



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

17 DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below:

APPLICATION NO: 20/1076/10 (CHJ)
APPLICANT: Zip World Ltd
DEVELOPMENT: Change of use of land for erection of a structure for use by coaster karts, alterations to existing Lamp Room building together with associated works
LOCATION: LAND AT RHIGOS MOUNTAIN AND FORMER TOWER COLLIERY SITE, RHIGOS ROAD, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE
DATE REGISTERED: 26/10/2020
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Rhigos

RECOMMENDATION: Approval subject to Conditions.

REASONS: The arrival of Zip World will bring exciting adrenaline-fuelled tourist attraction to the County Borough that will attract a significant number of visitors each year. It also has the potential to generate a significant number of employment opportunities, not only as part of the facility itself, but in the myriad of possibilities that it will create in the supply chain and in the complementary businesses that it can help to support.

The proposal will be used in conjunction with the previously approved zip line(s) as an additional facility making this a “destination” for visitors and a platform for further expansion in the future.

The construction of the Kart structure is considered to only have a negligible impact on the character and appearance of the landscape and the setting of the important heritage buildings but will have a more than compensatory benefit in the numbers of people that it will attract to share in the varied and dramatic landscapes of the Rhondda and Cynon Valleys as well as the Brecon Beacons National Park as well as benefit from an enhanced appreciation of the industrial heritage of the area.

The re-use of the lamp room will bring a vacant building of some architectural and heritage importance back into beneficial use.

The facility is compliant with both national and local Planning policies (PPW and the LDP) as well as the broader aspirations of the Well Being of Future Generations Act.

It is considered that the proposed use is acceptable in its chosen location, will complement the range and choice of outdoor activities both within the County Borough and within the Region and it will also have the potential to bring a meaningful new use to the County Borough's industrial heritage through its proximity to the former (Listed) buildings of Tower Colliery, safeguarding them for future generations.

REASON THE APPLICATION IS REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

While the scale and nature of the application is such that it is capable of being determined under the Council's Scheme of Delegation, its profile and potential positive impacts on the County Borough and wider region is such that it is considered prudent to report it to Committee for determination.

A separate application for Listed Building Consent will be determined under the Scheme of Delegation and referred to Cadw for consideration.

PREFACE

Background

The application is submitted by Zip World, an adventure tourism provider, who opened their first zip line adventure, known as Zip World Velocity at Penrhyn Quarry in Bethesda, North Wales in 2013.

The company has 13 adventure facilities, spread over three sites in Snowdonia, including Penrhyn Quarry, the Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Zip World Forest in Betws y Coed.

The North Wales adventure business wants to bring its "unique brand of experience and adventure" to the Cynon Valley in South Wales.

The relationship between Zip World and the County Borough was cemented by the approval in February, by Committee, of Phase 1 of the development – the provision of the zip line facility. It is understood that, at the time of writing the report, work has already started on site and it is anticipated that it will be fully operational in the Spring of 2021 (Covid-19 permitting).

APPLICATION DETAILS

The proposed development comprises a change of use of the existing Tower Colliery Lamp Room and the construction of a twisting “spaghetti-like” metal structure to be used by coaster karts.

The highest part of the track would be 3.9m (approximately 12ft. 9in.) above existing ground level. The overall length of the coaster track would be 1065m (approximately 2/3 miles).

The ride would both begin and end within the Lamp Room building where visitors would both mount and dismount the facility. The Lamp Room will also house the control room where the ride would be monitored and controlled.

The ride would take place within a coaster kart (a toboggan / sled-like vehicle) which would run on a tubular track which would be electrified at a low voltage. The karts use a manual braking system however they are equipped with a “speed governor” which prevents it from exceeding a maximum speed of 25 mph. A maximum of two riders would be permitted to use each kart. One rider would control the breaking mechanism. Both riders are required to wear a safety belt for the duration of the ride. Once the ride has started, there is no opportunity to leave the ride until it is finished. Access along the route of the ride will be strictly prohibited but can be viewed safely from near the lamp room and some surrounding areas.

Only within the lamp room will riders be able to mount and dismount the ride. Zip World staff will ensure that riders are secured correctly in the kart before instructing customers of the correct operation of the karts **BEFORE BEGINNING THE RIDE**. Once the ride is over, the karts would be derailed, hung up and then returned to the start position for the next riders. This will prevent a queue of toboggan sleds at the lamp room and ensures efficiency for riders. Zip World have advised that *“the kart would create a thrilling and memorable experience and is suitable for all the family (three years and over)”*.

The applicant has advised that the coaster kart will NOT be operated in times of bad weather.

Access to the site will be made from the existing junction off the A4061 Rhigos Road. This provides access to the (previously approved) car parking area and reception which would serve as a base for both this ride and the zip wire development. Additional works will need to be provided in the vicinity of the junction in order for this facility to be brought into beneficial use.

No additional facilities or amendments to the facilities previously granted are proposed as part of this application.

The proposal is NOT considered to have any significant environmental impacts and therefore was decided that the applicant was not required to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or submit an Environmental Statement (ES).

The developer has submitted a comprehensive application which, in addition to the appropriate forms and plans was also accompanied by a:-

- Planning Statement
- Bat Habitat / Ecology Survey (including mitigation and enhancement)
- Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)
- Landscape Assessment / Statement
- Transport Statement (TS)
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment (CMRA)
- Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)
- Construction Method Statement (CMS)
- Employment & Skills Statement
- Drainage Strategy

While not, strictly speaking, part of this application, Committee is reminded of what was written in the previous report (for the zip wire) in terms of access and parking arrangements.

“Visitors will use the existing access road within the site to access to an area of hard-standing at the Tower Colliery site, which was previously used for car parking when the colliery was operational. Car parking for approximately 80 cars will be provided informally initially on an area of hard-standing, which will be levelled out by use of compacted hardcore

The car parking area will be in very close proximity to a group of cabins, which will be used as office, reception, “kitting up” and “de-kitting” and toilets. This will be the central area where visitors will report to upon arrival and book in, before being “kitted up” ready for their zip wire adventure.

Once booked in and “kitted up”, riders will wait to be transported up, in groups, by Zip World to the top of Zip A. The access route will be from Tower Colliery, along the Rhigos Road (public highway), leaving at a junction which provides access to Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm, onto a private road.”

Committee is also advised that a separate application for Listed Building Consent has also been submitted. The Lamp Room is not, of itself, a Listed Building but, by virtue of its proximity and setting amongst buildings that are Listed, it benefits from “curtilage Listing” and, as such, requires Listed Building Consent and, ultimately, referral to Cadw for consideration / determination.

SITE APPRAISAL

The application site is in the north of the Cynon Valley. The site lies to the south of the villages of Rhigos and Hirwaun, covering an area of land on Rhigos Mountain, located between 0.5km and 1km to the west of the A4061 (the Rhigos Road) highway, between Blaenrhondda and Hirwaun.

The former Tower Colliery site as a whole covers a wide area of land and includes a number of buildings that remain from when the site was last used for coal mining. These buildings include:

- The Pithead Baths Building
- Lamp Room and Office
- Powder Room (Explosives)
- **Engine and Fan House**
- **Headframe & Pithead**
- Stores Building and
- Maintenance Workshop.

Land to be used at Tower Colliery also includes areas of hardstanding which were previously used as an area for car parking when the Tower Colliery site was operational. This area will be used for car parking as part of the proposed development, as well as being the base for the zip wire adventure, providing reception area.

The application site is in close proximity to the two Listed Buildings at Tower Colliery (the Engine House & Fan House and Pithead & Head Frame) and the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) in the form of Ffos Toncenglau Cross Ridge Dyke which has pre-historic origins. It is also located in the Rhondda Uplands Landscape Area which is a designated historic landscape. The proposed location is also incorporated a part of a wider Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

PLANNING HISTORY

Committee is advised that there is an extensive Planning History pertaining, in part, to this site and its historic applications for coal mining activities however none of these are considered to be relevant to the consideration of this application.

Therefore, in the interests of brevity, only those applications relating to the zip wire development have been included.

19/1192/10: LAND AT RHIGOS MOUNTAIN AND FORMER TOWER COLLIERY SITE, RHIGOS ROAD, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE

Erection of three zip wire courses (4 zip lines), laying of hard standing, creation of internal access roads and pedestrian routes, temporary siting of cabins and use of land for car parking

Decision: 05/02/2020, Grant

20/0266/38: LAND AT RHIGOS MOUNTAIN ROAD AND FORMER TOWER COLLIERY, RHIGOS ROAD, ABERDARE, CF44 9UF

Discharge of condition 10 (historic environment mitigation) previous app 19/1192/10

Decision: 07/04/2020, Grant

20/0289/38: LAND AT RHIGOS MOUNTAIN AND FORMER TOWER COLLIERY, RHIGOS MOUNTAIN ROAD, RHIGOS, ABERDARE, CF44 9UF

Discharge of conditions 5 (access roads and parking spaces) and 11 (drainage) of previous application 19/1192/10.

Decision: 21/08/2020, Grant

PUBLICITY

As part of the application process, formal Notices have been placed in and around the application site as well as in the Press (Western Mail). A letter was also sent to the agricultural tenant of the land, although this also formed part of the applicant's responsibilities under the legislation that requires them to serve notice on any agricultural / other tenants (Certificate of Ownership). Committee is reminded that issues of land ownership are not material in the consideration of an application. It simply requires that the correct procedures are followed.

Given the relatively remote location of the proposed development, Committee is advised that it is / was considered unlikely that this process would generate a significant amount of correspondence (either in support or objection). As a result, no correspondence has been received other than a request for information from the land owner but this is considered to be a private matter between them and the developer and there are no material planning considerations to be taken into account.

Separate publicity has been carried out as part of the LBC application.

CONSULTATIONS

In addition to the PUBLICITY exercise, the following have also been consulted as part of the application process.

Internal (RCT)

- **Transportation** – no objection subject to a condition
- **Drainage** – no objection
- **Public Health & Protection** – no objection
- **Countryside** – no objection
- **Tourism** – support the development

External

- **NRW** – no objection

- **Brecon Beacons National Park Authority** – no objection (no response)
- **Dwr Cymru / Welsh Water** – no objection
- **Electricity Utility Provider** – advise on the location of apparatus and infrastructure in the area.
- **HSE (using PADHI)** – no objection
- **Gas Utility Provider** – advise on the location of apparatus and infrastructure in the area. Holding objection in respect of HSE consultation.
- **National Grid** – place a “holding objection” in respect of the proposal due to the proximity to its apparatus. They make no comment in respect of the development itself but are concerned about the safety implications of construction in the vicinity of their services. This matter has been addressed by the applicant directly and it is hoped that an update can be provided at Committee. The objection does not prevent Committee from determining the application.
- **Coal Authority** – no objection
- **Rhigos Community Council** – no response received.
- **Hirwaun Community Council** – no response received.

Separate consultation has been carried out as part of the LBC application.

POLICY CONTEXT

LDP Policy

Proposals Map

The site is affected by:

- Regionally Important Geological & Geomorphological Site
- Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Special Landscape Area designation
- Sandstone and coal resources

Core Policies

Policy CS 1 emphasises building strong, sustainable communities in the northern strategy area, including by:

- Encouraging a strong, diverse economy including leisure & tourism (6);
- Protecting the natural environment (7).

Policy CS 10 provides for the protection of mineral resources.

Area Wide Policies

Policy AW 2 supports development in sustainable locations.

Policy AW 5 gives amenity and accessibility criteria for new development, including effect on character and appearance (1a), retention of features of environmental value (1b), safe access (2c) and parking (2d).

Policy AW 6 gives design criteria for new development, including reference to cultural heritage (13) and landscape and biodiversity (14).

Policy AW 7 gives criteria for development affecting Public Rights of Way

Policy AW 8 requires development not to cause harm to features of SINC or RIGS unless (a) the proposal is for positive management of the site; (b) no unacceptable harm would be caused; and (c) the proposal could not go elsewhere and the benefits of it outweigh the nature conservation value of the site.

Policy AW 14 safeguards from development the resources of sandstone (2) and coal (4). The coal boundary excludes the SSSI.

Strategy Area Policies

Policy NSA 25 requires the highest standards of design in the special landscape areas.

SPG

- Design & Placemaking
- Nature Conservation
- Access, Circulation & Parking
- Employment & Skills

Evidence Base

- EB44 SINC in RCT – Site Descriptions 2008
- EB49 Proposals for Designation of SLA in Rhondda Cynon Taf, 2008

National Planning Policy

Paragraph 4.1.39 encourages planning authorities to seek a minimum of 10% of car parking spaces to have ULEV charging points for new non-residential development. The paragraph gives criteria for how many ULEV charging points should be sought.

Paragraph 5.5.1 promotes tourism as vital contributor to economic prosperity, job creation, and regeneration.

Paragraph 5.5.2 encourages tourism where it contributes to economic development. It continues *“In addition to supporting the continued success of existing tourist areas, appropriate tourism-related development in new destinations is encouraged. In some places however there may be a need to limit new development to avoid damage to the environment or the amenity of residents and visitors”*.

Paragraph 5.5.4 recognises the opportunities to re-use historic buildings for tourism facilities.

Paragraph 5.5.7 encourages LPAs to adopt positive approaches to proposals which utilise previously developed or disused land for tourism uses.

Paragraph 6.1.10 gives a general presumption in favour of the preservation or enhancement of listed buildings and its setting, which might extend beyond its curtilage.

Paragraph 6.4.17 states that LPAs have a duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the special features of a SSSI, and there is a presumption against development likely to damage a SSSI.

Paragraph 6.4.20 states that non-statutory designations, such as SLA and SINC, should not unduly restrict appropriate development where there are no adverse impacts on the features for which a site is designated.

Paragraph 6.6.17 stipulates that new developments where the area covered by construction work equals or exceeds 100 square metres require approval from the Local Authority’s SuDS Approval Body (SAB) before construction can commence.

National Development Framework (Consultation Draft)

Policy 29 of the NDF consultation draft supports investment in the Heads of the Valleys area that can impact upon communities' prosperity and well-being. It states that the Heads of the Valleys is a priority area for the Welsh Government and should be a priority for future SDPs to deliver greater prosperity, support regeneration and improve well-being. It also notes the area's potential to build on its tourism offer.

Technical Advice Notes (TAN)

TAN 5 – Nature Conservation

TAN 12 – Design

TAN 18 – Transport

TAN 23 – Economic Development

TAN 24 – The Historic Environment

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies within the plan should not be allowed, unless material planning considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Committee is advised that, what is being proposed is relatively simple in terms of its construction (a tubular construction kart track and internal modifications to a building that enables the track to enter and leave it to form part of the "experience" of the facility).

It is considered that the principal issues in the determination of this application are (in no particular order of importance):

Transportation, Access & Highway Safety

Landscape and Visual Impact

Ecology

Impact on the Historic Environment

Economy, Employment & Tourism

Transportation, Access & Highway Safety

Trip Generation.

The Transport Statement (TS) submitted with the application indicates that Zip World Limited expect to attract a similar number of visitors for the coaster kart ride to that of the (previously approved) zip wire on any peak season day, increasing the total maximum visitors to around 800 per day. However, due to the nature of the facilities on offer, there would be a significant amount of linked trips between the two attractions.

The TS states that at other Zip World sites with multiple attractions such as Penryn Quarry and Betws-y-Coed Forest the linked trips would be of the order of 25% – 40%. Therefore, a total site peak patronage of around 600 a day would be a robust assessment.

It is noted that there is to be up to 40 full time equivalent staff members generating up-to 80 two-way trips for staff only and that vehicle movements associated with these would also need to be taken into account when assessing the impact on highway movements and, ultimately, safety.

The approved hours of operation, and those applied for are 08:00 – 21:00, seven days a week, including holidays.

The TS indicates that the proposed development could generate, on a busy day (for example a summer bank holiday), approximately 24 two-way visitor trips an hour. The TS states that 312 two-way trips over a 13hr period on a peak day would occur with an assumption that 80% would travel with 4 occupants in a car.

There is potential for the proposed trip generation being far in excess of 312 trips with fewer visitors travelling in cars such as 2 and 3 car occupation trips. Therefore, the figures quoted in the TS are considered to be conservative and the actual trip generation is likely to be in the region of 420 trips, (312 visitors, 80 staff trips and operational use with a mini bus to the zip wire platform access).

It is also noted that there may be around 50-part time employees which, due to the shorter working hours / shift patterns could potentially further exacerbate the trip generation figures quoted above.

Based on the applicant's submitted TS the proposed would result in a vehicular trip every 2-3 minutes onto the highway network.

The Council's Transportation Section are satisfied that there are no issues with capacity on the A4061 and adjacent strategic highway network therefore **the proposed trip generation only** is considered acceptable.

Main Site Access off A4061

The main access for the proposed development to be used by visitors and staff will be from the existing Tower Colliery site access off A4061. The second access to be used for transporting customers to the upper platform for the ride would be from the existing access which serves the Forestry and Pen-Y-Cymoedd Wind Farm.

The A4061 has a national speed limit of 60 mph but has no street lighting and no segregated footway facilities. The A4061 provides a strategic link between the Rhondda and Cynon Valley.

The achievable vision splays are below the standards required by **TAN 18: Transport** for a 60mph speed limit which would require 2.4m x 215m splays with only 2.4m x 140m achievable. In order to improve **highway safety** along the A4061, it is proposed to reduce the signed speed limit to 40mph and on this basis vision splays of 2.4m x 120m would be required. On the basis that the consultation is currently under way to reduce the speed limit to 40mph the achievable vision splays of 2.4m x 140m are considered acceptable.

There is concern that the proposed Tower access point has a two-way vehicular trip generation considerably in excess of the 300 benchmark suggested by highway guidance (420 approx.) vehicular trips. This in turn has potential for vehicles turning right into the site (travelling from the direction of Rhigos / Hirwaun having to queue on the A4061 in close proximity to the road bend with a sub-standard forward vision, thereby increasing safety concerns. There is potential to overcome these concerns by undertaking works to the access to provide for a safe and satisfactory vehicular access to the proposed facility. No information has formally been submitted with the application however discussions have been held with the applicants and an informal agreement has been reached in respect of making improvements to the access. In order to secure this provision, a condition has been attached for the submission of a full engineering design and detail of the improved access point to the main site (Tower) with implementation to take place prior to the first beneficial use of the new Coaster Kart facility which will overcome these concerns. Committee is advised that, while Zip World are looking to open the two facilities simultaneously, the "prior to first beneficial use / operation" condition would only relate to this current application and they may operate the zip wire independently.

Accident Data

The accident data has been assessed between 2000 and 2018 with a number of accidents (7 in total) in the vicinity of the main access. The causal factors being excessive speed, and driver inattention. The reduction of the national speed limit to in the region of 40Mph and junction improvements conditioned would mitigate the impact of potential collisions due to excessive speed.

Internal Circulation and Parking

The Transport Statement indicates that the maximum parking accumulation on a peak day is expected to be in the region of 57 vehicles. There is concern that this is a conservative estimation with the site being heavily reliant on private motor vehicle as the main mode of transport. However, considering there are 119 car parking spaces provided, 3 coach parking spaces, motorbike parking spaces and areas within the site that could easily cater for overspill car parking should the need arise, the parking provision is considered acceptable.

Sustainability

The nature of proposed development heavily relies on topography of its local context and as such is not located in an area with good sustainable transport links and sustainable modes of travel. The proposal would provide satisfactory, circulation and parking within the site curtilage to cater for all types of travel modes and upon demand, will arrange for pick up and drop off from Bus or Train Stations, which is considered acceptable in principle.

Construction Method Statement. (CMS)

The applicant has submitted a CMS to address concerns with regards construction traffic and general construction of the site which is acceptable. The submitted CMS shall remain in operation throughout the construction phase.

Highways Conclusion

Proposals with regard circulation and parking within the development site are considered acceptable.

The Transport Statement submitted indicates a conservative estimate of 312 visitor trips, which together with the staff trips and shuttle bus to the zip wire platform would result in approximately 420 two-way vehicular trips to and from the proposed on a peak day.

There is concern that the Tower access as existing would result in highway hazards to the detriment of safety of all highway users. There is potential to overcome these concerns by providing improvements to the access in accordance with details to be submitted and implemented prior to beneficial use of the Coaster Kart attraction and on this basis a condition has been suggested accordingly.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The application site is located within the open countryside and, by virtue of its location, has the potential to impact upon its character and appearance where the underlying universal policy principle is to protect areas of countryside for its own sake. The landscape also lies in relatively close proximity to the southern boundary

of the Brecon Beacons National Park, where there is also a national policy principle to have regard to any impact on its setting and preserve its “special qualities”.

As part of the application process, both NRW and the BBNPA were consulted.

No formal response has been received from the BBNP as part of this proposal although it is understood that comments are in preparation and should be received by the date of Committee. From discussions it would seem that there will be no objections offered in respect of this proposal. In respect of the zip wire application they commented it would “*have some adverse impact on views towards the National Park. However, it is recognised that the proposed development is limited in terms of its scale and impacts*”. It is considered that this development has a similar impact (but for different reasons to do with its unique shape and mass).

The BBNP concluded “*there is no objection in principle to the proposed development*” and it is anticipated that a similar response will be received.

Notwithstanding this current lack of response, it is not considered that the construction of this, relatively modest structure (however alien in form) would have such an adverse impact as to be considered to negatively impact on the “special qualities” of the Park.

Similarly NRW have reviewed the Landscape Statement submitted with the application and have not offered any objections.

Ecology

As part of the application, both the Council’s Ecologist and NRW were consulted.

While the surrounds and context of the coaster kart route are of largely high (SINC) value, the direct impacts and implications of constructing the ride’s infrastructure is shown by the habitat and species assessments to have a relatively small impact.

In terms of habitats, the scheme proposes a conservation grazing mitigation of adjacent marshy grassland as compensation/enhancement. This will be a minimum of 10 years management arrangement can be appropriately secured by a condition. As the applicants have already proposed this mitigation within their submission, Condition 2 (which lists all of the plans and documents submitted as part of the application and includes a requirement to carry out the development in accordance with those details) covers it appropriately. It is therefore considered any habitat impacts will be reasonably mitigated and enhanced.

No bat roosts were recorded in buildings affected and again precautionary measures for reptiles and nesting birds and other species/habitat features as identified in the mitigation section can be secured through Condition 2 then it is considered that any ecological impacts appear to be manageable.

The Council's Ecologist has also requested that, as a precautionary measure for bats, the appropriate informative is attached to any planning permission.

NRW have responded by offering "no objection". They have advised that there are no bats using the building, there is no risk of the development leading to the contamination of controlled waters and there is no impact on the Craig-y-Llyn SSSI.

Impact on the Historic Environment

The wider Tower colliery site consists of 7 buildings which remain on the site, these are the :

Pit-head Baths Building;

Lamp Room and Office;

Powder Room;

Engine House and Fan House;

Headframe and Pit-head;

Stores Building; and

Maintenance Workshop

The Engine House and Fan House and Headframe and Pit-head are **Grade II** and have been listed since 1993.

Of the remaining buildings on the site, other than the Listed Buildings, the key buildings from a heritage perspective are the Pithead Baths Building, the Powder (explosives) Room and the Lamp Room / Office building. These are all considered to be "curtilage structures" to the Listed Buildings (not listed in themselves but being afforded similar protection as if they were). It is for the LPA to determine the (this) planning application. A separate "sister" application has also been submitted for Listed Building Consent (LBC). It is still necessary for this application to consider any potential impacts on the Listed and Curtilage Listed Buildings although it is the "sister" application that will be in greater detail and, should Committee resolve to approve this application, will be sent to Cadw for determination.

The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) included with the application makes a thorough and rigorous assessment of the heritage assets at the site. It is clear from the details of the planning application that none of the Listed Buildings will be physically affected by the construction of the coaster kart ride. The Lamp Room enjoys the protection of being "Curtilage Listed". It is proposed to carry out physical alterations to this building to enable the ride to begin and end within the building (see APPLICATION DETAILS).

It is considered that the proposed works are sympathetic to this building, Members are advised that this building has not been “pickled in aspic” since its heyday and has evolved during its use by Tower Colliery. Many of its original characteristics still remain, including the canopy under which the men queued to receive their lamp as well as the outline opening of the hatch from which the lamps were dispensed. The opening itself has long been blocked up and the buildings largely used as offices for Tower Colliery activities. The proposed works do not affect these key features and the building will still have an important role in telling the story of the history and evolution of coal mining at this site. This can be enhanced through interpretation boards and other visual media so that its many visitors can learn of the important role that this site played within the South Wales Coalfield.

It certainly cannot be said that the construction of a coaster kart ride in and around this building will complement the Listed or Curtilage Listed buildings however, it will completely contrast with the heritage of the site such that there will be a clear distinction between the proposed modern adrenaline-filled rides (including the zip wire) and the industrial heritage of the site such that visitors are unlikely to lose that important distinction as they may if the applicant proposed many additional permanent buildings, where their importance may be lost in the melee of new structures.

The use of this building will also play a huge role in securing the long term welfare of the building which, in the absence of an alternative use, would likely fall into a state of significant disrepair, that would inevitably, year on year, become more expensive and increasingly unviable to protect.

In light of these considerations, Committee is advised that any impacts on either the Listed Buildings or Curtilage Listed Buildings is acceptable although, ultimately, Cadw will determine whether any impacts are acceptable.

Economy, Employment & Tourism

Technical Advice Note 23 (Economic Development) provides national guidance on matters relating to economic development and recognises the diverse range of employment uses that are present in the economy of Wales.

Paragraph 1.2.1 advises that *“the economic benefits associated with development may be geographically spread out far beyond the area where the development is located. As a consequence it is essential that the planning system recognises and gives due weight to the economic benefits associated with new development”*

Section 2.1 relates to the weight to be given to economic benefit. **Paragraph 2.1.1** advises that *“it should not be assumed that economic objectives are necessarily in conflict with social and environmental objectives. Often these different dimensions point in the same direction. Planning should positively and imaginatively seek such*

‘win-win’ outcomes where development contributes to all dimensions of sustainability.”

Paragraph 2.1.2 advises that *“Where economic development would cause environmental or social harm which cannot be fully mitigated, careful consideration of the economic benefits will be necessary. There will of course be occasions where social and environmental considerations will outweigh economic benefit. The decision in each case will depend upon the specific circumstances and the planning authority’s priorities.”*

As part of the PAC process, the BBNP responded *“From a tourism perspective BBNP welcome this development as another attraction based on the outdoors in the area. It would be helpful to discuss how the Brecon Beacons destination can work with Zip World to benefit both. BBNP would welcome working with the developers to provide information and interpretation within the complex to their guests – they would have some of the best views over the National Park anywhere in South Wales and they would be well placed to give their guests some of that story as well as links to other outdoor locations and businesses. The plans are relatively modest in terms of car parking and facilities. However, should the developer find that those facilities are outstripped by demand and expansion becomes desirable, BBNP would welcome more detailed discussion before plans are developed. We have concerns that the nearby Waterfall Country may become increasingly pressurised by guests being attracted to this general area when it is already at and indeed beyond capacity. We would welcome discussion with the applicants about how messages can be aligned.”*

It is clear from these observations that the BBNP can see the potential benefits to the wider area and are happy to work closely with Zip World to manage customer demand for the tourism experience offered by the region and the significant boost that the Zip World facility is likely to bring.

The development would involve a significant investment into the local economy which will, in the short term, benefit the construction industry and the associated supply chains linked to it. Once operational it will create valuable permanent employment opportunities. In addition, the facility would also complement and enhance the existing tourism offer in the area and help to ensure that the money spent by visitors is retained locally.

As stated in the introduction to this Committee Report, Zip World have established facilities in North Wales. A 2016 study undertaken by North Wales Tourism (NWT) identified that the average Zip World visitor spend is between £251 and £500 compared with a UK average of £161. Zip World (North Wales) has, so far, attracted 482,758 visitors since 2013.

An update to that study (2018) shows that the average spend in North Wales is increasing with 12.77% of visitors who went to Zip World less than a year ago spent

more than £1001. It was also noted that visitors spending at the lower end (£0-£100) has decreased by 7.8% from 3 years ago and 3.27% from the previous year. One of the factors identified in influencing this growth, is the greater range of local accommodation that is now on offer and provides a good illustration of where “spin-off spending” is being made by Zip World visitors.

In combination with the “average spend”, North Wales Tourism were able to calculate that Zip World has generated in excess of £121 Million (£121,172,258) to the North Wales economy. The applicant has advised that since the last survey was carried out (by NWT), Zip World has welcomed over 1,000,000 visitors since its inception and has now contributed over £251,000,000 to the local economy of North Wales. The applicants have further advised that these figures do not include “non-participants” in Zip World products / experiences which NWT estimate to be an additional 30%.

The 2018 Review suggests that Zip World is a strong pull factor and that some visits to North Wales wouldn't have taken place without the Zip World influence. It was concluded to be the primary factor with 63% of respondents visiting as part of a longer stay with over 25% stating that they had not been to North Wales before.

The applicant has estimated that the proposed development (in its submitted form) will provide employment opportunities for 8 full time staff and 50 part time staff when fully operational. They have also advised that, wherever possible, they will seek to employ people from the local area and the wider South Wales Valleys region. The NWT Review identified that Zip World hires 93% of its employees from the local area. The Review also identifies that the locality of the employee shows that Zip World employs very few people from outside the area (only 6.67%) and, because of this, there are fewer “leakages” with the money ultimately being both made and spent in the local economy.

Committee is advised that a company's past performance cannot be guaranteed to be replicated in a different location and that the success in North Wales is not automatic in the South, however “economic development” is a significant material consideration in the determination of this application, and there is every chance that this development, if approved, could provide similar opportunities both at the site itself and also in a wide range of complementary service providers (spin-offs) that could have a significantly positive influence on the County Borough and the Region.

Conclusion

The application represents Phase 2 of the Zip World development in RCT. The Coaster Kart ride will complement the previously approved Zip Wire ride and firmly establishes a presence of this leisure provider within the County Borough. It is hoped that not only will these rides be constructed and be operational by the Spring of 2021 but that they will provide a platform for further phases of the attraction to expand and

bring with it the significant economic benefit that it has done for the North Wales economy.

The ride itself is relatively modest in scale and will not have any significant adverse impacts on either the wider landscape or the Listed Buildings that it will sit adjacent to. Its construction should also signal a renewed hope for the industrial buildings of the former Tower Colliery without the investment of which would likely result in a continued decent into dilapidation and exponentially increasing costs to provide future repairs.

Access issues are capable of being resolved through either the modification of the existing junction or the construction of a new access to the south. The details are the subject of a further submission through Condition 3 but have already formed the basis of discussions and it is now for the applicant to formally submit those plans for consideration / approval.

In light of the comments made above, the following RECOMMENDATION is made:

RECOMMENDATION: Grant

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Sections 91 and 93 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the plans and documents listed in the letter from Cadnant Planning dated 24^h November 2020.

Reason: To ensure the compliance with the approved plans and documents and to clearly define the scope of the permission.

3. No development shall commence until full engineering designs and details of a new / improved vehicular access off A4061 (Tower), to include sections and surface-water drainage details, have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not be brought into beneficial use until the works to the highway have been constructed in accordance with the approved details unless agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the adequacy of the proposed development, in the interests of highway safety and to comply with Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan