

Stocksmoor is a small hamlet of around 100 homes which are predominantly built along the road network with infill within the centre of the hamlet .

Stocksmoor has no shops, garages, petrol stations or any other type of commercial activity, no churches or chapels are found within its boundaries. Local authority services are scant, bin collection being the one service which stands out. There are no employment opportunities within the hamlet and any provided by the wider community require transport to access it as that provided, see earlier, has hit and miss timings, is unreliable and probably won't go to the villages concerned.

Anyone wishing to live in Stocksmoor needs a car in order to access the 'outside world'. Walking and bicycles are an alternative for very local journeys if you are willing to risk the single track roads, however, you could not go shopping nor collect children from school on a bicycle. During winter months many of the smaller roads become more dangerous than normal as they become frosted, icy (wet and frozen ie lower coefficient of friction) or snow covered, they are not cleared or gritted, these services being reserved for the bus routes.

The proposed site is on the outskirts of the Hamlet and is currently used as farming land, animal feed production and grazing for sheep during winter months. Although downgraded by Kirklees, this land is very productive giving two or three good yields per year and as such is now wrongly categorized and has become safeguarded land.

Why this development is wrong for Stocksmoor:

Timing

The proposed development brought forward by Newett Homes is firstly premature. Just because someone wants to sell the land and someone wants to buy it does not automatically mean the potential new owner should be able to build on it. This land is safeguarded land (a misnomer at best), it is in reserve not for planning or building during the life of the current Local Plan (LP1). As such Kirklees should reject this proposal with the developer instructed not to resubmit until it has been included in a plan as building land. There is already a large stock of building land available within the Kirklees area which could be developed, there is even building land within the centre of Stocksmoor which is still awaiting development despite applications being made. Surely all land identified in LP1 should either have planning granted or have housing stock on it before safeguarded land is considered. I would suggest this land is, at the moment, neither for development or housing but is farming land. It is obvious, even to a lay person, that the reason developers want this sort of land is the ease of building and the high profits they potentially hold. The building of 50 houses is a massive increase in the property numbers of Stocksmoor and would be detrimental to character of the Hamlet, making it a village in size only, and detrimental to the environment next to the site, ie the ancient woodland.

Materials

As already stated Stocksmoor is built around its roads and as such was originally linear in layout along three sides of a triangle formed by those roads. More recent developments have seen the area bounded by the roads fill with small sympathetic developments, in keeping with the existing housing. These have been followed by small 'off-shoot' developments on the outer sides of these roads but still within the scope of the original roads, the latest of which has endeavoured to increase biodiversity and in some ways negate the effects of building the houses. The proposal put forward by Newett Homes

does not fit into this category, it is a large ‘town style’ development which would aesthetically sit well in any urban environment, **not a rural one**. Having reviewed the materials list it is as if no one looked at what was in Stocksmoor already, Natural Stone with natural stone tiles, Natural Stone with natural Slate and Red Ridge tiles, Artificial Stone with natural Slate or brown roofing tiles and some Stone and Buff Brick or just Buff Brick with Brown tiles, finally some have rendered highlights, overall a very natural look. Newett are proposing Artificial Stone with Grey Tile or Red Brick with grey tile, predominantly brick being used for the more affordable housing, highlighting them rather than blending them into the estate. They have taken their small portfolio of house types/styles and produced a ‘best fit, maximum profit’ estate, using the materials they always use on their sites, minimising costs, saving by economy of scale and giving themselves the opportunity to move materials between sites. No regard is shown for the locality in which they build, a ‘this worked in Wetherby, we’ll just build the same in ...’ approach is adopted, at least local builders use materials in keeping with the area they are building in, good examples of which can be seen in Shepley. Houses should be diverse yet sit well in the environments they are built within, not stand out looking like a ‘factory estate’.

Red paviers and Tarmac

These materials are planned to be used in this proposal but are not discussed. Used on the roads, neither of which are very environmentally friendly.

The red paviers are to be used on the Shepley Road and are hardly in keeping with road materials in this area, perhaps traditional cobbles would be a better choice for this area.

Tarmac is used throughout but surely Newett Homes could have introduced better greener alternatives particularly for parking spaces, both homeowner and visitor with tarmac being used for footpaths and roads.

Roads/Transport

As already stated, three roads effectively define Stocksmoor (Cross Lane, Stocksmoor Road and Station Road), off these run ‘link’ roads to surrounding Hamlets/Villages (Shepley Road, Fulstone Road, Stocksmoor Road to Whitestones and finally Birks Lane). Newett Homes ‘Transport Assessment’ is very much in the vein of their Visual Appraisal, ignoring one of the main roads that forms Stocksmoor, ie Cross Lane. Whilst there is mention of Cross Lane, no figures exist for road users choice of direction at the end of that road, this means the loading on Birks Lane could be higher than proposed. The junction of Cross Lane and Stocksmoor Road contains a Royal Mail Post Box, this too will have a bearing on travellers directional choices, not all mail is email. As a consequence all of their ‘Trip analysis’ is incorrect. Many drivers, particularly at peak times and winter, use Cross Lane rather than Station Road to head for Birks Lane, this is wider and less likely to have obstructions, reducing it to single file traffic. Station Road is very much used as a car park and as a result, on most days, is reduced to a single lane. For over two months, at the time of writing, a Northern Gas Networks amenities unit and materials store has resided on Station Road, this is higher and wider than a vehicle making progress along the road worse. Whilst hopefully not a permanent feature, the workforce have not been in Stocksmoor for at least a month, it is an example of ‘life’ in Stocksmoor and the difficulties on the transport infrastructure. Currently Thunder Bridge Lane is closed with traffic diverted up Dam Hill, effectively a single track road due to both natural and man made obstacles impinging on the road. Again parking is a problem on both Dam Hill and Thunder Bridge Lane sometimes rendering them almost impassable. Recently, May/June 2024 gas works has

seen many of the roads closed or controlled, a three way lighting system controlling a four way junction, where Thunder Bridge Lane/Riley Lane meet Penistone Road. These are the roads Newett Homes survey suggests over 80% of their sites traffic will use.

Most of the roads into and out of Stocksmoor and the surrounding area are closed as a matter of regular inconvenience with little to no notice or effective diversion, the roads above being particularly prone to such occurrences, residents are expected to know where to go.

Finally Shepley Road/Stone Wood Lane. There is a suggested loading of these roads of 4% of 'Shepley' journeys from and to the development with 96% heading to/from Stocksmoor. Currently the majority of Stocksmoor residents use that route for journeys to/from Shepley. This is the site of the nearest shops, Doctors surgery and Primary School. The probability is that drivers from the development will turn left to Shepley not right to Stocksmoor and make the same journey as the current residents. Stone Wood Lane is again a single track road with little to no true passing points. It is also a national speed limit road, 60 mph, without street lighting or footpaths for pedestrians making it dangerous for both the walking and cycling public. This is also a major route for agricultural traffic which is larger and slower making passing at the few passing points even more difficult, at busy times reversing a long stretch of this road is the only option to avoid a 'grid lock' situation. I note that a calculated average speed is given for both North and South journeys, however no maximum values are quoted in either case yet these drivers are the most likely to be involved in an accident. Suggested numbers of journeys to and from the estate are very low and in real, not modelled, life likely to be much higher. Whilst some people do now work from home they will still go out, probably by car, if only to get away from their work environment or see the outside world. Some will also have groceries/on-line purchases/larger items delivered, as well as hot food takeaway, these are also journeys to and from the estate, generated by the estate. As sat nav directions tend to direct traffic from the south through Shepley and onto Stone Wood Lane this will also increase the loading on this road, as the new residents/visitors 'bed in', once learned the route becomes the norm. Newett Homes Traffic survey for these roads does not actually refer to a specific position for data collection, rather states 'in the vicinity', surely using the 3 words location system they could identify a 3m square where the data was collected. Does 'in the vicinity' mean in specific locations where traffic has to slow naturally as their figures do seem particularly low.

Access to and from the estate is to be through a newly created road involving the removal of trees and the existing dry stone wall, the existing road and footpaths are to be modified. However the access point is on a bend, on a slope in an area where Spring/Autumn/Winter driving conditions are not always favourable and will increase the probability of accidents as motorists on Shepley Road/Stone Wood Lane try to maintain their momentum up the hill. Vehicles approaching from the North will have too much momentum to stop if a vehicle should leave the junction unexpectedly.

In order to facilitate the required viewing angles it is proposed to 'kink' the road towards the new entrance in order to create space opposite (actually the current road) for a passing space and to make it possible for larger vehicles to turn in and out of the entrance, the limited use highlighted using red paviers. This can only be to avoid trying to purchase third party land in order to create a safe junction, the existing road is almost up to a dry stone wall at this point. Surely a 'kink' in the road just before/after an already dangerous bend just makes it even more dangerous. Perhaps this is the reason for the red, it spells danger.

Walking

Whilst there are many recreational walkers who use Stocksmoor the majority of these have to negotiate roads without footpaths as part of their walks. These sections of their walks will become more dangerous as a consequence of this development, both from increased motor vehicle and bicycle use. For the residents of Stocksmoor there are footpaths around most of the hamlet, at least on one side of the road, however these are often in poor repair with grass and/or moss growing on their surface, during autumn wet leaves collect on the surface too, all of which make them dangerous to pedestrians.

Walking times quoted are from outside the development, use a nearest point to nearest point measure and a walking speed of approximately 6Km/hr, the average walking speed is just under 6Km/hr for 20-30 year olds but diminishes with age, which means the speed and times quoted are unrealistic in the real world, eg travellers to Huddersfield by train who need a ticket, have to walk to platform 1 to buy the ticket before walking back to platform 2 to catch the train. Walking to Thunder Bridge might take 15-20 minutes but it is down a steep hill, going back will probably take 25-35 minutes. No estimates are provided for walking times from the houses to the assumed starting point which in reality may add another 5+ minutes to the actual time needed.

Cycling

As Shepley is the nearest village with services this would be the most likely destination, however, bearing in mind the problems discussed with the route to Shepley it is unrealistic to suggest residents will cycle, purely from a safety standpoint they will go by car. The same is true of Kirkburton and Brockholes, both require the use of narrow and windy roads, plus the navigation of major 'A' roads. I would suggest individual cyclists 'popping out' would not wish to put themselves in these dangerous positions.

Public Transport

Public Buses

There is only one bus service from Stocksmoor which goes to Huddersfield, Monday to Saturday running approximately every two hours and ending at around 8pm, unfortunately this is prone to 'missing' busses reducing the service further. The bus stop highlighted within the submission, on Cross Lane, is probably about 3-4 minutes away from the entrance to the site, 8-10 minutes to furthest points but is only useful travelling away from Stocksmoor. On return the walk could be as long as 15-20 minutes as the bus stops outside 'The Clothiers' public house until it is due to set off for Huddersfield again. Alternatively the bus user could wait on the bus until it progresses to that stop, this can be anywhere between 5-15 minutes and still have a 8-10 minute walk home.

Rail

Historically a Railway station exists, to serve the surrounding area, with trains timetabled to run hourly, one in each direction (Huddersfield or Sheffield) from around 06:30. This service has timetabled reductions on Sundays, starting later and finishing earlier. Further to the low numbers of trains running on this route the service seems to suffer from a large proportion of cancellations during operating times due to staff shortages, problems with the infrastructure and problems with trees and shrubbery overhanging the line.

The infrequency and unreliability of Public Transport in Stocksmoor is further weight in the argument that new residents will drive to wherever they wish to go, on roads which are unsuitable.

Parking

Newett Homes obviously understands that residents will be using motor vehicles as their primary travel method as their plans incorporate parking spaces for the properties at a minimum of two per house, only flats are allocated one each. Roadside parking is negligible considering how many houses are proposed which means additional household cars will be parked ad hoc, causing problems of access for other residents and council services. Just looking at the proposed layout you can foresee visitors to plots 1,2,3,34 and 35 parking in the entrance to the estate, on the road/on the footpath or a combination of both making the entrance to the estate even more dangerous for road users and pedestrians. No doubt at high visitor rate times, such as Christmas gatherings, I am sure someone will use the 'new footpath' on Shepley Road as overflow parking, this is based on observations made on Cross Lane where visitors park on the footpath behind residents cars, pedestrians then have to walk on the road.

Travel Plan

Having discussed travel options in and around Stocksmoor it is obvious new residents are going to use motor vehicles as their primary travel method, further borne out by the design of all the properties. The travel plan is therefore a redundant item, it's only purpose being to facilitate a tick on a planning officers checklist. Whilst some residents may walk/cycle for recreational purposes in reality day to day travel will be by motor vehicle as it is the safer and more convenient mode of transport to local facilities.

Noise Impact

Having looked through this report it quickly becomes apparent that old data has been used throughout. Train data was collected from an online source, who doubt got their data from Northern Trains or Network Rail, no evidence is presented of a real-life survey. However, the noise survey was apparently conducted but on a cold winters day during School Christmas Holidays, Tuesday 20/12/2022, not really a true reflection of typical noise in the area at the times stated. No attempt has been made to ascertain when Network Rail were carrying out 'night repairs', probably the most intrusive time for noise, and therefore no noise assessment for between midnight and 6am.

Flood Risk

It is highlighted that Yorkshire Water have indicated that sewage can be discharged into a 6" sewer on Shepley Road but no surface water is to be discharged into the sewer system as there is no capacity to accommodate this. Surface water could be discharged from the attenuation tank into Stone Wood Dike, according to Yorkshire Water, within the ancient woodland, surely this would damage the woodland which is supposed to be protected. Use of a tributary shown on 1950's plans is suggested, by Kirklees as a possible connection but this will lead to increased soil and, possibly over time, underlying geology erosion.

Flooding, I am sure, would not be a problem in the immediate vicinity but as everyone in the area knows, will increase in Thunder Bridge. Only moderate rainfall is needed in order to see water flooding that area, lifting manhole covers or dislodging the road surface. Birks Lane becomes a waterway as the combined sewage and rainwater system become overly full, again this has lifted areas of tarmac on that road in the past. Station Road and Stockmoor Road gain rivulets in their gutters, all of which run into Thunder Bridge. Adding more sewage and surface water will only further exacerbate this situation.

Trees

Again another survey which contains incorrect information, carried out too quickly without due care, all comments and observations are from an 'I want to build here' standpoint. This blinkered approach means only trees against the boundary are looked at and are not viewed in the context of the homes and gardens of which they are part. An example is T16, identified as 'Common Lime', actually a Rowan Tree, on its own is unremarkable against the boundary but this is one of a pair of Rowan trees which together form a small shaded walkway in this area, trees cannot be looked at in isolation, if we did I am sure by now we would be devoid of all ancient woodlands, each tree probably being insignificant in isolation.

Wildlife

This field is a haven for wildlife, a fact I feel is borne out by the lack of a Biodiversity survey within the submission. Again it cannot be looked at in isolation but in conjunction with the woodland as many of the animals that live there use the field too. During the daytime you can regularly Buzzards and Kestrels over the field, occasionally Sparrow hawks hunt from the trees at the edges. Rural red foxes can be seen, particularly during mating season, smaller and much more beautiful than their grey urban cousins. The dry stone walls provide homes for smaller mammals and insects such as mice, weasels, bumble bees and wasps, all necessary to this environment but unwelcome near homes. I am aware of deer, badgers and owls in the vicinity, all use the field for feeding but only come out under cover of darkness. The presence of top level predators highlights a healthy ecosystem, containing both surface and subsurface dwelling animals, eg Frogs/Toads/Newts, Moles, Voles, Rabbits etc which, should this application go ahead, will all be displaced. Many of these animals are territorial and spend their entire lives in 'their home area', destroying this habitat effectively destroys many of these creatures as they cannot just 'move home'. I doubt Newett have a 'Rescue and Rehome Plan' for any of the wildlife, not everything can move into the woodland.

Geology

It should be noted that Newett Homes have not had/submitted a geological survey. For a site such as this a survey of the underlying geology is surely a must, in general the top soil lies on, probably, Grenoside Sandstone. However, this type of sandstone is bedded, some thick and some thin, in-between the beds of sandstone are shales and mudstones, which may or may not be significant. In some areas Grenoside Sandstone is Mica rich and can form banding along junctions. Mica is a very soft mineral (around 3 on the Mohs scale for hardness, 1 is Talc the softest and 10 is Diamond the hardest) and has near perfect basal cleavage which means it shears very easily when force is applied in a linear direction.

From West Yorkshire Geology Trust describing Stone Wood Dike within the woods:

The woods contain some exposures of solid rock, particularly along the stream bed to the west of Stone Wood Lane. Upper Carboniferous Greenmoor Rock is found in the stream beds and shows gentle folding in places. Most of the stream bed is incised into shales and silts, which in some places dip at steep angles.

This demonstrates the rocks underlying the Grenoside Sandstone, which have been cut through relatively easily by the dike during its lifetime. Newett need to appreciate not all stone is suitable for building on top of, remedial work at best may be required, at worst total removal of unsuitable material may be needed.

Outcropping within the rail embankment shows the rock to be highly fractured, this may or may not be as a result of the cutting, without a proper geological survey Newett homes cannot be sure. As the outcrop of stone at the embankment is fractured and unstable Network Rail have installed steel netting, secured with tie bars deep into the stone, to stop debris damaging the trains/lines. Newett need to be sure that the underlying geology is as expected, as recommended by Kirklees, but apparently ignored to-date.

Estate Design

Again Stocksmoor is a rural hamlet, not an urban development and as such does not lend itself to 'intensive housing' such as flats, yet Newett Homes seem to think these are a good idea for this estate. More suited to the area would be some small bungalows or houses.

From Newett Homes, 'Well-designed neighbourhoods need to include an integrated mix of tenures and housing types' yet the affordable housing and smaller units are used as a barrier against noise from the railway for the larger, more profitable housing. This highlights the social status of homeowners instead of blending the different types of housing to create a homogenous community, Newett Homes 'Talk the talk' but do not 'Walk the walk'. Perhaps houses more in keeping with the area would also help the estate blend rather than a choosing a selection from an existing catalogue used in earlier urban developments highlighting its difference.

Despite the area containing a high proportion of traditional dry stone walls, Newett Homes are proposing limited use of this traditional segregator. Instead they propose wooden fences and artificial stone walls. These are not wildlife friendly, provide no harbourage and have a relatively short lifespan, dry stone walls are wildlife friendly and last for hundreds of years when built properly.

Landscaping appears to be minimal, again Newett Homes propose to retain some existing trees but the majority of these, if not all, are outside of the estate boundary and do not fall within the control of the developer. The new planting is of very limited scope and misses the chance to promote a 'greener' environment, it is being built next to ancient woodland and the proposal is copper beach and cherry trees, as examples, supplemented with hedges and shrubs.

They highlight the use of an attenuation tank to help manage run off but this is a requirement of building so many houses yet they use materials which cause increased run off, such as tarmac. Why are they not providing green car parking spaces that allow water to be absorbed into the ground, a requirement for anyone now wishing to create a hard standing next to an existing home. They say what homeowners could do to make them water efficient but why not build these things in and add a grey water system for plant irrigation, this would alleviate some of the stresses on and already overstressed sewerage system.

The houses are to be energy efficient but no use is being made of solar energy, in fact they will possibly increase the emissions and heat requirements of houses on Station Road as the new houses block some/all autumn/winter/spring sun stopping it providing any solar advantage as it has since their construction, due to the new houses height and proximity to each other. No use of air/ground heat pumps are proposed when construction time is the easiest and cheapest time to install such items, instead Newett Homes are rushing to secure and start as many sites as possible now before they are required to fit these things as a matter of course. Kirklees should not be party to such practice and should send a strong message to all developers that sites should be as green as is possible within its district.

A playground is proposed for children, by the entrance to the estate. Surely this is the worst possible position for such a facility, anyone using the area will be subjected to air and noise pollution from the roads, children being particularly susceptible to such toxins. The apparent access to the play area is by plot 36 which could not be further away from the houses most likely to have younger children, this will make it more likely they will play by the railway boundary. How are the children to be stopped from running into the roads, low walls and hedges are easily scaled/run through by the young and as already discussed this is not a safe road.

Conclusion

Overall the submission from Newett Homes is a well put together exercise in box ticking. They have commissioned biased and inaccurate reports to highlight how they will improve the area by building on the 'poor' yet productive farming land using materials not sympathetic to the area to build housing better suited to towns/cities. They have ignored pre-planning advice from Kirklees not incorporating ideas which would have enhanced the proposals and demonstrate an arrogance that should send a very strong signal to Kirklees that this builder will not be good for this small hamlet or Kirklees. For building on this scale the infrastructure of the area is sadly lacking needing investment in road, water and electrical systems all of which are already inadequate and fail under pressure. Investment in rural areas is negligible and the expectations of residents low, anyone moving to this area will have to accept that there will not be any further investment once the builder leaves. Who will maintain the sewage pump if the management company go into liquidation (Yorkshire Water are unlikely to adopt this system due to the high costs of maintaining and repairing, they currently will not even repair a simple sewer pipe defect in Station Road, insignificant cost wise). What happens when the power goes off for 4-6 hours which is not unusual particularly during the colder wetter times of the year. How will new residents enter/leave the estate when it snows, only bus routes are gritted and they live on a steep hill.

The overall feel of the project is a graded approach to 'have and have not' housing as you move from the dangerous junction towards the railway, the entrance giving the illusion of space and affluence moving through to less space less expensive housing finally to pack it tight or stack it high affordable housing, using this to shield the others from the railway and its associated negatives.

Finally Newett Homes profess this is the only way the development is economic to build, do they mean it maximises profits? Experience shows this will not be the final version, problems will arise, probably because local authority advice was not followed and surveys were minimal and inaccurate. At this point Newett homes will suspend works and resubmit with more houses or want to renegotiate commitments/contributions/payments it is obliged to make, again to maximise their profits.

I would ask Kirklees to reject this application for all of the above reasons and stick to LP 1, keeping this as safeguarded land until LP 2 is adopted, at the earliest. If Newett Homes are correct in their assessment regarding the number of homes it is economically viable to build perhaps it would be better to remove this land from LP 2 citing it as more valuable as farming land, we all need sustenance, even domesticated and wild animals.