

P-05-1069 Save the farmland and green fields at Cosmeston, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 23.08.21

[REDACTED]

Date: 23rd August 2021

To, The Petitions Committee,

Re: P-05-1069 Pwyllgor Deisebau / Petitions Committee - Save the farmland and green fields at Cosmeston.

I would like to thank the Petitions Committee for reviewing the Petition and keeping a “watching-brief,” as agreed at the Petitions Committee meeting held on 9th February 2021.

The Petition was raised following the submission of a Planning Application by the Welsh Government for the development of 576 housing units and the provision of land (to the Vale of Glamorgan Council) for a primary school on land at Upper Cosmeston Farm, Lavernock Road, Cosmeston, Lavernock, in the Vale of Glamorgan, with the Petition requesting the Welsh Government to withdraw their application.

Previous statements submitted to the Petitions Committee contain a significant number of concerns regarding this application. However, I feel there is need to update the Petitions Committee on some of these concerns.

- I. The application is contrary to the many Welsh Government Environmental, Biodiversity Ecological and Climate Change Policies, etc, and to the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005.

The Welsh Government has recently (June 2021) made it clear that the environment and climate change will be ‘at the heart of decision-making’, with transport, planning, housing, energy, and the environment, being brought together to help Wales reach a Net Zero target by 2050, with the benefit of quieter roads, cleaner air, less noise, and a closer connection with nature being all part of the response to climate change

The Welsh Government have proposed commemorative forests and are now asking families to plant more trees in their gardens as tree planting targets are way behind where they need to be. However, many people are aware that a typical tree can absorb around 21 kilograms of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year, but this figure is only achieved when the tree is fully grown - saplings will absorb significantly less than this. Over a lifetime of 100 years, one tree could absorb around a tonne of CO₂. Removing mature trees and replacing with saplings will create a significant imbalance in CO₂ absorption and can only increase the effects of climate change.

The Welsh Government are acting in a contrary and painful fashion at Cosmeston by decimating the rural coastal landscape, removing mature trees and hedgerows, the natural habitats of our wildlife while exacerbating traffic movements, congestion, poor air quality, noise, etc. that will not tackle climate change, improve our health, benefit the local economy, or preserve Wales’ beautiful landscapes and nature

The proposed development would have a significant harmful effect sites of nature conservation and historic interest, and areas of landscape importance in the area which is of more than local importance due to its position adjacent to the Severn Estuary special area of conservation and designated Marine Protection Area. The site is also protected under the Ramsar Convention as this part of the coast, together with Cosmeston Lakes Country Park, is an assembly and arrival point for migrating bird. There is concern that the Environmental Statement does not fully reflect the importance of the site in terms of the importance of its varied ecology and its historic significance in terms of its relationship to Cosmeston Medieval Village, located immediately to the west of Lavernock Road. The assessments carried out by the applicant’s agents deliberately understate the importance of these features and therefore issues are not being properly addressed by the applicant.

The ever-increasing coastal erosion exacerbated by the many recent and continuing cliff falls around the development area, appears to be under dispute and would appear to be ignored by the applicant and the Local Planning Authority as any required 'buffer zone' will reduce the site area.

Recently the Vale of Glamorgan Councils have made declarations on a Climate Change Emergency and Nature Emergency but appear to be supporting the development which could be considered contrary to these declarations.

2. The application is considered contrary to Wales Planning Policy in that the proposed development on this scenic coastal and farming landscape cannot be seen as a 'coastal development' that requires a 'coastal location.'

This area of land was previously purchased some years ago by the Land Authority for Wales (LAW), who were aware that, a housing development could not be considered a "coastal development" at a 'coastal location,' and would decimate the natural landscape and wildlife and their habitats, and which would lead to the coalescence between Penarth and Sully. The LAW was also aware of the probable contamination from the landfill site.

Discussions with the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Department were favourable as they considered the golf course an appropriate "coastal development", maintaining the coastal landscape and wildlife habitats and would prevent any future coalescence between Penarth and Sully.'

The LAW discussed a proposed with the local Glamorganshire Golf Club, providing the Golf Club with a 27-hole golf course, etc, on the land to the rear of Lower Cosmeston Farm, while developing part of the Glamorganshire Golf Course for housing, and part being allocated to the adjacent Cosmeston Lakes Country Park.

However, the Glamorganshire Golf Club members opposed the scheme due to the Golf Club history and the location of the contaminated landfill site lying within the prospective golf course.

It is concerning that the Welsh Government are ignoring the reasons behind this previous development proposal.

3. Many residents and signatories to the petition consider that the application has not received and cannot receive the procedural fairness or be viewed in an independent manner that applications of this standing merit, and, that the Vale of Glamorgan may have pre-determined the application.

Further to the application being registered on the 23rd October 2020 by the Council on the same day that the Welsh Government announced the national "firebreak lockdown", which considerably affected public access to the applicants documentation and an inability to hold Public Meetings or visit residents to explain the application and documents it appears that various provisions are being made to the Council which can be perceived as inducements to approve the application and which the Council are readily accepting.

- I. Within the proposal the applicant is providing the Council land for a 2 form-entry Primary School.
- II. It has been agreed between the Welsh Government and the Council that on approval of the "housing" application the applicant will provide the Council with £8.25 million towards the £11 million cost to purchase of land (owned by Welsh Government, adjacent to the housing site) and development of a Special Needs School as an annex to Ysgol Y Deri School which is approximately 3 miles away in Penarth. Ysgol Y Deri School provides services for children from across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff. The Council have already agreed to take an amount from S106 monies from a local housing development in Sully towards the development costs of the Special Needs School.
- III. The Vale of Glamorgan Council has recently submitted a planning application for the Special Needs School annex, with the same Planning Officer dealing with both applications.
- IV. The proposed Special Needs School is being utilised by the Council to shame objectors to the housing development by stating that they are objecting to the Special Needs School.

(Many residents are not opposed to the need to the expansion of Ysgol Y Deri and have great regard for the education needs it provides but feel that the annex should be sited in closer proximity to the school with a more appropriate site being "across the road" from the present school which will still

be encompassed within the Penarth Learning Centre located there. This would also mean that the students and staff health and safety can be maintained away from the contaminated landfill site and the flood zone that the access to the schools and housing lie within, would negate the need for increased traffic movement by staff between the separate sites, reduce traffic movements in and around the locality of Cosmeston.)

4. Comments made by the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd in a statement (dated 13 January 2021) to the Petitions Committee are found to be contentious, threatening and demeaning.

I. *“The development proposals were also subject to public consultation as part of the preparation and examination of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan and extensive pre-application consultation was undertaken well in advance of the Covid 19 pandemic and associated restrictions. There have been several opportunities for residents to make comments in respect of the proposals.”*

At each of the above events, that the Minister refers to, different proposals were made at each event:

- Preparation of LDP - 235 houses smaller site, outside the proposed Green Wedge area.
- Examination of LDP – 576 houses, larger site, Green Wedge area readjusted to accommodate site.
- Public Consultation – plans and pictures shown were stated by the applicants’ agents as “our “ideas and dreams of the development” and not “concrete” proposals.
- Planning Application – development advances outside the LDP site into the Green Wedge area, involves demolition of Farm and 17 century farm buildings.

At each of the above stages, various objections were made, and all ignored by the Council, the Planning Inspector at the Examination Stage, the applicant’s agents / Welsh Government

II. *“A failure to develop the site could cause implications to the ‘soundness’ of the LDP.”*

This could be seen as a threat to prevent objections being made against the proposal, and a threat to the Council that if the application is not approved then the Welsh Government will impose sanctions on the Council by reviewing the ‘soundness’ of the LDP and impose the development of more houses in the Cosmeston or the Council area.

III. *“The Vale of Glamorgan Council will need to consider whether the application accords with policies contained in the adopted Local Development Plan.”*

The Site Notices posted by the LPA notified the public that, “the application does not conform with the adopted Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan 2017”. The application is different to the proposal contained in the LDP. The applicant also indicates in the submitted documentation that parts of the development lie outside the boundaries of the LDP site proposal and therefore does not conform to the LDP.

5. Changes appear to being made to the proposed development by the Welsh Government without significant public consultation or redress by the public, or contrary to objections already raised.

I. A Report from the Design Commission for Wales, (DCfW) dated 21st January 2021 notes that changes have been made and concerns raised by DCfW are being ignored by the applicant, resulting in the DCfW being unsupportive of the scheme. The report (attached) contains extracts as follows: -

“Due to time constraints resulting from the extended presentation, significant elements of the scheme were not afforded the attention they need, not least the Vision, the Design Code and its status. The Commission would welcome further opportunities to review these critical aspects which set the foundation and key parameters for the proposals.”

“The Commission raised a number of fundamental concerns about this project in December 2019 and has to date seen no evidence that the masterplan has been meaningfully altered to take account of and respond to those concerns”.

“The Welsh Government, as client and land-owner, has a particular responsibility to deliver exemplary development that meets the standards and ambitions set out in policy and legislation which it advocates for others and this scheme must be exemplary in every aspect. It is unclear which elements of the proposed development will make it distinctive from other residential development, and we are not currently confident that it will result in an exemplar of residential led placemaking.”

“In consultation with the Commission in March 2019, Design Review in June 2019, and a DCFW workshop with the team in December 2019 fundamental concerns were raised regarding elements of the approach to the project. We are now a year on and based on the planning application materials available, there has been no change that would enable the scheme to meet the stated aspirations.”

“We have considered this report very carefully looking back at earlier correspondence and reports which are appended here. Based on these and the materials now submitted for review in January 2021, we are unable to support the proposals as they have been submitted for outline planning consent, which is in our view a premature step.”

The Report also briefly highlights the concerns of DCFW over: -

- the increasing heights of the building which appear to have been raised significantly from the original application, despite a considerable number of objections received on this issue.
- the positioning of the dwellings, “fronts to back”
- the location of the school and suggest that alternative locations be tested, and,
- that Active Travel and Net Zero Carbon Development aspirations cannot be achieved.

- II. A report from the Vale of Glamorgan Council’s Principal Landscape Officer (dated 25th November 2020) shows concerns over the apparent reduction in buffer zone between the Wales Coastal Path and the development, by the developer. The Officer has also indicated concerns on the visual impact of elements of the development; -

“The height of the blocks of flats (now apparently raised to seven storeys) is intrusive.”

“Housing on the western boundary are particularly prominent and detracting.”

6. A request to “call-in” the application (attached) has been made to the Wales Planning Directorate (13th November 2020, Case No 1585.), on behalf of myself (Chair of Keep Cosmeston Green), together with The Saving Sully and Lavernock Group, Sully and Lavernock Community Council and the two Sully Ward Councillors of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

As yet none of the concerns made in the call-in have been addressed by the applicant or the Local Planning Authority (LPA), with the Planning Directorate still awaiting the LPA’s report to refer the ‘call-in’ request.

In conclusion it is absurd that the Welsh Government make and promote policies on the Environment, Ecology, Biodiversity, Nature and Wildlife, Climate Change, Flooding, Active Travel, Contaminated Land Planning and the Future Generations Act, yet do not observe or follow these policies themselves and continue to decimate the rural nature of our land and its wildlife and its historic culture, increase traffic congestion and emissions, increase the flood risk in the area and yet expect local residents and other members of the public to put with their development and absolve the Welsh Government inexcusable behaviour by suggesting that Climate Change can be solved by families planting trees in their gardens, trees that will have to grow for many years before they absorb CO₂ at the same rate as the trees that they are removing. It is also concerning the inducements being made by the Welsh Government to the Vale of Glamorgan Council in order to get “their” development approved.

There is still time and opportunity for the Welsh Government to lead by example in supporting and promoting the Countryside and its Environment by following and observing their own Policies

I therefore ask on behalf of residents and the signatories of the petition, from across Wales, that the Welsh Government withdraw this application and “save the farmland and green fields at Cosmeston”.

Yours Faithfully,

Michael Philip Garland