

CLOSING STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Broomhill Action and Neighbourhood Group is a local residents association with limited resources in terms of money and manpower -- typical of many voluntary organisations in this country. As we expected, having Rule 6 status for this appeal has been extremely demanding for us. But we felt we had to ensure we could play a full part in the process for the sake of our members, the community of Broomhill and the wider city, because we believe the Tapton site is so important and because we wanted to ensure that importance was fully represented. Throughout this process our task has been made even more demanding by factors including the submission of parallel applications, multiple revisions (even during this appeal), the frequent malfunctioning of the City Council's own website and other problems.

Our motivation to become involved was strengthened by the apparent strong presumption by the City Council in favour of any building development proposed by the University of Sheffield. In the case of the Tapton site, how else can one account for the disregarding of the views of the Sheffield Conservation Advisory Group and the Sheffield Urban Design Review Panel in respect of the proposals put forward and the marginalisation of experts such as the principal conservation and design officer, Craig Broadwith, in considering the planning application?

The SCAG concluded on 27 February 2007 that: 'The proposed scheme would be over-development of the site and would have a severely damaging impact on the character of the conservation area'.

In its report on 28 June 2007 the UDRP said: 'The current proposals failed to achieve the required quality of development on such an important site'.

And Craig Broadwith has voiced similar opinions, including: 'What may have been acceptable in the wider context is rendered unacceptable in relation to them being undertaken within the Broomhill Conservation Area'.

We agree wholeheartedly with these assessments. In the case of the City Council we feel entitled to add: 'Better late than never', but we also feel we should now

congratulate the Council team on the strong, well-argued case that they have presented to this inquiry.

In any event, we are here now with an opportunity to finally lay to rest what we consider to be a misconceived project that would harm the conservation area and cause the loss of an important historic garden.

THE SITE, DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Taptonville Road is one of the main features of the Taptonville character area within the Broomhill Conservation Area. It was planned and developed in its entirety by John Hobson, whose family lived in Tapton Elms (Hadow House) for many years. Tapton Elms and its gardens and coach-house were sited at the top of the site, and the falling land to the south ensured uninterrupted views in that direction. All the houses to the south of Tapton Elms survive virtually unchanged, and the 'outstanding historic ambience' of the street is recognised as a conservation priority in the Broomhill Conservation Area Appraisal recently published. The same report says that 'Taptonville Road and Crescent is one of the highlights of the Conservation Area'. John Betjeman's admiration for Broomhill is well known, and it is likely that the Taptonville villas were in his mind when he made his comments.

So any development on this land has to be designed and sited with utmost respect for its surroundings, both built and natural, if the unique features and ambience are to be retained and not spoiled.

It has been accepted by virtually everyone who has spoken on the subject during this inquiry that Taptonville Road and the Taptonville character area more widely are characterised by large residences set in substantial plots, clearly separated from each other, set well back from the highway and broadly on the same level as the street. They are impressive but never dominating or aggressive when viewed from the highway.

By contrast, the houses proposed for the southern part of the site are closely spaced, set close to the highway and on land that is well above street level. The effect would be dominating, even aggressive – quite unlike the effect of the existing Victorian properties in the Taptonville character area. The views both down and up

Taptonville Road would be permanently damaged, as would the setting of Tapton Elms itself.

It is the character and ambience of the Taptonville area that have to be the guiding criteria when considering what is suitable for the southern part of the site. The development proposed here faces entirely in that direction, with only a pedestrian access provided from Hoole Road. So any connection between the houses proposed for the 'Experimental Gardens' and the existing housing on Hoole Road, Spooner Road, etc is tenuous in the extreme. This factor is relevant for design, layout, materials, densities and virtually all other matters when judging the application. The test for whether the development proposed for the Experimental Gardens is suitable is: does it preserve the character and ambience of the Taptonville character area? Or is it alien and damaging?

BANG agrees with the Conservation Area Appraisal report that Taptonville Road not only falls squarely within the concept of the Taptonville character area to which it gives its name but is the jewel of that character area and, indeed of the whole Conservation Area. It would be irresponsible to reduce its quality by way of an inappropriate comparison with roads that do not share its special characteristics.

The definition of the building line has also been an issue. While there are not several houses along the east side of Taptonville Road conveniently providing a clear line for development, Tapton Elms itself does provide a guide, as does 24 Taptonville Road, and the regularity of development on the west side of Taptonville Road gives a definite sense of an appropriate set-back distance. The proposals take account of none of these.

Behind the tall houses fronting Taptonville Road, the terrace crescent is presented by the appellants as a 'landmark building'. This approach is totally inappropriate in a conservation area, as new buildings should harmonise with their surroundings, and in the case of this part of the proposed application the properties would dominate the views from the so-called 'arboretum'.

In response to the two 'reasons for refusal' in relation to the line of trees and the internal walls of the walled garden, the appellants have proposed some lateral re-positioning of the properties fronting on to Taptonville Road and of the access road to them. We believe this simply makes the situation worse by cutting Tapton Elms

off from its original setting by driving a road through the garden in front of the house's main elevation. In a previous version of the application, the appellants commended the fact that Tapton Elms would be re-connected with its original garden, but even that prospect has been removed by the latest revision.

What the appellants have simply failed to acknowledge is that the constraints of the site and the unique setting are incompatible with the number and type of properties, including terraces and apartment blocks quite alien to the Taptonville character area, that they wish to cram into the space.

THE HISTORIC GARDENS

The connection of Tapton Elms and its gardens with the prominent Hobson family, the Sheffield cutlery industry, social developments in the mid-Victorian era and other matters is important and interesting both locally and more widely. As Joan Sewell stated, the gardens do justify inclusion on the local schedule of Historic Parks and Gardens and indeed would probably already be included if Sheffield Council had been able to fund a full evaluation of these spaces within the city. As it is, the gardens are now going through the Council's evaluation process.

In Mrs Sewell's judgment, the gardens represent the scale and style of a 19th century villa garden, with surviving boundary walls and other features. She is firmly of the view that the intention of the original layout of Tapton Elms gardens is still evident, and it is notable that for the most part they have been in continuous horticultural use now for some 150 years. However, the proposed development, by building on this historic designed landscape, would affect the setting of Tapton Elms and destroy the meaning and integrity of the garden layout. Building the six four-bedroom villas within the walled garden would render the walls and entrances meaningless, dwarfed by the scale of the structures and disconnected from the historic purpose for which they were built.

The footprint of many of the buildings now on the site (glasshouses, Portakabin-type laboratories, rifle range, etc) is very light in terms of their construction and visibility from the public highway. These structures have either no or very shallow foundations, and only a small proportion of the original garden surface has been

excavated. Restoration would not be conjectural, since the original layout is accurately documented on large-scale maps.

Visually, below the two duplex blocks there is no sense of development when viewed from the street, but rather one of open space and spaciousness – exactly the effect desired and achieved by John Hobson in 1853.

Despite having access to the full archive of documents relating to the site, Philip Grover has not fully understood the history of Tapton Elms and its occupation by successive generations of the Hobson family. As a result he has made a number of unsubstantiated claims about their intentions for later development of the site. His evidence on the usage of the walled kitchen garden is inconsistent with the known facts and documentary evidence, as Joan Sewell's more thorough historical landscape appraisal has demonstrated.

He also claims that the proposed development will meet the objectives of 'retention and enhancement of the mature landscape core of the site' and 'enhancement of the setting of its key buildings'. These claims are totally rejected by BANG and have also been rejected by Sheffield's Conservation Advisory Group.

The presence of some buildings of indifferent quality on the appeal site is not a reason to construct more of them. The proposed new buildings do not reflect the form, massing, scale or individual character of the remainder of the street.

THE FUTURE

At various points during this inquiry the appellants have raised the question: What would happen to this site if this appeal was refused? And in particular, could BANG's vision of a restored garden open to the public, used by local schools, etc actually be realised? Mr Williamson repeatedly said: 'There's not much money about!' In fact, a considerable amount of money is available for open spaces, particularly in urban areas. This activity is a priority for many organisations, including the Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Just last Sunday Weston Park, just a mile away from the Tapton site, re-opened after having £2.5 million of Heritage Lottery Funds spent on it. Around £6.5 million

has been spent on Sheffield Botanical Gardens, again mostly from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Several other open spaces in Sheffield have been restored or improved with financial help from charitable funds, ranging from tens of thousands of pounds to over a million. And we should not forget the section 106 money generated by major developments taking place in and around Broomhill.

We are confident that our vision for a public park on the former gardens of Tapton Elms is realistic and achievable, given the commitment and expertise available in our community as well as the funding potentially available.

CONCLUSION

In 1975 a planning inquiry was held in Sheffield to consider an application to demolish the Lyceum Theatre, which was then unused and in a bad state of repair. However, the Secretary of State at the time refused permission for it to be demolished, and today it is one of the city's most important assets. The Tapton gardens, despite their unkempt condition and unfortunate recent history, could also make a valuable contribution in many ways to the lives of Sheffield's citizens.

Since the start of the appeal process much detailed information about the history and character of the site has come to light, and this must now be used to inform the planning process in the future. Above all, it is important to conserve John Hobson's vision of a coherent, elegant and spacious suburban landscape of distinctive character that makes an important contribution to the Broomhill Conservation Area.

Robert Peel, design manager for Miller Homes, described this parcel of land as a 'challengingly constrained site in a unique setting'. That is a fair and accurate description. Unfortunately, the appellants have failed to meet those challenges, and it is for that reason that we ask you to reject this appeal.

Thank you.

Broomhill Action and Neighbourhood Group

6 June 2008