

Mountaineering Scotland objection to change of use from agricultural land to outdoor activity centre; formation of car parking and siting of three containers and two portaloos at Spittal Farm Penicuik

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Mountaineering Scotland is an independent organisation of 14,000 members that represents the interests of mountaineers and hill walkers in Scotland. It also represents the interests of over 80,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council which provides financial and policy support for its work on issues affecting Scotland's landscape.

Our comments are therefore confined to the effects on our membership.

Mountaineering Scotland is supportive of the rural economy but firmly believes in the principle of appropriate development in the right location.

The Pentland Hills are modest in height but serve an important function to those in Edinburgh and wider afield and the Pentland Hills Regional Park was established in recognition of that fact. We have been approached by some of our membership who have raised concerns regarding this proposal.

Having considered the application Mountaineering Scotland objects to the application because it fails to comply with the aims of the Regional Park in that:

1. it fails to retain the essential character of the hills as a place for the peaceful enjoyment of the countryside;
2. it fails in that the landscape and the habitat is not protected and enhanced by this proposal; and
3. it fails to encourage responsible public enjoyment of the hills

We also believe it cannot co-exist with farming and other land uses within the park.

We believe that the development is incompatible with the Midlothian Local Development Plan Appendix 6: Pentland Hills Regional Park in which para 2 states "a) it should make a positive contribution to the amenity of the Park in terms of design and landscaping; and b) it should not be visually obtrusive or necessitate visually obtrusive constructions;"

The use of three containers and portaloos clearly fails to meet these requirements.

The activities proposed will also be noticeable, intrusive and damaging, both from a noise and visual aspect. It is also indicative of a low grade development, done on the cheap, where little attention has been paid to any mitigation.

The LDP continues "c) it should be compatible with existing adjoining and neighbouring developments and uses;"

We do not view this proposal as in any way compatible. The proposed development could be set up anywhere whereas the Pentland Hills provide specific opportunities for visitors which cannot fully be provided elsewhere.

Para 7 states "Intrusive tourist developments, including static and transit caravan and camping sites, will not be permitted within the Regional Park."

We believe this proposal is intrusive. It does not sit well with the established visitor activities, and the use of the proposed temporary structures are akin to caravan parks and should not be allowed.

Some of the activities proposed will create visible scarring which will result in longer term impacts on the amenity of the Regional Park.

The development fails to comply with planning policy and we urge the planning authority to reject this application.

We also feel the proposal is, in the light of the above, ill-considered and speculative and the applicant has not consulted (or perhaps ignored) the relevant policies and documentation prior to submitting the application.

David Gibson, CEO, Mountaineering Scotland