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**Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership**

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Your Ref: TWC/2012/0261  
Our Ref:

24 April 2012

Dear Anna

**TWC/2012/0261, Construction of a new carpark with 40 spaces and hardstanding to site a mobile café. Land off, Wrekin Course, Wellington Road, Wellington**

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership objects to this application. This would be a new development on a greenfield site immediately adjacent to the AONB and aims to improve visitor management at the Wrekin, and its rationale therefore needs to be completely sound and broadly supported. Unfortunately neither of these is the case.

The AONB Partnership was instrumental in setting up in 2008 the Wrekin Forest Partnership to bring together relevant stakeholders to discuss management issues on the Wrekin and surrounding area. Over four years the Partnership has established itself as valuable in this role and has good support at both regular and public meetings. The Partnership oversees the Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Management Plan, which is endorsed by the statutory Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan, and includes a section on visitor management, with actions to explore the issues around parking and traffic as well as visitor access more generally. These actions have been progressed – Shropshire Wildlife Trust working with partners developed a feasibility study on creating new car parking on the Donkey Field and concluded that there was no workable business model, in terms of capital investment and revenue for the necessary ongoing management. The AONB Partnership then commissioned a 'Wrekin Forest Sustainable Transport & Access Study', published at [http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Wrekin\\_Forest\\_Sust\\_Trans\\_and\\_Access\\_Study\\_2010.pdf](http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Wrekin_Forest_Sust_Trans_and_Access_Study_2010.pdf). This examined a range of alternative approaches to building a new car park, which is seen to carry risks of increasing use of private cars and traffic. These alternatives include developing the walking, cycling and riding networks, Quiet Lanes, Shuttle buses, and measures to deter unsafe roadside parking. Some progress has been made with these proposals but they have not yet had the chance of full implementation. Further work in these areas is ongoing, including through Telford & Wrekin Council.

On 17 May 2010 when the Wrekin Forest Partnership discussed the draft report and a Quiet Lanes study commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council, the Partnership voted by a clear majority against the principle of developing the Donkey Field as a car park ([http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Wrekin\\_Forest\\_Mtg\\_17.5.10.pdf](http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Wrekin_Forest_Mtg_17.5.10.pdf)). The Partnership has no decision making powers, but aims to be broadly representative and offer a useful considered opinion. The current development proposal has been put forward without regard to the view of the Partnership, and is lacking in support from a significant number of important stakeholders. The agent making this application has attended a meeting of the Wrekin Forest Partnership and is well aware of these views. Despite this, no approaches have been made by the applicants to discuss the proposal with the Wrekin Forest Partnership or the AONB Partnership prior to the application being submitted.

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Particular issues with the proposed development are as follows. Car parks in this area, as many urban fringe locations, have a history of becoming focal points for anti-social behaviour. The standards of screening and landscaping desirable from a visual impact point of view usually exacerbate this problem. The only way to avoid this is a rigorous procedure of locking up the car park at night. This is a very significant commitment and the proposed solution of catering providers being responsible for this is almost certainly unworkable. Locking up gates when cars are still present causes complications and can result in the need for call out procedures or the gate locker waiting around or returning. This make it an onerous task to link to an unproven catering franchise. Further, the demand for car parking is likely to apply on most days of the year, including many days when catering facilities would be unviable. And if the car park was only opened at peak times when a caterer was there, any potential benefits of the development to visitor management would be much reduced.

Having a catering facility of any kind in the car park to help justify and manage the car park is likely to draw in additional visitors specifically to use the catering facility, generating additional traffic to the current levels of walkers. There is thus a risk of exacerbating current traffic problems at this busy location. This was one of the key issues arising from the earlier feasibility study.

The Forestry Commission site at Haughmond Hill is not a particularly relevant comparison. While there is a catering franchise there, the site is in public ownership and has had significant and sustained input to development for recreation including capital investment and ongoing management. This is what is lacking at the Wrekin and is not viable on a private profit making or even break even basis. The establishment of a car park with a one-off grant without a clear mechanism for ongoing management would be very unwise use of funds. Some privately owned visitor sites with sufficiently high demand and monopoly of access are able to operate commercially on the basis of charging for parking. At this location, the ease of parking elsewhere at no cost makes this not possible.

The proposal has been planned in commendable detail in terms of site layout, but consultation has been poor or non-existent and there are major unanswered flaws with the rationale and operating model. While well intentioned, a development of this kind which is not completely sound has the potential to create new problems in a very sensitive location. We would urge the applicants to withdraw the application and re-engage in discussions with the Wrekin Forest Partnership on how best to take forward a range of workable solutions to the complex issues of traffic and visitor management in this area.

Yours sincerely

Phil Holden  
AONB Partnership Manager