

NO!

TO THE LOXLEY VALLEY TOWNSHIP!

A COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE LOXLEY VALLEY

June 2005

Dear Neighbour,

We are writing to you as a group of concerned local organisations, to urge you to make your voice heard if you value your local environment. You may be aware that a construction company, Bovis Homes, have bought the old Hepworths factory site in the valley bottom and are talking of putting 500 houses on it. We believe this would be a disaster for the valley, and we intend to fight it.

On July 6th, Bovis will discuss their ideas in public for the first time, when they hold a consultation meeting at Wisewood School. If you are as concerned as we are about the Loxley Valley, we would urge you to go along. In the rest of this letter, we will set out what we know about the situation so far.

We met the Bovis regional land director Terry Hyldon earlier this year to ask about his company's plans for the site. He told us they would like to put around 500 houses there, but that this number could vary slightly as they worked on more detailed ideas. He said the site would be expensive to clear, and that the company would need a large development to make a commercial return.

We made it very clear to Mr Hyldon that there are no valid planning grounds for building what would amount to a new township, This is a green belt site on the edge of a national park. Although it has already been built on, planning law states clearly that any further development should be minimal, and should improve the local environment. Five hundred houses would not do that!

It would devastate the valley, effectively moving the Sheffield commuter belt deep into open countryside. The neighbouring communities of Stacey Bank, Storrs and Dungworth would be dwarfed. The valley would be swamped by traffic. If you think the Malin Bridge bottleneck is bad now, can you imagine what it would be like with a thousand extra cars piling down Loxley Road? There would also be well over a thousand extra people in the valley, putting great pressure on local resources like schools and doctors' surgeries.

We have written to Bovis, and to the planning department, setting out the case against a new township. Sheffield has enough housing land in the existing built-up area to meet the city's needs until 2016. There is simply no need for new housing estates in valued countryside. We recognise that the ugly old factories need cleaning up urgently. But there is no need to build on the scale Bovis want.

We understand that they paid around £1m to buy the site, (but with a promise of more money if they get permission for a large housing estate!) We have been told by an environmental consultant that it should cost no more than £3m to clean the place up. This means Bovis should be able to turn a profit on the site if they can cover total costs of around £4m. We have put these figures to Bovis, who so far have not disputed them

At our meeting, Mr Hyldon told us the cost of building each house would not be more than £95,000. With similar houses on the Acorn Hill estate currently changing hands for around £250,000, this means they should stand to make about £150,000 on each house they sell. So they would need to build only 30 houses to clear their costs and turn a profit! If they were to build as many as 500, they would make around £70m - we reckon that's a return of nearly 2,000% on their investment. Not bad work if you can get it – but it would be the valley that would carry the full cost!

Of course, Bovis could be playing the numbers game. Make an opening bid with the outrageous figure of 500 houses, and it doesn't sound half as bad when you eventually compromise at, say, 200. We will not play this game. We believe there is no case for any mass housing in the valley. We have asked Bovis to meet us again to look at a more realistic small-scale mixed use development that would green the valley, but we have not yet had a full reply. We think there is potential to do something groundbreaking, in keeping with the principles laid down by the community in the Loxley Valley Design Statement, that would make the most of this stunningly beautiful setting.

In the meantime, we must use the meeting on July 6th as an opportunity to express the views of the community loudly and clearly. It is being held at the Wisewood secondary school, on Rural Lane. Bovis are holding an "open forum" from 2pm to 5pm, (you might ask how they expect working people to get there!). Then from 7pm to 8pm they are staging a public presentation and giving people chance to ask questions. Please be there if you can, and make them fully aware of the strength of local opinion.

Yours sincerely,

***The Loxley Valley Protection Society
The Loxley Valley Design Group
Bradfield Parish Council
The Campaign to Protect Rural England***