

Hillend ski centre plans may be shelved

A multi-million pound upgrade for Hillend ski slope should be shelved in the current financial crisis, Midlothian councillors were told this week.

Councillor Peter Smaill, Conservative group leader at Midlothian Council, said it was the wrong time to be making the investment which he said now stood at £33 million.

Speaking at a meeting where councillors were presented with a list of savings proposals – including axing community funding, teaching jobs and school libraries to plug a £14m hole in next year's budget – Mr Smaill questioned why the costly project was going ahead.

He told fellow councillors: "It is the wrong time to be pursuing the £33m investment into Hillend which could easily seep into further costs on our revenue account, quite apart from the question of capital priority.

"We do not have enough information as councillors at the moment. We have not had a review of our capital plans.

"We do not know if we can actually raise enough cash to pay for the schools and Hillend and the other projects heading towards us."

Initially the council agreed a £13.8 million capitals funding for the ambitious Destination Hillend which would see the redevelopment of the ski centre, which has the longest dry ski

slope in the UK, and included a promise to create the highest zip wire in the UK and create an activity dome, hotel accommodation, a glamping site for wigwams, and shopping and food retail areas.

In 2021 the amount set aside in the capitals budget was £24.68m and the hotel plans were scrapped.

At a meeting of the council in December reports on the project were heard behind closed doors as reports from independent consultants were presented to councillors.

Despite rising costs the council announced plans to go ahead with a new junction, access road and car park which it said was key to the development following the December meeting and said a planning application for the new centre would be lodged this spring.

Midlothian Council's cabinet member for economic development, Councillor Douglas Bowen said at the time: "We make no apology for the scale of our ambitions – we're confident the project's unique location in the Pentlands and the quality and breadth of what will be on offer will push visitor figures up from around 139,000 a year to an estimated 485,000."

The local authority said it is estimated 150 full time equivalent jobs will be created during construction and up to 157 full time equivalent jobs from when the facility is finished.



by Marie Sharp

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