

# **Councillors throw out plans to open a new family theme park at East Lothian farm**

**Councillors have thrown out plans to open a new family theme park on an East Lothian farm after they were told the crops lost would be equivalent to one million pints of beer.**

Concerns over the proposal by operators of East Links Family Park, currently in West Barns, to open a new park six miles away on East Fortune farm, saw hundreds of objections.

Council planning officers recommended to application for refusal after estimating the majority of visitors would have to travel to it by car with a lack of public transport and roadside paths sparking fears about safety.

At a meeting of elected members this morning councillors added an additional reason for refusing as the loss of prime agricultural land from the farm.

And Councillor Donna Collins, a farmer herself, outlined the impact of losing potential crops to the food chain.

She said: "The loss of 14.5 hectares of prime agricultural land which could produce 145 tonnes of wheat is equivalent to 246,000 loaves of bread and one million pints of beer."

Councillor Collins said although it had been said crop fields

next to the proposed family park would continue to be used, the type of food which could be grown would be restricted by the inability to spray them so close to a park used by children.

The operator of East Links Family Park submitted plans to 'relocate' the business to the farm after its lease runs out at its current site.

The plans brought more than 550 representations with around 465 objecting.

Local objectors told the committee that claims of a 'relocation' were not correct because the owner of the land where the current park lies has said he will find new management to keep it open.

They raised their own concerns about road safety, increased traffic on the surrounding country roads and communities and the impact on local wildlife and rural life.

Planners told councillors the application had to be considered as a 'new family park' which potentially meant two would be operating within six miles of each other.

And while the council's own economic development team backed the plans, officers ruled concern over transport links and access outweighed any benefits.

The site currently has a single bus service which operates every two hours and drops people at a bus stop which is a 15 minute walk from it, with no public footpath.

Their report said: "Road Services advise that the existing bus facilities are insufficient for the needs of the development and, moreover, would represent a significant road safety risk."

The applicants had argued that the new park was farm diversification and a lower 40mph speed limit could be

introduced at the entrances to the site to counter claims access was unsafe.

However road services had responded: "It is not normal procedure for speed limits to be introduced to support an sub standard development."

Local ward councillor Shamin Akhtar, who is not on the planning committee, urged her colleagues to support officers and refuse permission for the park.

She said: "The family park does not meet our safety standards."

Councillor Jeremy Findlay also backed officers concerns over road safety and the impact on local residents of noise from the park as well as the loss of prime agricultural land.

He said : "I am all in favour of farm diversification but it has to be the right project in the right place and at the right time and this is not the case."

Councillor Kenny McLeod supported the application pointing out the operator of the East Links Family Park had won awards for the business.

He said: "I feel to reject this diverse and exciting business would be a loss for East Lothian."

Councillor Shona McIntosh moved a recommendation for refusal not only on road safety grounds but on the loss of prime agricultural land, which was backed by Councillor Findlay.

The committee refused planning permission by nine votes to one with only Councillor McLeod supporting it.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter