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Date 17 July 2015
Our ref 03224/IR/9336919v1
Your ref PP-04302706

Dear Wayne

SMDC: Alton Towers Resort – Application for Minor Works in Association with the Air Rollercoaster

On behalf of our client, Alton Towers Resort, a company forming part of Merlin Attractions Operations Limited, please find enclosed an application for minor works to the 'Air' rollercoaster, including enhancing the existing station area, installing a small photo-opportunity kiosk and new themed features.

The application comprises:

- 1 Application form (signed and dated); and
- 2 Application drawings, prepared by Smytheman Architectural (please see Schedule 1 of cover letter).

A cheque for £195, made payable to "Staffordshire Moorlands District Council" to cover the Council's application fee, has been submitted under separate cover. This has been determined based on the total floorspace of the 'Photo-op' kiosk, totalling approximately 6.75sqm, and a charge of £195 where the floorspace created is no more than 40sqm. This is in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

Background

Alton Towers Resort is the UK's most popular and largest theme park, making it an important generator for tourism. The Resort is also a major employer offering a range of permanent and seasonal contracts. To continue to attract visitors and meet their diverse demands, Alton Towers must continuously refresh its facilities and attractions. Therefore, this application seeks planning permission for minor enhancement works to the Air rollercoaster experience.



By way of background, planning permission was granted for an extension to the existing Air shop, above the rollercoaster station, and installation of a themed entrance on 17 June 2015 (ref. SMD/2015/0224). The application seeks to further enhance the Air rollercoaster experience.

Proposals

The application site is located within the 'Forbidden Valley' area of theme park to the south of the Ripsaw ride and café and measures 885sqm. The existing Deer Park Wall is located to the west of the application site beyond which is the Abbey Wood Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and Registered Park and Garden. To the east, beyond the Air rollercoaster, is an area of woodland and car parking.

The proposed enhancements are small scale and comprise three elements, namely:

- 1 Enhancing the station area;
- 2 Installing a photo-opportunity kiosk; and
- 3 Installing new themed features.

Station Enhancements

The station area is positioned beneath the existing Air Restaurant and shop, to the north west of the rollercoaster track. As existing, this area is open sided and accessed via the queuelines to the south. In order to enhance the station area and the overall visitor experience, it is proposed to make minor façade alterations in terms of installing an external infill wall on the south west and north east elevation which in turn will shield visitors from the elements at this stage of the queue. The material will be similar to the elevational material of the existing Air restaurant. In addition, internal divisions are proposed to ensure that the queue process is more effective.

To assist in improving the queueing system, it is proposed to replace one access ramp on the west elevation with steps. Disabled access will be provided via the adjacent existing access ramp which will lead to a dedicated disabled guest entrance at the north west corner. Fast track guests will use the entrance on the south east corner whilst an additional guest entrance will be located on the north east corner. Whilst the façade alterations will enclose the station on the south west and north east elevations, the south east and north west elevations will remain open-sided to retain the rollercoaster access to the station. Accordingly, the proposals will not constitute the creation of new floorspace as the station will not be fully enclosed on all sides.

Photo-Opportunity Kiosk

In order to further enhance the visitor experience, it is proposed to install a photo opportunity area within the queueline, to the south of the Air station. The kiosk will measure approximately 2.7m by 2.5m, creating a total floorspace of approximately 6.75sqm, and will be approximately 3.25m in height. Access to the kiosk will be provided on the south east and north west elevations. The kiosk will consist of exterior quality tricoya panels. The kiosk will be themed by a corner finial which will measure approximately 4.25m in height.

New Themed Features

It is proposed to install additional theming to the ride in the form of new themed features. Theming feature 'A' will be positioned at the northern end of the rollercoaster track, to the north of the



station. It will comprise a free standing themed feature which will encircle the track, therefore resulting in the rollercoaster moving through the feature. At its maximum extent, the feature will measure approximately 10m in length, 1m in depth and approximately 11.1m in height.

Theming feature 'B' will be positioned to the south of themed feature 'A' on an area of existing paving. The feature will form a free standing feature with maximum dimensions of approximately 3m in width, 1m in depth and 4m in height.

The full details of the themed features with respect to material and appearance will be determined at detailed design stage.

Planning Assessment

The Statutory Development Plan for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council comprises the Core Strategy (CS, adopted March 2014). The Churnet Valley Masterplan (March 2014) is also a material consideration in the determination of planning applications at the site.

The proposals constitute the enhancement of an existing attraction in order to support Alton Towers' commitment to refreshing existing facilities at the site and improving the visitor experience. This is in accordance with the Churnet Valley Masterplan (2014) which identifies a key aim at the Resort to be the 'refresh' of existing themed areas. In turn, it will contribute towards the long term economic success of Alton Towers Resort in supporting the local economy (CS Policy E3 'Tourism and Cultural Development').

The Churnet Valley Masterplan identifies a series of zones for development at Alton Towers Resort. The application site is located within Zone 8 which is allocated an area for holiday lodge development and/or a new ride. Proposals within this Zone are required not to exceed the tree canopy and should have no adverse impact on woodland and the screening it provides. In addition, it is stated that development should sit clear of the woodlands. The proposed development meets these identified criteria.

Design

The external façade of the station enhancement proposals will correspond to the appearance of the existing Air restaurant/shop above, consisting of Kingspan cladding, and will therefore complement the overall aesthetic. Similarly, the photo-opportunity kiosk is not considered to impact upon the character of the area as it constitutes a minor addition within an already developed area of the theme park. In addition, the photo opportunity kiosk (max. height of 4m) and themed features (max. height of 11.1m) will be seen in the context of the surrounding taller structures including the Air Restaurant/Shop and the rollercoaster. Accordingly, the proposals are considered to be appropriate to the character of the area and respect the local landscape as required by CS Policy DC1 'Design Considerations' and CS Policy E3 'Tourism and Cultural Development,' requiring proposals to be of a scale and design compatible with the local area and enhance the landscape.

Given the positioning of the proposals within an existing developed area of the site and the minor nature of the works, the proposals are not considered to detrimentally impact on views within the park or from beyond the park boundaries (Churnet Valley Masterplan, 2014). In addition, the proposals meet the requirement of the Churnet Valley Masterplan for development within Zone 8,



not to impact the woodland and is screening quality. Hence, the proposals will not be visible from beyond the Resort boundary due to the surrounding woodland.

Heritage Impact Assessment

The site is located within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area and within the setting of a number of listed buildings associated with Alton Towers Country House (itself listed Grade II*) and Alton Towers Gardens (Grade 1 Registered Park and Garden). The Deer Park Wall adjacent to the site has been identified as being of historic value (in association with the Registered Park and Garden) and should be treated as a non-designated heritage asset under the NPPF (see below).

Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires Local Authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the settings of listed buildings. Under Section 72 of the Act they are also required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving the character of Conservation Areas within their area. Under the NPPF (2012) listed buildings, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks are considered designated heritage assets. Paragraph 131 to 135 require Local Authorities to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their historic significance. Core Strategy Policy DC2 'Historic Environment' states that the Council will safeguard and enhance the historic environment and its settings. Likewise the Churnet Valley Masterplan identifies that proposals should seek to maintain the character of the parkland landscape.

The proposed works will not be visible from the surrounding listed buildings due to the screening by the woodland to the south and west of the application site – the closest listed building to the application site is the Prospect Tower and wall and railings, located approximately 270m to the west, which is not visible from the application site. Therefore, the proposals will have no impact on the settings of the surrounding listed buildings.

In relation to the Alton and Farley Conservation Area, the proposed works are in association with an existing attraction within a part of the Conservation Area characterised by theme park rides and associated buildings. The scale and appearance of the proposed works will complement the existing structures and will be consistent with the existing character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area. Therefore it is considered that the proposals will have a neutral impact upon the special architectural or historic interest of the Conservation Area, its character or appearance, and its setting.

The proposed station enhancement works are proposed adjacent to the Alton Towers Registered Park and Garden. This relevant aspect of the proposals involves minor works to the existing station façade in the form of installing external walls on the south west and north east elevation. Therefore, there will be no direct physical impact on the Registered Park and Garden and in turn the setting is already characterised by the existing ride and station area. It is concluded that the proposed extension will have a neutral impact on the existing setting of the Registered Park and Garden.

As mentioned, the Deer Park Wall is identified as a non-designated heritage asset. The station enhancement works will be adjacent to the Deer Park Wall (please see drawing ref. 2937-04-A for detail of the relationship). The proposals comprise a negligible change to the existing setting of the heritage asset which is characterised by the presence of the existing Air rollercoaster/station and Air restaurant/shop. Therefore the proposals will have a neutral impact on the overall significance of the Deer Park Wall.



Paragraph 135 of the NPPF (2012) states that a balanced judgement should be made in weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets. Accordingly, it should be noted that the proposals constitute the enhancement of an existing ride which will contribute to the 'refresh' of the attraction, in turn supporting the continued economic success of the Resort and improving the visitor experience.

Summary

Overall, the proposals comprise three key elements, namely:

- 1 Enhancements to the existing station;
- 2 Installing a photo-opportunity area within the queueline; and
- 3 Installing new themed features within the ride.

These proposals are small scale in nature and constitute the enhancement of an existing attraction at the Resort and will improve the overall visitor experience. The works are of a scale and appearance corresponding to the surrounding context and will not be visible from beyond the Resort boundary. It will therefore not impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape and Conservation Area. The station enhancement proposals, located adjacent to the Deer Park Wall, are considered to have a neutral impact on the non-designated heritage asset.

We trust we have provided you with sufficient information to validate and determine the application. Should you require further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague Tor Barrett.

Yours sincerely

RP Tor Barrett

Hannah Whitney
Planning Director

Copy

Neil Walker
Mark Kerrigan
Trevor Mountford

Alton Towers Resort
Alton Towers Resort
Smytheman Architectural



Schedule 1 Application Drawings

Drawing Title	Reference	Scale
Location Plan	2937-06-A	1:2500@A1
Block Plan as proposed	2937-08	1:200@A1
Air Station – Plan as Existing	2937-01-A	1:100@A1
Air Station – Plan as Proposed	2937-03-B	1:100@A1
Air Station – Elevation as Existing	2937-02-B	1:100@A1
Air Station – Elevation as Proposed	2937-04-B	1:100@A1
Air Station – Site and Roof Plan as Proposed	2937-05-A	1:250@A1
Theme Feature Elevations	2937-07	1:100@A1