

Hillend plans will have to be revised

Ambitious plans to turn Midlothian's ski centre into a top visitors attraction have been dealt another blow as councillors agreed to go back to the drawing board over its design.

Cost have soared at Destination Hillend since it was first agreed four years ago from £13.8million to £37million.

Last year the local authority approved a revised business plan which reduced the cost to £31 million by scrapping proposals for a glamping site and agreeing to charge people who use its new 412-space car park.

But a meeting of the council yesterday was told that the spiralling costs of construction meant it was time to look at the project again and find ways to make further cuts to costs.

Councillors were asked to agree the new building contract for the site would not go forward.

Instead they were asked to approve a "revised replacement to reduce the footprint of the building with a focus on facilities essential to the wider business case in order to protect the level of revenue to be generated on site."

A report to members added: "The extent of saving to be made is currently being reviewed by the design team and will be presented to

council in the form of a revision to the business case once this exercise is complete.”

When it was first approved in 2019 the original £13.8million council investment was meant to see the redevelopment of the Hillend 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 capital budget was £24.68m and the hotel plans were scrapped.

Midlothian Council has said Destination Hillend will create around 150 jobs during construction and up to 157 jobs from when the facility is finished adding the project is forecast to bring in just over £1 million a year to the council, helping support other council services and benefiting the wider local economy by up to £3.8million.

At this week’s meeting the changes were put forward as part of a revised Capital Plan Prioritisation.

Councillors were told the Covid pandemic, Brexit and global conflicts had played a part in increasing construction costs with tenders for council projects returning at prices 30 per cent higher than expected.

The report said: “Recognising that in this environment it will not be possible to deliver the agreed plan within the available resources a review to establish options to deliver the council’s priorities has been undertaken. It is proposed to focus the resources we have on our priorities and critical building projects.”

While Hillend’s main building is reviewed, councillors agreed the plan would move forward with school extensions at Bilston and Mauricewood Primaries, and at Hawthornden and Mount Esk to

provide dedicated Additional Support Needs provision for Lasswade Community High School and relocate Mount Esk Early Learning Centre provision to Hawthornden Primary school.

by Marie Sharp, Local Democracy Reporter.

