

Burnett, James

From: Sheila Walters [mailto:swalters@sheila-walters.co.uk]
Sent: Tuesday, July 07, 2015 9:13 AM
To: Swithenbank, Arne
Cc: Bull, Julie (CLLR)
Subject: Moneystone Quarry / Solar farm SMD/2015/0220 visual impact of future reduction of tree cover

Dear Mr Swithenbank,

Having only just returned from holiday to find your report in respect of the above application has finally been made available on line, I should be grateful if you would include the following letter as **a late submission of objection to be presented verbatim at the PAC meeting on Thursday 9th July** which I will be attending but at which unfortunately I cannot speak as I understand that the three places allocated have already been overbooked.

My concern relates to the issue of the visual and landscape impact which you will recall from your own previous refusal report to the same application (please note ref is SMD/2014/0432 and not 2014/0220 as you've reported) was one of the key issues for its rejection.

As this application is a re submission and as such no radical alteration has taken place within the documentation submitted in its support to mitigate against the charge being upheld once again, this should remain a deciding factor.

Your report to the committee **para 14** appears to contradict itself in that it states that *"additional tree planting required by the approved quarry restoration scheme will assist in mitigating the impact of the proposed solar farm, notwithstanding that in some locations thinning is planned."*

That so called "additional tree screening" was **already a condition imposed way back in March 2014** when the SCC quarry restoration plan was approved in conjunction with the owners of the site Laver Leisure and therefore **it would have been an obligatory requirement last time this scheme was submitted in April of this year when it was rejected.**

Also how otherwise can additional screening not be obviated or reduced but **by thinning?**

This brings me to **the crux of my objection** and the nature of **your own interpretation** of the circumstances relating to **the impact of recent forestry work and further tree cover reduction in paragraph 16** of your report.

You have acknowledged the valid concerns raised about the risk of further exposure of the site as a result of ongoing forestry operations. However you dismissed the argument on the following basis

These have been considered with officers making a tour of the site and surrounding areas on 12th June 2015. In short, the felling was found not to have opened up wooded areas significant to the landscaping of the application site.

This is a very cursory, unscientific and late in the day approach to obtaining a verifiable assessment of the situation given that the application was made as early as in April of this year when the forestry management scheme was already well signposted.

I believe that the response reflected in your report was only as a result of public concern and therefore more of a knee jerk reaction than a proper longer term appraisal of the potential denudation of the site.

This is further reinforced by your submission that *"in short the felling was found to not to have opened up wooded areas significant to the landscaping of the site."*

Given that your site visit took place almost in midsummer when tree cover and vegetation growth would have been at a maximum and therefore very restrictive from ground views in terms of penetrating the interior and topographical extents of the woodland involved, I'm not surprised.

If you had read the maps and signs publicly visible on the estate boundaries of the woods in question, you will surely have noticed that it states categorically that the work scheduled to begin in the spring and summer upon both the woods bordering the quarry had been delayed because of felling elsewhere in the Churnet Valley in Ruelow woods to the north of the area, and so it is unsurprising that what you saw on your whistle stop tour on that particular day was only the onset or peripheral effects of the reduction of tree cover, not the eventual result.

Moreover the work did not start until May so the overall visual impact of the devastation on view at the time of your visit was only a preliminary one and as the schedule of the Forestry Commission's notice clearly specifies the work will be over a year in duration once started.

It has to be said therefore that your comments have somewhat understated the true, wider and long lasting environmental impact of this programme of felling and thinning on the southern and south western edges of the quarry site. This is a long term denudation of the flanks of the quarry edges and the large area immediately to the south because the plan is to let nature take its course and it is envisaged by the Forestry Commission that it will take at least 5 years to recover. As a result the vicissitudes of cyclical vegetational regrowth and the accompanying woodland flora will dictate the renewal pattern as no replanting of screening trees, saplings or nursery species will be carried out.

The degree of denudation of the sides of the steep edges of valley is reflected upon the google images re-attached* from my email to you of the 28th May and which have been adapted from the Forestry Commission's own mapping of the areas that have already been worked and within which it intends to continue working shown in white.

* one vertical to show the size and one oblique to reflect the distant visual impact as the arc of visibility is enlarged proportionately to the distance ratio and the natural contouring of features nearby.

As stated above SMDC refused the solar farm application earlier this year (inter alia) for the very sort of landscape intrusion that was regarded as contrary to its Core Strategy Policy which in SS7 states "Any development should be of a scale and nature and of a high standard of design which conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area..." and as such the solar farm proposal failed meet the required consideration of landscape at the core of this policy.

Of course this attitude was prevalent and guided the decision to refuse the application at the time because of its inability to screen the site properly and thus mitigate against the visual impact, and crucially several months before this current swathe of destruction had begun.

I also attach an image taken from the recent early stages of the resulting disturbance as a sample of what will eventually be the norm over a much wider area.

Accordingly on this basis I would like to draw the PAC's membership to my objection to this application.

Yours sincerely,

David Walters
Oakamoor resident