LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 2009

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

ALLERDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL (YELLOW SHEETS)
RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE with conditions

REPORT:

1 BACKGROUND & PROPOSAL

1.1 I am reporting this application to committee because my recommendation of approval conflicts with the views of Keswick Town Council. There is a related application at the neighbouring 17a Church Street on this agenda (7/2008/2281). Committee deferred a decision at the meeting on 3 June 2009 and have carried out a site inspection of both sites.

1.2 17 Church Street is a three storey Victorian end of terrace house within the Conservation Area on a corner plot. It is characteristic of houses within the Conservation Area having local stone walls, slate roof and a distinctive Victorian character.

1.3 This application seeks planning permission for a single storey pitched roof extension on the gable of the house. It would have a footprint of approximately 6m x 4m and a height to the ridge of the roof of 5m. Subject to the revised elevations referred to in the body of my report the extension would be detailed to reflect the house and finished in local materials characteristic of the Conservation Area including slate stone walls and local slate roof. Internally the extension would provide extended living accommodation and a utility area.

1.4 The application also proposes the addition of a dormer window to form a door and provide access to an existing flat-roofed terrace area above the neighbouring house (no. 17a Church Street).
2 REPRESENTATIONS

2.1 Keswick Town Council have objected to the application on the grounds of impact on residential amenity if both this and another application at no. 17a (7/2008/2281) are approved and particularly to the overbearing impact of the single storey extension.

2.2 One letter of objection has been received from the owner of 1 Ratcliffe Place, diagonally opposite. Objections raised are to the design of the proposed extension which the objector feels is out of character with the predominantly two and three storey buildings in this part of the Conservation Area. The objection also states that visibility of the extension would be increased if a previous planning permission for a new access through the boundary were implemented (7/2004/2087).

2.3 A further letter of objection received in response to the application at no. 17a is also relevant to the roof access element of this application. The letter was received from the owner of 18 Leonard Street, directly adjoining 17a Church Street and objects on the grounds of overlooking from the flat-roofed area.

3 POLICY & ASSESSMENT

3.1 Although the issues are essentially site specific the following policies form the development plan context for the assessment of this proposal:

North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy:

- Policy DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality)

Extended policies of the Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001-2016:

- EM38 (Historic Environment)

Saved policies of the Lake District National Park Local Plan:

- BE11 (Conservation Areas)

**Is the design of the proposed extension acceptable in this Conservation Area setting?**

3.2 Policy DP7 of the Regional Spatial Strategy requires high quality design for all new development and Policy BE11 of the Local Plan ensures that all development in Conservation Areas pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing their character and appearance.

3.3 The gable of no. 17 Church Street forms a prominent feature in the Conservation Area. However, I do not consider a single storey extension constructed of high quality materials and with the appearance of an attached out building would be harmful to this character. An improved design was negotiated with the applicant's architects and the main
elevations of the extension now better reflect the character of the host building with detailing to match.

3.4 Stone walls, slate roof and timber windows would all reflect the local traditional materials in the conservation area and assist in the integration of the extension into its built context. I therefore consider that the proposal would conform with the above-mentioned policies and I have reached this conclusion assuming that the new access for which planning permission already exists, was implemented.

**Would there be an adverse impact on residential amenity?**

3.5 There are two possible sources of harm to residential amenity; harm to the amenities of no. 17a from the erection of the single storey extension and use of the flat roofed area which sits between no. 17 and 17a.

*Proposed extension*

3.6 The proposed extension would be sited along the boundary with no. 17a facing a small patio / yard area at the front of the house which gives access from the street to the front door. There are a pair of French windows facing into this yard area which would look out onto a side wall of the proposed extension. This yard area is currently contained on three sides, by the two walls of the house and by a high hedge along the boundary. It does not benefit from much direct sunlight and the views out of the windows are into the hedge. The extension is shown as following the boundary which would necessitate the removal of the hedge. However, the eaves height along the boundary will be considerably lower than the height of the existing hedge. Therefore, although there would be a changed outlook from a hedge to a wall and single storey slate roof I do not consider that this would be any more overbearing or would lead to any more loss of daylight than is currently the case. There are no issues of overlooking.

*Changing the access to the flat roof*

3.7 Currently occupiers of no. 17a have use of a flat roofed area as a roof terrace. This proposal would allow access to the flat roof by occupiers of no. 17 instead, through an existing dormer window which would be altered to form a door. The erection of railings to match the existing railings which line the flat roof would mean that use by 17a would cease.

3.8 The applicant owns both houses at this time but this is not necessarily a situation that will continue. We have to be convinced therefore that the amenities of both houses will be protected regardless of ownership. The potential for harm comes from the use of the flat roof of no. 17a by the occupiers of no. 17. A scheme of noise attenuation would be sufficient to ensure that there was limited impact on amenity by noise transfer through the roof structure. I am proposing a condition which would require details of a noise attenuation scheme to be submitted and agreed prior to the first use of the roof access door. Subject to its implementation there would be no harm to the amenities of the occupiers of either house.
3.9 The overlooking which is currently possible from this flat roof would be unchanged, it would simply be accessed in a different way.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 The proposed extension and alterations would preserve the character and appearance of the Keswick Conservation Area and would not have an unacceptable impact upon the amenity of neighbours subject to a suitable noise attenuation scheme that may need to be secured by planning condition.

Committee is recommended to:

APPROVE with conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be commenced before the expiration of THREE years from the date hereof.

   REASON: Imposed in accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990.

2. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the development hereby permitted shall not be carried out otherwise than in complete conformity with the submitted plans as amended by the plan (No ) received by the Local Planning Authority on

   REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of appearance of the development.

3. Prior to the first use of the roof access door hereby permitted a detailed noise assessment and a scheme for attenuating noise in relation to No. 17a Church Street, Keswick shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall be completed in its entirety before the use of the roof access door commences.

   REASON: In the interests of the amenities of the residents of 17a Church Street, Keswick.

4. Prior to their installation full details of the hood moulds to the windows and doors of the extension hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such details shall include the proposed materials and drawings of a scale not less than 1:20. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the details so approved.

   REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to maintain the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with Policy BE11 of the Lake District National Park Local Plan.

5. All doors, windows and associated framework and all external joinery shall be painted or stained in a colour, or colours, to be first approved in writing.
by the Local Planning Authority. Such painting or staining shall be 
undertaken not later than three months from the substantial completion of 
the development or not later than three months from the building hereby 
permitted being first brought into use, whichever is the sooner. 

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory 
standard of appearance of the development.

Summary of Reasons for Approval

The proposed extension and alterations are appropriately designed and finished 
for this Conservation Area setting and would have a negligible impact on the 
amenities of neighbours. Having regard to the relevant development plan 
policies, in particular Policy DP7 of the North West of England Regional Spatial 
Strategy, Policy E38 of the Cumbria & Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001-
2016 and Policy BE11 Lake District National Park Local Plan and all other 
material planning considerations, the proposal is considered to be acceptable 
subject to the conditions imposed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Background papers are available for 
inspection on the planning application file 
unless otherwise specified on that file as 
confidential by reasons of financial/personal 
circumstances in accordance with the Local 
Government (Access to Information) Act 
1985.
Lake District NPA Development Control Committee – Wednesday July 1 2009

Application no: 7/2008/2281
Applicant: Mr C Prentice
Date of Application: 1 December 2008
Type of Application: Full

Location: 17a, Church Street, Keswick, Cumbria, CA12 4DT
Grid Reference: 326915 523304  See Plan
Proposal: Proposed renovation of house, including attic conversion/heightening of roof

District Council:
Parish Council: Object Suggest overall effect of 17 (7/2008/2280) & 17a Church Street applications be assessed together in view of overlooking potential if both are approved.

Highway Authority:

**RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVE with conditions

REPORT:

1  **BACKGROUND & PROPOSAL**

1.1 I am reporting this application to the committee because my recommendation of approval conflicts with the views of Keswick Town Council. There is a related application at the neighbouring 17 Church Street on this agenda (7/2008/2280). Committee deferred a decision at the meeting on the 3 June 2009 and have carried out a site inspection of both sites.

1.2 17a Church Street is an unusual house. It is sandwiched between the end of two Victorian terraces sitting at right angles to each other. It is a pink-painted rendered building and is split between a flat roofed section and a two storey pitched roof section.

1.3 This application seeks planning permission to raise the roof of the pitched roof part of the house by 0.6m to form loft space accommodation. A window would be inserted into the gable to light this loft space.

1.4 In addition, access to the flat roofed area would be subject to alteration. Access would be allowed from the neighbouring house (no. 17 Church Street) rather than from no. 17a as is currently the case. This is also the subject of the application at 17 Church Street (7/208/2280).

2 **REPRESENTATIONS**

2.1 Keswick Town Council have objected to the application on the grounds of impact on residential amenity if both this and the application at no. 17 are approved.
2.2 Two letters of objection from neighbours have been received. A letter received on behalf of the occupier of 1 Ratcliffe Place objects on grounds of design to the size and proximity of the new window in the gable end and asks of the pink render can be removed or painted white if permission is granted.

2.3 A letter from the owner of 18 Leonard Street, adjoining, objects on the grounds of overlooking from the flat-roofed area.

3 POLICY & ASSESSMENT

3.1 Although the issues are essentially site specific the following policies form the development plan context for the assessment of this proposal:

North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy:

- Policy DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality)

Extended policies of the Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001-2016:

- EM38 (Historic Environment)

Saved policies of the Lake District National Park Local Plan:

- BE11 (Conservation Areas)

Is the design of the proposed extension acceptable in this Conservation Area setting?

3.2 Policy DP7 of the Regional Spatial Strategy requires high quality design for all new development and Policy BE11 of the Local Plan ensures that all development in Conservation Areas pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing their character and appearance.

3.3 The existing building makes only a limited contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. Its pink rendered walls and flat roof section in particular are out of character with the local stone walls and Victorian character by which this area of Keswick is defined. The front of the house which has stone facing is of a more traditional character but its modern construction and design is clearly at odds with the buildings around it.

3.4 The pitched roof part of the building is stepped down significantly from the roof of the adjoining three-storey terrace. The increase in height proposed would still leave a step in the roof, retaining the separation between the rest of the terrace and what is clearly a different character of building.

3.5 The window in the gable, although large is not considered to be harmful to the character of the building or the wider conservation area. The proposals conform with policy relating to Conservation Areas.
Would there be any adverse impact on residential amenity?

3.6 This part of the Keswick Conservation Area is characterised by three and four storey buildings, a two storey building therefore gives rise to little overbearing or loss of light to neighbours. An increase in height of 0.6m would lead to no further loss of light or overbearing. The additional window proposed in the gable would look down on an area already subject to public view and overlooking from other houses.

3.7 In partnership with the application at no. 17 Church Street (7/2008/2280) which is under the same ownership, this proposal would also alter the layout and use of the flat roofed area which sits between no. 17 and 17a.

3.8 Currently occupiers of no. 17a have use of a flat roofed area as a roof terrace. This proposal would allow access to the flat roof by occupiers of no. 17 instead, through an existing dormer window which would be altered to form a door. The erection of railings to match the existing railings which line the flat roof would mean that use by 17a would cease.

3.9 The applicant owns both houses at this time but this is not necessarily a situation that will continue. We have to be convinced therefore that the amenities of both houses will be protected regardless of ownership. The potential for harm comes from the use of the flat roof of no. 17a by the occupiers of no. 17. A scheme of noise attenuation would be sufficient to ensure that there was limited impact on amenity by noise transfer through the roof structure. I am expecting details of a noise attenuation scheme in time for the meeting. Subject to its implementation there would be no harm to the amenities of the occupiers of either house.

3.10 The overlooking which is currently possible from this flat roof would be unchanged, it would simply be accessed in a different way.

Would there be any impact on nature conservation interests?

3.11 A bat survey was undertaken as part of the application. No evidence of use of the building by bats was found and no mitigation considered necessary. Under the circumstances I consider an informative to be appropriate. This would remind the applicant and developer of the need to be vigilant for bats during construction.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 The proposed extension and alterations would preserve the character and appearance of the Keswick Conservation Area and would not have an unacceptable impact upon the amenity of neighbours subject to a suitable noise attenuation scheme that may need to be secured by planning condition.

Committee is recommended to:

APPROVE with conditions
1. The development hereby permitted shall be commenced before the expiration of THREE years from the date hereof.

REASON: Imposed in accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990.

INFORMATIVE:

Bats and their roosts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). It is an offence to deliberately capture, kill or disturb bats or to recklessly damage or destroy their breeding sites or resting places. The applicant/developer should remind the building contractors to be vigilant for bats during the building work. If at any time bats are found or suspected then, as a legal requirement, work must cease in that area and further advice must be sought from Natural England. Natural England’s telephone number is 01539 792800 or, in an emergency outside office hours, the bat help line is 017687 76911.

Summary of Reasons for Approval

The proposed extension and alterations are appropriately designed and finished for this Conservation Area setting and would have a negligible impact on the amenities of neighbours. Having regard to the relevant development plan policies, in particular Policy DP7 of the North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy, Policy E38 of the Cumbria & Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001-2016 and Policy BE11 Lake District National Park Local Plan and all other material planning considerations, the proposal is considered to be acceptable subject to the conditions imposed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Background papers are available for inspection on the planning application file unless otherwise specified on that file as confidential by reasons of financial/personal circumstances in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

7/2008/2281
Application no: 7/2009/2050
Applicant: Newlands Adventure Centre
Date of Application: 25 February 2009
Type of Application: Full
Location: Goosewell Farm, Keswick, CA12 4RN
Grid Reference: 329349 523730  See Plan
Proposal: Provision of climbing wall in vacant agricultural building, new highway access and climbing wall car park with additional public car park serving Castlerigg stone circle
District Council: 
Parish Council: Comments A car park would be needed. A detriment to local young people and visitors by being so far out. PC against development in the open countryside.
Highway Authority: Grant/approve with conditions

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE for the following reasons

REPORT:

1  BACKGROUND & PROPOSAL

1.1 I am reporting this application to Committee because of the sensitive nature of the proposal and the degree of interest shown in retaining a climbing wall in the Keswick area. On my recommendation the Committee inspected the site on 10th June 2009.

Location of Proposed development Site

1.2 Goosewell Farm is located adjacent to a minor road about 1 km east of Keswick and about 250m north east of Castlerigg Stone Circle which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. From previous planning history I understand that the land holding extends to 141 ha (350 acres) between the farmstead and the western flank of Low Rigg. The land is rented for sheep rearing and grazing by another farmer. Buildings at the farmstead have been converted for use by small businesses under a planning permission granted in 1991 when Goosewell was an active farm.

The Original Climbing Wall

1.3 For the last 14 years Keswick Climbing Wall, a stand alone company, owned and operated a climbing wall from a building within the Southey Hill Industrial Estate which is located near to the town centre of Keswick and next to the Keswick Pencil Mill.

7/2009/2050
1.4 In 2008 the building was sold by Keswick Climbing Wall and it is now used as a James Bond museum. The current applicants, Newlands Adventure Centre bought the business with the intention of securing alternative premises which would allow provision of the wall to all existing user groups and the applicants began seeking an alternative building for wall approximately 10 months ago.

1.5 The former wall at Southeys Hill occupied approximately half of a building with a floor area of 20 metres x 26 metres. It provided approximately 60 metres of climbing wall from 4 to 8 metres in height. The planning unit also contained a café, toilets and changing facilities. The wall supported 5 full time staff with additional part time staff in summer months and received approximately 18,000 visits per annum.

Planning History of Goosewell Farm

1.6 A parcel of land comprising a copse to the south of Goosewell Farm has been used by Newlands Adventure Centre for some time for outdoor activities which I understand include a ropes course, orienteering and bush craft. This use evolved without formal planning approval. The Newlands Adventure Centre is based approximately 5 km to the south west of Keswick. Pony trekking has previously been available from the farm under a permission granted in 1985 when the farm was still in operation.

1.7 In August 2008 a two year temporary planning permission was granted for the operation of guided quad bike tours on agricultural land at Goosewell Farm. This use is seasonal from 1st May to 31st October each year. A maximum of two tours a day would be operated starting and finishing at Goosewell Farm. These tours would be booked through the Newland Adventure centre and according to the supporting statement for that application user groups will arrive at the site either by mini-bus from Newlands Adventure Centre with up to 2 mini bus movements and up to 4 private car movements per day per projected for this use. This use has not yet commenced.

1.8 Planning permission was granted in 1991 for the conversion of a traditional farm building neighbouring the farmhouse for 4 studio workshops and businesses now operate from these units.

1.9 While the climbing wall was still in operation at Southeys Hill, and shortly before the business had to leave the building at the end of October 2008, Newlands Adventure Centre submitted an application to the Authority for the “operation of an educational climbing wall in a vacant agricultural building (Temporary Change of use until April 30th 2009) at Goosewell Farm”. The agent had identified the ongoing provision of a facility for outdoor education and school groups as “the most important to seek to protect” and further observed that “it is not possible, practical or financially viable to seek to redevelop the entire existing wall provision on a temporary basis in order to serve all user groups”. The application was made in order to provide continuity of provision for one sector of the wall’s users (education groups) in the short term whilst a permanent site was sought.

1.10 Notwithstanding the absence of support for the development in terms of policies relating to spatial principles, temporary planning permission was
granted for this limited use subject to conditions relating to the access which, for the purposes of that application, was to be the existing access into the building group which contained the agricultural building. This permission was made in recognition of the level of use associated with education and outdoor groups and of the benefits of maintaining provision those whom the applicant saw as being the most important group of climbers.

The Current Situation

1.11 During my site inspection in early April I noted that the climbing wall was still under construction within the building and therefore if the permission was implemented at all it could only have operated for a very short time due to the unrealistic time period which the applicant applied for (the permission expired on 31st April).

1.12 The applicant's plans had simply indicated the construction of 2 x 10m slab educational panels in the centre of the building. The wall was to be free standing giving a climbing area 20m long and capable of accommodating 12 ropes i.e. 12 separate routes. In addition to the wall shown on the applicant's approved drawings a separate 'bouldering' wall and additional wall panels were being installed on the side walls of the building at the time of my site visit. An office area has been created by partition walls and a porta-loo has been positioned on the hardstanding in front of the building. I understand that this facility drains to an existing agricultural waste tank.

1.13 The installation of the internal climbing walls does not amount to a breach of planning control but their use would be a breach of control as there is no planning permission to use the building.

1.14 The outer walls of the main building, and the smaller building attached to its western side, have been re-clad with vertical timber boarding. A timber fence has been erected on the edge of a concrete hardstanding to the front of the building where there is a drop to the forecourt area between the building and the highway. A blockwork wall with a fence above has been constructed at one end of the hardstanding. This foreground area and an existing track which leads to a clearing in the neighbouring copse where the proposed car park would be situated has been re-surfaced with loose stone. These areas were formerly compacted earth and stone. These re-surfacing works do not require planning permission.

Current Proposals

1.15 Two developments are included in this planning application. One proposal is for the conversion of a portal framed former agricultural building for use as a climbing wall and the creation of a vehicle access, road and car park (28 spaces) to serve that development. The second proposal is to construct a car park (25 spaces) to serve visitors to the Castlerigg Stone Circle which lies nearby. Both car parks would be served from a new access.
The Proposed Climbing Wall and Associated Car park

1.16 By adapting the former agricultural portal framed building at Goosewell the applicant intends to provide a 60 metres (approx) climbing wall. This area of wall is approximately 3 times larger than the wall which gained temporary planning permission for educational groups and offers a similar size of climbing wall to the wall that was formerly located at Southy Hill. The building would contain an office and changing facilities. The wall would be available for all climbers to use and the projected visitor numbers would be the same as those visiting the original climbing wall. The application does not include reference to a café or changing room which were facilities available at the former wall. Approximately one third of the building is empty and is set out with bench tables as a 'rest' area.

1.17 The plan indicates that a portable toilet would be sited in the adjoining smaller building. Full details of how the foul drainage would operate have not been submitted.

1.18 The intended opening hours would be 9.30 - 21.30 Monday to Friday, 9.30 - 21.00 Saturdays and 9.30-19.00 Sundays.

1.19 Sightlines at the existing junction of the access track for the building group and the U2230 are substandard and for reasons of highway safety a significant increase in its use would be inappropriate. In recognition of this constraint the applicant proposes to create a new alternative access road. The entrance point for this road would lie 120 metres to the west the building corner of a small conifer plantation.

1.20 The access road would terminate at the proposed car park which would be located in a clearing at the north side of the plantation. Users of the climbing wall would be able to use the existing track from the clearing to the building group.

1.21 The works involved in the creation of the access would involve the removal of a six metre section of the dry stone wall which separates the woodland from the highway, the removal of some trees which lie in the verge between the wall and the metalled road and some lowering of ground levels on the inside of the wall. The access track to the car park would be two lane width and both the track and car park would be surfaced with compacted hardcore.

1.22 The car park would be largely accommodated within an existing clearing at the north side of the copse. Trees would need to be removed along the route of the access road. The plan identifies the need to fell 21 trees along this route and six trees along the highway verge. These are predominantly spruce but also birch willow and Scots pine.

The Proposed Car Park for Visitors to the Stone Circle

1.23 This car park would be located adjacent to the proposed car park for the climbing wall. To accommodate this car park the southern edge of the existing clearing would need to be extended into the copse by a small margin.
A further 10 trees would be felled to accommodate this car park and a path would be created through the wood to the access point onto the highway.

2 REPRESENTATIONS

2.1 The Authority has received a petition of 843 signatures, 49 e-mails and 17 letters in support of the application. These include submissions from individual climbers, outdoor organisations, schools, local businesses and tourism organisations.

2.2 Four letters of support, which are representative of others, are attached in full as APPENDIX 1.

2.3 In addition to a letter of support from the Keswick Tourism Association, a letter of support has been received from Cumbria Tourism (CT). In summary Cumbria Tourism makes the following points:

- Most importantly the wall would add to the case for the Lake District and Cumbria being regarded as the Adventure Capital of the UK. The work that CT is undertaking in conjunction with the National Park Authority and other partners is seeking to enhance the area’s reputation as an outdoor destination where visitors can readily access adventure facilities and experiences. This will attract new younger visitors while building on its natural beauty. An indoor climbing wall in Keswick is an important part of the Adventure capital package to compliment climbing, bouldering ropes courses elsewhere in the Keswick hinterland (all facilities incidentally which are heavily dependent on access by car).
- The benefits of locating this sort of facility in accessible locations which can be reached by public transport are recognised but locating a wall in Keswick would present real difficulties because public transport is very limited particularly in the evenings and this creates a heavy dependence on cars.
- The marginal viability of leisure facilities like climbing walls means they can rarely be located in central locations because of the higher rents such sites command. As a result such buildings such as the Pencil Factory or Southey Hill Estate buildings are likely to prove to be too expensive unless it is related to a more commercial package which includes retail and food and drink.
- The site is on the fringe of Keswick and is accessible for visitors who do not have a car.
- It will bring social and economic benefits not least the retention of six jobs.

2.4 The views of the St Johns Castlerigg and Wythburn Parish Council are attached in full as APPENDIX 2. With regard to the climbing wall the Council notes that the car park would be adequate but they make the point that if the climbing wall is to be permanently removed from Keswick it would be to the detriment of Keswick young people and visitors because is not easily accessible.

2.5 With regard to the car park for visitors to the stone circle the Council considers that adequate parking is currently available and questions the safety of the proposed entrance to the car park.
2.6 The full response from the National Trust is attached as APPENDIX 3. The Trust does not raise specific objections to the climbing wall component of the application or to any car parking that the Authority considers is essential to serve that particular activity.

2.7 The National Trust expresses concern about the proposed car park for visitors to the stone circle. The Trust considers that other than exceptional one off occasions each year such as the summer solstice the current parking close to Casterlegg is generally adequate to meet the needs of visitors. Given that the applicant does not control the land where roadside parking currently takes place the Trust questions whether the benefits of the parking scheme which the applicant believes would result from the proposal could be achieved.

2.8 The National Trust promotes a walking route from Keswick and encourages sustainable visits to the stone circle. And it believes that the proposed car park would conflict with this approach and erode the special qualities of the stone circle and its setting. The Trust also considers that the provision of a car park is likely to add to visitor presser on the stone circle and potentially upset, to adverse effect, the balance between conservation and access. The Trust feels that the impact of the car park and access on the landscape could be a significant intrusion.

3 POLICY & ASSESSMENT

3.1 Given that the proposed public car park is not directly related to the proposed climbing wall and car park these two developments will be considered separately.

3.2 In terms of development plan policy this is an open countryside location and in large measure the issues raised by the proposals relate to key policy considerations concerning the location of new development.

Is the location of the proposed climbing wall and associated car park acceptable in principle?

3.3 Saved Local Plan Policy NE1 (Development in the open countryside) of the Lake District National Park Local Plan states that development in the open countryside will only be permitted where it would:

a) be closely integrated with existing uses; or

b) be in accord with policies in the Structure and Local Plan to meet the social and economic needs of local communities and to protect and enhance the scenic beauty, natural resources and quality of the built environment.

Policy NE1 goes on to advise that, amongst other things development should respect the character of the area and not cause demonstrable harm to landscape and nature conservation interests.

3.4 With regard to requirement a) Goosewell Farm is not an outdoor centre in its own right and outdoor recreational use at Goosewell is mainly that associated
with a ropes course in a nearby copse which has evolved without the formal approval of the Authority. The temporary permission for quad bike tours, which has not been implemented, expires in August 2010 and this temporary permission was granted on the basis of it being a very low key activity. There is no direct connection with these uses I do not consider that in any meaningful way the proposed use would be closely integrated with an existing use. The proposal therefore fails this policy test.

3.5 With regard to requirement b) of Policy NE1 the principle policy in the Structure Plan concerned with meeting the social and economic needs of local communities was ST7 and this policy has been replaced by policy RDF2. For the reasons given below I do not consider that the proposal accords with this policy. I am not persuaded that the proposed development would protect and enhance the scenic beauty, natural resources and quality of the built environment. In consequence of the above I do not consider that the proposed development accords with Policy NE1 of the local Plan.

3.6 Policy RDF2 (Rural Areas) of the North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (RSS) recognises that outside key and local service centres more innovative and flexible solutions to meet their particular development needs should be implemented and targeted towards achieving (amongst other things) a more diverse economic base. On this basis Policy RDF2 allows that exceptionally new development will be permitted in the open countryside where it (amongst other things not relevant in this case) involves the appropriate change of use of an existing building.

3.7 RSS Policy W6 (Tourism and the Visitor Economy) and Policy L1 (Health, Sport, Recreation and Education Services provision) recognises and supports the economic and social benefits of this type of development where it is sustainable and accessible.

3.8 RSS Policy DP5 (Manage Travel demand, Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility) seeks a shift to more sustainable modes of transport, encouraging an integrated approach to managing travel demand. It states that development should be located so as to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, and in rural areas accessibility by public transport should also be a key consideration in providing services and locating new development, emphasising the role of Key Service and Local Service Centres.

3.9 RSS Policy DP4 sets an overall spatial approach and prescribes the application of a sequential approach but given that we are concerned with development on the open countryside Policy RDF2, is the most relevant.

3.10 The site lies within open countryside and is very poorly served by public transport where such development would run counter the thrust of spatial policy which seeks to guide development into recognised settlements/local and key service centres. Exceptions to spatial policy should not be permitted on an ad hoc basis and in recognition of this RSS Policy RDF2 identifies those circumstances where an exception to this policy approach can be made.

7/2009/2050
3.11 **Policy RDF2 of the Regional Spatial Strategy advises that exceptionally, new development will be permitted in the open countryside in specified circumstances. Those circumstances are set out below, with comments in respect of the proposal:**

i) Development may be acceptable in the open countryside where there is an essential requirement for an open countryside location. A climbing wall does not have this requirement, most climbing walls, like the Keswick Climbing Wall which closed recently, are located in towns where they are the most accessible.

ii) An exception can be made where the development is needed to sustain an existing business. The logic of this aspect of the policy is that it is needed to sustain an existing business in the open countryside and not the re-location of a business to the open countryside.

iii) The third criterion allows an appropriate change of use of an existing building. In determining what an appropriate use is for this site it is instructive to compare the proposed use with those uses which presently operate from the former farm buildings at Goosewell. These low key uses are not reliant upon attracting the wider public and they have helped to retain redundant traditional buildings which make a positive contribution to the character an appearance of the area. In contrast the proposed use would involve a substantial level of visits by the wider public, an estimated 18,000 users per annum, to a site which is not very accessible, has a poor standard of road serving it and where the impact of additional vehicle activity would add to the erosion of the quiet character of the area which already occurs through the attraction of visitors to the nearby stone circle. In addition this large portal framed type of building, which was permitted under particular polices designed to support agriculture when the farm was operational, does not contribute positively to the landscape and its retention would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the area.

3.12 **Notwithstanding the current reality that many group users would be transported to the climbing wall by mini bus and that many individual users would travel by private car (arguably irrespective of its location) it is sound policy principle that this type of facility should be ideally located in a rural service centre closer to some of the people it would serve and with a range of more sustainable transport options including public transport, walking and cycling. To set aside these policies in this case would undermine an important spatial development principle and the recognised benefits of a climbing wall to serve the area do not outweigh this.**

**Would the proposed use of the climbing wall be harmful to the character and appearance of the area?**

3.13 **RSS Policy DP7 advises that environmental quality should be protected and enhanced by, amongst other things maintaining and enhancing the tranquility of open countryside and rural areas and by assessing the potential impacts of managing traffic growth.**
3.14 Local Plan Policy NE1 advises that development in the open countryside should not conflict with the enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park and that it should respect the character of the area in which it is proposed.

3.15 Since no new buildings are proposed and the main impact of the development on the countryside would be that which arises from increased activity which would manifest itself primarily by an increased number of vehicles on the access road and at the site and by the visual impact resulting from the construction of the car park and access road.

3.16 With regard to the visual impact the access road to the car park would require the removal of a 6 m section of dry stone wall and the felling of a relatively small proportion of trees within the plantation. To meet Local Highway Authority standards the first 10 metres of the road would need to be surfaced in a bound material. The introduction of a formally surfaced access road would spoil the undeveloped appearance of the immediate locality, however the access point would not be prominent in the wider landscape and in my view the harm would be localised.

3.17 Because the proposed car park would be separated from the highway by a wide belt of trees the car park would not impose itself on users of the highway. The tree belt on the north side of the car park would largely shield the car park from views from the fells to the north. This cover is incomplete but the gap could be filled by further planting and the applicant has expressed a willingness to carry out such landscaping. The area between the climbing wall building and the road has been resurfaced uniformly with quarry bottoms. This area would benefit from further soft landscaping and tree screening. In my opinion the degree of harm on the character and appearance of the landscape that would arise from the operational development involved in the car park would be very small.

3.18 With regard to the impact of increased activity the visitor movement around the building itself would not be particularly intrusive in the wider landscape given that most of the movement would be associated with arrivals and departures at the car park which is screened from the road. While some visitor movement at the building may be observed from a short section of the highway I do not consider that it would be unacceptably obtrusive.

3.19 According to the National Trust's figures the Stone Circle attracts 250,000 visitors per annum and, while the Trust encourages visitors to arrive by foot it would be realistic to expect that the majority of visitors arrive by car. During peak holiday season the traffic associated with this attraction is a factor which is likely to diminish the experience of visitors and particularly to those visitors who walk to the site up the road. When looked at against the traffic generated by the stone circle the traffic that would be generated by the proposed climbing wall would be comparatively small. However it would not be an insignificant addition and it would be an unwelcome intensification of activity on a back county road which is unsuited to high levels of traffic and I do not think the proposals could be said to maintain and enhance the tranquillity of the open countryside.
Would the proposed climbing wall result in a danger to users of the highway?

3.20 The approach road from Keswick has no footways and is narrow with some pinch points. While the road does not serve as an important route between settlements a significant number of visitors use this road to view the Stone Circle.

3.21 The applicant has provided figures to the Highway Authority based on the past visitor numbers to the climbing wall in Keswick and these were broken down into three main groups;
- Private climbers - 4,000 pa,
- Education/outdoor groups - 6,000 pa and
- Tourists - 8,000 pa.

3.22 The applicant’s agent has made informed estimates of likely vehicle numbers from these groups and observes that there would be seasonal variations with higher tourist visitors in summer and public holidays and education groups in term time. Taking into account the probability that most private climbers and tourists arrive by car and most groups by mini buses and the characteristics of the users in terms of vehicle occupancy he estimates an average of 98 vehicles per week or 14 per day.

3.23 The Local Highway Authority did not make specific reference to the impact of the development on the local road network in their consultation response but they have informed me verbally that in their view, in terms of road safety, road conditions following the development not be materially different.

3.24 While the Local Highway Authority was prepared to accept the use of the existing access into the farm group for a temporary use of the building as a climbing wall for educational groups this access is not considered to be acceptable for the proposed use which is more intensive and intended to be permanent. The proposed alternative access is considered to be acceptable by the Local Highway Authority subject to conditions which include the surfacing of the access road for at least 10m inside the site and the provision of 2.4x 59m sightlines to the east and 52 m to the west.

3.25 The drystone walls flanking the highway are set back from the carriageway and the access point lies on the inside of a slight bend. Sightline clearance might fall a little short of the specified 2.4 metres. The roadside wall to the east is in the applicant’s control and if necessary its height could be reduced in height to meet the recommended sightlines but apart from a short section the wall to the west is not within the applicant’s control. It appears to me that the sightlines would not fall substantially below those specified by the Local Highways Authority.

Other material considerations relating to the climbing wall

3.26 It is evident from the substantial amount of support for the Goosewell climbing wall that many people attach great importance the provision of such a facility in the north lakes. The support has been offered not only by leading
representatives of the climbing world like Sir Christian Bonington and Doug Scott CBE but also by major clubs like the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, Keswick School, local scouts, local businesses and a large number of individual climbers including many youngsters. I am in no doubt that provision of an indoor climbing wall in the north lakes would be of very considerable benefit to local climbers, local organisations and to visiting climbers and groups from further afield. However, this support does not persuade me that Goosewell is the appropriate site for such a use.

3.27 The applicant has advised us that his endeavours to find an alternative site have been unsuccessful and in support of his application he contends that that in the absence of any alternative the wall should be sited at Goosewell. The Development Plan polices do not say that if an applicant has failed to find a site within a settlement it should be permitted in the open countryside. The sequential tests referred to in RSS Policy DP4 are related to situations within towns and Policy RDF 2 sets the framework for where development should be permitted in the open countryside.

3.28 The applicant has apparently ruled out the possibility of locating the business in the vacant Pencil Mill and a vacant unit in the Southev Hill Estate which forms the other half of the unit which contained the former climbing wall, in part because the building is protected by a policy which seeks to retain such units for employment and storage use. This option has not been fully explored; while this policy would weigh against a change of use of the unit to a climbing wall the policy would need to be carefully weighed against the need for a climbing wall which would be best located in a sustainable location like Keswick.

3.29 As a factor in support of the proposal the applicant cites the recommendations of the recommendations of the Taylor Report 'Living and Working in the Countryside' which is a review of the rural economy and local housing. I am not persuaded that this outweighs my assessment. However I attach the applicant’s assessment as APPENDIX 4.

3.30 As mentioned above, a climbing wall has no requirement in location terms to be in the open countryside and if permission were granted the Authority would need to be satisfied that the circumstances were such that that approval would not form a precedent for other visitor attractions with comparable levels of use in the open countryside and on minor roads with poor accessibility.

3.31 Two distinguishing features are that, while the wall is a form of visitor attraction the wall would also serve the local climbing community and secondly the use is an adjunct to outdoor climbing and this outdoor activity is one of the special experiences that the Lake District offers. While it could be said of other visitor attractions that they also serve the local community and such a characteristic is not particularly individual I consider that the second characteristic is particular to the proposal and is a factor in favour of the development in line with Adventure Capital aspirations.

Does the proposed car park for visitors to the Stone Circle satisfy the Authority’s policy on car parks?

7/2009/2050
3.32 This part of the development proposal amounts to permanent public parking. It has long been recognised that meeting ever growing demands for public car parking in the Lake District is not a sustainable prospect and would bring unacceptable consequences. As a point of sound policy principle the proposal is contrary to Policy TR11 (Permanent Public Parking) of the lake district national Park Local plan which states that additional public parking facilities will only be permitted where they would resolve an unacceptable road safety hazard or lead to significant environmental improvement and are an integral part of a traffic management plan for the area. It would also conflict with the aims of Policy DP5 (Manage Travel Demand, Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility) of the North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2001 which seeks a shift to more sustainable modes of transport, encouraging an integrated approach to managing travel demand. There are no material matters of weight I the particular circumstances of the case to outweigh these policy requirements.

3.33 Policy TR11 of the Local plan advises that the Authority will grant permission for additional public parking facilities only where certain criteria are met including where it would… ‘resolve an unacceptable road safety hazard or lead to significant environmental improvement and are an integral part of traffic management plan for the area’. Under a traffic management plan new parking should be designed to solve exceptional congestion and not merely attract additional vehicular traffic or cater for peak demand.

3.34 The proposed scheme is not part of a traffic management scheme and therefore fails this policy test.

3.35 Informal parking by the roadside near to the entrances to the stone circle has taken place for very many years and there is no evidence before the Authority which demonstrates that even during peak visitor times the roadside parking is a significant road safety hazard and therefore the proposal runs contrary to Policy TR11. Furthermore, even if there were an identified hazard, I am not persuaded that the proposed scheme would either result in result in improved road safety or bring about any significant environmental improvement because it is highly unlikely that the proposed car parking would replace this roadside parking. The applicant does not control the roadside verges and the provision of a car park would not prevent people from parking freely at the most convenient access point to the Stone Circle. In my opinion the car park would be more likely to be used as an over flow to the exiting parking.

Would the proposed car park result in improvements to the appearance of the highway in proximity to the stone Circle?

3.36 There is no formal parking provision for visitors to the Stone Circle. For many years visitor’s vehicles have parked by the roadside near to the gates entering the field where the circle lies. Some of the verges, particularly those on the north side of road, have been eroded are now worn and compacted earth and stone. The applicant contends that as a result of this roadside parking the context of the stone circle is degraded both visually and audibly and that it impacts on the on the visual amenity of the area. The proposed car park is intended to address this issue.
3.37 To a degree the eroded verges detract from the appearance of a limited stretch of the road but I do not consider the harm to visual amenities which arises from this informal parking to be a major blight on the wider landscape. More fundamentally, it is highly unlikely that the proposed car park would not result in removal of roadside parking since visitors would still find this the most convenient place to park for access to the stone circle.

Would the proposed car park impact upon the character and appearance of the area?

3.38 The car park itself would be largely screened by trees however, as mentioned above there would be some localised harm to the undeveloped area where the access point would be sited.

3.39 I share the National Trust's concern that a new car park, particularly one which is promoted, is likely to add to visitor pressure on the environs of the stone circle and it could also result in additional road traffic. While it is difficult to quantify this additional traffic I think it is reasonable to expect that a new car park would bring additional visitor pressure on the locality which runs counter to the objective of reducing reliance on the private motor vehicle and sustaining the qualities of the open countryside. Further activity concentrated on the environs of the Stone Circle would diminish the experience of visitors to the Stone Circle and such activity would run counter to objectives to maintain the character and tranquillity of rural areas as set out in RSS Policy DP7 and Local Plan policy NE1.

Would the proposed access for the car park for the stone circle result in a danger to users of the highway?

3.40 The proposed access for the car park is the same as one for the climbing wall car park and this issue was addressed above. Sightlines may be marginally less than those advocated by the Local Highway Authority but it does not seem likely that the access would introduce a hazard to users of the highway.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Notwithstanding the very high level of support that the proposal has attracted and the clear benefits of providing a climbing wall to serve the north lakes the location of the proposed climbing wall runs counter to Development Plan polices which seek to direct new development into sustainable locations.

4.2 The proposed car park for the stone circle does not form part of an integral traffic management plan and would neither resolve an identified road safety hazard nor bring about significant environmental improvements to the area. In consequence the proposal would be contrary to contrary to the Authority's policies which seek to discourage additional traffic generation. In addition increased parking provision is likely to increase pressure on an open countryside locality to the detriment of the special qualities of the area.
Committee is recommended to:

REFUSE for the following reasons

1. The site lies in open countryside where long standing national and local spatial polices strictly control new development both to protect the countryside for its intrinsic qualities and to manage traffic and reduce reliance on private transport. Such policies include; Government Planning Policy Statement 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, Policy DP5 of the North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 and Lake District National Park Local Plan Policy NE1. Regional Spatial Strategy Policy RDF2 sets out those circumstances where development will be supported as an exception to the general presumption against new development in the open countryside. Having regard to that policy the proposed climbing wall and associated car park do not have a requirement for a rural location and are is not needed to sustain an existing business. While the proposal involves the re-use of an existing building the proposed use is considered to be inappropriate because it involves a substantial level of visits by the public to a site which is not very accessible, has a poor standard of road serving it and where the impact of additional activity would further erode of the quiet character of the area. Also, due to its scale and utilitarian appearance, polices do not seek to find new uses for and/or retain buildings of this type, which were permitted to serve specific agricultural needs and because they do not conserve and enhance the landscape.

2. The proposed car park for visitors to the Castlerigg Stone Circle amounts to permanent public parking. It has long been recognised that meeting ever growing demands for public car parking in the Lake District is not a sustainable prospect and would bring unacceptable consequences. The proposal is contrary to Policy TR11 (Permanent Public Parking) of the Lake District National Park Local Plan which states that additional public parking facilities will only be permitted where they would resolve an unacceptable road safety hazard or lead to significant environmental improvement and are an integral part of a traffic management plan for the area. It would also conflict with the aims of Policy DP5 (Manage Travel Demand, Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility) of the North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 which seeks a shift to more sustainable modes of transport, encouraging an integrated approach to managing travel demand.

3. The proposed development would result in additional visitor pressure on the locality and further activity concentrated near the environs of the Castlerigg Stone Circle and its approaches and run counter to objectives to maintain the character and tranquillity of rural areas as set out in Policy DP7 of the North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy and Lake District National Park Local Plan Policy NE1.

4. The creation of the access road through the woodland area to serve the proposed car parks involves the removal of a section of a traditional field wall, removal of trees, the creation of a two lane road with a bound surface and a need for directional signs and these works would be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural lane and therefore contrary to Policy NE1 of the
Lake District National Park Local Plan.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Background papers are available for inspection on the planning application file unless otherwise specified on that file as confidential by reasons of financial/personal circumstances in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.
Sir Christian Bonington, CBE
Badger Hill, Hesket Newmarket, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 8LATel: 016974 78286 Fax: 016974 78238
e-mail: chris@bonington.com Web site: http://www.bonington.com

Chief Planning Officer,
LDNPA,
Bushel Walk,
Kendal
LA9 7RL

6th May, 2009

Dear Sir

I write in support of the planning application to relocate Keswick Climbing Wall (ref 7/2009/2050) to the redundant farm building at Goosewell Farm, Castlerigg.

The Keswick Wall has been a huge benefit to thousands of youngsters over the years, introducing so many to a safe and enjoyable activity. Keswick schoolboy, Adam Hocking became British Champion a few years ago. It has catered for all abilities, from Himalayan climbers through to guests of the Calvert Trust.

There has also been the benefit of reducing the over-use of the very few crags which are suitable for novices.

Historically, climbing walls were perceived as a wet-weather alternative to days on the crags. To some extent, the Keswick Wall has provided for climbers “rained off” from the fells but it caters for tourist families looking for “something to do” and school and youth groups.

I would be most grateful if you would read out this letter of support at the Development Control Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely

Chris Bonington
20 May 2009

The Chief Planning Officer,
Lake District National Park Authority
Murley Moss
 Oxenholme Road
 Kendal
 Cumbria
 LA9 7RL

Dear Sir

I write in support of the planning application to relocate Keswick Climbing Wall (ref 7/2009/2050) to the redundant farm building at Goosewell Farm, Keswick.

The original Keswick Climbing Wall in the old Caterite warehouse has been a huge benefit to thousands of people over the years, providing an all year round indoor training facility for serious sport climbers as well as traditional climbers and also, of course, beginners.

Historically, climbing walls were perceived as a wet-weather alternative something of huge benefit in our area where the rainfall is so heavy. Keswick Climbing Wall has proved to be a valuable indoor facility for not only local climbers of all levels but also for tourists and their families, schools and youth groups, looking for somewhere to exercise when the weather is too bad for outdoor climbing.

Keswick is privileged to have world class climbers living and working in the local area, many of whom train or began their climbing careers at Keswick Climbing Wall. It would be a sad omission if they could no longer have this training facility in wet weather and especially in the winter months.

Keswick is aiming to be The Adventure Capital of England. It would therefore be a travesty not to have an indoor climbing wall facility since just about every other town in the country now has one.

As climbing has become a more popular activity, and with the nearby Borrowdale Valley being the home of climbing, Keswick Climbing Wall has helped reduce the over-use of the very few crags which are suitable for novices by providing a safe and accessible alternative. To not have public access to Keswick Climbing Wall would therefore have an impact on the outdoor crags.

I would be most grateful if you would read out this letter of support at the Development Control Committee meeting. I feel so strongly about this that I am prepared to make time to attend any meetings to make the case for this climbing wall on the outskirts of Keswick personally.

Yours faithfully

Doug Scott CBE
Anne Atkinson

From: mike weeks [mikeweekskeswick@hotmail.com]
Sent: 06 April 2009 16:27
To: Planning
Subject: New Keswick Climbing Wall

Dear Sir or Madam

I wish to register my keen support for the move to grant public access to the newly relocated and refurbished Keswick Climbing Wall.

As a resident of Keswick I have enjoyed climbing on the local rocks and outcrops since the age of twelve. On a personal basis I have always valued the enjoyment afforded by a local facility when the weather is so often unsuitable for climbing outdoors. The specific fitness gained from using the local wall has allowed me to achieve various personal goals. I have also developed my skills in a controlled environment and become a safer climber as a result.

In my capacity of a climbing Instructor I am well aware of the value of a climbing wall experience for young people from all walks of life. As a Primary Teacher I know a trip to a local Climbing Wall has huge value in terms of meeting the criteria of the Government's ECM Agenda along with presenting an accessible activity in the context of obesity issues. However, as a parent the current situation precludes me and my family from any of these benefits.

I would urge you most strongly to support the reopening of this facility for the benefits of the local population and visitors alike.

Yours Faithfully

Mike Weeks
Mr N Thompson  
Lake District National Park Authority  
Murley Moss  
Oxenholme Road  
Kendal  
Cumbria  
LA9 7RL  

Dear Sir

Re Keswick Climbing Wall – Goosewell Farm, Keswick

Reference 07/2009/2050

I write to you to express my support for the permanent relocation of Keswick Climbing Wall to Goosewell Farm and for public access to the climbing wall as all members of the public should be able to use the valuable indoor facility and not just organised groups. As President of the Fell & Rock Climbing Club I am head of a Club with 1200 members and eight properties in the Lake District. Last weekend I and some of my colleagues had to make the journey to Penrith from Buttermere to visit a climbing wall—what a waste of the earth’s valuable resources, when we could have had the opportunity to put money in the much more fragile economy of Keswick.

The Lake District is purporting to be the Adventure Capital of the UK. Rock Climbing has been an important element of activities in the Lake District for well over 100 years and many people come to the Lakes to enjoy the crags and climbing available here. Climbing Walls are now an integral part of the climbing scene giving a controlled environment to climb throughout the year and not affected by the weather, especially the rain. The old climbing wall in Keswick was an important location for climbers and groups and its removal has left a gap in provision for climbers in the northern part of the Lakes. There are other walls at Penrith, Newton Rigg and West Cumbria however it is important to have a climbing wall more in the Central Lakes.

To have a climbing wall at Goosewell Farm only for organised groups in nonsensical as this facility would well serve the general public. There is adequate parking there with plenty of facilities as well as a mountain feel when one looks out of the door.

I therefore ask that the Lake District Special Planning Board allows use of the climbing wall at Goosewell Farm for use by the general public as well as organised groups.

over
Yours sincerely

[Signature]

John Robinson, President, Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District on behalf of the Committee and members.
PARISH COUNCIL OF
ST JOHN'S CASTLERIGG & WYTHBURN
Clerk: Mrs Sally M Bickerdyke, Manesty, Springs Garth, Keswick, Cumbria CA12 4BG
T: 017687 73537. E: sally.bickerdyke@btinternet.com

Development Management Support Team
Lake District National Park Authority
Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road
KENDAL
Cumbria LA9 7RL.

Your Ref DMST/7/2009/2050

04/05/2009

Dear Sirs,

APPLICATION NO: 7/2009/2050
LOCATION: Goosewell Farm, Keswick, CA12 4RN
PROPOSAL: Provision of climbing wall in vacant agricultural building, new highway access and climbing wall car park with additional public car park serving Castlerigg Stone Circle

The Parish Council of St John's Castlerigg and Wythburn held a Council Meeting on Tuesday 28th April 2009 to comment on the above planning application.

Climbing Wall If this is to be permanently removed from Keswick it will need a car park.
(a) The Parish Council feel this is to the detriment of the local Keswick young people and also Keswick visitors, most of whom will have to access the climbing wall by car. It is too far out to walk, say after school and the buses that run in the summer holidays are not always convenient.
(b) The climbing Wall at Goosewell will need it's own car park but use of existing space around the building and in trees nearby seems adequate with modifications for both cars and mini buses.
(c) The existing access off the lane is wide and easy and not on a bend or brow of a hill.
(d) Site of a full plan of Goosewell Farm will show the existing accesses from the lane.

New Highway Access and Car Parks
(a) This Parish Council is against development in open country side as set out in their Parish Plan.
(b) Residents like to recognise the unique nature of Castlerigg Stone Circle and it's environs.
(c) A recent significant archaeological discovery has been found in the area. A Roman Camp. This is still being revealed and studied.
(d) Most visitors to the Stone Circle only park for a short time, adequate parking is available.
(e) Proposed new entrance is on a bend and brow adding to existing hazards on this narrow lane. Felling trees for creation of car parking would result in loss of a woodland habitat and an attractive landscape feature.
(f) The Traffic survey undertaken was done during the quietest months. (figures by email)
(g) The only time there has been problems with parking is around the Summer Solstice and The Parish Council are in discussion already with the Police and National Trust to resolve this.
(h) Creation of the proposed car park entrance will increase the current risk to pedestrians on this stretch of lane as walkers using the public footpaths to The Stone Circle are forced to use the roadway at this point. Pedestrians from the car park will add to this number.
(i) Using the existing entrances reduces the risk of mixing walkers with turning cars.

The meeting was unanimous with these comments and observations.

Yours faithfully

Sally M. Bickerdyke
Parish Clerk.
Dear Mr. Thompson,

Re: Planning Application 7/2009/2050; Provision of climbing wall in vacant agricultural building, new highway access and climbing wall car park with additional public car park serving Castlerigg stone circle – comments from the National Trust

The National Trust’s attention has been drawn to the above application for planning permission. Having assessed the submitted proposals from the Authority’s website and considered them on the ground it is requested that the representations set out in this letter are taken into account in the determination of application.

The National Trust and Castlerigg Stone Circle

The National Trust is a charity and Europe’s largest conservation organisation with a membership in excess of 3.6 million people. With the support of our Parliamentary Act we are legally responsible for the protection of some of the most beautiful, historically important and environmentally sensitive places in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is made up of nearly 250,000 hectares of land, including 700 miles of coast and 250 historic buildings.

The Trust is a major land owner and manager within the Lake District National Park, currently being responsible for some 25% of the total designated area. This land holding is concentrated upon the central fells but also includes many other sites.

Castlerigg Stone Circle

Castlerigg is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Monument No. 22565) it is owned by the National Trust and jointly managed by the Trust and English Heritage. It is one of the finest stone circles in the country and the most visited prehistoric monument in the north-west region. English Heritage quotes: ‘Castlerigg is perhaps the most atmospheric and dramatically sited of all British stone circles, with panoramic views and the mountains of Helvellyn and High Seat as a backdrop’.
sits within an enclosed field (roughly 4 hectares) of permanent grassland on Castlerigg Fell which is let to a local grazier.

Dating from the late Neolithic period (around 2,500 BC), the circle comprises some 38 stones, with an additional 10 stones forming a small rectangular setting (known as the Sanctuary) located in the eastern quarter of the monument. The circle is thought to have originally been composed of 39 or 40 stones and had at least one outlying stone, although more may have originally existed. The circle is believed to contain at least one, and possibly two, small barrows of probable Bronze Age date.

One of the best-loved and most-visited places in the Lake District, the stone circle at Castlerigg lies less than three kilometres from the centre of Keswick. The monument has free and open access all year round and is readily accessible from Keswick.

Although many visitors to Castlerigg undoubtedly have some degree of interest or inquisitiveness in the archaeology of the monument, a great many visit to enjoy the unique sense of place of the monument. This enjoyment is derived in equal measure from the antiquity of the stones themselves and their outstanding location that offers wonderful views over the northern Lake District fells.

The circle continues to have immense spiritual significance for a great many groups and individuals in contemporary society. New age spiritualists, modern antiquarians, druidical groups, white witches and others for whom the monument has some special contemporary significance still visit the monument in surprising numbers.

In addition to its significance as a site of archaeological interest, Castlerigg is a popular visitor attraction because of the high quality of its views and its close proximity to Keswick. Whilst is difficult to accurately assess the economic importance of the monument to the local tourist economy it is clear that the monument, with an estimated over 250,000 visitors annually, does represent a significant component of the popular tourist itinerary in the local area.

The overall Vision in the Trust’s agreed Conservation Plan for the property includes:

"The National Trust in the future should seek to manage the monument in a wholly sustainable way. The priority being to maintain the integrity of the stone circle, including all buried archaeological deposits, and its wider setting...The National Trust should also ensure that the long distance views from the monument are retained without detrimental visual intrusion."

The Conservation Plan for the Stones recognises that the Trust wishes to maintain open access to the monument, but that the “correct balance between conservation and access is found to ensure that the site does not deteriorate as a result of erosion resulting from visitor pressure”.

**Response to the Planning Application Proposals**

**Generally**

Whilst in principle the National Trust is a supporter of farm diversification projects in the Lake District National Park as an important part of maintaining the viability of
farms and thereby continuing landscape management, it considers that such proposals need to ensure that the special qualities of the Lake District are safeguarded and indeed wherever practical enhanced. The Trust itself is of course a major farm owner in the Lake District and well aware of the pressures that agriculture is facing.

In this instance the Trust does not wish to raise any specific objections to the climbing wall component of the application, or to any car parking that the Authority considers is essential to serve that particular activity and can be satisfactorily accommodated within the applicant’s ownership.

**Car Parking for Castlerigg Stone Circle**

The Trust is however concerned about the proposal to provide additional car parking to serve Castlerigg Stone Circle.

It should firstly be stated that whilst this element of the application appears to be founded, at least in part, in providing facilities to benefit Castlerigg and its users that surprisingly this has not been discussed formally with the National Trust. I understand that some early talks took place, but none with myself as Property Manager, nor to my knowledge with English Heritage.

Other than the exceptional one-off occasions each year such as the summer solstice the current parking close to Castlerigg is generally adequate to meet the needs of visitors. The site is regularly included in group tours by mini-bus, e.g. the daily Mountain Goat ‘Ten Lakes’ Tour, and the Trust is not aware of any particular parking issues associated with these Tours or indeed other visits.

It is noted that whilst new car parking for Castlerigg Stone Circle is proposed there is no indication that any measures are proposed, or indeed have been discussed, to secure the removal of the existing spaces – indeed this is outside the applicants’ ownership and similarly not within its control. Accordingly there is no guarantee that the alleged benefits could actually be achieved, i.e. the new car park could be provided whilst the roadside parking provision still remains in situ.

Provision of a new parking area, especially if there is related promotion of it, is likely to add visitor pressures upon the Stone Circle and potentially upset, to adverse effect, the balance between conservation and access.

It is noted that the application places considerable reliance upon the 250,000 figure for visitors to Castlerigg (at one place erroneously referring to this as a ‘published figure’). For example, at page 25 of the Supporting Statement the following appears:

> "In the context of existing road level usage which are confirmed by traffic survey it must again be noted that these levels of traffic increase are not significant in the context of a road network which already provides access for 250,000 people per annum of Castlerigg Stone Circle."

As indicated above the 250,000 figure is the Trust’s estimate of all visitors.

In particular the road network does not ‘provide access for 250,000 people’ to Castlerigg Stone Circle each year, only for a proportion of them. There is ready
access to Castlerigg by a variety of modes including in particular on foot. The surrounding land includes 'open access land' and there are established footpath networks that connect to the site. Indeed the Moot Hall (Lake District National Park) promotes a walking route from nearby Keswick to Castlerigg, thereby encouraging sustainable visits to the Stone Circle which the Trust is keen to encourage.

Promotion of a separate car park would conflict with this approach and erode the special qualities of the Stone Circle and its setting.

**Interpretation for Castlerigg Stone Circle**

It is not considered that the stated intention (Supporting Statement, e.g. pages 9/10) to provide interpretation within the proposed car park would be especially helpful. Such material needs to be readily available to all visitors, not just those utilising the proposed new car park area; the information would not be convenient (or indeed seen by) walkers, cyclists and those who continued to park alongside the road. Interpretation material needs to be viewed on the site so that it is seen in context and it is noted that the Trust already has a project underway to improve interpretation at the site; it is currently anticipated that installation will take place this year.

Similarly the National Trust's direct information service and recruiting activity is more sensibly provided to all visitors on site or immediately adjacent to it, rather than in a nearby car park.

**Tree and Landscape Considerations**

The Trust notes that contrary to the information on plan and in the Supporting Statement that the 36 trees to be removed are not only Sitka Spruce but also include several Scots Pine, Silver Birch, Goat Willow and other species (as identified in the submitted tree report – the Sitka Spruce comprising about 60% of the affected trees within the plantation).

However, of greater concern is the absence of any assessment of the impact of the proposals upon landscape character. The provision of a new car park and associated access works, visibility splays and the like, within a National Park is potentially a significant intrusion. It is unclear how landscape character has been assessed in this instance, or indeed what assessment has been made of the alternative options that might be available in the surrounding area.

**Planning Policy Considerations**

It is notable that the consideration of relevant national planning policy in the application documentation does not consider the relevance of either PPS7 (especially with regard to development in the National Park and the impact upon landscape character) or PPG13.

In terms of the latter the proposed development is arguably contrary to the three overall objectives set out at paragraph 4, i.e. it does not promote more sustainable transport choices, does not promote accessibility by public transport, walking or cycling, and does not reduce the need to travel by car.
At the *regional* level specific attention is drawn to the following adopted RSS policies:

- **DP5** – reducing the need to travel, especially by car, and a shift to more sustainable forms of transport.
- **DP6** – promoting environmental quality.
- **RT2** – managing travel demand, including discouragement of car use and the promotion of alternatives.
- **CNL3** – protection of the landscape (and heritage) of the National Park and ensuring that the proportion of travel within the National Park by sustainable modes is increased.

Relevant saved **Structure Plan** policies in the adopted Joint Cumbria CC Lake District National Park Structure Plan include:

- **EM16** – tourism – development in the National Park should not conflict with its special qualities, nor should it introduce inappropriate levels of use or be detrimental to the character and quality of the environment.
- **E37** – development to be compatible with the landscape character of the area.

Relevant saved **Local Plan** policies in the adopted Lake District National Park Local Plan in particular:

- **NE1** – development in the open countryside – especially (b) to (d)
- **NE15/NE16** – protection of ancient monuments/archaeological sites – including the protection of their character or setting
- **TR11** – there has been no unacceptable road safety hazard identified and nor is the car parking proposed an integral part of a traffic management plan for the area (a); and landscape impacts have not been addressed (b).

Having regard to the relevant planning policy considerations as identified above and the anticipated impacts of the proposed car park for Castlerigg Stone Circle as set out in the previous section of this letter, it is concluded that the proposed development would be contrary to the Development Plan and should be refused accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

**Kathie Murphy**
**Property Manager**
Our Ref: KCW/LDNP1/09
Your Ref: 7/2009/2050
Date: 5.5.09

Mr. N Thompson
Development Control
Lake District National Park Authority
Murley Moss
Oxenholme Road
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 7RL

Dear Mr. Thompson

7/2009/2050
Provision of Climbing Wall, New Highway Access, Climbing Wall Car Park and Separate Public Car Park to Serve Castlerigg Stone Circle at Goosewell Farm, Keswick

I write with reference to the above and further to our last conversation regarding progress on the current application.

As discussed my clients and I were hopeful that this application may have been considered at the Planning meeting to be held on 6 May 2009. It is clearly the case however that it will not be. Given the issues involved in the continuity of provision of this facility it is of course disappointing that a decision on this facility will not now be available till June at the earliest. Given that the application has been valid since 26 March and statutory consultation on the application should have finished by 22 April it is a concern that no realistic effort was made to determine the application before its 8 week expiry on 20 May 2009. I appreciate as you stated that officer workload on applications is always a problem and this is something I recognise from my own past experience as planning officer. I trust however you will recognise that for the applicants who are seeking a decision from a Local Planning Authority in relation to their business and livelihood the reason for such a delay is not compelling.

It is a matter of concern for the applicants that when we last spoke over 4 weeks into the application cycle that no further work other than posting of site notices had been undertaken. Further to this as indicated in my phone message of last week, I am also very concerned to learn from Dawn Wilson of Cumbria County Highways that as of last week she had not received any consultation on this application. She has reaffirmed to me today that no consultation has still been received. This is 5 weeks into the application. I understand she has now independently submitted comments to you after I raised the issue with her and made her aware of the application. I am concerned by this situation and I
trust that this is a simple isolated administrative issue and that all other statutory consultations have been undertaken? I would certainly be very concerned if a request for amendments or further detailed information was to be received some 6 or 7 weeks into the application or if the June committee were to be missed because of this.

Moving forward therefore the applicants are very anxious that a decision on the proposal is made as soon as possible at the next planning meeting. There exists huge demand for the facility with already constant requests for use by all the identified user groups both in the short term and stretching forward into the summer and autumn. This demand is considered to further demonstrate the ongoing need for the facility. Continued uncertainty over the wall provision impacts upon all these user groups. In addition to this, staffing provision must also addressed and whilst I appreciate this is not a concern for the LPA the uncertainty over the wall and potential loss of 5 jobs from the local economy is a very real issue. The applicants do therefore require a timely positive decision to address these matters.

As we discussed given the timescales which the current application is now constrained by, it is also clear that no new permission can be in place to provide continuity of consent post April 2009. Because of the demand for use and pressures for the provision of this facility it is however the case that climbing wall use is likely to continue in the interim whilst the current application is being determined. The applicants have been left with little alternative but to do this given the lack of a decision on the application. I can confirm however that whilst this situation exists, no other consents such as the quad bike tours will be implemented. I trust that the reasons for this and its acceptability will be recognised in the context that encouragement for a longer temporary period of use was being given by the LPA as part of the last application and that the LPA are already considering an application which would regularize any use on site.

In terms of the merits of the application I understand that many individuals, groups and schools have written to express their support for the proposal. It is considered that this further demonstrates the widespread support and desire for the provision of this facility. With the Highway Authority having confirmed that they have no objection to the proposal this has removed one of the principle issues which affected previous proposals for a wall on the site. I understand the LPA must consider the out of town location of the site but hope that it is recognised that no alternatives within Kewsick do exist. In this context this proposal provides a solution to the shortfall in the provision of this key facility and it is hoped that the LPA will recognise the merits of this proposal, its quality and the opportunity it presents for the National Park to be demonstrably pro active in encouraging provision of facilities in an imaginative and diversified manner.

If there is any aspect of the proposal you wish to discuss further, myself and the applicants would be happy to have a meeting with you, Paul Haggin, David Mc Gowan or Richard Leafe. I trust if there are any outstanding matters in the meantime you will contact me in the very near future and I thank you for your help in this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Robin Wood
Cc Mr. R Leafe – Chief Executive
Our Ref: KCW/LDNP1/09b  
Your Ref: 7/2009/2050  
Date: 11.6.09

Mr. N Thompson  
Development Control  
Lake District National Park Authority  
Murey Moss  
Oxenholme Road  
Kendal  
Cumbria  
LA9 7RL

Dear Mr. Thompson

7/2009/2050  
Provision of Climbing Wall, New Highway Access, Climbing Wall Car Park and Separate Public Car Park to Serve Castlerigg Stone Circle at Goosewell Farm, Keswick

I write with reference to the above and further to the Members site visit of 10 June 2009. I am pleased that Members had the opportunity to view the site prior to considering the application and appreciate your recommendation that they do so. Following the Members visit I think it is appropriate to write to you to clarify some points raised in the course of the Members visit and to also address matters relating to the potential recommendation to be taken forward to the forthcoming committee meeting. I will first address the substantive issues related to any recommendation and will deal with the two aspects of the application separately, namely the climbing wall and associated car park and the proposed public car park serving Castlerigg Stone Circle.

Climbing Wall and Associated Car Park

It is my understanding from our previous telephone conversation prior to the last committee meeting and also on the basis of your comments to Members during the site visit, that it is still officers intention to recommend refusal of the application. In relation to the climbing wall and dedicated car park element my understanding is that the proposal is intended to be recommended for refusal on the basis of the principle of development and specifically its location outside Keswick. The principle being deemed to be unacceptable based on non compliance with RSS policies DP4 and DP5, which would form the basis of a refusal. I am not aware of, and you have not previously indicated, any other proposed reasons for refusal other than these. I would not expect any others would be proposed given the acceptability of the scheme in highway terms, as
confirmed by the County Highway Authority response, or in relation to visual impact given the lack of actual external development proposed on the site.

I do not propose in this letter to reexamine all the material considerations relating to the location of development, which we have previously examined in detail in the statement supporting the application. Never the less this is an important point and it is clear as this application progresses that the ongoing view of the LPA can be summarised in relatively narrow terms. i.e.

‘We feel the climbing wall should be located in Keswick’

My apologies if this is something of an oversimplification but this is in essence the stance that the LPA I understand are adopting.

From my own perspective I could fully accept and would indeed agree with this position if the option to accommodate the climbing wall in Keswick did actually exist. If a suitable, available and viable option of premises in Keswick did exist it would be appropriate for the development to be directed to Keswick. This however is not the situation which exists.

As has been examined in detail in the application, through a sequential search and property survey, no premises for this climbing wall do exist in Keswick. There simply are no alternatives available. The LPAs own action in relation to this application and our pre application discussions have reinforced this. You will recall from the pre application meetings, which you referred to at the Members site visit, that alternative premises in Keswick were discussed. In particular you will recall from our meeting on site on 12 August 2008 which Paul Haggin attended, that we specifically discussed the Keswick Pencil Factory as a possible site. One action from that meeting you will recall was that the LPA would seek to facilitate, though discussion with the site owner, a possible home for the wall. Clearly as no further communication on this has been received from the LPA it was not possible to facilitate this building or any other premises in Keswick. This further reinforces our own findings from discussions with the building owner that this building is neither available nor likely to be financially viable as a home for the wall. No other buildings exist in Keswick which are either suitable for the wall or which do not have other material considerations present such as employment designation, preventing there use.

On this basis I would submit it must be accepted by all parties, including the LPA that no alternative premises exist in Keswick which would allow the Keswick Climbing wall to reopen in Keswick.

In this context it is therefore the case that the LPA view that the wall should be located in Keswick is unrealistic and undeliverable. Even if that is the LDNPAs view, it has to be accepted that it has no ability to ensure this occurs or that it is delivered. The view that the wall should be in Keswick is therefore nothing more than a wish.

A refusal of permission in this context will therefore have a very clear and direct outcome. Keswick and the north lakes area will not have a climbing wall.
With this clear background it is inherent on the LPA to therefore carefully consider the specific merits of this application, the circumstances which have generated the application and the specific material considerations relating to this application in this location. I would submit an over simplistic application of policies relating to sustainability and accessibility does not do this. The current application of RSS policies DP4 and DP5 as a means of refusal in no way reflect a proactive approach to facilitating this valuable resource. In relation to RSS Policy DP4 this represents an urban centered policy which effectively prevents any out of settlement development in rural areas. Given, as demonstrated, that there are no alternative venues in Keswick it is inherent that a more flexible and proactive approach to application of this policy must be undertaken. In a similar manner policy DP5 if applied in prescriptive and inflexible manner similarly prevents any out of settlement rural development.

The restrictive and inflexible use of policies such as these, which are framed to serve the whole north west region, including its main urban centres, is not considered appropriate as basis for framing a recommendation for refusal of permission. I would further submit that using these policies in this manner is not appropriate and that this narrow approach to rural development is actually now wholly out of step with best practice and government advice on rural development.

You will no doubt be aware of the July 2008 report ‘Living Working Countryside – The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing’. The extensive government commissioned review by Matthew Taylor, considered in detail the issues of rural planning and the application of policy with regards to rural development. The report makes a number of very significant recommendations which are directly relevant to this application.

The first chapter of the Taylor review considers general planning issues. One particular focus is the issue of sustainability. The comments of the review on this are clear. The report identifies what is referred to as a ‘sustainability trap’ in which a tick box approach and an inflexible range of sustainability criteria has held back sensitive and appropriate development. Taylor goes on to state that;

_We need a can-do system that asks the question of each development proposal “how will this development add to or diminish the sustainability of this community” and include social, economic and environmental factors in the answer._

In relation to this application the choice is between local climbing wall provision in Keswick or if refused no climbing local wall provision and a necessity for long distance travel to another wall. Within the terms of the Taylor question above it is absolutely clear that permission should therefore be granted.

Further statements which are applicable to this proposal are also made in chapter 1 of the review. Of striking relevance is a paragraph on the application of sustainability policy. It states:
Prior to this review there have already been a number of criticisms of the way planning policy for sustainable development is interpreted and implemented at the regional and local levels. In particular, the way regional and local planners are applying these requirements through prioritizing certain narrow environmental indicators (namely the objective to reduce energy use and emissions, measured almost exclusively by transport use)

The review goes on to state that these narrow perceptions of sustainability have been left unchecked and have become embedded in regional and local planning.

It unfortunately the case that it appears that this is exactly the manner in which sustainability policy is potentially being applied to this application.

In this context the Taylor review makes a number of key recommendations the first of which states:

Planning Policy should be reviewed by the government as a body to create a more coherent set, reducing apparent conflicts between interpretations of sustainability, and the means by which competing priorities are assessed, and by doing so aid consistent interpretation and application at the local and regional level.

The Taylor review in Chapter 4 specifically considers rural economic development and the impacts of policy on this. It is identified that the previously identified ‘sustainability trap’ and the narrow approach to sustainable development also curtail economic development.

In the framing and use of policy on this issue it particularly striking that the North West RSS is specifically identified and criticised in relation its policies on development locations and how these impact on rural development.

Given the previously stated intention of the LPA to refuse the climbing wall based on RSS sustainability policy DP4 this critique is particularly relevant.

Similarly the Taylor review comments on accessibility and the presence of public transport are also of key relevance with regard to application of Policy DP5 in this application. It is identified that an overly narrow emphasis on access to public transport and an unrealistic requirement for its proximity to development is also a barrier to otherwise appropriate development. Recommendation 24 specifically addresses this and states that:

The consultation paper on new PPS4: planning for Sustainable Economic Development recognised that not all development in rural areas can be accessed by public transport and should not be refused simply on this ground, a change in emphasis which this review very much supports. This new message should be retained in the Final Planning Policy Statement, and early action taken to ensure it is reinforced in the development and application of regional and local plans. This would help remove a significant barrier to rural economic development, including the re-use of disused farms and farm buildings, subject to proper assessment of the impact on economic, social and environmental sustainability.
Whilst clearly sustainability and access to public transport is an ideal which should be secured wherever possible, which we fully support, the message from Taylor is that access to public transport is not the only consideration. It should certainly not be used as a reason for refusal of otherwise acceptable schemes.

It remains the case in this application that it does benefit from some limited public transport provision. More importantly however it must be recognised that a large proportion of users will be transported by minibus and that a number of users, due its close proximity to Keswick, will have the option of walking or cycling to the site. In the context of the more realistic approach to this issue, as advocated by the Taylor review, it must also be recognised and accepted that in practice the previous climbing wall while based in Keswick, was still predominantly accessed by private vehicles. Public transport even for the original site was not a realistic or widely used facility because of Keswick’s rural location. The wall location now proposed will not result in any actual marked increase in the level of private car usage by users, over and above that which existed at the previous climbing wall. A more realistic and pragmatic approach to this issue must be adopted to application of policy in light of the Taylor findings.

The message from the Taylor review is therefore absolutely clear, greater flexibility in application of sustainability policy is required and the lack of access to public transport should not in itself be a reason for refusal. These findings could not be more relevant to any proposed refusal of this application on the basis of RSS policy DP4 and DP5.

It could of course be argued by critics of the Taylor review that it is nothing more than a review and as such carries little material weight. This is not the case however as the Government has now formally responded to the Taylor review.

The Department of Communities and Local Government published the Government response in March 2009. This government response fully endorses all the recommendations of the Taylor review, including recommendations 1 and 24 above.

As part of the response it is stated that:

*In responding to the Review’s recommendations, we wish to emphasis the message that sustainability is not about choosing the environment over development but about recognizing both and striking a balance. As the review makes clear, a “one size fits all” approach cannot do justice to the diversity of rural communities and experiences.*

We would submit that the relevance to this application of the Taylor review and the timely government response cannot be underestimated. It has been confirmed by both DCLG and GONW that the review and government response are material considerations which should be afforded weight in the decision making process. Accordingly it is considered that weight must be attached to them in determination of this application.
What this means for the assessment of the application is that a more flexible approach to the assessment and determination of the application must be undertaken. The previously expressed view of the LPA that the application is contrary to RSS policy on location and public transport is manifestly at odds with the latest government statements on this issue.

The Taylor review and the government response now gives the LDNP a clear basis and valid reason for not having to narrowly apply sustainability policy to this development. It is indeed the case that continuation of such a 'one size fits all' approach would be out of step with developing policy. Similarly it would not reflect the 'can do' proactive approach to rural development advocated by Taylor and endorsed by the government.

In the context of the application it is now the position that if LDNPA places any importance on continued provision of a climbing wall, it has a policy framework which allows it to grant planning permission. As you will be aware the application enjoys very large scale support from a large cross section of individuals and organizations. These include amongst others: Tony Cunningham MP, Cumbria Tourism, CCC Children's Services, Sir Chris Bonington (Chairman of Council for National Parks), Doug Scott (Everest climber) Ron Kenyon (British Mountaineering Council), the parents of Adam Hocking (from Keswick who became British Junior Champion), Keswick Tourism Association, Local Schools and Youth organisations. In addition I believe other support letters have been submitted as a well as a petition with several hundred signatories.

It is the case therefore that all the key stakeholders in the Lake District National Park and the Cumbria area are in support of this application.

In planning terms it continues to be the case that this is effectively a unique application in planning terms as it is a proposal to provide a recreation facility which already existed in the area. It is not a new activity being proposed or simply relocated to new facilities. This application offers the only opportunity to actually again provide this key facility for which so much support and demand exists. The fact that no other alternatives exist cannot be ignored. The particular merits of the proposal and material considerations related to it as a replacement facility, ensure that the proposal would not set a precedent that could be applied to other entirely new leisure facilities and therefore fear of precedent should not be a material consideration in determination of the application.

We would request therefore that prior to framing of any recommendation in relation to the climbing wall for the committee report, further careful consideration is given to the merits of this application and in particular the application of sustainability policy in light of the Taylor review and government response. The application generates significant wider questions about who the Lake District National Park serves the LPA has a clear choice to make in relation to this application with regard to what its priorities are and who it serves. Clearly resistance to the scheme would be at odds with other partners work such as Cumbria Tourism and the adventure capital programme. A recommendation of refusal of permission I am afraid would indicate the LPA does not give any weight
as a material consideration to the provision of a climbing wall within the Lake District, the overwhelming view of its residents and key stakeholders and latest government guidance on the application of rural policy.

In this context I would strongly urge that a pro active approach be adopted to this application and that careful consideration be given to an appropriate recommendation to Members.

**Castlerigg Stone Circle Car Park**

As you correctly identified in your introduction to Members on the site visit there are essentially 2 separate parts to the application, the wall and associated car park and the public car park, which whilst sharing a combined new access, are effectively stand alone proposals.

In bringing forward the proposal for the public car park to serve Castlerigg Stone Circle it has always been the intention that this scheme would be of benefit to the environment and wider road safety. The merits of the proposal in relation improving the visual context of the stone circle, wider visual benefits of removing cars, removing road side erosion and improving highway safety are all set out in the application statement. It continues to be our view that these are important and valid benefit that the car park could deliver.

In our previous discussion prior to the last committee you indicated that notwithstanding these merits the car park would still in its own right be recommended for refusal on the basis of Local Plan Policy TR11. This I understand is because it does not form part of a traffic management plan for the area.

It is the case therefore that whilst it is considered that the merits of this particular proposal would still outweigh any adverse impacts, the public car park proposal is not a priority or key aspect of this application. It was never brought forward for commercial purposes and was intended purely to improve the local environment over and above its existing condition. We would have hoped this may have been welcomed.

Notwithstanding this view, in the context of you previous comments on a likely recommendation I would advise that we would not wish the Castlerigg Stone Circle public car park proposal to be prejudicial to the main climbing wall and car park proposal. I would advise therefore that if the public car park proposal was to be prejudicial to a recommendation to grant permission for the climbing wall and car park, or if Members were minded to grant permission for the climbing wall element that the public car park could acceptably be removed from the scheme by way of condition.

Such a condition can easily be framed and has been used widely in such circumstances. The condition would effectively read:
Notwithstanding the submitted details of the application received on 26 March 2009 this decision does not grant or imply any permission for the development or operation of the public car park proposed to serve Castlerigg Stone Circle as defined on drawing KCP/SCP1.

This approach meets all relevant tests and is a lawful way of dealing with this issue. As detailed we would not wish for this aspect of the application to be prejudicial to the main climbing wall development which is the key proposal for which support clearly exists. I trust that this can be noted and addressed in your assessment of the application and committee report.

Clarification of Points Related to the Members Site Visit

A number of points were raised during the member’s visit which I would like to clarify for the avoidance of doubt. I would be grateful if these could be made clear to Members.

1. On the issue of the buildings on site some confusion appeared to be continuing at the end of the visit regarding the buildings present. It appeared to be the case that some members felt that the smaller lean to building was a new building. As you are aware no new buildings have been erected on site and all that has taken place is the painting or repair/re cladding of existing buildings. I would be grateful if this point could be reemphasized to members in order to avoid any confusion.

2. In relation to the graveled parking and maneuvering areas around the site, the visual impact of these areas appeared to be a potential issue for some members. Again I would request that it be made clear that no new surfaced areas have been created and that all open areas to the front and rear of the buildings were present prior to the existing use. All these areas were clear and had a hard core base already in place. All that has been done is that new gravel has been placed on site. Therefore the extent of gravel is not new. In terms of its appearance I think it is important to note that this is newly placed gravel which as such has not had time to weather or have the quarry dust washed off it. As such it appearance is brighter than will be the case in the near future. It remains the case that additional boundary planting is proposed to reinforce that already present and certainly no adverse visual impact over and above the previous appearance of the site is present.

3. With regard to disabled access I can also confirm that a bound surface and markings within the disable parking area would be provided to enable wheel chair users to access the site. As discussed a detailed scheme for this provision could be conditioned for submission as part of any approval and I would be grateful if this could be reaffirmed in the report.

This letter sets out what we consider to be the key considerations relating to the assessment of the application. We remain of the view that the proposal is acceptable in planning terms and this is further identified with reference to the Taylor review and government response. The merits of the proposal and the
absence of alternatives are key material considerations which are considered to outweigh any limited policy objections which may exist. The application I believe provides an opportunity to address a key gap in the provision of facilities in one of the original birthplaces of rock climbing which has the ability to actually be seen as an exemplar of good practice in reuse of redundant rural buildings. I would strongly request therefore that the scheme be recommended for approval with appropriate conditions attached and I remain more than happy to discuss any aspect of the scheme further with you, should you feel this would be of assistance.

Yours Sincerely

Robin Wood
Cc Mr. R Leafe – Chief Executive
    Mr. D McGowan – Head of Development Control