

Scottish Ministers throw out appeal over second theme park at East Fortune

The operators of a family theme park have lost their appeal to Scottish Ministers after road safety concerns were ruled too high to let it go ahead.

East Lothian councillors last year refused to grant planning permission for the new theme park at East Fortune after it received hundreds of objections.

The applicants, who run East Link Family Park, in West Barns, had described the move as a 'relocation' of their popular attraction.

However councillors were told the owner of the land where the original park is based had indicated he would find a new operator meaning it would be a second similar facility.

An appeal to Scottish Ministers was lodged last summer but this week the Scottish Government Reporter backed the council's decision.

And they rejected a claim from the applicants for expenses to be paid by the local authority over the case.

One of the biggest concerns raised by objectors was the impact of the estimated 100,000 visitors to the theme park on the rural community and its roads.

The Reporter heard the access initially proposed for the site did not meet the required visual distances at its junction with the national speed limit road approaching it.

The applicants had submitted an alternative access site asking the Reporter to consider it however this request was refused after the Reporter said objectors had the right to be consulted on the change before it could be accepted.

It had been argued that support for the theme park was in the council's own local development plan which supported tourism and leisure projects in the countryside.

However the Reporter said visitors to the new park would rely heavily on cars with public transport limited and people who take a bus facing a 12 minute walk along the national speed limit road, with no pavement or path.

The applicants had said talks were in place with a local bus company to provide a new bus stop at the park and argued that the speed limit on the road at the access could be reduced and traffic management measures implemented.

However the Reporter said these changes all relied on other to carry out the work and could not be guaranteed.

They said: "The proposed development's effects in terms of road safety and its dependency on use of private cars mean that it would not be compatible overall with its surrounding area, would not provide opportunities for sustainable travel, would not take sufficiently into account the transport need of the development as appropriate for the rural location, and would not minimise carbon emissions.

"For the type of development proposed, road safety and sustainable transport are important considerations. I find that for each issue individually, the failure to comply with policy outweighs the in-principle support for the proposed development elsewhere in the development plan."

East Lothian MSP Craig Hoy, who campaigned against the new park, welcomed the decision.

He said: "I am pleased that the Scottish Government reporter has refused the appeal to relocate East Links Farm Park.

"I worked hard, alongside the community, to oppose this relocation, and it's excellent to see their strong concerns being heard and respected."

East Lothian Council's planning committee rejected the application last year after hearing the local authority had received more than 550 representations on the plans with 465 objecting to them.

Council planning officers recommended the 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.

And councillors added an additional reason over the loss of prime agricultural land.

At the meeting in June 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."

However the Reporter, rejecting the appeal, said the loss of the land in itself would not have led to it being refused "had I been satisfied that the proposed development was acceptable in all other respects".

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter