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| Application Number: | DMSE/100298/O |
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| Comment Type: | Object to Proposal |
| Comment: | |

The site of the proposed development lies within the boundary of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is an area designated for its national landscape importance. The Wye Valley AONB Partnership seeks to encourage high quality design and to protect and enhance the landscape.

The Wye Valley AONB Unit objects to this development on the grounds that it will be detrimental to the character and appearance of the area and the wider landscape of the AONB. We consider that the applicant has failed to recognise the national importance of the AONB in undertaking further studies since the previous application. Many of our comments are, therefore unchanged and repeated again below.

The ecological study is welcomed, but the applicant has not undertaken any form of landscape assessment or visualisations as to the likely appearance of the development from viewpoints within the AONB. With the site being of national importance, we do not accept that this can be a reserved matter for future consideration. A full assessment needs to be complete before any decision on the principle of development can be made.

The site is an undeveloped area of land, which is not currently part of the Industrial Estate and did, until the mature trees were removed, form a buffer between the Industrial Estate and the open countryside within the AONB. The character and appearance of the site have already been damaged, whether or not the application is approved.

The proposal is to create an earth bund by importing materials to raise the ground level. As well as the damage already caused by the removal of trees, the bund would be likely to cause damage to the brook at the base of the slope in terms of its physical structure and the risk of pollution from imported materials, and would be likely to kill the existing pollarded willow trees through root compaction. The linear nature and raised landform of the bund, with industrial units on top, would form an unacceptably prominent feature in the landscape of the AONB. The addition of a new access road and presumably parking areas for the car showroom would further add to the visual impact of the proposals.

The application refers to a replacement buffer zone along the site boundary, but this is unlikely to be effective in screening the bund and the proposed industrial units from views from the open countryside. No assessment has been made of views towards the site from open countryside and visualisations would have been useful in this respect. We would like to see this area left free of development and the tree cover reinstated or allowed to regenerate to act as a screen for the existing Industrial Estate.

Whilst the land is within the settlement boundary of Ross-on-Wye, it was not identified in the Unitary Development Plan as a site for industrial development. The proposal is clearly in conflict with policies S7 and LA1 of the UDP which seek to protect AONBs from inappropriate development. The proposals would also, in our view, be contrary to policy LA2 which seeks to retain landscape character, policy LA3 which should protect the setting of Ross, and policy LA5 which seeks to protect trees and groups of trees.

In relation to Policy LA1, the applicant has not demonstrated that the national importance of the development proposed outweighs the national importance of the AONB and therefore the application should be refused against this policy.

The applicant's planning statement refers to PPS7, but fails to recognise that it also gives strong protection to AONBs from development. They are given the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty, and are, in this respect equivalent to National Parks. Conservation of this natural beauty must be given great weight in planning decisions.

If the Council is minded to accept the principle of development here, we would recommend that the outline application is refused or withdrawn and a detailed application is required to include a full landscape appraisal and a justification as to why the need for the development outweighs the damage caused to the AONB. Until this information is available, we do not consider a decision, other than a refusal, should be made in such a sensitive location.

If you wish to discuss any of the above comments further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Please could you inform me of the decision on this application.