

Burnett, James

From: Planning (SMDC)
Subject: FW: SMD/2016/0378
Attachments: Planning objection.docx

-----Original Message-----

From: Alison Conybeare
Sent: Monday, September 12, 2016 10:23 PM
To: Curley, Jane
Cc: Planning (SMDC)
Subject: SMD/2016/0378

Dear Mrs Curley

Please find attached another late objection to the above application.

Thank you

Alison

Alison Conybeare
The Old Post Office
8 Whiston Eaves Lane
Whiston
Staffs
ST10 2JB

September 2016

Dear Councillor

I am a resident of Whiston and am writing, begging you to seriously consider refusing the current planning application for Moneystone Quarry (SMD/2016/0378). Essentially, this application, if it goes ahead will ruin my life and that of many other residents in the surrounding area of the Quarry. Please, please, please take time to read this letter, which points out some of the arguments against the proposal. I have tried so hard over the years to read all that is on the website and write coherent planning objections, despite working, running the household and looking after my young son. I feel at complete despair that we are continually being bombarded by glossy leaflets and technical reports produced by people who have spent years convincing councils of their proposals with all the working day to produce them. Please read this and stand up for your local community. Not only do we not want this proposal, we actually fear its consequences. If given the go ahead, it will ruin this part of the Churnet Valley forever. There is no going back.

Site

Moneystone quarry (formally Whiston Eaves) is a beautiful area nestled in the heart of the Churnet Valley. As recognised previously by the fact that it currently has an area of outstanding national beauty (AOB) application and current sites of specialist scientific interest (SSSI) and sites of special biological interest (SBI) due to its biodiversity, Ancient Woodland and Listed Buildings. It has also been specifically recognized by SMDC in their recent refusals for small developments, namely the land adjacent to 18 Whiston Eaves Lane, Ross Road & recommendations for a change of use for the Sneyds Arms public house and refusals of a dwelling adjacent to the Sneyds Arms. Where SMDC have suggested that sites should be selected "only for appropriate development which enhances community vitality or meets a local, social or economic need". In addition, the area in question is a greenfield site. It is a former quarry with a legal restoration plan, which should be completed before any additional planning is considered.

Residents views

Over 15% of the villagers of Whiston, Moneystone & Oakamoor took to a protest walk early on a cold and icy Saturday morning during December 2014. This is not an insignificant number of people to sacrifice their Saturday morning and of course does not include those who were either otherwise committed or unable

to physically undertake such a venture. Laver Leisure constantly talk about “expert” advice and opinions, but how can any of these be more expert than the people who see it 365 days a year? It is well known that no amount of studying can equal real experience and it from the passion of the local experts in their determination to undertake such a walk, not to mention those who have taken time out of their busy lives to formally object to this application specifically, it’s predecessor (SMD/2014/0682) and in the previous shaping of the Core Strategy. And don’t forget, it is the taxes of these same residents that is paying for the council’s officers and it is also the votes of these same people who voted in you, the councilors. It is therefore the duty of both councilors and officers to represent the views of the local residents and not be taken in by the finances and glossy leaflets of large companies. In 2011, when Laver Leisure first informed the public of its intentions with the site, a survey of Whiston, Moneystone & Oakamoor was conducted, which showed that 90% of villages were against the proposal, with over a 50% response rate. To make this worse, Laver Leisure have then shown intent in their documentation (Christie report) to have the number of staying visitors up to 248,000 within 5 years in order to make it a viable business venture.

Can Laver Leisure be trusted?

Laver Leisure acquired this land with a legal restoration plan already in existence. A restoration plan which they failed to undertake within the agreed time frame and only some time after this agreement had expired did they apply for a revision to this restoration plan. This revision was granted, yet despite being the restoration plan that they have now asked for, they have failed to complete the restoration, which expired March 2014. With a company that cannot even comply with its own agreed plans, how can we expect any future agreements/conditions be adhered to?

Listed Buildings

There are 3 Listed buildings from Whiston Eaves, which were demolished on the condition that they should be reconstructed as near to their original site as possible, while the area was still being quarried. One of these has been reconstructed further along Whiston Eaves Lane, in the village of Whiston. The other two remain palleted. One has been recommended refusal by Jane Curley, the same planning officer for this application, to be constructed down Ross Road, Whiston, as it is too far from its original site. Part of the other building remains on site as part of the dry-stone walling (a fireplace is clearly visible). Surely, now that quarrying has ceased on the site, the nearest place to their origin is back where they came from, on the restored land, especially as part of it has never been removed? This is in keeping with the agreed policy SM98-02852LB. Further to this, Little Eaves Farm and Barn are also listed buildings, with direct views onto the solar farm (already under construction) and the hub area; as well as some of the recently moved lodges being planned right against their field. Not only does this risk undermining the land, but the setting of these listed buildings will be seriously compromised by visual intrusion, light and sound pollution, not to mention the potential for lost or intoxicated guests.

Ancient Woodland

The Woodland Trust have recently brought our attention to the ancient woodland of Frame Wood, with their excellent objections. It is proposed that this area can be mitigated against. However, ancient woodland by default must be at least 400 years old, so cannot possibly be mitigated against. Further to this, walking in the ancient woodland will destroy it. Walking on the surrounding soil results in damage and uprooting of the ancient trees and especially the destroying the microecosystem that is so vital in such an area. Visitors do just that, they visit areas and often do not stick to the designated paths. In addition they may feel that the walking of their dogs in this area would be ideal, adding to the damage on these ancient woodlands. It must be pointed out that only 2% of the UK consists of ancient woodland, a figure similar to the rainforest. Yet the UK is absolutely up in arms about the destruction of the rainforest. This figure is also likely to get smaller as the proposed HS2 is likely to destroy even more of this vital land. Please don't let a leisure park add to the devastation of this rare gem in our local countryside.

Business Future

It must be remembered that Laver Leisure is a business and as with any business will result in one of two outcomes – success or failure. If Laver Leisure is successful, the result must surely be growth and it is this that not only am I sure is the intent, but is also noted in Laver Leisure's documents with their 5 year forecast to grow to 250,000 visitors a year, with the 10 year plan being currently unknown.

If however the venture fails, there will be a large area of land with planning permission for 250 log cabins etc., which will most likely be up for sale. Laver Leisure will then want to recuperate their losses as much as possible and I suspect will then suggest it is a good area for housing. And on what grounds could this be refused when permission for the log cabins etc. has already been granted? Especially as 40% of the proposed log cabins are to be sold off privately.

Either way, with a venture planned in a remote area, nestled between 3 small villages currently of 167, 285 & 27 houses, the result will be to swamp the villages turning the area into a small town. Certainly not in keeping with the current character of the area. And it is obvious in their dismissal of the ancient woodland that their only interest is in the making of money.

Traffic

Moneystone Quarry is situated in a highly rural area, with a minimum of 30 minutes drive to the nearest dual carriageway (A50). Further to this, the roads between the A50 and Moneystone are small rural roads, with many buildings abutting the road, making them unsuitable for widening. More specifically, the so called A52 (Laver Leisure's suggestion as to the main way in) has many areas of concern, from the tight bend and parked vehicles at Kingsley, the poor visibility of roads and turnings in Froghall, not to mention the steep Whiston bank which has jack-knifed lorries closing the road approximately every 3 months and the ridge to the east of Whiston often impassible due to snow.

The roads to Monestone Quarry itself comprise of 3 small roads, unsuitable for the traffic proposed. The road from Oakamoor has a weight-limited bridge and although suggested by Laver Leisure to be a road they will use a right turn sign and island to discourage visitors using, I cannot see how, in the age of satellite navigation systems, they will persuade visitors not to use this road on their way to Alton Towers, which is otherwise a long way round. Even if they do go down Whiston Eaves Lane to the A52, they are then likely to go down the tiny Blakely Lane to arrive just a few yards southeast of the original exit, still using Carr Bank.

The other two proposed roads are not much better. Blakely Lane is a single lane through much of the road and runs through the middle of Blakely Farm with buildings abutting the road on either side. Certainly not a road suitable for an increased traffic load and no means of easily widening it either.

Whiston Eaves Lane, is the road of choice for visitors to Laver Leisure's proposed venture. A road that has its junction with the A52 at a place with very poor visibility due to the tight corner to the west of the junction. SMDC & SCC have previously commented on the lack of site lines on the other side of the road (the outside curve), which has better vision. It has been used to refuse planning permission for a dwelling adjacent to the Sneyds Arms, for the recommendation for refusal of the change of use of the Sneyds Arms public house and for conditions on development plans for the Ashbourne Road Garage, further up the hill with even less of a problem with site lines. This has also been noted in Laver Leisure's application where an ambiguous site line has been marked. What do they plan to do with this line? Widen the road and take out the path and Jubilee Garden? They also propose bollards with a ghost island and reducing the speed limit either side of the junction. If the road and junction were suitable for such a venture that Laver Leisure is proposing, then why the need to alter the roads so drastically over a mile away from their own site entrance? It is also a junction that already entertains the traffic not just of the local residents, but also for the nationally famous Whiston Golf Club, situated up Black Lane. Added to this, the entrance to Whiston Eaves Lane is marked by a number of old houses abutting the road on either side. Again, an area where there is no room for widening the road and due to parked cars, is down to one lane. A road that currently does not exceed 75 vehicles per day (as per a local survey) and is certainly not a road that could cope with an additional 2000+ cars (a 30 fold increase) as initially proposed by Laver Leisure, let alone the proposed buses to Alton Towers and increase in traffic as proposed over their 5 year plan, whatever their paid experts suggest (who are basing all their reports on the lower car parking figures rather than actual traffic numbers). Added to this there is a contrary independent traffic report by Paul Mew, who suggests that the safety of this junction has not been complied with as the applicants traffic assessment has used the wrong guidance. And of course Alton Towers is only 3 miles away from the site – 3 miles nearer the A50. The proposed number of visitors by Laver Leisure will therefore only compound any traffic issues already arising from Alton Towers.

It has already been shown that the roads in this area are not suitable for the current traffic level. The Department of Transport in their "Think" campaign has shown that the number of accidents on the rural roads in Staffordshire

Moorlands is twice that of the number of accidents in Stoke-on-Trent. Further to this, the Carbon Dioxide level in the area is already over the national average. The proposal by Laver Leisure can only add to this with drivers unsure of the roads and way.

Health & Safety

Whiston is a village largely of an elderly population. A population that is at a higher than average risk of requiring hospitalization and ambulance requirement. It is my grave concern that due to the traffic issues caused by Laver Leisure's proposal, not only will there be an increase in the number of accidents and therefore injuries and deaths on the roads, but the increased traffic may result in the inability for an ambulance to get to a person who desperately needs such medical input in time, resulting in their death.

Further to this, the only amenities left in Whiston still running (in addition to the Golf Club & Churches) are the village hall (a vibrant heart to the community), the village recreation ground and part-time framing service, all of which are situated on Whiston Eaves Lane, the proposed main access road. The footpaths down this road are limited to a small area round the old Post Office and certainly do not extend to either the village hall or the recreation area opposite. My concerns are that the proposed increase in traffic will either deter local residents from utilizing the existing facilities or worse still will result in a vehicle versus pedestrian fatality – with a high likelihood of it being a child visiting the swings.

Proposed advantages to the local population

1. Sustaining the local economy – Laver leisure suggest that £1 million will be spent on other nearby located local attractions. From the figures proposed, this accounts to approximately £10 per visitor – not a huge amount considering the time each visitor is encouraged to stay. And as it costs about £70 per person to visit Alton Towers, the only real near local attraction, I suspect that the real benefit to the local economy will be negligible. Further to this, many smaller accommodation facilities will become under threat, along with the associated supporting facilities eg local pubs – The Star Inn at Cotton relies entirely on its visitors to succeed, these being from the Star Caravan Park whereby extra facilities are not on site, making people venture out to use the local facilities.
2. Tourism – Laver leisure argue that only 7% of the visiting population stay overnight and this is a good reason to build such an adventure. Yet Alton Towers itself has added a number of lodges in their own grounds and Laver Leisure suggest that closing a currently viable Bed & Breakfast (Crowtrees Farm) and turning it into a stable complex as a good idea for promoting the local businesses and population. As a result, I cannot see how Laver Leisure's proposals will benefit the areas in the way they suggest.
3. New Jobs - Laver Leisure has made a big deal of the advantages it will be giving the local population, mainly the increase in job opportunities of 250 new full-time equivalent positions. This is a figure that needs to be taken with caution, especially as How Planning suggest on their website it is actually 25 fully time jobs. Not much of a difference is it? What sort of

jobs will these be? To be able to afford to live in a rural area, you cannot survive on minimum wage – running a car is a necessity in order to get groceries, work, education, medical care etc. With Alton Towers in close proximity, similar employment is already catered for. As it is there are only 52 persons currently seeking employment in the area and Alton Towers already bus in their staff as there are not enough locally.

4. New facilities - The facilities Laver Leisure is proposing are not devoid from the area. There are excellent farm shops in both Ipstones & Denstone and the Sneyd Arms Public House & restaurant has recently closed down. Archery is catered for in The Cheadle Academy and with a short car journey to Uttoxeter, Ashbourne or Stoke-on-Trent, all the other suggested facilities can be catered for. Laver Leisure do not even plan to offer compensation to the local residents, and I do not see how many of the facilities on offer will appeal to the current local population demographics
5. Connections – There are already a number of public footpaths and bridleways within the Moneystone Quarry area. The proposed development of buildings will certainly not enhance these, but more likely with the use of tarmac and more formal paving result in a more artificial experience, of which most current visitors to the area would avoid.
6. Sustainable proposal – restoring the quarry as per its legal restoration plan is surely the best way of protecting and enhancing the local wildlife and ecology on the site. No such development could surpass this, however carefully planned.

Personal view

As a resident on Whiston Eaves Lane, I cannot see how Laver Leisure can even suggest that the proposed increase in traffic will have no effect on our lives. I live in a house made of soft sandstone, abutting the road, which is already suffering from the effects of the splash water from the small number of vehicles already using the lane. To have such a number of increased vehicles utilizing the road can only compound this issue further.

I am also faced with a difficult exit from my drive with poor visibility. Being someone who leaves their house during Laver Leisure's proposed peak traffic times to drive down Whiston Eaves Lane into Oakamoor to use the nearest school (amongst a number of other similar parents), I cannot see how I will be unaffected by such a proposed increase in traffic by conservative estimate of 129 vehicles over the hour, not to mention the concern I have with my young son visiting either the recreational ground, our goats and chickens or his grandmother's house on the other side of the road.

This is an objection from a mother who is concerned about the health and safety of her son and neighbours, and I would urge anyone considering voting for such an adventure to look at themselves and see if they would be happy to have any potential deaths, whether directly or indirectly, on their conscience.

This is a proposal that even Mark Lynch, the previous Case Planning Officer has described as being controversial. I am therefore relying on you, as a public

official, behaving reasonably, owing a public duty to me, to properly test this application against the policy of the Churnet Valley Core Strategy and hold account if it does not do so.

Yours Sincerely

Alison Conybeare