

I have lived in the Loxley valley for nearly thirty years, and I also have experience of working in the Marshalls refractory works in the valley when the old factories were still in full production in the 1970s. I am submitting this objection on behalf of the Loxley Valley Design Group (LVDG), who have been involved in discussions about the future of the factories since the early years of this century. Members of the Design Group met recently to discuss the applicants' plans. They were unanimous in opposing them. They agreed that the LVDG would from now on work in close partnership with the newly formed Friends of the Loxley Valley group (FoLV). I am now a member of the FoLV management committee. The LVDG would like this objection to be read alongside the more detailed submission presented separately by FoLV

In 2003 I was one of a team of four people who edited and designed the Loxley Valley Design Statement. We were tasked by our LVDG colleagues with putting into words a vision for this precious and beautiful valley and how it might evolve over time and in keeping with its sensitive location on the edge of the Peak District National Park. Publication of the Design Statement followed an extensive public consultation process that spanned three years and embraced extensive community involvement. The process was originally initiated by Bradfield Parish Council. Elements of the Design Statement have been adopted by both Sheffield City Council and the Peak District National Park Authority, i.e. the two planning authorities with jurisdiction over the Loxley valley. These adopted elements have continuing status as supplementary planning guidance.

I have posted a digital pdf copy of the Loxley Valley Design Statement alongside this objection. It can also be read or downloaded here via the Friends of the Loxley Valley website: <https://friendsoftheloxleyvalley.com/loxley-valley-design-statement/> A hard copy of the Design Statement was given to representatives of the Patrick Properties team at the two "stakeholder meetings" in December 2018 and December 2019. A pdf copy was also emailed to them during the "community consultation period" at the turn of the last year.

The Design Statement was launched at the Royal Hotel in Dungworth, at an event attended by our then MP Helen Jackson, and by the Countryside Agency. At the event, the Countryside Agency praised our document as the most ambitious village design statement they had seen. They also praised the community consultation process as a model of its type. That was a considerable source of pride for the Loxley Valley Design Group. Over 15 years later, we are still able to look back on the Design Statement with pride, and with confidence that it remains relevant to the issues facing the valley and reflective of local people's views towards these issues.

The Design Statement is a broad document, addressing strategic socio-economic policy issues on the one hand, and detailed prescriptive design issues on the other. On pages 9-10 it details why transport and communications are delicate, sensitive and difficult once the valley moves beyond the built city (i.e. beyond the existing Loxley and Stannington conurbations). On pages 13-18 it details how the "beyond the city" part of the valley has evolved in a charmingly sustainable and vernacular way over several centuries of change, clustered around small and widely scattered settlements with highly distinctive characteristics. Pages 19 to 24 of the document deal with how the valley might cope with change, including the central challenge of redeveloping the abandoned old factory complex, (most of page 22 is devoted to this, and makes clear the community's overwhelming opposition to the type of "new village/township" major housing estate that is now being proposed).

In December 2018, I was invited to speak for the Design Statement and to help to provide community input into the first "stakeholder" meeting that was held at Langlands garden centre. I listened with cautious optimism as the then chief planning officer Rob Murfin introduced what he hoped would be another detailed community consultation process. He said this process could

possibly precede a full planning application that would deliver an outstanding project of award-winning potential, befitting a uniquely sensitive location. He said the meeting would mark the start of detailed discussions that would explore in the round whether it would be possible to develop the site in a sustainable way, while acknowledging that one possible outcome was that no such solution could be identified. The meeting felt a bit tight on time after extensive introductions, and “stakeholder” involvement was largely restricted to a few hurried scribbles on flipcharts with groups of people who did not all seem fully familiar with either the valley or the site. That notwithstanding, it seemed a reasonable first step. There were grounds for encouragement and optimism in the minutes of the meeting. These minutes said that the crucial next steps would be to open up the conversation to the wider community to enable a collaborative approach.

A year later, just before the Christmas and New Year break, with no intermediate communication or consultation, Patrick Properties announced that there was to be no full planning application. Instead, they were reconvening the stakeholder meeting at short notice to announce proposals for a large residential estate of up to 350 houses. They were seeking only outline planning permission, and in the absence of a suitable development partner were proposing to sell any ensuing permission on to builders who would then attempt to secure their own detailed planning permission. Given the short and unexpected timescale, the stakeholder meeting was poorly attended. Given the magnitude of this announcement and the shortage of time, discussion was essentially limited to asking questions of the applicants, to try to find out more about the detail of the proposals.

A few days later, the proposals were made available to the wider public at a drop-in session at Stannington community centre. I attended, as did many of my neighbours and friends. Everybody I have spoken to since has said they were angry and disappointed that a supposed process of community engagement had failed to materialise. Instead they were presented with proposals for a large and remote new housing estate incapable of sustaining itself through local facilities, and dependent on long vehicle journeys for its everyday needs. This is very much the outcome we warned against in the Loxley Valley Design Statement.

The proposal as now submitted for planning approval is for slightly fewer houses, but it is essentially the same proposal that caused so much disquiet in the local community at the turn of the year. It is no surprise that at the time of writing it has attracted 741 objections from local people and from a wide range of concerned organisations, local councillors and MPs.

The proposal has some limited but marginal merits which might attract support if they were part of a more imaginative, consensual and visionary solution for this unique site, for example communal broadband working, low energy building and some elements of responsive low impact lighting. But in all key respects, this is an unsustainable residential enclave that moves the inhabited city deep into a key Green Belt corridor and to the very doorstep of the Peak District National Park. It is precisely what the city should not countenance as it tries to tackle the climate breakdown emergency. It will be a new township without a heart, dwarfing the existing Loxley valley settlements of Dungworth, Storrs, Holdworth, Stacey Bank, Low and High Bradfield, Load Brook and Ughill.

The arguments against it have been very well summarised in the detailed document submitted separately by FoLV, which the LVDG endorses and supports. We would underline the following observations based on local knowledge and underpinned by the points that we summarised in the Loxley Valley Design Statement:

- The proposed new township has negligible on-site services and is remote. It will be over dependent on private vehicle journeys for access to shops, schools, doctors' surgeries, workplaces and the numerous other places that people will need to access in their daily routines;
- These vehicle journeys are likely to raise the city's carbon footprint and will add to already unsustainable pressures of congestion and pollution at Malin Bridge and at other local traffic bottlenecks;
- More sustainable, active, modes of local transport are fraught with difficulty and hazardous. For example, as outlined in the Design Statement, access on foot or by cycle to one of the nearest primary schools (Bradfield Dungworth) is indirect, hilly, dangerous and dark. Similar considerations apply in accessing the nearest local shopping centre at Stannington and to the Nook Lane primary school;
- The 52a bus route proposed by the applicants as a public transport solution is notoriously slow, indirect, unreliable and underused. We fail to see how making the journey even longer and slower will persuade people to use it. We would not expect significant passenger take-up, and we doubt its long-term viability;
- Compared to other, smaller, local settlements, this new township will have little to create community heart or soul. For example, Dungworth, a much smaller settlement, has a school, a village hall, a public house and a recreation ground all within safe walking distance of all its sixty or so houses. Low and High Bradfield sustain two public houses, a church, a village hall, public toilets, a cricket pitch and pavilion, a tennis club, two cafes, a post office and a car repair business, again all within walking distance. Even the tiny settlement of Stacey Bank is centred around a public house and a garden centre.
- There are very real, demonstrable flood risks on site. In 2007, much of the site was under surging floodwater. Parts of the site were frequently washed over during the exceptional rainfall of last winter. This flood plain is not a suitable place to build mass housing when other, dry, sites are in adequate supply in the city.
- While street lighting on the site may be subdued, we fear that it will still be visible from the surrounding hillside communities. The same goes for internal and external lights in/on the houses themselves and from vehicle movements. The new township is likely to add to light pollution from the inhabited city and to extend it intrusively, deep into the heart of the Green Belt.
- As has been outlined in many other objections, it is now nearly thirty years since the factories were in active production. During these years, and during the 16 years since we published the Design Statement, they have been largely reclaimed by nature and enclosed by trees. Although they are undeniably ugly and decrepit in places, they now host a thriving ecological system that includes numerous birds and animals including barn owls, dippers, herons, badgers, foxes, roe deer, wagtails, ducks and geese, coots, moorhens, and several species of bat, to name but a few. This localised ecosystem within and around the buildings does of course co-depend on the neighbouring ancient woodlands, fields, moors and national park. A healthy ecosystem in the one place helps to sustain a healthy ecosystem in the others. Conversely, damage or removal of the one will impact on the others. This "naturalising" of the long-abandoned factories requires exceptionally imaginative stewardship and reuse, not the wholesale removal and destruction represented by this planning application.

These problems represent very real worries for the local community. It may be that they are not all insurmountable, but we are not able to know this because we have had no opportunity to explore or

discuss them in detail. The promised exploration of whether there is a sustainable way of developing this site never materialised. As outlined in the Design Statement, redevelopment of this site represents a massive change for the valley that will have multifaceted ramifications down the years. As things stand, these proposals are not consistent with the community's aspirations as voiced in the Design Statement. While the old factories in their present state are unsightly, they are in most respects a passive and undamaging presence. Rather than rush into a huge mistake now, most local people would prefer to leave things as they are and to spend more time properly discussing a consensual solution that will command support. This is made very clear by the torrent of hundreds of passionate and eloquent local objections, produced in the middle of the coronavirus epidemic when we have not even been able to hold community meetings to discuss things.

We would urge the applicants to pause this destructive adversarial process at this stage and to engage properly in the consultative process that we were led to believe was underway in 2018. If they choose to press ahead, we urge our city councillors to reject this application unreservedly. We hope that might force common sense to prevail so that local "stakeholders" can reconvene to explore a genuinely sustainable solution. We would hope that this could achieve a satisfactory outcome for the community, while at the same delivering a reasonable financial return for the site's owners. Given patience, imagination, determination, proper exploration of the city's many intellectual resources and potential funding partnerships, there is no reason to believe this could not happen. This would be in keeping with this remarkable gateway site linking 'The Outdoor City' to the national park on our doorstep. We believe there is the potential to create something truly wonderful that would make a bold and visionary statement about Sheffield's Outdoor City credentials, and about the city's commitment to sustainability. The Loxley valley and its people deserve better than the imposed solution submitted in this planning application!