Team Manager (City Centre & East Team) Development Management City Growth Department, for me to review. This is my report: <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/EO-18ReviewofPlanningMeeting.pdf> Extracts from the report. The planning Solicitor, Kate, explained the procedure and vote was taken with many of the committee citing traffic impact as the reason for rejecting this application. The result was 10 against with 2 abstentions. After the vote was taken Colin Walker Interim Head said "I think there is a significant risk if you throw Highways impact into this as a reason for refusal and that risk is that you effectively neutralise the site in residential terms." **If Inspector O S Woodward had reviewed the video footage I do not think building on plot E would have been granted?** I have reported Inspector O S Woodward to the Parliamentary Ombudsman for his conduct in the enquiry. Copies of the videos are available; would you like a copy? I believe Inspector O S Woodward was derelict in his duties as an independent arbitrator. I have followed the Planning Inspectorate's procedures. Copies of the videos are available; would you like a copy? The Planning Inspectorate is aware of my ongoing complaint.

Question 6: "Michael Johnson (DEL-Planning) Fri, Jun 25, 2021, 7:37 AM to me Dear Mr Meredith, I am writing to thank you for sending the below correspondence and to confirm we will respond fully with any Ombudsman enquiry

that is forthcoming. Kind regards Michael. Michael Johnson Head of Planning Sheffield City Council <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/ParliamentaryOmbudsman.pdf>” **Have you any comments to make?**

Question 7: In the Draft Planning Design Brief for Housing Sites (C, D, E), Moorthorpe Way Owlthorpe Dated: 21 February and 7th March 2014 it states on page 42: “The Coal Authority is keen to ensure that coal resources are not sterilised by new development. Where this may be the case, the Coal Authority would seek prior extraction of the Coal, removing any potential land instability problems.”

“If you wanted to cite more detail in the brief to help the implementation of the site you could add: Parts of site C, D and E are underlain by a coal outcrop which may have been worked in the past. A coal Mining Risk Assessment will need to be undertaken to assess the impact of mining legacy and determine what mitigation measures may need to be undertaken. Given the nature of the risks.” **Question 7: Do you agree with me that Sheffield (LPA) should have made it more clear to Avant Homes and Inspector O S Woodwards that coal must be removed before building takes place?**

Question 8: Can you explain why this document, [https://www.ecologicalowlthorpe.org/19_03143_FULCOAL_AUTHORITY-1401550%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.ecologicalowlthorpe.org/19_03143_FULCOAL_AUTHORITY-1401550%20(2).pdf) was not made available at the Inspectors Inquiry? This document shows the outcrop of surface coal. Was Avant Homes made aware of the outcrop of coal before they purchased the land? Was Inspector Woodwards misled about the extent of work that would need to be undertaken to make the land safe? In Inspector O S Woodwards Appeal Decision there is no mention about the fact that permission to remove surface coal must be obtained from the Coal Authority before construction can take place. **Please explain?**

Question 9: Published 30th Mar 2022, 16:16 GMT By Lucy Ashton (Sheffield Star) Sheffield MP calls for answers about new housing estate being built on top of coal Owlthorpe Fields coal Clive Betts MP v.1. <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/politics/sheffield-mp-calls-for-answers-about-new-housing-estate-being-built-on-top-of-coal-3633718> MP Clive Betts said: “Even from outside the fence, you can see coal is there and it’s not surprising given the area had coal all over the place. Until the 1970s there was an opencast mine just over the hill. It does appear from an external inspection that the foundations have been built on or just above the coal measures.” Many residents of Owlthorpe have witnessed and taken photographic evidence of this fact. I have asked the following questions of the Coal Authority. <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/TheCoalAuthority3rdJan2024.pdf> (1) How will coal be extracted from under these properties? (2) Will new properties have to be jacked up to remove coal? (3) Will new properties have to be demolished and rebuilt? **Please could you comment on this situation?**

Question 10: At the planning Inquiry Held on 12-15, 19, and 21 January 2021 Site visit made on 20 January 2021 by O S Woodwards, I explained to the inspector, Roland Bolton, Strategic Planning Research Unit, Mrs Stephens, Sheffield City Council and Mrs Hull, Sheffield City Council that in my opinion Sheffield (LPA) had prioritized building student accommodation instead of building Residential homes. With the demolition of Hyde Park flats. Hyde Park was made up of 1,313 dwellings including 665 flats and 648 maisonettes and housed around 4,600 people. Also, the demolition of the high-rise flats in Gleadless Valley. **Do you agree with me that the shortage of housing in the city centre is the result of Historic bad planning?**

Question 11: SUDS system: Facts Matter: “In the site visit we also passed by the spot where the **SUDS system** would be, the path had turned into a river that we all had to paddle through.” 23 October 2023 reported By Victoria Scheer **BBC News** The flooding created by Storm Babet took just hours to overwhelm defences and make its way into homes in Catcliffe. As shown in this video: <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/MoothorpeGatepedestrianunderpassFlooding.mp4> The **SUDS system** in Owlthorpe failed and water overflowed into the Ochre Dyke increasing the contribution to downstream flooding. **Question: What are you going to do to rectify this very dangerous situation?**

Question 12: As a result of COVID many employees have been working from home. This works especially well for moms with young children, they can fit work around looking after their children. Many employers have realized that they no longer need expensive office space. Many companies are not renewing their leases on office space. **My Question is, can offices be converted into residential properties?** Empty offices do not generate revenue for Sheffield City Council.

Question 13: With the expansion of on-line selling, many retail outlets are redundant. **My Question, can retail outlets be turned into residential?** Empty retail outlets do not generate revenue for Sheffield City Council.

Question 14: When students leave University, they explain that they would prefer to rent and live in the City Centre not the suburbs. **My Question, should Sheffield (LPA) build more new houses in the city centre or continue to destroy the suburbs?**

More questions will follow.

Regarding my complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, I had an in-depth conversation, last week with my Intake Caseworker at the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman he explained that they are happy to accept new evidence that has come to light after the Planning Enquiry. I have been through the complaint procedure with the Planning Inspectorate. They are aware that I am not satisfied with their internal investigation of Inspector O S Woodwards enquiry.

Although protocol states that you are able to bring your complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman via your MP, my Intake Caseworker is aware that MP Clive Betts although requests have been made on many occasions my MP Clive Betts has not forwarded my complaint. <https://www.ecological-owlthorpe.org/CliveBetts24thAugust2023.pdf> in the last entrance, of my communication with MP Clive Betts dated: 24th August 2023, I request yet again,

“Clive, I ask again, please sign off on my request to the Parliamentary Ombudsman so he can start his enquiries. Thank you for your Attention Kind Regards Michael Meredith”

I am reliably informed by my Intake Caseworker if MP Clive Betts continues to block my complaint, I must report him.

<https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/>

Thank You for your attention

Kind Regards

Michael Meredith