

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

- 1.1 Laver Leisure (Oakamoor) Limited (hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant') is seeking to obtain outline planning permission with all matters reserved for future detailed approval, except means of access for the development of a high quality leisure-led mixed use development on a 51.58 hectare site located on land known as Moneystone Quarry, Staffordshire.
- 1.2 The proposed development comprises 250 lodges, a business centre and hub buildings with a variety of leisure uses, water sports and visitors centres.
- 1.3 On behalf of Laver Leisure, HOW Planning submitted an outline planning application for a high quality leisure development at the above site to SMDC on 20 October 2014. Despite the Council's Planning Officers recommending the application for approval, the Planning Committee resolved to refuse the planning application at its meeting on 26 November 2015. The application was formally refused by the Council on 2 December 2015. There were four reasons for refusal which relate to:
  - **Landscape** – relating to the height of the hub building and the principle of the proposed lodges at Black Plantation;
  - **Highways** – relating to an increase in the amount of traffic using Carr Bank and also the reliance of visitors staying at Black Plantation to use private cars to access all facilities within the hub area;
  - **Heritage** – relating to the adverse impact the multi-activity hub area would have on the setting of Little Eaves Farm, a Grade II listed building; and
  - **Planning Balance** – stating that the benefits of the leisure scheme when considered together would not be sufficient to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the harm identified above.
- 1.4 Paul Tucker QC advised Laver Leisure throughout the preparation of the original planning application. Leading Counsel undertook a detailed review of the application prior to its submission as well as a review of the Planning Committee report following its publication. Laver Leisure has sought further advice from Leading Counsel following the refusal of the original planning application and an appeal was lodged to the Planning Inspectorate on 18 February 2016. It is the position of Laver Leisure, as supported by Counsel, that the original proposals are in accordance with the development plan and therefore represent sustainable development. In light of this, and the recommendation by the Council's Planning Officers, Laver Leisure has been advised that it has a strong case for the planning appeal.
- 1.5 Nevertheless, Laver Leisure have sought to accommodate the concerns of the Planning Committee. Accordingly, without prejudice to the ongoing appeal by Laver Leisure, HOW Planning has been instructed to submit this revised planning application which directly addresses all the issues raised within the reasons for refusal.

## **The Proposed Changes to the Leisure Scheme**

- 1.6 This planning application re-submission has made the following changes to the proposed development:
- The height of the proposed hub building has been reduced from 12 metres to 6 metres and the proposed climbing wall has been removed and does not form part of this planning application;
  - The Parameter Plan provides more certainty on the future location of the hub buildings. The area in which the hub buildings can be located at the detailed design stage have been significantly reduced as shown on the Parameter Plan which accompanies this application re-submission;
  - Additional landscaping is proposed within the hub area which further screens the hub development from the listed building and the surrounding footpaths. The additional landscaping is shown on the Illustrative Landscape Detailed Plan for The Hub which also accompanies this application re-submission;
  - The 14 lodges proposed at Black Plantation and the proposed vehicular access from Blackley Lane have been removed as part of this application re-submission. Whilst both the land at Black Plantation and Blakeley Lane remain within the site edged red, permission for this work is not sought as part of the re-submitted application. Black Plantation is shown as “retained existing woodland” on the Parameter Plan;
  - The total number of lodges for which planning permission is sought as part of this application re-submission remains at up to 250 lodges. The 14 lodges removed from Black Plantation have been re-distributed within Quarry 2 – The Upper Lakes. The re-distributed lodges are within the existing development areas as shown on the Parameter Plan and the Illustrative Masterplan for the Upper Lakes;
  - A “no right turn” vehicular access arrangement is proposed onto Eaves Lane. The revised vehicular access design is shown on the Eaves Lane Access Plan which accompanies this application re-submission;
  - A Tunnel Stability Report has been prepared and submitted with this application resubmission. The report demonstrates that in its current state the overall stability of the tunnel is considered acceptable with no significant failures or displacements observed; and
  - Further detail has been provided to clarify the alignment of the proposed footpaths, cycleways and bridleways at the site. This detail is provided on the Detailed Footpath Connection Plans and the Overall Footpath Connection Plan which accompany the application re-submission.
- 1.7 The planning application boundary is shown edged red on an existing Ordnance Survey base map at **Figure 1.1**. The site is described in detail in Chapter 3: Site Description.
- 1.8 A detailed description of the development is presented in Chapter 5: The Proposed Development, which is supported by a series of plans and drawings.
- 1.9 HOW Planning has been commissioned by the applicants to co-ordinate the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process and produce the Environmental

Statement (ES) for the proposed development. Specialist consultants have been appointed to undertake the component studies of the EIA.

## The Site and the Development Proposals

### Site Overview

- 1.10 The site is located 16.5km east of Stoke on Trent, 11km south of Leek, 14.5km west of Ashbourne, 26km north east of Stafford and 4km north east of Cheadle. The entire site lies within the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and is split across the parish boundaries of Kingsley and Oakamoor. It is centred on National Grid Reference SK.045482.
- 1.11 The site, which is approximately 51.58 hectares in size, comprises the former Moneystone Quarry and its landholdings located between the villages of Whiston and Oakamoor in Staffordshire. The silica sandstone quarry, which is known for its production of industrial sands, closed following 60 years of operation in 2012. This decision follows a refusal of planning permission to extend the quarry for further extraction.
- 1.12 Land use within the site boundary comprises a central administrative and processing area of office buildings, former plant sites, car parking and a research and development laboratory. With the exception of the laboratory, the majority of the buildings are currently being demolished. The site is accessed by a private tarmac road off Whiston Eaves Lane and at the northern extent via Blakely Lane.
- 1.13 There are three main quarries on the site, which are hereafter referred to as Quarry 1, 2 or 3. The location of Quarries 1-3 are shown on the Site Location Plan at **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.14 Quarry 1 is located to the immediate south and east of the administrative and processing area on the south side of Whiston Eaves Lane. This area of former quarrying has been largely restored to wetland habitat and some lagoons are present in this area.
- 1.15 Quarry 2 lies to the north of Quarry 1 on the opposite side of Whiston Eaves Lane. Quarry 2 is accessed via a tunnel under the Lane, thereby connecting the two parts of the site. The access track leading from the tunnel separates the quarry in two with its western half consisting of an existing tailings lagoon and the eastern half consisting of a former tailings lagoon which has been restored.
- 1.16 Quarry 3 was the last part of the site to be actively quarried and is located to the immediate north-west of the former plant site at Quarry 1. This area includes a deep quarry with steep sides to the northern edge that has filled with water since the cessation of quarrying activities, forming a lagoon. Water level control gates are situated at the south-western corner of the lagoon that can control the flow of water to the SSSI.
- 1.17 To the south of the site a steep track leads down to the disused Churnet Valley railway, much of which has now been demolished. A former conveyor and pipeline follows the route of the track. Dense woodland and vegetation is located to both the east and the west of the track which form part of Carr Wood and Key Wood respectively.

- 1.18 The land outside of the development site is dominated by open grassland fields bound by stonewalls and hedgerows, some of which are in agricultural use. Crowtrees Farm, which has been subject to a recent change of use application, is located to the immediate east of the site.
- 1.19 The Restoration Scheme for the Quarry was approved in March 2014 (approved 'Restoration Plan' dated December 2013). The key components of the scheme are to supplement existing birch and willow planting with broadleaved planting. Additional areas will be provided for green hay strewing and open grassland. Marginal aquatic planting will take place around the periphery of Quarry 2, and effectively integrated with scrub/wetland habitat.
- 1.20 Condition 35 of the quarry permission (planning permission ref: SM.96/935) requires the restoration of the site within 2 years from the completion of working and for the management and aftercare of the restored site for a period of five years from the completion of its restoration. Laver Leisure submitted amendments to the approved Restoration Plan. This was approved by Staffordshire County Council on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

### **The Need for the Proposed Development**

- 1.21 The Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD (March, 2014) provides a comprehensive framework for future development in the area. Within the Masterplan are eight local character areas which have been identified for their distinctiveness and role they play in achieving the vision of the area. Of the eight, Moneystone has been identified as a character area suitable for development due to significant pressure for change. The SPD recognises the site's potential to enhance the countryside and recreational and leisure opportunities; ensure management of the area's biodiversity; and increase the accommodation available in the valley through a new scheme of restoration and introduction of new activities.
- 1.22 There is a demonstrable shortage of employment opportunities in the district. In 2011, around 8,000 people commuted into the district to work, whereas almost double that amount (15,900) of people commuted out from their residence in the district, to work elsewhere in the region. This indicates that there is a need for employment opportunities to be created within Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 1.23 In terms of the tourism industry, where the district is a popular destination there are comparably very low levels of overnight stay within the district. Of the estimated 4.1 million trips in 2012, 95% were day trips and did not involve an overnight stay. The low amount of overnight stay has been attributed to the shortage of quality accommodation in the area. Further to this, Staffordshire County Council has expressed its belief that the current accommodation stock is not of high enough quality to satisfy demands for overnight hotel visits to the district.

### **Outline of the Proposed Development**

- 1.24 The proposed development has been developed at the strategic level through the Council's Local Plan Core Strategy and the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD, and through the EIA and design process with extensive stakeholder and community consultation.
- 1.25 Environmental constraints and potential adverse effects have been identified and, as a result, mitigation measures have been incorporated into the proposals. Where environmental mitigation measures have not been integrated into the proposals through design, it is expected that the requisite mitigation measures

will be secured by appropriate planning conditions. These have been identified where appropriate in each technical chapter [Chapter 7-16] and summarised in Chapter 18: Summary of Mitigation and Residual Effects.

- 1.26 The key components of the proposed development are listed below and a detailed description is included in Chapter 5: The Proposed Development.
- 1.27 The application proposes the following:
- Up to 250 lodges;
  - Central Hub building providing a swimming pool, restaurant, bowling alley, spa, gym, informal screen/cinema room, children's soft play area, café, shop and sports hall;
  - Farm shop;
  - Visitor centre;
  - Administration building;
  - Maintenance building;
  - Archery centre;
  - Water sports centre;
  - Equipped play and adventure play areas;
  - Multi-sports area; and
  - Car parking and managed footpaths cycleways and bridleways.

## **The Planning Application and Environmental Impact Assessment**

### **EIA Context**

- 1.28 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a systematic process by which information about the scope and likely environmental effects of a proposed development are assessed and presented to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), relevant stakeholders and the public to inform the decision on whether the development should be granted planning permission.
- 1.29 Due to the scheme's nature, scale and location, the proposed development constitutes 'EIA development' under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations 2011 (hereafter referred to as the 'EIA Regulations'). Criteria for establishing the need for an EIA are set out in Schedules 1 and 2 of the EIA Regulations. The proposed development falls under Schedule 2, Section 12(c) 'Holiday Villages and Hotel complexes outside urban areas and associated development'.
- 1.30 The indicative threshold for this class is that if the area of works exceeds 0.5 hectares the development may be referred to as a Schedule 2 project, and it should be evaluated to establish whether the potential for significant environmental effects exists so that an EIA would be required.
- 1.31 This document is the Environmental Statement (ES) which reports the findings of the EIA and supports the planning application re-submission for the proposed development. It has been prepared by HOW Planning LLP with technical contributions from a range of specialist consultants.
- 1.32 The ES is designed to inform readers of the nature of the proposed development, the likely significant environmental impacts and the mitigation measures proposed to protect the environment or seek to reduce any significant adverse impacts. It also identifies the impacts that may remain after mitigation measures have been

implemented and any cumulative impacts that arise in combination with other developments in the area.

### **The Planning Application and the Environmental Statement**

- 1.33 The Moneystone Quarry planning application is re-submitted in outline with all matters reserved except for means of access and proposes:

*"The erection of a high quality leisure development comprising holiday lodges; a new central hub building (providing swimming pool, restaurant, bowling alley, spa, gym, informal screen/cinema room, children's soft play area, café, shop and sports hall); café; visitor centre with farm shop; administration building; maintenance building; archery centre; watersports centre; equipped play and adventure play areas; multi-sports area; ropewalks; car parking; and managed footpaths, cycleways and bridleways set in attractive landscaping and ecological enhancements (re-submission of Planning Application SMD/2014/0682)".*

- 1.34 The methodology for assessment is explained in Chapter 2: Approach and in more detail within each technical chapter.

### **The Planning Application Package**

- 1.35 The planning application re-submission package consists of the following documents:

- Applications Forms, Notices and Certificates;
- Planning Application Plans and Drawings;
- Supporting Planning Statement;
- Environmental Statement (Vol. 1-3);
- Statement of Community Involvement;
- Design and Access Statement;
- Sustainability Statement;
- Energy Statement;
- Feasibility Study; and
- Tunnel Stability Assessment Report

### **The Environmental Statement**

- 1.36 The ES is divided into three volumes and the contents outlined below:

- **Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary** – A document providing a synopsis of the ES without utilising technical language. The summary includes a description of the development, the potential environmental effects associated with the development and the measures proposed to mitigate these impacts.
- **Volume 2: Environmental Statement Main Text** - This volume contains the main body of text of the ES, split into chapters and illustrated with a series of figures. It provides an introduction, the approach to assessment, the assessment of alternatives, a description of the proposed development, a review of relevant planning policy, a series of technical assessments relating to specific environmental topics including cumulative and combined effects and a summary of residual effects.
- **Volume 3: Appendices** – This volume contains supporting information and a collection of technical reports upon which the conclusions of the ES are based.

**Environmental Statement Availability**

- 1.37 The Non-Technical Summary, Environmental Statement and Appendices are available for viewing at the offices of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC).
- 1.38 Further copies of the ES are available on CD-ROM at a cost of £25 from HOW Planning LLP. Paper copies of the Non-Technical Summary are available free of charge.
- 1.39 All documents are available from:

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