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Dear Mrs Curley

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council: Cbeebies Ride 2016 at Alton Towers Resort

On behalf of Alton Towers Resort, a company forming part of Merlin Attractions Operations Ltd, please find enclosed an application for planning permission for the demolition of existing structures and the installation of a new ride and construction of an associated building, along with landscaping works at the Alton Towers Resort. This covering letter sets out the background to the proposed development, the nature of the proposed works and the details of the enclosed application documents.

The planning application comprises the following:

- 1 Completed and signed planning application form and Certificate B;
- 2 Planning Application Drawings (see list at Schedule 1 of this letter);
- 3 Noise Assessment prepared by CDC;
- 4 Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Tree Heritage;
- 5 Ecology Report prepared by Baker Consultants; and
- 6 Drainage Statement, prepared by Simpson Associates

A cheque for **£770** made payable to 'Staffordshire Moorlands District Council' to cover the requisite planning application fee is being provided directly by Alton Towers Resort Operations Ltd under separate cover. This fee has been calculated on the basis of 'where the area of the gross floor space to be created by the development exceeds 75 square metres, but does not exceed 3,750 sqm, £385 for each 75 sqm of that area' in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Request and Site Visits)(England) Regulations 2012, Schedule 1 Part 2, 2(2)d. The total proposed floor area is 98.10sqm (GEA).



Background

Alton Towers Resort is operated by Merlin Entertainments Group. It is the UK's most popular and largest theme park, and is therefore an important generator of tourism. The Resort is also a major employer offering a range of permanent and seasonal contracts.

It is vital that theme park operators refresh their offer to ensure that they remain competitive and continue to attract visitors; a lack of investment results in declining visitor numbers. In 2013, planning permission (ref.13/00861/FUL) was granted for the re-theming of the Old MacDonald Farmyard including the erection of new buildings, extensions to existing buildings, demolition of Big Top and other structures, associated landscaping and pathways. This planning permission has been implemented at Alton Towers Resort and forms an established part of a newly themed area called CBeebies Land. The proposed development seeks to add a small extension to the existing CBeebies Land, replacing an existing maintenance/ back of house area of the theme park with a new attraction, in order to refresh and enhance children and visitor offer at Alton Towers Resort.

Site and Surroundings

Alton Towers Resort is located in the Churnet Valley to the north of Alton Village, and is approximately 195 hectares in size. The main access to the site is from Farley Lane to the west of the Resort. In terms of levels, the main site is located on a plateau from which levels drop into surrounding valleys. There are extensive areas of woodland, particularly on the steep downward slopes of the southern and eastern boundaries. The woodland serves to screen the main part of the park's development from the surrounding area, although there are some limited distant views of structures within the Resort, such as glimpses of parts of the Oblivion ride and existing roof structures (e.g. Hotel). The Resort is broadly rectangular in shape with an east west dimension in excess of 2km and a north south dimension of approximately 1km, albeit varying across the site. The nearest major urban areas are Stoke on Trent, approximately 19km (12 miles) east of the park, and the City of Derby, 29km (18 miles) to the east.

Alton Towers Resort is an established theme park containing a range of rides, attractions, overnight accommodation and ancillary facilities. The resort contains 32 listed buildings and a Scheduled Monument (Bunbury Hillfort). The gardens at Alton Towers are listed Grade I on the Register of Parks and Gardens. In addition the resort is located within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area. Abbey Wood and Park Banks are identified as 'Sites of Biological Importance' and 'ancient woodlands'.

Beyond the Alton Towers boundary are two SSSIs; Dimmingsdale is located to the west and is approximately 1km from the development site and Saltersford Lane Meadow is located to the south of the development site and is approximately 1km from the development site.

The application site is located in the north-west corner of the Resort between the 'Tree Fu Tom Training Camp' and 'Big Fun Show Time'. The site occupies an area of approx. 0.12ha and includes an earth bund, overgrown by dense vegetation. The site is currently occupied by a number of timber building and small sheds, and is used as a maintenance/back of house area for the CBeebies Land.



The site is located outside of the boundary of the Registered Park and Garden and Site of Biological Importance. The closest listed buildings to the development site include the grade II listed gate piers, gates and railings forming principal entrance to Alton Park, which are located approx. 80m from the nearest boundary of the development site.

Proposed Development

The proposed development will introduce a new rotating ride and associated themed building and operator's booth as an extension to the existing CBeebies Land. The footprint of the proposed themed building will be 94.1sqm GEA (81sqm GIA) and will measure 9.7m by 9.7m with a height of approx. 3.6m. The building will be themed along the eastern, western and northern elevations to complement the existing CBeebies theme. The thematic elements will be supported by a colonnaded structure, the maximum height of which will be approx. 7.4m. The footprint of the operator's booth will measure 2m by 2m (4sqm GEA and 3.24sqm GIA), with a maximum height of 4.5m (including theming on top). Four ride signs are also proposed along the edge of the rotating ride, each of which will measure 3.43m (H) by 1.93m (W). These advertisement signs do not require consent as they are located within enclosed private land in accordance with Class A of Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007.

The accompanying drawings of the proposed building show the maximum size of the buildings, extent of theming and materials proposed. In summary, the new themed building will be clad in dark coloured profiled metal sheeting and the thematic elements will be made of timber, render and tiles. The operator's booth and associated signs will be made of steel painted with thematic details. The proposals will also extend the existing paved area in order to allow easy access with for pushchairs.

The proposed new attraction will also involve the removal of a section of the bund adjacent to the existing Tree Fu Tom Training Camp together with the trees and shrubs growing on it. There are 19 trees within the site, all of which are of low Category C trees and shrubs and have no significant arboricultural value. In order to mitigate the loss for these trees a replacement landscaping scheme will be implemented, details of which to be agreed by way of a planning conditions.

Planning Assessment

The Statutory Development Plan currently comprises the Core Strategy (CS, adopted March 2014). The Churnet Valley Masterplan – Supplementary Planning Document (March 2014) is also a material consideration in the determination of planning applications at the site.

Alton Towers Resort is identified within the Core Strategy as being within the Churnet Valley, an area identified for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. The promotion of new tourism opportunities within the Churnet Valley area and at Alton Towers Resort is supported by Spatial Strategy SA3 'Encouraging a strong, prosperous and diverse economy' and Core Strategy Policy SS7 'Churnet Valley Area Strategy', CS Policy E3 'Tourism and Cultural Development' and the Churnet Valley Masterplan.

Spatial Strategy Policy SA3 seeks to develop and diversify the economy in a sustainable manner. The accompanying text identifies strong support for the growth of existing businesses and specifically mentions the need to provide support and opportunities for the growth and expansion



of major employers such as Britannia Building Society, JCB and Alton Towers which are central to the delivery of a thriving economy.

CS Policy SS7 supports the sensitive expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities, such as Alton Towers Resort, and the provision of compatible new tourist attractions and facilities. Development should be of a scale and nature and of high standard of design which conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area and demonstrates strong sustainable development and environment management principles. Furthermore, it states that the consideration of landscape character will be paramount in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities and sense of place and to maximize opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features. New tourism and visitor attractions are further supported by CS Policy E3 'Tourism and Cultural Development'.

A Long Term Plan with supporting technical studies has been prepared by Alton Towers Resort. This sets out Alton Towers Resort's plans for the next 10 years. Alton Towers Resort undertook community consultation in connection with its Long Term Plan in summer 2009. The development strategy at Alton Towers Resort included a Concept Plan which identified a number of zones within the Resort and within these zones measures which are considered appropriate subject to further detail. The proposed development is in accordance with Alton Towers Resort development zones identified in the Churnet Valley Masterplan (2014). The application site is located within Zone 1 which is designated as a '*redevelopment area*'. In accordance with the requirements for Zone 1, consideration has been given to the impact on trees within this area which is discussed in detail below.

We set out below the key planning issues and how the development is compliant with planning policies.

Trees and Landscaping

The new ride is proposed to be located within an existing developed area and will have no adverse impact on the Register Park and Garden and woodlands to the south of the site.

The proposed expansion of the Cbeebies attraction will extend into an area divided by bunds. These bunds were planted with a mix of predominantly native species for the purpose of forming a dense barrier. The proposed extension of the Cbeebies land will involve the removal of a section of the bund adjacent to the existing Tree Fu Tom Training Camp together with a total of 19 trees / shrubs growing on it. The trees/shrubs on site have been surveyed and the accompanying Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) identifies that they are all low value, category C trees which were planted to form a dense barrier and not for arboricultural value and for long-term retention as mature trees. The accompanying AIA identifies that many of these low quality trees have already been removed as part of the ongoing safety management of the tree stock due to significant defects.

The AIA concluded that the proposed development will not involve the loss of any significant trees and the effect of the loss of the small on-site trees/shrubs can easily be replaced within the proposed landscaping for the scheme. The section of trees to be removed is not visible externally and the trees closest to Farley Lane will be being retained.



Ecology

The wider landscape beyond Alton Towers Resort is pasture and agricultural land of improved and semi-improved grassland, hedgerows, woodlands, dry stone walls, rivers, streams and open water, with the village of Alton located to the south and Farley to the northwest.

A preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been undertaken on site which concluded that the impact of the proposed development on local biodiversity will be negligible. As a result of the proposed development, scrub habitat and trees will be retained where possible in order to maintain connectivity between Local Wildlife Sites. Further details on ecology can be found in the accompanying report produced by Baker Consultants.

Flooding and Drainage

The application site is currently occupied by dense vegetation and a few small timber buildings with a small concrete area. The Environment Agency's Indicative Floodplain Map shows that the site lies in Flood Zone 1 - an area with a low probability of flooding. The application is accompanied by a Drainage Statement to ensure the development would not cause an increase in the risk of surface water flooding.

The site is currently heavily overgrown and has no existing drainage outfalls. In the current situation surface water runoff is drained by overland flows or infiltration into the ground. It is therefore proposed that excess surface water flows from the buildings and from new hard surfacing are to be discharged to ground via SUDS in the form of a geocellular storage crate soakaway, located beneath external paving via a traditional network of below ground pipework. The SUDS will provide sufficient capacity to store and attenuate water for all storm return periods up to and including a 1 in 100 year design event with an allowance for 30% future climate change.

The park discharges foul water runoff to a pumping chamber via a traditional network of underground pipework. The pumping chamber in turn discharges foul water runoff to Severn Trent's public sewer network, via a rising main. Foul water flows resulting from the proposed building will be minimal and will be discharged via a traditional network of underground pipework to the existing 100mm foul drainage serving the existing buildings to the south of the application area, which in turn, discharges to Severn Trent Water foul sewer in Farley Lane to the west of the site.

In terms of flood risk, it is concluded that the development can be occupied and operated safely and that there will be no increase in the level of flood risk to the site or neighbouring sites as a result of the development. Therefore the development is considered acceptable in terms of flood risk. Further details on flooding and drainage can be found in the accompanying assessment by Simpson Associates.

Heritage and Archaeology

The site is located within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area which has a varied character and appearance. It includes the Alton Towers estate with its major rides and theming as well as the villages of Alton and Farley. Alton Towers Resort contains a number of listed buildings and a schedule of ancient monument.



The proposed CBeebies extension will not be visible from the surrounding listed buildings due to screening by the woodland surrounding the application site. The closest listed building/structure to the site includes the grade II listed gate piers, gates and railings forming principal entrance to Alton Park on Farley Lane, located approximately 80m to the south 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 extension will form part of the CBeebies land, a well-established part of this part of the Conservation Area, characterised by theme park rides and associated buildings. It is considered that the proposals are consistent with the existing character and appearance of this part of the conservation area, and as such, will have no material impact upon the special architectural or historic interest of the Conservation Area, its character or appearance, and its setting.

With respect to below ground heritage (archaeology). The site is currently occupied by vegetation on a man-made mound and a few small timber buildings with a small concrete area. Much of site has previously been disturbed as a result of the bund development and associated landscaping of this area as part of the CBeebies Land development as well as during the development of the site as a theme park. Therefore, the archaeological potential of this area is considered to be low.

Transport

The Resort has a Long Term Plan that includes a strategy on-site family accommodation to encourage longer stays and assists in reducing the peak time traffic movements on the local highway network. Furthermore highways contributions have been made by Alton Towers Resort to the County Council to allow local measures to be implemented to improve traffic flows in the surrounding area.

The proposed ride will operate as a 'secondary attraction' within Alton Towers Resort comprising part of the cumulative overall theme park offer, rather a 'destination' attraction in its own right. Indeed given the nature of the leisure and entertainment industry, the need to upgrade and refresh attractions is necessitated by the need to maintain appeal and retain visitor numbers, rather than to grow visitor numbers in the traditional sense. As such the proposed small scale CBeebies extension will not generate additional traffic numbers associated with the Resort and will not affect the operational capacity of the local highway or public transport network.

Noise

A Noise Assessment has been undertaken of the proposed ride development to ensure that no adverse impacts will arise from operational and construction noise associated with the new attraction. For the purposes of the noise assessment the nearest residential receptors to the proposed attraction have been defined and assessed.

With respect to construction activities, the proposed ride will be predominantly constructed off-site and the proposed building will be a modular construction. The predicted noise levels will not exceed the outlined threshold value in line with BS5228 with respect to the identified nearest residential properties at Wootton Lane, Longshaw Lane and Pink Lodge on Farley Lane. Therefor



the Noise Assessment concluded that no significant impacts are predicted during construction phases to any receivers.

The Noise Assessment also considers operational noise impacts. In terms of traffic generation the report identifies that there will be no change to existing transportation noise levels as the proposed attraction will not generate any additional traffic numbers to and from the Resort. With respect to operational noise from the proposed development will involve a small rotating ride with a number of themed carriages that will rise and fall throughout the ride time, and a new building which will offer children's entertainment in the form of amplified music and speech internally within the building. Mitigation features have been incorporated into the design and fabric of the building in the form of substantial sound insulation, to ensure that noise levels, expressed as $L_{Aeq, 15mins}$, from the proposed attractions, do not exceed existing background noise levels, expressed as $L_{A90, 15mins}$. The assessment has shown that levels will comply with the agreed requirements for noise at defined noise sensitive receivers, as agreed with environmental noise officer at the Local Authority:

- Ambient noise levels, expressed as $L_{Aeq, 15mins}$ dB, measured at the nearest receivers to the north, south and west of the proposed attraction, should not exceed background noise levels, expressed as $L_{A90, 15mins}$ dB, as measured before the proposed attraction becomes operational.

It is therefore concluded that the proposed development will not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area from a noise perspective.

Summary

The proposed new development will refresh the attractions offered and contribute to the long-term viability of Alton Towers Resort, and, in turn, the associated economic benefits it brings to the surrounding area. This is in accordance with local policies and the adopted Churney Valley Masterplan which support the sensitive expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities at Alton Towers Resort.

There is a need to maintain a continuous programme of investment and improvements in the quality and value for money of the services and facilities offered at the Resort. At the national and local level, policies seek to support proposals to promote tourism and the economy. The proposed new ride development will continue to diversify the existing range of attractions available at CBeebies Land, within Alton Towers Resort, thereby enhancing the visitor offer and ensuring the Resort continues to attract visitors. The proposals will therefore contribute to achieving the Council's aims to support and promote economic development and tourism in the district.

We trust the enclosed application documents are sufficient to enable the application to be validated and look forward to receiving your decision as soon as possible. In the meantime, if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, Iain Rhind or Timea Nacsá.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Whitney
Planning Director



Cc Neil Walker – Merlin Entertainment Group
Liz Greenwood – Merlin Entertainment Group (Alton Towers Resort)
Andy Nichols - Nichols Brown Webber

Schedule 1 – List of Application Drawings

Drawing Title	Drawing Reference	Scale and Size
Location Plan	373/94.2/1	1:2500 at A1
Block Plan as Proposed	373/94.2/2	1:500 at A3
Site Plan as Existing	373/94.2/3	1:200 at A3
Site Plan as Proposed	373/94.2/4	1:200 at A3
Building Plans and Elevations	373/94.2/5	1:250 at A3
Site Sections AA-BB as Existing	373/94.2/6	1:250 at A3
Site Sections AA-BB as Proposed	373/94.2/7	1:250 at A3
Operator's Booth, Sings Plans and Elevations	373/94.2/8	1:50 at A3