

Response to NCC planning application mini consultation for recycling centre at Sheringham

Hilltop Outdoor Centre

We would ask the planning committee to read through this even though it is lengthy. Hilltop is convinced that the poor process that has been followed is such that we will move to a judicial review if planning permission is passed for this site without alternatives being genuinely investigated.

A great deal of public money has been spent on the process so far. We are sorry for this waste, but we have experienced little openness and transparency from the officers and members who are driving this application. To continue with the present approach will only compound the issues.

For the avoidance of doubt, We most strongly object to the planning application in its current form and the process undertaken by NCC.

1. General statement

Hilltop Outdoor Centre was **established in 1989**. It is a family run, residential education centre based on adventure activities and environmental studies for primary school visits. It employs 50 staff mostly young people and has 180 beds, 30 acres of land and inputs over 2 million pounds into the local economy. It is an all-year-round business. The business is successful, stable and the directors acknowledge the support we have had from both the NCC and the NNDC in developing our facility and survival of the pandemic. Our entrance lies in the 'layby' 50 metres west of the present recycle centre but **our grounds, fields and paths surround the proposed site from the north and west.**

Our clients are **primary school children, many coming from city and suburban backgrounds**. The special nature of AONB **bringing nature, tranquillity, wildness, countryside** as a place for children to learn and discover about themselves, nature and the countryside.

Hilltop was given Planning Permission in 1989. NCC applied for planning permission for the present site in 1992. NCC awarded themselves permission despite strong objection from NNDC, CPRE and Hilltop. **Much was made by NCC of the fact that the site would be discreetly set in woodland.** Its presence has become accepted, but its presence should have no bearing on the present application. Imagine no present recycle centre, **would anyone dream of siting a waste facility in AONB, next to a sensitive children's business?**

THE PROPOSED SITE IS BETWEEN 20 AND 60 METRES FROM OUR SITES OF WOODLAND STUDIES, FORESTRY SKILLS AND CHILDRENS PLAYING FIELD. It also creates specific problems in connection with child protection and pollution issues. We are concerned over noise, visual impact and disturbance of the site operation **and especially the 9 months construction phase** when mitigating measures will not be in place.

THE PROPOSED SITE SHOULD NEVER BE PLACED ON AGRICULTURAL AONB LAND WHEN ALTERNATIVES are/WERE AVAILABLE.

2. Planning Rules re AONB.

National planning policy framework paras 176/7

GREAT WEIGHT MUST BE PLACED ON THE CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF WILDLIFE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE. The scale and development within should be limited. Any development should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts. Projects should be refused other than in exceptional circumstances.

This proposal drives a coach and horses through the NNDC planning rules.

National and NCC guideline cs6,6,14,15,55,56 and DM 10

Any development should **not adversely affect local amenity.**

Noise from a waste recycling centre **should not adversely affect local amenity.**

Any development **should respect the character and appearance of the area.**

Industrial development should only be allowed if no other suitable sites can be found.

Will not cause unacceptable impacts on road safety, local network, air quality or rural amenity.

NCC should protect and enhance Norfolk's natural environment.

Any development should be **on land already in use for waste or derelict land.**

SO ITS CLEAR....NO DEVELOPMENT OF WASTE FACILITY, UNLESS IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES. It is the responsibility of NCC to prove public need and that there are no suitable alternatives. Even so there should be no unacceptable intrusion of visual, noise, tremor, traffic, pollution.

AONB RULES AND GUIDELINES SHOULD BE VIEWED WITH RESPECT. INDEED, GIVEN GREAT WEIGHT. THEY ARE NOT OBSTACLES WHICH CAN BE MANIPULATED AND CIRCUMNAVIGATED BY THOSE IN AUTHORITY WHO BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS ON BEHALF OF THE PUBLIC.

TWO ALTERNATIVE SITES AVAILABLE FOR 6 YEARS HAVE BEEN DISMISSED BY NCC WITHOUT GREAT WEIGHT BEING PLACED ON POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT. BOTH ARE STILL AVAILABLE

A. **WOODLAND to the west of the present site**

Great weight has not been applied. A variety of superficial AND MISLEADING REPORTS and comments dismissed this opportunity. The comments of the arboreal team leader and the fig 3 enigma are examples of these. Plans to extend into this woodland have been drawn up since 2016.

B. **INDUSTRIAL SITE AT WEST EDGE OF CROMER**

Although having been available since 2016, NCC became aware of this absolutely ideal site in August 2023. There has been no genuine investigation of this by NCC. This site would not require mitigation measures nor an expensive new road junction. It already has a hard standing base.

NCC ARE DIRECTED BY THEIR OWN RULES NOT TO USE AONB WHEN ALTERNATIVES ARE AVAILABLE. THEY ARE BOUND TO GENUINELY ASSESS THESE POSSIBILITIES RATHER THAN SEEK ONLY TO FIND WAYS OF DISMISSING THEM SO THEY MAY FOCUS ON THEIR PREDETERMINED VIEW WHICH WILL CAUSE DISTURBANCE TO THE LOCAL AMENITY, impair an ethical business, AND LOOK COMPLETELY OUT OF PLACE.

3. Traffic matters

AT THE HEAD OF ALL PLANNING DOCUMENTS, IT SAYS THAT TRAFFIC FLOW IS THE FIRST THING TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN PLANNING AN INCREASE IN TRAFFIC.

NCC rules and guidelines cs15, cs7

Take account of safety of road users, capacity of infrastructure, suitable highways access, do not harm the local amenity, **will not cause unacceptable harm to the local network.**

Take into consideration **unacceptable impact on harm to amenities and highways.**

No assessment related to this application has been made of the arterial A148.

A study of the Old Holt Road excluded most of the traffic from Hilltop.

NCC have insisted for over a year that there will be no increase in traffic. In fact, their report from Stantec states it 7 times including that the vehicle **movements will be identical.** **The new site is four times larger, it has a large reuse building (a new feature), new containers for construction, trade waste, plasterboard, tyres, batteries, flat glass etc.** The tonnage allowed will be 6,000. Previously the limit was 5000 tons although the present site has a through put of 3000 tons. It has been upgraded from a main to a main plus centre.

Why have NCC stood by this no more traffic stance?

NCC Highways, in their consultation, said they had no objection as the applicant has stated there **will be no increase in vehicle movements.** However, Highways stated if there was an intensification of vehicle movements an objection would probably follow. We can only wait to see the second mini consultation statement from Highways. They are aware that this stretch of A148 has an accident history (4 more since the first planning statement) has regular visits from the speed camera team indicating that police and speed authority regard it as hazardous. The increase in traffic in the last 4 years makes this one of the busiest in North Norfolk. Imagine HGVs, coaches etc trying to turn right towards Holt in an ever-increasing constant flow of traffic on the A148.

Those cars and trucks from Sheringham will take the easier turn left option and **use Britons Lane.** It should not be forgotten that the vehicles from Hilltop will be carrying 6 – 12-year-olds.

Even with no increase the proposed TRO will force all vehicles to leave by the eastern exit of Old Holt Road increasing the number of vehicles using this junction by 30%. Hilltop has been ignored by the traffic report and no account has been taken of the coaches, delivery trucks, staff cars and cars with children visiting educational sites. This will increase use of the east exit another 15/20%

Now add even a conservative 20% for growth of recycle traffic, we now face 60 – 70% increase in vehicles trying to exit the east end. Worryingly there is to be no central reservation for vehicles from Cromer direction. We will have another Holway Road but without a central reservation. Is this sustainable development? And then growth in the future?

The proposed TRO. Many HGV and coach drivers use the layby for rest periods. If they enter from the east they will become isolated in the layby unable to turn round. They will need to enter from the west creating danger especially turning right when heading westbound. This requires some serious manoeuvring across oncoming traffic. Coaches and lorries leaving Hilltop also often use the layby for rest before moving on. Their only option will be to park up between Hilltop entrance and the east exit causing great congestion. Or they will all look elsewhere on the busy local network. Has this really been thought through?

4. Matters of concern – issues of transparency and openness.

We have attempted to highlight these thoughts to NCC. We have pointed out that their process has been flawed and each step further down their predetermined road is done so at extra cost to the public purse. The major statements are given above but these statements are supported by a full record of facts, Freedom of information files as well as interpretations of NCC and its satellite company statements, letters and e-mails, and photographs.

Matters of concern that will be involved in a **judicial review** including many of the unusual replies to FOI. We have engaged with [REDACTED] to consider the evidence trail.

- A. The manner of the searches carried out by NPS including correspondence regarding potential purchase of land from landowners. The description of further 'discussions with landowners!'
- B. Communications between the preferred landowner and NCC.
- C. Incorrect or omitted information provided to the cabinet on 31/1/2022.
- D. The summary of verbal conversations for the extension into the woodland west of current site between the waste and arboreal officers regarding defining the woodland as mature based on a 1905 document.
- E. The phrase 'site option review' which was used in the proposal to the cabinet. NCC now declare there has been no site option review and offer no dates or personnel involved in decisions.
- F. The enigma of Fig 3 which was used to block use of the potential expansion into the woodland west of the current site. Despite farming this out to an external company, NCC state they are unable to date this early concept which was used erroneously to expand arguments to eliminate the woodland alternative.
- G. Statements made by an officer in the response to public comments and planning statement 2 regarding 'missing this opportunity', and how residents will have to go to Norwich, Wells or Worstead. This is an inappropriate and unprofessional statement.
- H. The same officer stated 'the NCC could not support the removal of the whole woodland'. This is a vast exaggeration of the facts and is misleading the reader to dismiss the woodland alternative.
- I. The identification of the proposed site soon after its purchase by the new landowner via a land registry search which did not include other local landowners. The almost immediate following assessment to negate the possibility of using the west woodland which had been the plan for 3 years.
- J. The lack of liaison with NNDC or Hilltop particularly before site was selected.
- K. Why the 2016 drawings were not included in the planning statement. Only fig 3.
- L. Cromer alternative investigations.
- M. Proposed site too small for sunken containers and Berms discussed in public consultation Aug 2022. NCC deny these were ever discussed but documents confirm their presence in early stages.
- N. Sustainability of site if increase in use is large over the next 25 years. Danger of future expansion on AONB and traffic issues.
- O. Lack of consultation with highways/visual impact/Stantec with stakeholder Hilltop.

- P. Why did NCC ask the land owner of the woodland west of the current site to sell in July 2019, then ignore his positive reply without even an acknowledgement. Then in 2023 again he offered land, but NCC did not even acknowledge!
- Q. Why was an Environment Impact Assess not required when it is clearly required if an educational business was involved.
- R. The historic use of the words extension or replacement in various public documents.
And many more questions on this process!