

Your ref: 7/2017/2298

Kevin Richards

Lake District National Park Authority Murley Moss

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5th January 2018

Dear Mr Richards,

Planning Reference: 7/2017/2298

Re Thirlmere Activity Hub: Development of a zipwire attraction, a series of improvements to the round Thirlmere cycleway, improvements to car parks, access paths and the extension and development of an existing toilet block to provide reception, changing area and toilet facility, Land at Thirlmere

The John Muir Trust is objecting to this proposed development.

The Trust is the leading wild land conservation charity in the United Kingdom, with 11,000 members, including around 1800 members in the north of England. Founded in 1983, the Trust is named for John Muir, the leading conservationist. The Trust seeks to ensure that wild land is protected and enhanced and that wild places are valued by and for everyone. The Trust does this by owning and managing wild land for conservation; assisting others in wild land management; campaigning for the long-term legal protection of wild land; and encouraging people to connect with and care for wild places through the John Muir Award and volunteer conservation programmes.

The Trust has recently taken over the management of Glenridding Common, which comprises 1,000 hectares of common land which includes the summit of Helvellyn, along with Striding Edge and Swirral Edge. So we have a particular interest in the experience that walkers have when they are approaching Helvellyn from the west.

We object to the proposals on the basis of detrimental impacts on landscape character, visual amenity, tranquillity and conflict with the following policies and regulation.

Most of our objection below uses the Park Authority's own words to make the argument. Often, we couldn't make the point better ourselves.

NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES and THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 1995

The Development is in conflict with the statutory purposes of the National Park, which must be the basis of a major planning decision. The purposes which would be impacted by this development are detailed here.

Purposes and duties

As noted on the Lake District National Park Authority webpages,

“As set out in the Environment Act 1995, the Lake District National Park Authority's statutory purposes are:

- *To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Lake District National Park; and*
- *To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.*

It also has a duty in pursuing those purposes:

- *To seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park by working closely with the agencies and local authorities responsible for these matters, but without incurring significant expenditure.”*

The Trust contends that the first two of these purposes would be significantly adversely impacted by the proposed Thirlmere Activity Hub with the risk of little benefit to the local communities.

Furthermore, the Sandford Principle, which states that conservation must have priority in the National Parks, must be acted upon.

The Sandford principle

The Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) information states that,

“Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 makes clear that if National Park purposes are in conflict then conservation must have priority. This is known as the ‘Sandford Principle’ and stems from the Sandford Committee’s recommendation, in 1974, that enjoyment of the National Parks ‘shall be in a manner and by such means as will leave their natural beauty unimpaired for the enjoyment of this and future generations”.

The NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

states:

*“115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, **which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.** The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.*

116. Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*

- *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

These aspects are further elaborated in the National Park Core Strategy policies.

THE LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK CORE STRATEGY

The proposal specifically contravenes the following policies

(Quotes in italics are extracts from the policies):

CS01: National significance and distinctive nature of the National Park

As noted above, the development is in conflict with the Park’s statutory purpose.

CS02: Achieving vibrant and sustainable settlements in the National Park

Point 3.4.3 of the CS02 policy Context identifies a need for small-scale business growth, and the policy notes:

“Development should be of a scale and nature appropriate to the character and function of the location in which it is proposed and:

- 1 contribute towards meeting the needs of the local community, or*
- 2 bring benefit to the local community, or*
- 3 deliver sustainable tourism”.*

This is a major development, not small-scale. A considerable body of the local community, including the Parish Council of St John’s Castlerigg and Wythburn, have expressed opposition and there are few local residents to benefit from the jobs associated with the development.

CS04: North Distinctive Area

states that:

“We will use the Lake District Landscape Character Assessment to guide management of development and land use change. We will strengthen the landscape character of the North by:

- *protecting the skyline and views into and out of the area.... and*
- *enhancing the sense of remoteness and tranquillity of the upland mountain massifs and less frequented fells north of Skiddaw and Blencathra.”*

The proposal would significantly impact on the experience of remoteness and tranquillity by walkers approaching Helvellyn from the west. Many walkers will start out from the car parks on Thirlmere which are included in the Activity Hub plans for expansion.

CS11: Sustainable Development principles

“We want all development to be designed and carried out in a way that avoids adverse effects on the special qualities of the National Park. We will require all proposals to apply the principles of sustainable development.

Developments will:

- 1. be in locations that are consistent with our strategy for rural service centres, villages and Cluster communities. New developments should demonstrate efficient use of land and buildings;*
- 2. conserve and enhance the character and quality of the local landscape, of the wider countryside and of the built environment;*
- 3. reduce people’s need to travel, by demonstrating that the development is accessible by cycling, walking or public transport including water-based transport... ”*

The Environmental Impact Assessment refers to the A591 as a busy road. However, there are times of the year and day when it is quiet and the experience of driving to and from Thirlmere allows the traveller to appreciate the quiet and naturalness of the area. The numbers of visitors predicted for the Activity Hub would cause a step change in the impact of cars in the area on visitor perception and would very significantly affect their experience.

CS12: Major developments

“Major developments will be subjected to the most rigorous examination and must be shown to be in the public interest. They will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that:

- *there are no alternative sites available outside the National Park;*
- *there is a proven overriding national need that cannot be met in any other way.....”*

There are alternative sites and there is no overriding need for this development in this special landscape. The topography required for a zipwire attraction can be found elsewhere. Even within the National Park there are areas where the impact on landscape and tranquillity would not be so damaging.

CS14: Sustainable transport solutions

“We will reduce the need to travel within and through the Lake District National Park, and promote the development and use of sustainable travel choices.

Appropriate development proposals should:

- *contribute to improvements in the provision of, linkages with, and accessibility to sustainable modes of transport including rail, bus, boat, cycling, horse-riding and walking;*
- *reduce non-essential travel especially by car-based visitors....”*

The developers accept that the vast majority of visitors to the Hub would come by car, not by sustainable transport.

CS24: Delivering sustainable tourism

“New development in locations other than rural service centres will only be permitted where:

....

it relies upon a specific geographically fixed resource which justifies the development...

New development and the re-development, extension and improvement of existing tourism accommodation, facilities and attractions to raise the quality of provision will deliver sustainable tourism by:

- *enabling the economic and physical regeneration of an area, or diversifying the economic base of an area; and*
- *not introducing inappropriate activities, or levels of use, or otherwise being of a nature and scale detrimental to the character and quality of the environment*

If development will attract significant numbers of people, the proposal must incorporate improvements to its accessibility by sustainable forms of transport.”

This area is not a rural service centre. As noted above, most visitors to the Hub would come by car.

CS25 Protecting the spectacular landscape

“We will protect the Lake District National Park’s spectacular and inspirational landscape by promoting a character-based approach to conserve and enhance its uniqueness and diversity. The management of development and land use change will be guided by the Lake District Landscape Character Assessment recognising the distinctive characteristics identified in the Landscape Character Types and Areas of Distinctive Character. The type, design and scale of development, and the level of activity, should maintain and, where possible, enhance local distinctiveness, sense of place and tranquillity. In assessing development proposals the highest level of protection will be given to the landscape.”

The Core Strategy’s explanatory text states that

“Government advises us to place particular emphasis on identifying the qualities associated with ‘wide open spaces and the wildness and tranquillity which are to be found within them’. The LCA takes account of the National Park’s ‘quieter areas’, and sensitivities of the ‘Areas of Distinctive Character’ that will undermine the sense of remoteness, tranquillity and relative isolation.”

Thirlmere is one of the quieter areas within the Park and must be protected to maintain the Park’s landscape quality as a whole.

CS27 The acclaimed historic environment

The context notes for this policy, at paragraph 4.59.4, say,

“The National Park’s character is inseparable from the personalities and traditions of its people. From those who have worked the land, to the artists, authors and environmentalists who have campaigned for landscape protection. Cultural associations with the Lake District landscape, from the Picturesque and Romantic movements to the foundation of the National Trust, are universally significant. They underpin the county-wide partnership’s proposal for World Heritage Site inscription.”

Thirlmere, and the controversy around the construction of the reservoir, is widely recognised as being very significant in the history of the conservation movement in the UK and further afield. The love of the romantic poets for the area and how that captured the public’s imagination is well-known. John Muir took inspiration from Wordsworth and Coleridge, and he recognised that wild places were essential in their capacity to nurture and uplift imagination, creativity and spirit.

Such influences, along with John Muir’s understanding of the natural world and recognition of threats to it, led to his campaign which helped - particularly through his association with the US President, Theodore Roosevelt - in the creation of a global family of National Parks. In his later life, John Muir visited the Lake District saying, “Have visited Wordsworth's and Colerige's [sic] graves & Dorothy's and the childrens...a robin... came and sang on the maple as I stood with damp eyes and a lump in my throat”.

CS28: Lakeshore development

“We will only permit lakeshore development where:

- *the development provides facilities or services that have a direct lake use function for recreation or water-based transport purposes;*

and

- *the applicant demonstrates that other locations are not feasible or viable; and*
- *the scale, siting, design and character of the development enhances or maintains the character of its lakeshore location and the character of the lake, including undeveloped stretches of lakeshore.”*

It is very clear that “*the character of its lakeshore location and the character of the lake, including undeveloped stretches of lakeshore*” would not be enhanced or maintained by this proposal.

The Trust objection does not address issues beyond our expertise, such as the impact of the activity on road users regarding distraction or safety. That does not mean we consider them insignificant.

For all of the above reasons, so clearly identified in the National Park Core Strategies, the Trust objects to the Thirlmere Activity Hub and requests that the Park follow those policies and rejects the development outright,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen McDade". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H' and 'M'.

Helen McDade
Head of Policy

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