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Senior Planning Officer (Majors and Commercial)
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
Stockwell St
Leek
ST13 6HQ

Date: 27 August 2025

Our ref: 03224/10/JF/MLa/33998766v3

Dear Ms Curley

Alton Towers Resort: Planning application for Stage

On behalf of our client, Alton Towers Resort (ATR), a company forming part of Merlin Attractions Operations Limited, we apply for full planning permission for the installation of a stage at ATR. The stage is proposed to be installed within Ingestre Court – a courtyard located north of Mutiny Bay.

The description of development is:

“Installation of a stage and associated canopy structure.”

The application comprises:

- 1 Completed and signed application form and certificates;
- 2 Planning Application Drawings, prepared by Smytheman (see drawing schedule in Annex 1);
- 3 Design and Access Statement, prepared by Smytheman;
- 4 Planning Assessment, including Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) exemption justification, prepared by Lichfields (contained within this cover letter);
- 5 Heritage Impact Assessment, prepared by Lichfields; and
- 6 Sound Impact Assessment Report, prepared by Cahill Design Consultants.

A payment of £298 (plus the Planning Portal administration fee of £85) has been made via the Planning Portal in respect of the Council's planning application fee. This has been determined on the basis of 'other operations' and a charge of £298 per 0.1 ha or part thereof and a site area of 215sqm.

Alton Towers Resort

Alton Towers Resort is the UK's and largest and most popular theme park. It is located in the Churnet Valley to the north of Alton Village and is approximately 195 hectares in size. The main access to the site is from Farley Lane to the west of the Resort.

The Resort comprises rides, attractions, overnight accommodation and ancillary facilities. Within the site there are 32 listed buildings, including the Grade II* listed Alton Towers, and a Scheduled Monument (Bunbury Hillfort). The gardens at Alton Towers Resort are listed Grade I on the Register of Parks and Gardens. In addition, the Resort is located within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area. Abbey Wood and Park Banks are identified as ‘Sites of Biological Importance’ and ‘ancient woodlands’.

There are extensive areas of woodland, particularly on the steep downward slopes of the southern and eastern boundaries. The woodland screens much of the Resort’s activities from the surrounding area, although there are some limited and distant views of the upper elements of the some of the rides and existing roof structures.

Beyond the Alton Towers Resort boundary are two SSSIs; Dimmingsdale is located to the west and is approximately 1km from the development site and Saltersford Lane Meadow is located to the south of the development site and is approximately 1km from the development site.

Application site

The application site is in the north-western part of the resort, just north of Mutiny Bay, west of the Wicker Man ride and south-east of the Skyride Towers Street station. The application site is 215sqm and comprises an area of hardstanding, surrounded by an early 18th century courtyard named Ingestre Court (listed Grade II). The courtyard comprises four red brick ranges surrounding a rectangular courtyard, with an entrance in the centre of each range. The south elevation has a castellated ashlar white Hollington stone façade and large square tower at either side, designed to screen the functional brick stables from the main house (Alton Towers). To the centre of the courtyard is an existing covered canopy with demountable seating.

Figures 1 and 2: Photographs i) Ingestre Court courtyard showing existing canopy / benches at the centre ii) the gothic styled, castellated southern elevation of the courtyard



Source: Lichfields 2025

Stage – Background

ATR originally applied for the installation of a temporary stage in March 2021. Full planning permission was subsequently granted in August 2021 under ref. SMD/2021/0330.

The approved stage was installed on the Front Lawn to the south of Towers Street and north of the lake for the summer season. It then relocated to the Fountain Square, to the south-east of the Hex ride entrance, for the winter season. The permission was granted for a temporary period of three years expiring 15 August 2024, with Condition 6 restricting the use from between 11am – 7pm from 1 February to 30 September, between 11am – 9pm during October, and between 11am – 8pm from 1 November to 31 January.

Subsequently, a S73 application (ref. SMD/2024/0016) was approved in April 2024, which extended the timeframe for the installation of the stage to allow for longer opening hours during September and until the 7 November each year. This was to allow for the stage to be used for the Octoberfest period. The planning permission expires on/before 15 February 2026, after which the stage is to be removed.

Since the S73 approval, ATR has reviewed and assessed potential alternative locations within the resort for the stage and has identified a new location that better serves theme park operations and also reduces impacts on views towards the Towers from the lawn.

Proposed development

Since the stage was introduced in March 2021, the outdoor shows have been a popular attraction for guests. ATR is seeking planning permission for the installation of a stage for outdoor entertainment events between September and February each season. The same stage (of a smaller configuration) will be located within the Ingestre courtyard, as shown on the proposed layout drawing (ref. ATIC-SA-MB-GF-DR-A-0203). Following the end of February of each season, the stage will be removed and put in storage until the following September. The stage will be used for shows during special event periods only: Scarefest, Christmas and February half term. Due to the cost and resource required to install and remove the stage after each event, it is proposed to keep the stage in situ between each special event period.

The stage structure will be approximately 12m wide and 8.8m deep, elevated 0.6m above ground level. Each side of the stage will contain a 2.5m high speaker stack. The stage will also have an arched canopy structure surrounding it (with a maximum height of 6m above ground level), which will be grey coloured high-performance PVC-coated polyester membrane. Installation will not require any groundwork, nor will it be attached to the courtyard building itself; therefore, listed building consent is not required. The existing central canopy and seating area will be used for guests watching the shows to ensure there is protection in all-weather.

This application seeks permission for the installation of the stage on 15 September, and its removal by 1 March each year. The proposal is for a maximum of seven shows per day between the hours of 11am and 9pm (although during Christmas and February half term the shows would be no later than 6pm). The stage will be managed by the ATR operations team in line with existing event management procedures and the mitigation measures set out in the Sound Impact Assessment (see below).

Planning policy context

The Statutory Development Plan currently comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan adopted in September 2020. The Churnet Valley Masterplan – Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

(March 2014) and National Planning Policy Framework (2024) are material considerations in the determination of planning applications at the site.

Designations relevant to the application site are:

- Within Churnet Valley Masterplan boundary (SS11)
- Within Alton Conservation Area
- Within the courtyard of the Grade II listed building (Stables: Ingestre Courtyard, Home Farm)
- Within Alton Towers Registered Park and Garden (RPG) (Grade I)
- Within Countryside Designation
- Within Flood Zone 1 (at low risk of flooding)

Planning assessment

An assessment of the key policies and their relation to the main planning considerations for this application is provided below.

Principle of development

Alton Towers Resort is recognised in the Local Plan Spatial Vision for Staffordshire Moorlands as a significant tourist attraction within the local area and Policy SS11 (Churnet Valley Strategy) identifies the area for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. In particular, Policy SS11 supports the expansion of existing tourism attractions and facilities as does Policy E4 (Tourism and Cultural Development) and the Churnet Valley Masterplan.

The Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD identifies Alton Towers as an opportunity site based on the Long-Term Plan that set out the Resort's plans over a 10-year period. This includes the aim to extend the appeal of the resort beyond the core 'theme park' as well as providing entertainment for different groups of people and age profiles. The SPD includes a Concept Plan for the Resort which identifies a number of zones within which certain measures are considered appropriate subject to further detail.

Consistent with the site's overall use as a theme park, the proposal will support the successful operations of Alton Towers Resort and aligns with the aspirations of the development zone identified in the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD, which is an 'area of redevelopment/retheming for leisure uses which must be sensitive to the heritage of the site' (Zone 1). Accordingly, the principle of development is supported by policy.

Design and heritage

NPPF para. 207 identifies that applications should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by proposals, including any contribution made by their setting. Local Plan Policy DC2 states that the Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. Development in the Churnet Valley is also required to be of a scale/nature and of a high standard design which conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area (Local Plan Policy SS11) and development is also required to respect the site and its surroundings (Local Plan Policy DC1).

A Heritage Statement has been prepared by Lichfields, which considers the proposal's potential effect on the significance and setting of the following heritage assets:

- Stables (Grade II): the assessment concludes that the proposal would have no lasting, material impact on the setting of the Stables and its significance would be preserved.
- Alton Towers RPG (Grade I): the assessment concludes that the proposal would be screened from the wider ATR by the taller walls of the Stables – therefore there would be no material affect on the significance of the RPG.
- Alton and Farley Conservation Area: the assessment concludes the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The stage is proposed to be free-standing and modular, with no fixing or alteration to the surrounding courtyard building. The proposed stage is subordinate in scale to the courtyard and would not be seen when looking towards the Stable building from the surrounding area. The canopy structure will comprise grey high-performance PVC-coated polyester membrane and therefore will not detract from the neighbouring listed building.

Accordingly, the proposed development is of appropriate scale/nature and respects the site and surroundings and complies with NPPF paragraph 207 and Local Plan Policies SS11, DC1 and DC2.

Noise

Local Plan Policy DC1 (Design Considerations) requires that new development protects the amenity of the surrounding area. ATR has carefully considered the design to minimise impacts by using multiple low level localised and point source directional speakers to control the noise from the proposed stage. The position and orientation of the stages have also been informed by the need to deliver effective noise control.

The submitted Sound Impact Assessment identifies that the predicted operational music noise levels and low-frequency sound levels will be well below the background sound levels at all identified receptors. The assessment demonstrates full compliance with the adopted criteria based on PopCode guidance, even under worst-case modelling assumptions. Additionally, no significant impact is anticipated from operational transportation or mechanical services noise from the stage. Mitigation measures, including pre-event monitoring and sound level management are recommended to safeguard residential amenity (see section 6 of Assessment).

As a result, the proposed development will protect the residential amenity of neighbouring residential properties in line with Local Plan Policy DC1.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The BNG Regulations (2024) require developments to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG. However, there are certain occasions when exemptions to this requirement may apply, such as where the proposed development does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 sqm of non-priority onsite habitat or less than 5m of non-priority onsite linear habitat. There is no onsite habitat, therefore the proposed development falls below the 'de minimis' threshold and is exempt from the BNG requirement.

Other environmental matters

The proposal will not generate any increase in traffic as those visiting this attraction are likely to be visiting the Resort already; therefore, it will not have an adverse impact on the local highway network and will be acceptable in transport terms in line with Policy T1.

There are no issues of drainage and flooding, trees or ecology raised. As such, the proposal is compliant with Local Plan Policy NE1 (Biodiversity and Geological Resources).

Conclusion

The stage is a valuable and popular attraction and supports the important contribution that ATR makes to the local economy. The principle of development of this proposal is supported by planning policy and it is acceptable from a heritage and amenity perspective.

We trust the information enclosed and described within this letter provides the Council with the information it requires to validate and determine the application. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague Hannah Whitney.

Yours sincerely



Maddie Lane

Associate Director

MPlan (Hons) MRTPI

Copy Kirsty Eccleston (Alton Towers)

Annex 1: Application drawings

Drawing title	Reference	Scale
Plan as Existing	ATIC-SA-MB-GF-DR-A-0201	1:100 @ A1
Plan as Proposed	ATIC-SA-MB-GF-DR-A-0203	1:100 @ A1
Location Plan	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0101	1:2500 @ A1
Block Plan as Proposed	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0102	1:200 @ A2
Roof Plan as Proposed	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0204	1:100 @ A1
Roof Plan as Existing	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0205	1:100 @ A1
Sections as Proposed	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0301	1:100 @ A1
Sections as Existing	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0302	1:100 @ A1
Elevations as Existing	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0401	As indicated (1:100 @ A1 + 1:200 @ A1)
Elevations as Proposed	ATIC-SA-MB-XX-DR-A-0402	As indicated (1:100 @ A1 + 1:200 @ A1)