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**ALTON TOWERS: PROPOSED NEW
ROLLERCOASTER**

Design and Access Statement

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1.0 **Introduction**

Purpose of the Statement

- 1.1 This Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of Alton Towers Resort Operations Limited (Alton Towers). It accompanies the application for planning permission and conservation area consent for the demolition of existing structures, including the Black Hole building, and the installation of a new rollercoaster, construction of associated buildings and landscaping at Alton Towers.
- 1.2 This statement responds to the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 for planning applications to be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement. It has also been prepared in accordance with Communities and Local Government '*Guidance on information requirement and validation*' published in March 2010. The CLG guidance states that a Design and Access statement is appropriate for an application for full planning permission.
- 1.3 The statement will cover the key design principles and concepts applied to the proposed development. It should be read in conjunction with the application submission, including accompanying plans, drawings and photographs.

Description of the Proposals

- 1.4 Alton Towers is located in the Churnet Valley to the north of Alton Village. In terms of levels, the main site is located on a plateau from which levels drop into surrounding valleys. There are extensive areas of woodland, particularly on the steep downward slopes of the southern and eastern boundaries. The woodland serves to screen the main part of the park's development from the surrounding area.
- 1.5 The Alton Towers site contains a number of listed buildings and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Bunbury Hillfort). The gardens at Alton Towers are listed Grade I on the Register of Parks and Gardens. In addition the site is located within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area and is within an area that is designated as a Special Landscape Area. The woodland to the south is a registered Site of Biological Importance
- 1.6 The application site is located to the west of the Alton Towers Resort and occupies an area of approximately 0.6ha. The site is currently occupied by a number of structures (total floorspace of 2,304 sqm) including the Black Hole building comprising a total floorspace of 1,923 sqm. To the north west of the site is an area of woodland, whilst to the south and south west is the Oblivion rollercoaster and the X Sector themed area of the resort.
- 1.7 To enhance the offer at the Resort, it is proposed to demolish the existing Black Hole building and other structures on site (total floorspace of 2,035 sqm) and construct a new rollercoaster on the site.
- 1.8 The coaster track will be constructed from steel supported by stanchions/ columns. It will have a maximum track height of 22.15 metres from ground existing level. Some sections of the proposed track will be positioned below the existing ground level and therefore some excavation will be required.
- 1.9 A new station building (measuring 872 sq.m. including canopies) and maintenance building (190 sq.m.) are proposed as part of the application. The new buildings will have a maximum height of 11.3m (station building) and 7.8m (maintenance building) and will be themed to complement the surrounding theme park. Whilst the drawings submitted with the application demonstrate the maximum size of the buildings and theming proposed, the detailed materials, coloured elevations and theming of the coaster are being developed in more detail and will be submitted at later date, prior to the application being taken to committee. This has been agreed with officers at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

2.0

Assessment

Planning Assessment

2.1

The statutory development plan comprises the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (2004), the “saved” policies of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan (2001) and the “saved” policies of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (1998). The Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy is currently being prepared but has not yet been adopted. National planning policy guidance is also of relevance.

National Planning Guidance

2.2

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) provides a Statement of central Government policy for the conservation of the historic environment. It stresses the requirement placed on local planning authorities, via the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to pay special regard to the preservation of the settings of listed buildings and conservation areas, and highlights the central role planning plays in conserving our heritage assets and utilising the historic environment.

2.3

The Government’s overarching aim, set out in PPS5, is that “...*the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations*”.

2.4

In considering the impact of any proposal on a heritage asset, local planning authorities must take into account the nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds (policy HE7).

2.5

Policy HE8 makes clear that the effect of a proposal on the significance of a heritage asset or its setting must form a material consideration in determining a planning application for development. There should be a presumption in favour of conserving designated heritage assets (policy HE9).

2.6

Policy HE9.5 states that not all elements of a Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance, and the policies of PPS5 HE9.1 to HE9.4 and HE10 apply to those elements that do contribute to the significance.

2.7

National Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) recognises that sites of local biodiversity interest have a role to play in helping to meet overall biodiversity targets (paragraph 9).

2.8

National Government has produced a “*Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism*”, which is a material consideration to the determination of this application. Paragraph 2.2 recognises the importance of tourism to the national economy. Specifically, paragraphs 2.4 – 2.6 recognise the benefits that tourism brings to the economic and social well being of local communities. Paragraph 2.5 identifies that the revenue generated by tourism can be particularly valuable in rural areas and can, inter alia, help to support and

enhance local services, aid diversification and secure retention or upgrading of public services. It is recognised that these benefits can be particularly important in rural areas as they may provide amenities that people would otherwise not have access to.

Local Planning Guidance

- 2.9 Alton Towers is located within an area that is designated as a Special Landscape Area. This is a broad area identified in the County Structure Plan. Local plan policies require more careful consideration of landscape impact than would normally be the case. Development should promote a high standard of design (policy N9) and should not detract from the high quality landscape (Policy N8).
- 2.10 In terms of design, policy B13 sets out the design criteria which proposals are expected to demonstrate, including:
- a Design which takes account of its surroundings;
 - b Provision of design and landscaping for the spaces between buildings and throughout the whole site;
 - c Provision of satisfactory standards of amenity;
 - d Mitigation from adverse environmental effects;
 - e Provision for those with restricted mobility; and
 - f Provision for safety and security by maximising natural surveillance.
- 2.11 Policies R21-R24 specifically relate to Alton Towers. R21 states the importance of conserving and enhancing the conservation area and the amenity of local residents, the impact on traffic routes and the economic and employment benefits of the proposed development. R22 seeks to protect the heritage assets and the peripheries of the estate from visual and aural intrusion. R23 specifically relates to where planning permission has been granted, and the need for conditions requiring a high standard of landscaping, materials and finishes. Finally, R24 outlines the Council's support of a new main vehicular access from the east and the retention of a subsidiary access from the Alton-Farley Road.

Proposed Ride

- 2.12 In summary, the proposed rollercoaster is located within the GDO Area and is in an area excluded from the Registered Park/Garden Boundary. The site is in a Special Landscape Area and is also located within the Alton and Farley conservation area.

Use

- 2.13 The site is a resort theme park in Use Class D2. The proposed rollercoaster will not result in a change of use.

Amount

- 2.14 A total of 2,035sqm of floorspace will be lost through the demolition of existing structures on site, including the Black Hole building. The proposed rollercoaster buildings comprise a total floorspace of 1,062 sqm, including a station building and canopies (872 sqm) and a maintenance building (190 sqm); this results in a net loss of building floorspace of 1,242sqm.

Layout

- 2.15 The positioning of the new rollercoaster and associated buildings and structures are shown on drawings 373/78-2 and 373/78-4 that have been submitted as part of the planning application submission. Alton Towers has discussed the proposed development with planning officers at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. The key objective has been to provide a rollercoaster that will have a minimum impact on its surroundings and that is contained within the General Permitted Development area.
- 2.16 The scheme proposes a new queue line to serve the new ride, but the siting of the proposed coaster and station and maintenance buildings will not adversely affect or obstruct pedestrian routes to the site.

Scale

- 2.17 The planning application is accompanied by a photographic assessment showing views as existing and views as proposed (see drawings 373/78-12 through to 373/78-19).
- 2.18 The assessment identifies that the existing domed roof of the Black Hole building can be seen from a limited number of viewpoints. The proposed ride has been carefully designed to ensure that the majority of the coaster track remains below the existing tree canopy and only parts of the high level of the proposed track will be visible from a limited number of viewpoints (the red areas shown on the photographic assessment will not be visible; the grey areas will be visible in distant views). Parts of the site are also proposed to be excavated to ensure the ride sits within the existing landscape. The coaster will be viewed adjacent to the existing 'Oblivion' attraction, and the coaster track has been designed to a similar height, using dark colours/materials, minimising the impact on the views assessed.
- 2.19 As can be seen from the viewpoints submitted, whilst the coaster can be seen from the high points at Alton Common, Newton and Greendale (to the west), the coaster is hidden from views from Farley, Farley Park and Longshaw (to the north and north-west) and is only minimally visible from Ingestre (to the north-east). This is similar to the views of the existing Black Hole building.

Landscaping

- 2.20 The coaster track layout has been carefully designed so that it is located within the GDO area on an existing developed site and avoids the wooded area to the north. This methodology means that of the 70 trees and two surveyed groups of trees only 8 trees and two groups will be felled as part of the proposed development. With the exception of one tree (which is category A – high quality) the trees to be removed are of low quality and value (category C). The contribution of these trees is therefore limited. It is noted that there are approximately 12,000 trees under the control and ownership of Alton Towers, and that Alton Towers has a programme of woodland management within its woodland which has significant benefits to the woodland and to its biodiversity. The proposed development will not affect the woodland at Alton Towers. Given the existing woodland management and proposed landscaping at the site it is considered that there will be no overall adverse impact on trees or the woodland as a result of the proposed development.

Appearance

- 2.21 The design approach for the replacement ride will seek to complement existing theming within the Resort and to meet the expectations of resort guests. Whilst the drawings submitted with the application demonstrate the general bulk and size of the buildings proposed, the detailed materials, coloured elevations and theming of the coaster are being worked up in more detail and will be submitted at later date, prior to the application being taken to committee. This has been agreed with officers at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. A schedule of illustrative finishes for the attraction and the themed station and maintenance building is submitted as part of the application to demonstrate Alton Towers' intentions for the coaster, and the materials have been chosen to complement the surroundings. The dark colour for the coaster track and stanchions will assist to minimise any available distant views of the proposed structure.

Access

- 2.22 As identified above, the proposed rollercoaster will not obstruct existing pedestrian flows in the vicinity of the site. Ramps will be installed where there are significant changes in levels and a separate access to the ride will be available for disabled guests. Due to the nature of the proposed ride there will be restrictions on use (this is the case for a number of rides at Alton Towers).

3.0 **Summary/Conclusions**

3.1 This statement has addressed the following issues in connection with the design approach for the proposed replacement rollercoaster:

- Use;
- Amount;
- Layout;
- Scale;
- Landscaping;
- Appearance; and
- Access.

3.2 The proposals meet the relevant policy criteria set out within Section 2.0. The proposals will not have an adverse effect on the character of the Alton and Farley Conservation Area. In this respect the proposal is in accordance with the statutory requirements laid down by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990.

3.3 The design of the new rollercoaster will respect its surroundings and in townscape and landscape terms and the design approach will seek to meet the expectations of resort guests whilst respecting the site and its surroundings.