

CHAPTER 4: ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

- 4.1 A statutory requirement for inclusion in an ES is the reporting of the consideration of alternatives in the development of a proposal. Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations states that an ES is required to provide:

'An outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant or appellant and an identification of the main reasons for his choice, taking into account the environmental effects.'

- 4.2 This chapter describes the alternatives that were studied for the proposed development and the process of design evolution in response to the EIA process.
- 4.3 The applicant and the design team have undertaken a continuous review process to improve the design, taking into account the views of key consultees, stakeholders and the public. This design evolution process is described in detail and the reasons for the selection of the preferred option stated.
- 4.4 As described in Chapter 1, it is the position of Laver Leisure, as supported by Counsel, that the original proposals contained within the 2014 application are in accordance with the development plan and therefore represent sustainable development. 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.

Alternative Sites

- 4.5 The Moneystone site requires a long term viable use, the proposed development has been specifically designed to integrate with the site and provide a long term sustainable solution for the sites restoration.
- 4.6 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 sites potential to enhance countryside, recreational and leisure opportunities, ensure management of the areas biodiversity, and the potential to increase the accommodation available in the valley through a new scheme of restoration and introduction of new activities. As such, no alternative sites were considered for the proposed development.

No Development Option

- 4.7 The 'no development option' evaluates the likely environmental conditions at the site in the absence of the proposed development. The evaluation of this alternative includes consideration of the future environmental conditions of the site as well as those currently present in order to identify improving or deteriorating trends in the environmental baseline. The consideration of these

conditions may identify whether the proposed development will provide positive or negative environmental consequences in the long term.

- 4.8 In relation to the proposed development, Condition 35 of the quarry permission (planning permission ref: SM.96/935) requires the restoration of the site within two 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. Therefore, in the absence of the proposed development the site would be restored in full accordance with this Restoration Plan.
- 4.9 The proposals are for a high quality leisure led development. This presents a significant opportunity to complement other recreational and leisure attractions in the district. Without the proposed development, which is detailed in Chapter 5, the following positive and negative impacts of the proposals may not be realised:

Socioeconomic effects

- 4.10 The proposed development will provide local employment opportunities and increase the number of overnight stays in the Staffordshire Moorlands District, which is currently very low compared with the rest of the country. In addition the development of Moneystone has the potential to deliver wider economic benefits, acting as a catalyst for further investment and job creation in the local area.
- 4.11 The proposed development will provide new community facilities which will help sustain local villages and businesses through the promotion of local services, goods and attractions, which will be open to all members of the public.
- 4.12 In summary, in the absence of the development the socioeconomic benefits, which correspond with Local Policy Objectives, would not be realised.

Accessibility and Connectivity

- 4.13 The proposed development will lead to a number of changes to the overall pattern of traffic flows in the local area, although there would be no exceedance of capacity on the network. However, the provision of new footpaths and bridleways will be of benefit to existing residents and visitors, and future guests of the leisure village.

Landscape and Ecological Effects

- 4.14 The proposals will restore the site in line with the Restoration Plan, and where plans deviate compensation will be provided in the form of additional comparable habitat.
- 4.15 Whilst in the short term the proposed development will affect habitats in the former quarry areas, in the long term the development provides the opportunity to ensure the long term management of land for nature conservation and will provide the opportunity for the enjoyment of wildlife both on-site and off-site including the SBI adjacent to the site.
- 4.16 Based on the above information, the 'no development' option is not seen as the most appropriate or policy compliant option for the site.

Alternative Layouts & Designs

- 4.17 Several variations in design were proposed for the site, which incorporated variations in site arrangements to assess the site's flexibility in terms of layout and form. These designs were influenced by the results of consultation from discussions with SMDC and other consultees as well as through the identification of site constraints.
- 4.18 The various alternative designs considered are outlined in the supporting Design and Access Statement (Plan-it, 2014) but are also considered below. It should be noted that the mix of alternative uses were considered at the early design stage to test the site constraints and to determine the fundamental requirements of the proposed development.
- 4.19 The emerging proposals were presented at a public consultation event in 2011 to inform and engage the local community on the development. At this point in the Masterplan development, the proposals included c. 640 lodges, a hotel, housing, and a caravan site, along with a holiday leisure complex and associated facilities.
- 4.20 The Masterplan has been tested by the EIA throughout its development to assess the impact of the proposals. In 2013 the LVIA influenced significant changes in the Masterplan. These included: re-designing and reduction in the quantum of development in Quarry 3 to reduce visual impact; removal of the hotel, housing and caravan site from the proposals; a reduction in the number of lodges provided; and removal of development south of Crows Trees Farm.
- 4.21 Preliminary results of the ecological assessment led to the removal of development from protected sites including the SSSI and SBI to the west.
- 4.22 Following these revisions a Development Strategy was outlined in the 2014 Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD to guide the development proposals, the following components formed the Concept Plan (refer to **Figure 4.1**) for the site, and are as follows:
- New development based around restoration of the quarry;
 - Potential for a complementary renewable energy scheme on the site;
 - Suitable uses on site comprised of:
 - Maximum of 250 holiday lodges in total;
 - Outdoor recreational facilities – including walking, cycling, horse riding and climbing;
 - Hub development; and
 - A recreational lake to include non-motorised water based activities.
- 4.23 To ensure that, the design of the proposed development was suitable and sustainable, a series of development principles were established to guide the design evolution process. The development principles are outlined in the Churnet Valley Masterplan (CVM) and guide the overall strategic development approach in the Churnet Valley area. The principles are as follows:

Accessibility and Connectivity

- Utilise the opportunities the site affords for outdoor recreational activities such as cycling, walking and horse riding and water based activities;
- Ensure development does not generate unacceptable volumes of traffic on existing road network and that major highway works are avoided;

- Incorporate measures to create off road links to be used by cyclists, walkers and horse riders to reach other attractions;
- Appropriately address any significant demand for travel generated by development through complementary highway improvements of access routes;
- Ensure that necessary road improvements associated with the expansion of the facility should be in-keeping with the character of the area and avoid creating intrusive features. Roads within the site should be of a scale and nature that are not intrusive to the landscape character and should minimise hedgerow and tree removal; and
- Ensure highway/junction improvements to support development subject to minimising environmental impact.

Economic Considerations

- Complement the role of other key facilities and attractions in the area;
- Lodge development should complement and not impact negatively on existing accommodation stock in the area; and
- Encourage the creation of local jobs.

Sustainable Development

- Create a high quality, sustainable environment which will promote environmental awareness – use of sustainable building techniques, low carbon, low impact development with on-site energy generation, green technology, eco-lodges;
- Ensure new development is water efficient; and
- Ensure that where feasible renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies are included within projects for new development.

Community

- Provide new community facilities which will help sustain local villages and businesses through promotion of local services, goods and attractions, according to local need.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- Ensure that any development is in-keeping with the scale and nature of the landscape character of the three sub areas within which it is located;
- Ensure that any additional planting is of a nature that complements the informal wooded setting of the Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys and relates to the existing woodland planting associated with the quarry. Woodland planting should aim to take on the form and character of the ancient and semi natural woodland which is typical of the landscape character type. This should avoid the introduction of incongruous woodland blocks within the landscape;
- Ensure that any future development is located in a way that does not impinge on the small scale landscape or the open, visible landscape and where they can be screened by existing vegetation or can be screened by appropriately located new planting;
- Ensure that any future development proposals give consideration to the openness and high visibility of areas outside of the core quarry and any development within these locations, where it can be justified, will be required to be low key and should be of a nature, character and style that is intrinsic to the character of the area; and

- Development proposals to be subject to a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and potential impacts on landscape need to be mitigated through sensitive design and a landscape strategy.

Ecology

- Active conservation of the site – re-establishing habitats, measures to protect SSSI, woodland planting;
- Ensure development makes appropriate provision for the management of land for nature conservation and the enjoyment of areas of wildlife and geological interest while ensuring that any potential impacts of development on biodiversity and geodiversity are appropriately mitigated including, if necessary, off-site compensation and enhancements are delivered where possible;
- Maintain the agreed management regime for the Whiston Eaves SSSI;
- Ensure enhancement of biodiversity; and
- Ensure development makes appropriate provision for the sustainable management and use of surface water.

Tourism and Leisure Activities

- Ensure high quality, sustainable tourist facilities are provided;
- Ensure provision of outdoor activity facilities – walking, cycling, horse riding, water sports, climbing etc.;
- Expand off-road paths with existing networks for walkers, cyclists and horse riders; and
- Promote industrial heritage of the site and educational opportunities.

4.24 The Masterplan, as submitted as part of the 2014 planning application was designed to respond to this detailed design guide, and 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.

4.25 As detailed in Chapter 1, 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.

4.26 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.

4.27 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.

4.28 No alternative designs that fall outside of the CVM brief have been considered by Laver Leisure.

Conclusions

4.29 The consideration of alternatives has included the evaluation of a “no development option” and design options. The alternative layouts of the scheme have evolved around a specific design brief outlined by SMDC, through further consultation with key stakeholders and SMDC and in response to the EIA process.

4.30 The 2014 planning application proposed development which represents an appropriate and informed use for the site and accords with the Development Plan. 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 and comprises the following proposed changes to the 2014 planning application. A detailed description of the development proposals which are subject to this planning application re-submission are presented in Chapter 5: The Proposed Development.