

SITE NWS31

REVIEW OF SCC SUITABILITY ASSESSMENT &
PLANNING APPRAISAL



Rev.01

Wharncliffe Side – Let's Breathe

6/1/2025

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this review is to highlight some of the considerations that may have been missed, inaccuracies and potential flaws in Sheffield City Council's Suitability Assessment and Planning Appraisal in relation to Site NWS31 in Wharncliffe Side.

Sheffield City Council have put this site forward for declassification of Greenbelt status with a view to building a proposed 103 new homes with a 50% affordable homes ratio.

Having reviewed the Suitability Assessment and Planning Appraisal, it raises some questions as to how the Council has come to some of the conclusions they have made.

In some areas the assessment and appraisal contradict each other with statements around affordable housing of up to 25% and 45%.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that a minimum of 50% must be achieved to comply with Greenbelt Golden Rules.

Having local knowledge of the area some of the assessments are inaccurate or have not been considered thoroughly. It may be the case that some of the assessments are left a little ambiguous with a view to further detailed reports, surveys and investigations being carried out a later date, relying on a developer or housebuilder to conduct these and make financial contributions to undertake these.

It is likely that if some of this additional information was currently available, Sheffield Council would have a more accurate Suitability Assessment that would deem the site NWS31 unsuitable for inclusion in the Local Plan.

These are due to several factors, including, but not limited to:

- Loss of Green Belt
- Loss of Green Space and recreational area
- Adverse impact to ecology and biodiversity
- Adverse impact to an area of flood mitigation
- Adverse impact to local infrastructure, transport & road networks & local schools provision
- Lack of amenity and distances to local convenience
- Adverse impact on GP surgery and healthcare provision
- Adverse impact on mental health and wellbeing of the local community

The following review picks out key elements in **Section 1: SCC Suitability Assessment** and **Section 2: Planning Appraisal**, as stated by SCC, with comments following each of these key points.

Copies of the original Suitability Assessment and Planning Appraisal are included as appendices.

SECTION 1: Review of SCC Suitability Assessment for Site NWS31 (Pages 40-41)

Items in **BOLD** are the comments taken from SCC's own assessment

1. Transport

****SCC Assessment - Site more than 1200m from the Core Public Transport Network, Site beyond 400m of an existing or proposed route which is at LTN 1/20 standard, Site is beyond 400m of planned bus network improvement or 800m of planned tramrail network improvement***

Poor transport links. Bus services 5, 7, 57a reduced timetable, removal of 58 bus SL1 & SL1a Supertram Link Buses. Remaining bus provision hourly 57 & 57a Mon to Saturday & 2 hourly bus service on Sundays. The proposed tram/ train development to Sheffield is likely to miss Wharncliffe Side if the existing train line through Wharncliffe Woods is utilised. It will be too far to walk, Oughtibridge would be over 30 mins walk (approx 1.5km) and Deepcar is around. 55 mins walk (approx. 4km)

2. Potential to provide family housing

****SCC assessment - site is in a part of the city where development viability is higher - potentially means up to 25% of the new homes could be affordable homes and that NWS31 could provide 30-40 homes per hectare density area.***

This seems high and fails to consider the extent of developable land once all ecological buffers, heritage mitigation zones, provision of green spaces and retained access paths are accounted for. This would likely be reduced to around 20 houses per hectare or less making the scheme commercially unviable.

The Golden Rules for Greenbelt housing are for a minimum of 50% affordable housing. The assessment fails the test on this assessment.

3. Availability of local facilities and education capacity

****SCC assessment - site within 800m of 4 classes of local facility / Current surplus capacity for Early years, Primary and Secondary education***

There is a primary school, a part time post office and a chapel. No clinics, doctors, pharmacy (essential), or recreational facilities such as swimming pools, cinemas, café, library etc. Nearest local facilities are only accessible by car. The surplus capacity at Wharncliffe Side Primary school is for early years / pre-school provision. The school could well be oversubscribed in the next few years with the addition of 761 new homes at Oughtibridge Mill, Cloverleaf Court & Deepcar.

Nearest accessible recreational facilities are at Oughtibridge (Coronation Park and Oughtibridge War Memorial Club). These are over 1.2km away, accessible via car or the

poor public transport provision. Walking access is via the busy A6102 Manchester Road, along narrow footpaths with 50mph traffic. Approx. 25 min walk and unsuitable for parents with young children, pushchairs, and bicycles.

4. Loss of onsite Open Space, sufficiency of Open Space in the surrounding area and impact on Local Green Spaces

***SCC assessment - the site is not a Local Green Space.**

NPPF Definition of Local Green Space: "*The Local Green Space designation allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Local Green Spaces should be reasonably close to the community they serve; demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance; and local in character and not an extensive tract of land.*" Key Criteria for Designation: *To qualify as a Local Green Space, the area must: Be reasonably close to the community it serves. Be demonstrably special to the local community, for example due to:*

- *Beauty*
- *Historic significance*
- *Recreational value*
- *Tranquillity*
- *Richness of wildlife*
- *Be local in character and not an extensive tract of land.*

Whilst not formally designated as a green space, this site meets the criteria of all the above which provides similar protections to Greenbelt land. The local community would like the opportunity to designate as such. The loss of this space to development would constitute a loss of our local green space.

5. Impact on heritage assets

***SCC Assessment - Development could possibly harm elements which contribute to the significance of heritage assets**

Glen Howe Park has been identified as a heritage asset and this development is likely to have a significant impact on this. NWS31 is identified in the Heritage Impact Assessment as impacting heritage assets (PASA, Page 26). Paragraphs 202–221 of the National Planning Policy Framework require clear and convincing justification for any harm to heritage significance. There is no indication in the site proposal that such harm has been justified, or that less harmful alternatives have been properly explored in this regard. The precautionary principle should apply, and the site removed unless robust evidence can be provided.

6. Impact on ecology/local nature recovery networks

****SCC Assessment - Site is likely to have a significant ecological value. Requires further ecology assessment.***

The land is adjacent Glen Howe Park, a mature natural woodland and is of special ecological interest. The site is home to a variety of plant, bird and animal species including bats, frogs, visiting badgers, visiting foxes, visiting deer, moles, hedgehogs, and butterflies. Barn owls and Tawny owls can be seen hunting here and heard almost nightly.

Some of the bird species noted recently that live and forage within the site include Blackbird, Blackcap, Robins, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Song Thrush, Willow Warbler, Heron, Curlew, Greenfinch, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Ring-necked pheasant, House Sparrow, Little Ringed Plover, Sandpiper, Gray Wagtail, Collared Dove, Starling, Yellow Hammer, Carrion Crow and Jackdaw, Housemartins, Swifts and Skylarks.

Additionally, Skylarks and House Sparrows are protected birds. They are protected under the EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in the UK. Further, Skylarks are classified as a Red List species, indicating a high conservation priority, and are a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan

Hedgehogs are also present. Hedgehogs are currently on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List as they are an endangered species and could be extinct within ten years.

The site is currently designated as 'Open Space' on the Sheffield City Council Proposals Map. On a local level, given the demonstrable importance of the site to bats, it is considered the scheme does not accord with Core Strategy 47 (b) which states: 'Development of open space will not be permitted where it... it would result in the loss of open space that is of high quality or of heritage, landscape or ecological value.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states that proposals should be focused on 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value' whilst 'providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks'. It is not considered the development will result in net gains to biodiversity, whilst the existing coherent ecological network in the local area is likely to be harmed by the proposals. The site sits on the eastern perimeter of Glen Howe Park. Glen Howe Park is one of Sheffield City Council's target sites included within the city-wide Habitat Action Plan.

Whilst not actually within Glen Howe Park, its proximity provides an important corridor for plant, bird and mammal wildlife that transit this area from Glen Howe Park, through the adjacent Tinker Brook at the south of the site, over to the River Don and Wharncliffe Woods.

Declassifying this area of greenbelt would be at odds with the Council's Habit Action Plan and ecological policy. It also seems to fly in the face of Sheffield City Council's own Green

& Open space Strategy 2010-2030. This sets out the framework and principles for conserving, promoting, and improving green spaces and biodiversity throughout the city. Surely these principles that even go as far as a promoting “living highways” by reducing on cutting back of grass verges and promoting “No Mow May” seem nonsensical when SCC are looking to declassify an area of greenbelt for housing and roads, next to one of their target sites identified within the Council’s own Habitat Action Plan. To lose such a prized area rich with wild habitat is seriously concerning. It’s worth noting that whilst there is much “greenspace” within the Wharncliffe Side locality, the majority are privately owned land, managed farms, and agricultural land where the natural habit has lesser opportunity to thrive. This field that has been identified is a minority of natural grassland in Wharncliffe Side and is unmanaged, just left to nature.

The Council’s own assessment is that any development should provide a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

How can the biodiversity of an already wild and natural area be increased by 10% when it is built on?!

Section 2: Review of SCC Planning Appraisal Suitability Assessment for Site NWS31 (Page 42).

Items in **BOLD** are the comments taken from SCC's own assessment

1. Site is within 10-minute walk (800 metres of a convenience shop and at least 3 other types of community facilities or important local services

THIS ASSESSMENT IS IN CORRECT. There is post office that doubles as a "corner shop". It closes around 12:30pm. If we need provisions after that the nearest convenience store is The Village Shop in Oughtibridge, around 1.8km away. Without a car, and there are large proportion in Wharncliffe Side that don't drive, it's around 25 to 30 minute walk, one way. (Alternative is to take a bus, however, public transport limited and unreliable), There is also the Co-Op convenience store which is 2.4km away. There are no other amenities or local important services within the village such as GP surgery, pharmacy, dentist, cafe etc.

2. Close to community facilities and open spaces

THIS ASSESSMENT IS INCORRECT. Which facilities are they close to? There are limited community facilities. There are no clinics, pharmacies, cafes, convenience stores, recreational facilities etc. Local residents travel to Oughtibridge (1.8km) or further afield to Hillsborough (7.2km) or Stocksbridge (6.4km). In line with Policy NC11, Community facilities include local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses, places of worship and other local services which enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments such as; community centres, youth clubs, libraries, information and advice centres, lecture theatres, drop in centres, crèches and nurseries, training centres and toilets. Important local services include: schools, libraries, health facilities, local offices of the City Council or other local service providers.

In Wharncliffe Side there are two pubs, a part time post office, Chinese takeaway and a chapel. Open spaces, as stated previously are either private farms and agricultural land or site NWS31 that the SCC are proposing for housing development.

3. There is no secondary school within 4.8km of the site and there is no primary health care facility within 3.2km of the site

The nearest secondary schools are Bradfield School (6.0km) or Stocksbridge High School (6.8km). Transport provision to both is poor and unreliable with many parents choosing to drive their children to school. It's likely that any future provision on family homes will put additional pressure on the already unreliable school bus service and create more car journeys to and from those schools, adding to additional traffic and parking issues around Stocksbridge and Worrall.

4. In a part of the city where development viability is higher – potentially means up to 45% of the new homes could be affordable homes

"Potentially up to 45% affordable homes" is less than the required 50% and therefore fails the governments Greenbelt Golden Rules test as set out in the NPPF

5. Limited archaeological, ecological or geological concerns. A 15m buffer is required to the adjacent Local Wildlife Site (Glen Howe Park), and any existing hedgerows should be retained

THIS ASSESSMENT IS INCORRECT. The site is of ecological value and acts as a buffer and a wildlife corridor to the adjacent Tinker Brook, Glen Howe Park and the wider area from Morehall reservoir, Wharncliffe Woods, Usher Wood and the woodland adjacent to Owler Gate. As detailed elsewhere in this report there are number of species present that are already on the Red List.

6. Potential capacity issues previously identified at junction Langsett Road/Church Street and Orchard Street/Station Lane within the centre of Oughtibridge. Contributions may be required to local highway improvements identified through the additional transport modelling and/or Infrastructure Delivery Plan

What consideration has been given to capacity issues at the junction in Wharncliffe Side, adjacent the Blue Ball pub, where Brightholmee Lane meets the A6102 Main Road? It is surprising as that this has been missed in this appraisal as this of a more immediate concern. Vehicles turning off Brightholmee Lane are often queueing to join the busy Main Road where there is also a pedestrian crossing and two bus stops. This creates further waiting when buses are pulled in, unloading beer wagons for the pub or the pedestrian crossing is in use.

There is also the school bus to Bradfield which picks up and drops off at the junction of Brightholmee Lane and Wharncliffe Avenue. This is usually around 8:15am and becomes busy with secondary school children, people leaving for work, and coincides with children being dropped off at Wharncliffe Side Primary school on Brightholmee Lane. At school drop off and pick up times this junction is already very busy and is hazardous for pedestrians and other road users. This development would add to the issues already faced around this junction.

7. Site is more than 400m from an active travel/cycle network. Footpaths on the site should be retained

Consideration needs to be given to the narrow footpaths on the busy A6102 Main Road through Wharncliffe Side to Oughtibridge. The pedestrian footbridge that was promised as part of the Oughtibridge Mill development has never been installed with plans and negotiations being protracted. This has resulted in huge increase in foot traffic from the Mill development through to Oughtibridge. It is unsafe for people with children, pushchairs,

wheelchairs and cyclists. The proposed development of 103nr new homes will only add to these issues.

8. Areas of functional floodplain on site that will need to remain undeveloped. This can be mitigated by removing the areas from the site allocation and/or inclusion within the Local Wildlife Site buffer. Minimal flood risk issues present on the remainder of the site, a Level 2 SFRA site assessment will identify any other specific mitigation required

The introduction of ecology buffer zones, wildlife mitigation measures and flood mitigation along with maintaining existing walking routes will likely reduce the density of housing available from 103nr which would impact on the commercial viability of the development along with provision of the required 50% affordable homes requirements to meet the Greenbelt Golden Rules. It's possible that a developer will seek a S73 amendment to reduce the affordable homes ratio.

9. Adds further development in a ward where there are already other housing sites

Recent planning consents in the past ten years has seen the approval of a total of 846nr dwellings along the Upper Don Valley corridor between Oughtibridge and Deepcar. (85nr dwellings at Hollin Busk, 428nr dwellings at Deepcar, 13nr at Cloverleaf Court Site in Wharncliffe Side and 320nr dwellings at the Oughtibridge Mill development.) There has been no improvements in local community infrastructure despite S106 & CIL money commitments being made with SCC. Public transport links have worsened considerably in that same time frame and provision of other amenities such as GP surgery hasn't improved. The proposal to add a further 103nr dwellings at Wharncliffe Side and 69nr houses at Oughtibridge will only increase pressure on the already fragile infrastructure in this area. Oughtibridge Mill was conditioned that a new pedestrian footbridge would be provided along with bus stop improvements and upgrades to the road network. The bridge hasn't materialised, the bus stops haven't been upgraded and the roads are in a worse state due to constant digging up for new utility infrastructure for all new housing.

10. Potential impact on heritage assets, development must follow the recommendations set out in the Heritage Impact Assessment

Glen Howe Park has been identified as a heritage asset, and this development is likely to have a significant impact on this. NWS31 is identified in the Heritage Impact Assessment as impacting heritage assets (PASA, Page 26). Paragraphs 202–221 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Dec 2024 (NPPF) require clear and convincing justification for any harm to heritage significance. There is no indication in the site proposal that such harm has been justified, or that less harmful alternatives have been properly explored in this regard. The precautionary principle should apply, and the site removed unless robust evidence can be provided.

APPENDICES