

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0064
Valid 06/02/2024

RIPSAW CAFE
ALTON TOWERS FARLEY
LANE
FARLEY

Demolition of existing Funk n Fly ride and erection of replacement ride'
(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Heritage
- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Trees
- Residential amenity including consideration of noise

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

This site formally housed the Funk n Fly ride which has now been removed. It lies within the established Alton Towers theme park in the area known as Forbidden Valley. It is however on the edge of the park, Adjacent to ancient woodland also part of the Grade 1 Registered Park and Garden. The Deer park wall, a non-designated heritage asset lies immediately to the south of the application site and forms the boundary of the ancient woodland. The site also lies within the Farley and Alton Conservation Area.

Three trees (two Sweet Chestnut trees and a Holly, all Category C trees) would be removed to accommodate the queue lines

The application site extends to approx. 933 sq m

PROPOSAL

The new ride will sit on top of a building which has dimensions of approx. 11.5m by 14.5 and which is shown to span across the existing wide path to form an underpass arrangement. The building has a height of 4.8m. Details of the actual ride are not provide for commercial reasons, however the maximum parameters of the ride when operational are clearly shown. The top height in operation is 18m. When on site the Case Officer was shown a visual of the ride and is satisfied that the amount of information shown on the amended plans is sufficient to enable an understanding of the visual impact of the ride and its extent when operational.

Revised plans requested by the Case Officer now show the proposed queue lines formed within the area of existing green banking to the north west. Sections have also been provided. The ride is accessed via external stairs leading to the top of the building. Guests leave the ride on the opposite side of the building, again via an external staircase. A lift is provided for any guests with mobility issues.

Two theming structures are shown either side of the ride – height of approx. 10m
Again detailing is reserved for commercial reasons

Plans considered

ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0101 P0.1	Location Plan
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0201	Existing Plan (site)
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0400 PO 1	Existing elevations
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0401 PO1	Existing elevations Sheet 2
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0301 PO2	Site sections
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0402 PO 3	Proposed elevations – Sheet 1
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0403 PO 4	3D Isometric
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0404 PO 1	Proposed elevations – Sheet 2
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0202 PO 5	Proposed plans (site)
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0205	Proposed fence plan and elevations
ATPO SA FV XX DR A 0601 Rev C1.1	Deer Wall Protection Detail
373 106 1	Site Landscape Plan existing
373 106 2	Site Landscape Plan proposed

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Adopted 2014)

SS1 Development Principles
 SS11 Churnet Valley Masterplan
 SD4 Pollution
 DC1 Design Considerations
 DC 2 Heritage
 DC3 Landscape Impact
 T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None specifically recorded for this site but much history for the wider Alton Towers site

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice: Expired
 Neighbour consultation: Expired
 Press Advert: Expired

Public Comments

Two letters of support – consider a new attraction at AT is needed to provide thrills for guests, that it will provide economic benefits and jobs and cement AT as the UK's Number 1 destination.

Alton Parish

No objection but would like any lighting at night to be either low lighting or preferably no lighting to prevent light pollution

Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions

Trees and Woodland Officer

No objection subject to conditions

Conservation Officer No comments

OFFICER COMMENTS

There is no objection in principle to this development which replaces an existing, albeit smaller ride which has now been removed from site. It lies within the established Alton Towers theme park. Policy SS11 of the Local Plan provides support for the expansion and provision of new tourist attractions within the Churnet Valley in which the site lies. The adopted Churnet Valley Masterplan supports Policy SS11 and provides a comprehensive framework for development in the Churnet Valley. Alton Towers is identified as an Opportunity site within the Masterplan. The site is within the developed area of Alton Towers, Zone 4 albeit as noted above the site is towards the edge of the park adjacent to the ancient woodland. Zone 4 has been earmarked as a potential new entrance for the park

Heritage impact and Design

A Heritage Statement is provided. It concludes that the impact on the historic gardens and Conservation Area will be 'completely benign'. It mentions in brief the Deer Park wall, a non-designated heritage asset immediately to the south but outside of the application site, but does not assess its significance.

Plans submitted of the existing ride suggest that it also operated to a height of approx. 18m. The proposed ride would however occupy a greater footprint/area. The queue lines are to be formed in the green open area to the north west and will regrettably result in the loss of a small area of green open space and three trees, however this is more than compensated for by the proposed landscaping – see further assessment below.

In terms of heritage there is no intervisibility between the proposed new ride and any of the Listed buildings on site. Consequently no harm is identified. The Deer park wall, does lie very close to the southern boundary. A plan detailing measures to protect the wall during construction is proposed and is acceptable providing all protection measures are removed once the ride becomes operational .

In more general design terms the proposal is a ride in a theme park and in that respect it is in keeping with its surroundings. There is some sympathy with the applicants

desire to keep details of the theming and the ride confidential at this stage for reasons of commerciality. The scale (height, extent) of the ride is provided and can be assessed – see detailed visual assessment below. The actual detail of materials and finish can reasonably be conditioned.

For the above reasons and with conditions there is no objection on design or heritage grounds and with conditions compliance with Policies DC1 and DC2 and the NPPF can be achieved

Landscape and Visual Impact including tree protection

In terms of existing trees a Tree Constraints survey plan and schedule is provided but seemingly not the complete Arboricultural impact assessment report that would normally accompany a planning application where trees are present and need to be taken into account. Notwithstanding this, and with assistance from the existing/proposed landscaping plans, the Trees and Woodland Officer advises that certain key information can be derived. He says that there are only 2 trees of any note within the application site, these being denoted T8965 and T9966, both early-mature Sweet Chestnuts around 7m tall and both assessed as retention category C (low arboricultural value/amenity significance); they are evidently both part of previously planted ornamental landscaping rather than components of the underlying historic/natural landscape structure of the resort. It can be deduced that both these trees would need to be removed to accommodate the proposed development, and this is confirmed in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The LVA also notes that a third tree, a Holly again of low quality/significance, would also be removed but the proposed landscape scheme seems to suggest that it would in fact be retained.

The Trees and Woodland Officer advises that the loss of 2 (or 3) low grade trees would not have a significant impact within the site and would be more than compensated in the longer term by proposed new planting. He also comments that there are also existing trees at various points outside but close to the application site boundary, but given suitable temporary protection during construction there should be no significant harmful impact on these.

In terms of landscape and visual impact the application site is partly developed and partly landscaped. The proposed development would change the character of some of the existing landscaped areas within the site, as noted above, by the introduction of ride structures and queue lines. It would also introduce new landscaping. All of these elements would be within the context of the existing resort/theme park and would be in clear public view from within the theme park, but this would be very much in keeping with existing character and appearance. No objection is raised. The submitted LVA demonstrates that the proposed development would be completely screened in views from key viewpoints in the surrounding area external to the resort, and so would have no visual impact from outside the resort. The new landscaping includes 16 new standard trees of species appropriate to the planted estate landscape setting of Alton Towers, together with areas of dense native understorey planting. This would more than compensate for the loss of 2 (or 3) existing trees discussed above and some existing shrub planting.

Finally it is noteworthy that the existing mature woodland to the south of the Deer Park Wall is registered as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW). Ancient Woodland is regarded as an irreplaceable natural habitat, and there are strong national and local

policies which would oppose development proposals which would lead to the loss or deterioration of Ancient Woodland. In this instance, the application site is outside the extent of ASNW and the Trees and Woodland Officer advises that there would be no direct harmful impact on it or its trees.

He goes on to remind of Natural England and Forestry Commission standing advice on Ancient Woodland which advises that a buffer zone of minimum 15m around Ancient Woodland is kept free of development, and ideally managed as semi-natural habitat, and it is also appropriate to have regard to potential indirect impacts such as disturbance. However, in the case of Alton Towers Resort, there are numerous locations where development and intensive operational and visitor activity (including noise, crowds of people, lighting etc) occurs immediately adjacent to the Ancient Woodland – this would include existing and previous rides on the current application site itself. It is therefore considered that given this long established existing situation, it would not be reasonable or justified to expect or require full compliance with the standing guidance as the proposed development would not create any new or particularly intensified impacts.

For all of the above reasons the application is considered to be acceptable in terms of tree protection, landscape and visual impact and the impact on Ancient Woodland. With conditions compliance with NE2, DC3 and the NPPF is achieved

Amenity

An updated Noise Impact Assessment (Cahill design Rev 1.2 – APR 24) was provided during the course of the application. It has been assessed by the Environmental Health Officer who says that it is based on a similar ride at another Merlin site. He advises that the predicted noise impacts indicate no adverse impact to neighbouring residential properties and that provided the mitigation is secured (Section 9 of the Noise Assessment) then residential amenity can be protected.

The EHO also recommends a lighting condition. This is a matter which has also been raised by the Parish Council. A condition to secure an external lighting scheme is recommended.

With conditions in place there is considered to be compliance with relevant parts of Policies DC1 and SD4 and the NPPF.

Highway Safety

No issues raised. The ride is not expected to generate new/additional trips.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The scheme complies with policies in the Development Plan. A recommendation of conditional approval is made

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION :

APPROVE

Case Officer: Jane Curley

Recommendation Date: 29/04/2024

X *J. Colley*

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council