

The round table event regarding housing supply.

Attendees to the housing supply round table meeting

Inspector O S Woodward

Richard Sager, Barrister for Avant Homes

Guy Williams, Barrister for Sheffield City Council

Roland Bolton, Strategic Planning Research Unit

Mrs Stephens, Sheffield City Council

Mrs Hull, Sheffield City Council

Michael Meredith, Ecological Owlthorpe

Mr Woods of (OAG) was invited by the inspector, but declined to attend

After reading Government Statements by the Secretary of State, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and Natural England, regarding support for upstream nature-based solutions to combat climate change and stop downstream flooding, I thought the inspector would be interested in a proposal I made to the inspector at this inquiry.

I do have an interest in architecture as my father was a Draftsman/Estimator and I do support the construction of new housing. My only concern is that they are constructed in areas that do not increase flooding downstream.

I suggested to the inspector that Avant Homes should move their project to the disused Aerodrome at Norton, which is a Brownfield site by definition boasting many derelict buildings in need of redevelopment. I explained that the MOD may be responsible for removing asbestos from the site. Reported in Sheffield Star March 29th 2021 "Demolition finally gets underway at former air base." Buildings have now been removed, so there is no reason why Avant Homes cannot remove their project to the Aerodrome at Norton.

I thought this would be a win win situation for all concerned and would conform with the statement announced by the Secretary of State. When I requested that the inspector should suggest this to the Secretary of State he said "speaking to the Secretary of State is above his pay grade." This is very concerning as the inspector is supposed to be appointed by the Secretary of State. Guy Williams Barrister acting for Sheffield City Council thanked me for trying to obtain funding from two separate government funds. Unofficial feedback from the Labour held SCC to my suggestion was very negative with comments such as "we are not going to except handouts from the Tory Government." It seems to me that SCC would rather cut off their noses to spit their faces rather than accepting funds from central government.

I suggested that Sheffield (LPA) had caused a shortage in social housing by neglecting it whilst concentrating on student accommodation. I asked what was happening to Park Hill Flats which were built as social housing. Residents fondly called it "streets in the skies." Although some of it has been re-developed, Roland Bolton, Strategic Planning Research explained the rest is to be made into student accommodation. I rest my case.

I had retail premises in the London Road area of Sheffield, which was a thriving economy because of a Ford main car dealership and repair centre, a night club and other manufacturing and retail outlets. Most of this made way for a student accommodation complex. At a local interest open day

held by Carillion to show the community what to expect the complex to look like when developed, one business man was interested in occupying the vacated Ford premises for his own manufacturing company which would have employed 800 staff. Carillion were optimistic that their development would be approved. However, the business man predicted,

‘ You are building slums of the future, because when the student bubble bursts (and it will), you will be left with empty real estate. It will not easily convert to social housing’. He was met with derision by both the Council and Carillion, who have incidentally gone out of business. Recent events have proven him right. The student bubble is close to collapse because of recent Covid-19 pandemic, with many students on rent strike and much of the accommodation currently empty. Future university accommodation is in jeopardy as distant learning might well become the norm for the foreseeable future.

The BBC have taken up the story and interviewed on or two of the remaining students in accommodation who are struggling to make ends meet. They are not happy and ask why they could not have completed their degree by video conferencing method. Please look at this BBC video.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=467326297599930>

The Council also turned the night club into a Sainsbury’s and a Wilkinson’s to support the students; this was a massive loss to the local economy. Many who met their husband or wife in the night club for the first time were disappointed at its closure. Today, both Wilkinsons and Sainsburys have closed these branches, not because of Covid-19, but because they are not financially viable.

I was a member of the London Road Business Forum. After the completion of the Forge Student complex many of the local businesses complained that the students stay in their own enclave and do not mix with the local community or contribute to the local economy. I took their concerns up with the then local MP Richard Caborne and I communicated with the chair of Unite, who own the complex. This was to no avail. Before these complexes were built, monies raised from the rentals profited Sheffield. The rents now go to multi-glomerates with Sheffield missing out on this revenue. This is not good for local businesses or the Council.

Whilst teaching I placed many of my technical students in universities and school and various companies. One student explained how he had

installed video conferencing equipment in the board room in the company where he worked enabling the owner to attend meetings without having to fly back to the UK. This was the early stages of video conferencing. Many of my students were involved in the helping with the transference of paper documents to digital format from council and education departments.

University Students were given space on the University server together with log in details to enable them to leave work for lecturers to assess. Lecturers at Hallam University were taught how to use Video Conference equipment. This has been useful for distant learning with many foreign students being able to attend University whilst still living abroad.

Many of the students attending University say that the tuition for their degree is for only two or three lectures a week, which could easily transfer to video conferencing. Thus, no need to pay for student accommodation. It is worth remembering it is the lecturer and the students that produce the degree. In many cases, the premises are no longer relevant. Many students come to university for the 'University Experience' and still want to come, but by using video conferencing they can save on rental accommodation. This needs to be taken into account by not only Sheffield (LPA) but by all (LPA's) Feedback from students and lecturers is very positive with regard to video conferencing. Students say they can get a one-to-one with their lecturer, normally impossible in the classroom situation. Lecturers say they can deliver their lecture to the whole class and then have one-to-ones with students or with groups of students working on different projects. All positive, but not for student accommodation. My wife uses Zoom technology on a daily basis. Within the meetings there can be as little as 25 attendees or up to 100 spread over a number of tiles. The technology is just like this inquiry. Many companies are evaluating whether their office space is still needed. I fear that there will be many empty office blocks in the near future which would have a profound effect on the building industry. With the closure of many of the leading High Street brands and premises there will be millions of square feet of retail space no longer required. Will these converts to housing requirements? This is a conundrum for all LPA to tackle in the near future.

Government directive states constantly the need to save precious greenspaces and utilise brownfield sites instead. Norton aerodrome fits the criteria as an excellent site for Avant Homes as a viable alternative to the proposed Owlthorpe development.

