

PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

PEAK WILDLIFE PARK, WINKHILL

FEBRUARY 2021

Site Address:

Peak Wildlife Park, Winkhill, Staffordshire, ST13 7QR

Applicant:

Peak Wildlife Park

Proposal:

Proposed erection of marquee, agricultural shed, snack shack,
associated works and diversion of public footpaths

Planning, Design & Access Statement:

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Report Prepared By:

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Peak Wildlife Park to prepare a Planning, Design & Access Statement to accompany an application prepared by CTD Architects for the erection of a marquee, storage building, snack shack and covered area, on land at the Peak Wildlife Park, Ellastone Road, Winkhill.
- 1.2 The proposed marquee will occupy a floor area of 450m² and is to be located to the northwest of the existing complex of buildings, to the north of a biomass building which is currently the subject of an application for consent (SMD/2020/0711 refers). The marquee will stand to a maximum height of 5.8 metres and will be finished in a sand coloured material with glazed elevations. It is to be used principally to accommodate school groups for educational purposes.
- 1.3 The proposed snack shack will occupy a floor area of 58.2m² and is to be located immediately south of the proposed marquee and adjacent to the biomass building. To the east of the marquee and the snack shack will be an outside space covered by stretched canvas to provide an undercover outdoor seating area.
- 1.4 To the west of the snack shack and southwest of the marquee it is proposed to erect a storage building that is to be used for storage of hay and animal feed associated with the operation of the zoo and for general implement storage. The building will occupy a floor area of 540m² and will adopt the appearance typical of a portal framed agricultural building.
- 1.5 The application also proposes the diversion of two sections of public footpaths Ipstones 87 and Ipstones 91 in order to address site security and safeguarding issues, as shown on the submitted plans.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site lies to the immediate north / northwest of the main complex of buildings associated with the zoological park, which is a long established tourist attraction (formerly known as Blackbrook Zoological Park). The park lies to the west of the Ellastone Road, from which it has an established vehicular access. The buildings are to be located on a parcel of land that is already laid to hardstanding, and which contains a number of storage containers / materials. Open land extends to the west and north of the site, with the main complex of buildings to the south/southeast. The site as a whole lies within the rural area, and also lies within the Churnet Valley Master Plan area.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 **Policy SS10** of the Local Plan states that the rural areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The Council and its partners will achieve this through a number of actions, including:

- Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified
- Supporting sustainable tourism developments and measures in the Churnet Valley in accordance with Policy SS 11 and the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD;

3.3 **Policy SS11** of the Local Plan states that the Churnet Valley is identified as an area for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. The Churnet Valley Masterplan provides a comprehensive framework for development in the Churnet Valley and development should be in accordance with the

Masterplan. Within this area particular support will be given to the following forms of development and measures:

- short stay and long stay visitor accommodation;
- the expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities and the provision of compatible new tourist attractions and facilities;
- measures to enhance, protect and interpret the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley;
- measures to remediate and restore derelict land, buildings and features including the appropriate redevelopment of sites;
- actions to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the valley, including the maintenance, buffering and connection of designated sites and actions to mitigate climate change.
- measures that support and integrate the heritage transport infrastructure of the valley, sympathetically with enhancing and developing links to strategic footpaths, cycle and horse riding routes.
- measures to improve connectivity and accessibility to and within the Churnet Valley by sustainable transport means having regard to the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

3.4 Policy SS11 also states that 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. Strong sustainable development and environmental management principles should also be demonstrated. 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 maximise opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features.

3.5 **Policy DC1** of the Local Plan states that all development should be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design SPD. It goes on to state that new development should, *inter-alia*:

- *be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area;*
- *be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance;*
- *protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour, and light pollution;*
- *provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use;*

3.6 **Policy DC3** of the Local Plan states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by,

1. Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;
2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;
3. Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds;
4. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;
5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's approach to securing the delivery of sustainable development, and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, aimed at supporting a prosperous rural economy, and securing high quality design. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this Planning Statement.

SMDC Churnet Valley Master Plan SPD (March 2014)

- 4.2 The Churnet Valley Master Plan identifies the Blackbrook Zoological Park (now Peak Wildlife Park) as an opportunity site. It notes that it comprises an existing zoological park where there are opportunities to enhance the attraction. It also notes the possibility to extend passenger services along the route to Waterhouses, with potential for a halt to serve Blackbrook Zoo. The SPD goes on to identify a number of development principles to be applied to new development on the site. The content of the SPD has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application and is discussed in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The application proposes the erection of a marquee on the site, to be used to provide additional indoor space for visitors to the Park, principally for education purposes. It also proposes the erection of a storage building and the siting of a snack shack to serve visitors. The site is located within the rural area wherein proposals that promote sustainable tourism and which sustain the rural economy are generally acceptable in principle (Policies SS10 and SS11 refer). Policy SS10 specifically states that support will be given to sustainable tourism developments in the Churnet Valley, of which this site forms part. Policy SS11 also confirms that support will be given to the expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities and the provision of compatible new tourist attractions and facilities.
- 5.2 The Churnet Valley Master Plan SPD identifies this site as an 'Opportunity Site' and recognises that opportunities exist to enhance the attraction. The Master Plan also encourages development that brings benefits and a sustainable

future for local communities through the provision of employment or improved facilities and unlocking the potential of under-utilised assets.

- 5.3 The applicant acquired the site in 2015 and in the first year of operating had total visitor numbers of 36,931. Since then the applicant has made various improvements to the site to enhance the attraction, which this has led to a substantial increase in visitor numbers which during 2019 totalled 168,104. Turnover has increased ten fold over that same period. Associated with the increase in visitor numbers has been additional employment generation, with the site currently employing 25 full time members of staff and 24 part time members of staff. The applicant aspires to increase visitor numbers on the site up to 200,000 within the next 3 years, but to achieve this the infrastructure on the site needs to be improved.
- 5.4 The proposed marquee is required in order to provide additional accommodation on the site to enable the Peak Wildlife Park to cater for additional school groups and other indoor activities. Peak Wildlife Park currently host around 6000 school children every year (pre-Covid), with around 2,500 of those receiving specially created talks and workshops. The lack of indoor space on the site means the applicant has to regularly turn away schools, as they are unable to accommodate more than 100 pupils a day, as most schools insist upon indoor facilities for both lunchtimes and workshops.
- 5.5 The Covid-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for extra space to be provided, as there is a requirement for social distancing to be maintained, and for a safe environment to be provided. The business is looking to respond positively to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic so that it can operate effectively (post lockdown) whilst meeting Government imposed

recommendations and requirements. As a zoological attraction, the overheads of the business do not disappear as soon as the doors are closed, as the applicants have a duty to keep their animals fed, cleaned and provided with warm and comfortable housing. It is therefore imperative to the business that they are able to provide appropriate space to maintain its visitor numbers, whilst also maintaining compliance with government requirements.

- 5.6 The proposed marquee, snack shack and covered seating area will play a pivotal role in the growth of the business, by providing a valuable area of indoor space for educational purposes and other indoor activities, as well as undercover external seating, something which is in short supply within the Park as a whole. The snack shack will likewise enable the Park to continue to offer refreshments to visitors – a key component of its overall business model. The shack is already in situ on the site and is to be relocated from its current unauthorised position to the new location, where it will no longer have any adverse impact on the setting of the listed buildings.
- 5.7 Paragraph 80 of the NPPF states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account local business needs and wider opportunities for development. Paragraph 83 of the NPPF goes on to state that planning decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings and should also enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.
- 5.8 The addition of the marquee, snack shack and external covered seating area will enable the applicant to triple the number of school children they can

accommodate on the site at any one time, which will provide a substantial boost to the business. This is particularly important from a business perspective, as school groups generally visit the site during 'off peak' times and thus play a highly valuable role in providing income streams during periods when the park is not usually busy with visitors. The proposed marquee will also offer opportunities to host team building events in order to further diversify the Park's income stream, whilst also enabling the applicant to broadcast their strong conservation message to new people.

- 5.9 The storage building is required to provide a dedicated area for the storage of bedding, hay and foodstuffs for the animals, and for the storage of associated implements and maintenance machinery / vehicles and will constitute an appropriate facility for the upkeep of the Park. It is anticipated that the proposed development will generate an additional 3 full time jobs, and 6 additional part time jobs on the site, whilst also serving to safeguard the existing jobs that the park supports.
- 5.10 The proposal will therefore derive economic benefits, both to the business itself by helping it to grow in a sustainable manner, but also in terms of job creation and retention. Such benefits are considered to carry significant weight in favour of the proposed development.
- 5.11 Having regard to the above considerations it is submitted that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and accords with the objectives of policies SS10 and SS11 of the Local Plan, and guidance contained within the Churnet Valley Master Plan. The principle of development is therefore considered to be acceptable.

Landscape Impact

- 5.12 The application site is located within the Churnet Valley Master Plan area, wherein there is a focus on ensuring that new development respects, enhances and protects the positive aspects of the Churnet Valley. The proposed marquee, outdoor seating area, snack shack and storage building are to be located to the northwest of the existing cluster of buildings which will serve to minimise their wider visual impact on the landscape. In views from the Ellastone Road the buildings will be largely screened by the existing buildings and structures associated with the Park, whilst from the Ashbourne Road, the buildings will be seen against the backdrop of the existing cluster of buildings.
- 5.13 The buildings are low-key in nature and utilise a palette of materials that will serve to minimise their visual intrusion and assimilate them with the surrounding zoological park. The scale, massing and design of the buildings is furthermore in keeping with those typically found within the Park and the surrounding area. In addition, there is scope within the site to undertake some additional planting in and around the buildings if this is felt necessary to help further soften the impact of the development. For the reasons set out above it is concluded that the proposed development is in accordance with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Local Plan.

Residential Amenity

- 5.14 There are no immediate residential properties who will be adversely affected by the proposed development, and the facilities will only be used during existing park opening hours. The buildings will not derive any conflict with the Local Authority's minimum interface distances, and consequently the proposed development is considered to accord with the relevant provisions of policy DC1 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Car Parking & Means of Access

- 5.15 The application site benefits from an established means of vehicular access, along with a substantial area of car parking which has sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the business and avoid any adverse impact on highway safety. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with the requirements of paragraphs 108 and 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Public Footpath Diversion

- 5.16 The submitted proposal also seeks consent for the diversion of two sections of existing public footpath (Ipstones 87 and Ipstones 91). The existing public right of way (Ipstones 87) intersects through the centre of the park which makes it extremely difficult for the applicants to ensure that the zoo's perimeter is secure at all times (as required in The Secretary of State's Standard of Modern Zoo Practice, section 8.29). The existing alignment of the rights of way also raise concerns from a health and safety perspective, as the current routes could potentially allow members of the public access to dangerous animals as part of the Park's expansion plans. The application proposes to divert Public Footpath 87 northwards from the point where it meets the public highway, connecting with Public Footpath 91. The application also proposes to divert part of Public Footpath 91 so that it connects with Public Footpath 90 further north, adjacent to a nearby ford. The diverted footpaths will still enable walkers to connect with the existing public footpath routes, but will do so in a manner which safeguards the security of the park in line with the applicant's legal requirements.

6 Conclusion

6.1 It is submitted that the proposed development constitutes a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- *The proposal relates to an Opportunity Site within the Churnet Valley Master Plan, and will facilitate the sustainable growth of the existing business and address an identified need for additional indoor accommodation, undercover seating and storage on the site;*
- *The proposal will secure an increase in the number of full time and part time employees on the site;*
- *The proposal will not give rise to any material adverse harm to the character and appearance of the landscape or derive any harm to neighbouring residential amenity.*
- *The proposal will not give rise to any highway safety impacts as there is already adequate parking facilities on site to meet the needs of the business.*

6.2 For these reasons the proposed development is considered to accord with the provisions of policies SS10, SS11, DC1 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, and guidance set out within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Churnet Valley Master Plan.