

Middleton Lodge – Review¹ of submitted documentation

Non – technical note

Timing unclear in respect of reference to a 15-year extraction period then an additional further 5 years of management and aftercare. The three-phase development is noted and it states that the first phase would include the creation of the quarry garden – to be completed after five yrs.

The illustrative plans go further, noting Phase 2 restoration as including the quarry garden, water feature and maze; the stable development; the walled garden into a working kitchen garden, the self catering, and the adventure play area². Phase 2 would be yrs 2-6. For Phase 3 (yr 6 to 2022) the restoration would include the second lake and associated habitat creation.

Para 13 - Transport includes the routing for the traffic (heavy vehicles and visitor traffic using the same routes and also signing of the routes. The latter notes signage from the A1(M) – this would not be straightforward and indeed in the EIA this difficulty is noted P10.23, para 10.4 but not clarified. It is however critical to the routing of the visitor traffic).

EIA Report

- 1. Introduction** – Reference to the interlinking of the mineral working with the rest of the scheme. [This is clearly a financial link. However the development works monies are to come not from Middleton Estates but rather the Sherburn Company. What happens if, over the passage of time, the inter-company arrangements change? The scheme includes a number of specialist elements e.g. the catering, one assumes that these could be operationally outsourced / leased].
- 2. Site Description** – Country house built around 1779 surrounded by 77ha of agricultural land and woodland. (Includes the Georgian walled garden). Location 9km from Darlington, 0.8km east of A1, 1km north of Middleton Tyas, 1.5km SW of Barton and 1.8km NE of Scotch Corner.

“The kitchen gardens and tearooms would be open during the summer from year three.

The rest of the stable development would be opened at the same time as the quarry gardens.

The Quarry garden and fountain are needed to create an “attraction” that would bring people to the Middleton Lodge Development. The estate would be restored and regenerated during the first five years of the development”. (2.8)

¹ [RHA observations]

² In the subsequent documentation there are no details of the adventure play area that could have a significant impact and large footprint.

[There is no reference to market positioning nor is the rationale explained of why the garden and fountain are deemed so important –there is a limit as to how many gardens and fountains can be catered for in the market place particularly given the presence of the Alnwick Garden. There are also several examples of quarry gardens e.g. Belsay and Castle Howard and country houses open to the public invariably have gardens open to the public].

- 3. Project description** – Quarrying and restoration are estimated to take 15 yrs. Once phase 2 is completed the quarrying would be restricted to winter working only and would take 10 years to complete [3.1]. The later explanation is “to prevent any impact on visitors to the gardens during the summer months” [3.3]. [This is logical but does not resolve the conflict with the all year round conference and function trade, restaurant / café and shop trade. In terms of the later stated traffic forecasts the visitor attraction is also open all year].

Proposals:

Rock Garden – Reference to “powerful fountains, the tallest of which is 50m high”. [See the Alnwick Garden commentary].
In 3.8 it also states “The quarry gardens would be open primarily [?] during the summer months (Easter to end of Sept.). The restaurant, function rooms and the kitchen garden would be open all year”. [In Appendix 10.3 Visitor Forecasts the visitor attraction is noted as being open all year].

Restaurant – 88 inside couverts³ with potential for a further 80 and an additional 50m² bar area. Reference also to local artwork gallery space and outside sculptures and woodchip boiler for the stable block. [This is quite a large facility and one also capable of accommodating the travel trade (including coach groups) as many other country houses / garden operations do. This is not referenced in the Chapters].

Georgian walled kitchen garden – Reference is also made to “lean to bothy” [but no description of what this means – accommodation?] and to two holiday cottages for conference delegates and for use by those attending private functions. [Does this mean an all year round occupancy? And would any length of occupancy restriction apply?].

Public access – “It is also proposed that public transport links would be promoted”. [No reference as to how this would be done nor to any green transport plan (staff and visitors), or visitor management programme, as would now be normal for any such development. There is reference to car parking provision but not of coach parking and associated turning angles, nor to service vehicles].

There is a note that there would be free access for the first 10 years to the public gardens for Middleton Tyas and Barton village residents.

³ wrongly spelt as covers in report.

Employment (3.7) – “The proposed restoration scheme for Middleton Lodge Quarry is essential to the regeneration of Middleton Lodge Estate and would help create around 50 direct and indirect jobs”. [In the recommendations they say 50 FTE to the regional economy]. [There is no indication of any employment split e.g. PT, Occasional etc and there crucially is no reference as to where the direct staff (no figures) would come from or how they would be accommodated in terms of travel and on-site staff accommodation].

[The shop is also referenced but there is no inclusion of plant sales / nursery, a normal extension of such house / garden visitor facilities. Similarly the noted associated conference delegates activities are not identified – team building, quads, paint balling? There is also no reference to product development / refreshment – this would be essential to attract new / repeat visitors to the quarry gardens. The normal, and most cost effective route would be by running events.]

[The proposals represent a mixed shopping list. There is no clear theme or anchor but what is being talked of is two development themes - the revenue earning stable block developments and the low income, return quarry / fountain visitor facility. The former could potentially survive without the latter (a value rather than volume of visitor ethos)].

- 4. Planning Policy** – “Informal” discussions with Richmond Council officers have identified a wish to enhance visitor facilities in the local area to provide a range of different attractions that together will provide a significant “draw” to attract visitors. This scheme can contribute to this aim”. [Surprisingly there is no reference to any discussions with Yorkshire Tourist Board, Darlington Council, nor to the Tees Valley Area Tourism Partnership (given they are less than 9km away and the issues of other developments / competition and displacements)].

[There is reference to PPG21 and its para 3.25 re the application of three principles to rural tourism proposals but they neglect to mention the third – “large scale tourist proposals must be assessed against the whole range of sustainable development objectives (PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development). This includes not only their transport implications but also other sustainability considerations such as how they assist rural regeneration and the well being of communities”. It is the last sentence that has not been taken on board].

“The scheme would have a low impact and would draw upon heritage assets without causing harm”. [The estimate is for 80k visitors pa and up to 12k visitors staying overnight in area plus an extension of the season. Such numbers are significant and in regional terms – North East and Yorkshire – Middleton would already be middle ranked. (See Comparative Note).

It is also stated “the scheme is not sufficiently large to provide major employment, but jobs generated by the visitor facilities can make a contribution locally, as well as providing continued employment for staff at Barton quarry”. [It is unclear as to the benefit in terms of local jobs not least given the type of jobs that would result from the project. There is also the question of the local availability of labour given that local employment⁴ in Richmondshire is 80.1%, in Hambleton 79.7% and in Darlington 73.6%. This is compared to a Yorkshire and Humberside figure of 74.9% and for the England 75.18%].

It is stated that “Although there would be a slight increase in the number of vehicles using the road network as a result of the proposed visitor attraction at the Estate, it is concluded that there will be no significant impact on the operational capacity of the existing road network and no significant adverse environmental impact as a result of the proposals”. [Given the vision there will be a different pattern of impacts – greater weekend movements (particularly on Sundays) and during the summer, and also a probable different traffic mix including coach traffic. There is also the potential of vehicular conflicts with heavy traffic.]

[PPG21 (para 5.5) states, “In all cases, planners will need to weigh up the other benefits of a tourism proposal against any disadvantages arising from its location. Some of the key considerations will be the extent to which the proposal:

- Helps to protect or improve a specific site or general location. Many new proposals offer the opportunity for landscape enhancement, to re-use an historic building or to improve a derelict and unattractive site;
- Contributes to tourism in the locality. New tourism developments will usually be beneficial to the local economy and complement the areas tourism function;
- Provides a new facility for the local community as well as visitors; and,
- Assists more generally with diversification of rural economies; where appropriate,
- Impacts on the vitality and viability of town centres].

[Although a number of the above are addressed the case for local benefit, complementing the area’s tourism function, and impact on vitality and viability have not.]

⁴ Employment rate of working age population, June – Aug 2004. Source: National Statistics – Labour Force Survey.

5. **Socio Economic** – Preparation by Tourism UK Ltd.

The stated rationale for the renovation of the Estate is through a consideration of a number of commercial ventures to provide income, local employment, greater access to assets and attract new visitors. The objective is to provide a viable, sustainable business venture “that would enable the continued restoration and conservation of the Estate” (para 6.2) [Is the estate currently being restored as is implied?]

[In terms of the stated visitor facilities these are noted in greater depth but do also include items not previously mentioned].

Rock garden and garden feature – “encompassing a 50m high fountain” and in Stage 3 a second lake, woodland and grassland area attracting wildlife. Also promontory with views. Connection by tree lined avenue to stables area. However on P6.9 there is reference to themes and an enhanced experience – “the following examples might be considered:

- A garden or woodland maze
- A stone maze
- Items for sale in the shop including of a Middleton estate brand
- Stonemason demonstrations
- Water play area
- Play area with plastic tractors etc
- Seating
- Interpretation to provide a learning experience”

[This appears as an ad hoc mix of possible additional add on facilities. Some would have significant impacts e.g the shop items and the play area].

Walled Garden – Grade 2 listed walls. Transformation into a working and ornamental garden as part of the visitor area. Freshly produced produce for restaurant and for sale in the Estate shop. [Fresh produce sale would be competition to local shop].

Restaurant – Estate shop, function space in former stable block buildings. Also use of space as daytime café. Use of locally produced beef and lamb from the Estate and fruit and veg. from the kitchen garden. Visioned as a destination restaurant. [Is it assumed that it would be a café during weekend days and not a restaurant? There are a limited number of what may be termed destination restaurants in rural areas. If this is the route are they proposing a restaurant of more than local significance?]

Estate shop – “small Estate type shop”. [This is somewhat contradictory to the later reference to Middleton Lodge branded products “which over time perhaps also sold on line”. There are issues re competition and scale of such shops – see Comparative Note. There is no reference to a shop alcohol licence again important for any local shop competition].

Function space – a wedding venue – main house and gardens as backdrop with function rooms in the stable block redevelopment. Mid week conference facilities [reference also to on-site office facilities – unclear of what this means]. Some area of Estate available for “team building exercises” [This is not clear – see above reference.] Private hire of stable block and Main Lodge house.

Holiday lets – “The estate also incorporates a number of small cottages that could be used for holiday letting”. [No further information is provided].

Market analysis – Three activities are referenced:

- Review of local visitor market plus a census analysis of 20 and 30 min drive time
- A supply side review of other garden based visitor attractions and function venues
- A market segmentation and the “application of appropriate penetration rates to each”.

[The above are considered in more depth in the Comparative Note]

- 10. Transport** – In respect of public transport the only existing service close by is to Middleton Tyas (Mon – Sat, hourly Darlington to Richmond).

[Trip generation is addressed in the Comparative Note. There is a question over the peak volumes that are said to be a Fri and Sat in this para (P 10.4), but not a Sunday? In Appendix 10.3 the Visitor Forecasts – through put per month Sunday is noted as the busiest day]

Table 10.2 outlines arrival and departure periods [a query would be raised over the visitor attraction arrival from 08.00 – very early and departure to 20.00 – very late. Staff movements and servicing / service vehicles are not noted].

P10.18 makes reference to 40 job opportunities [is this the direct jobs as against the 50 referenced earlier? The jobs are also FTE and given the nature of the industry will have high proportions of part time and occasional staff that will result in more vehicular movements].

A car occupancy of 2.5 is included (P10.18). It is noted that this is higher than DoT figures. [Given the nature of the garden attraction a better figure would be 2.3].

Signage (P10.23) and the Highways Agency [This has been referenced earlier].

Car parking provision (P10.24) is referenced. This includes provision for the disabled. [There is however no reference to coach parking, turning angles or provision for service / delivery vehicles].

Appendix 3.2 - Stable Block proposals

Appendix 3.3 - Walled Garden

Appendix 5.3 – In letter dated 20/1/06 to Adrian Speir (?), James Allison states the following:

- “It has never been my intention to create an attraction that would rival Alnwick castle [?] in either size or national recognition”.
- “I actually see this as primarily a restaurant / catering business”.
- “The vision I have is of a restaurant with nice gardens to visit as well”.