

**KIRKLEES LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION
STAGE FOUR HEARINGS**

**HEARING STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY
SPEN VALLEY CIVIC SOCIETY**



**Re: MATTER 37: BATLEY AND SPEN HOUSING ALLOCATIONS
- GREEN BELT RELEASES**

**Site reference H198
Land south of Second Avenue, Hightown**

Date of Submission: 21st January 2018

Issue: *Are the proposed Green Belt release housing allocations in the Batley and Spen sub-area justified; effective; developable; deliverable; and consistent with national policy?*

Response:

1. Site H198 was proposed by Spen Valley Civic Society (SVCS) during the call for sites exercise, as having good potential for housing allocation.
2. Our reasoning is that the site is brownfield within the green belt and therefore should be prioritised if green belt land has to be released to meet the urgent need for housing. It was formerly R.M.Grylls Middle School, which was demolished over 10 years ago and is owned by Kirklees Council. The land is in a generally neglected state of broken rubble and tarmac, although there are areas where trees have naturalised and a pond has survived from the time it was a functioning school. Being in the ownership of Kirklees Council gives the potential for the site to be developed in conjunction with a housing association, to provide an entire scheme of affordable housing in a pleasant environment, preserving many of the trees, pond etc as part of an attractive design, linking to the adjoining green belt. The site is a sustainable location: it is surrounded on three sides by Local Authority and private housing; a primary school is nearby; and a bus route passes through the estate.

3. With respect to the specific questions posed by the Inspector:

3.1 Is the proposal consistent with para 74 of the NPPF in relation to the potential loss of open space and sports facilities?

Response It is not an area used by the community and there are no sports facilities remaining. Two alternative areas of open land used for sport and recreation already exist nearby on the edges of the Windybank estate.

3.2 Has the impact of the proposal on heritage assets been adequately assessed and addressed? Should the proposal seek to provide links to and enhancement to the adjoining PROW, in line with mitigation measures in the Heritage Impact Assessment (LE71)?

Response SVCS does not consider that the proposal will have a detrimental impact on the heritage asset, which is Grade II Listed Thorn Bush Farm. Our reasoning is that there is existing housing in nearby Lincs Wold, Walton Heights and Hare Park which is a similar distance from Thorn Bush Farm as H198. Sadly, Thorn Bush Farm is in a terrible condition, and neglected by the current owners. The Reverend Patrick Brontë, who briefly lived there as a lodger, would not recognise it. Enhancement of the adjoining PROW would be very beneficial, if it involved re-routing. Currently PROW 89/91 (which is a well-used route and part of the Luddite Trail) goes through Thorn Bush Farm. However it is not the Grade II Listed structure which is at risk from users; it is footpath users who are at risk from the pack of dogs

which are consistently allowed to run freely from the farm in order to deter walkers from using the PROW.

Further mitigation is proposed in the Heritage Assessment, in the form of an information board. In fact, one already exists: SVCS installed an information board at the junction of Church Lane and Windy Bank Lane, part of the Luddite Trail, in 2015. This explains the rich history of the area, including Thorn Bush Farm, the Brontë connections and the Luddite risings.

4. In conclusion, Spen Valley Civic Society considers that the brownfield nature of this site, combined with the potential public benefit of affordable housing, constitute exceptional circumstances which warrant site H198 being removed from the green belt.