

Reed Parish Council:

Re. Application 22/00910/FP:

Retention of 5500 cubic metres of Inert Material For Engineering Operations To Build An Agricultural Reservoir, Land Between Rokey Wood & Bush Wood

Reed Parish Council objects to this application and requests it be refused on the grounds detailed below. The Parish Council believes the application is lacking in essential information needed for the Authority to make a determination.

1. The information presented in the application is inadequate. Specifically, the inert material proposed for retention appears to be insufficient for the engineering works proposed. It is hard to comprehend how only 5500 cu.m. of material is sufficient to erect the reservoir banking to contain 5,500 cu.m. of water. It behoves the applicant to provide accurate and complete information about the amount of material to be used for the proposed reservoir. And to explain also what happens to additional material already imported to the site. See 2 below.

2. The application makes no reference to what should happen to 39,500 cubic metres of inert material imported to the site since 2018 along with the 5500cu.m. of material referred to in this application. This total of 45,000 cu.m. of material was imported to putatively construct a much larger reservoir (of 24,000 cu. m. capacity). It is now established that such a reservoir cannot be supplied with water in the manner proposed in 2019 (ref. application 19/01955/LDCP). It is therefore material to the present application that the Planning Authority be able satisfy itself about what should happen to the already imported soil not required to build a much smaller reservoir of 5500 cu m. capacity. That inert material is currently deposited on the site where it has had for the last four years a deleterious effect on a beautiful landscape. It is a crucial omission in this application that no proposals are included for the use or disposal of this additional imported material. Such an omission requires a decision to refuse.

3. The retention of the imported material proposed is to make a reservoir of 5500 cu.m. capacity. This is to be supplied solely by means of rainwater. Extraction is not proposed and has, anyway, been ruled out for this site by the Environment Agency. That being the case, it is not evident that the reservoir presently proposed is a viable engineering project. If it is not then retention of imported material is not justified and the application should be refused. Planning history is relevant here. In August 2019 the applicant applied to the Planning Authority for a Certificate of Lawfulness. This was to legitimise imports made to the site as being for an agricultural permitted development under Part 6, Class A GPDO of 2015 planning legislation. Before granting the Certificate of Lawfulness in September 2019, the North Herts. case officer insisted on receiving expert evidence that the reservoir then proposed (which was of of 24,000 cu.m. capacity) could be viably supplied with water. This evidence was given by the agents in the form of a water report from Peter Campbell Bennet. The Campbell Bennet report included extraction from boreholes in water courses adjacent to the site. It seems that neither the author or agents had consulted the Environment Agency. It has become clear since that EA will not licence extraction of water in this area and for this site. This has rendered the proposed reservoir of 24,000 cu.m. capacity (which was to be built using the 45,000 cu.m. of imported material) unviable. Given this history, it is a material consideration that with the present application there are serious doubts about the degree to which rainwater alone (in an EA designated area of water shortage) can viably supply the presently proposed smaller reservoir of 5500 cu.m. capacity.

Further Comment

The supporting statement to the application makes reference to landscaping measures and ecological benefits, for example the planting of a line of native trees. However none of these landscape mitigations are shown on any of the submitted plans. This must call into question their credibility. This is especially so given the precedent of past failure to present and carry through measures proposed for the site (as detailed in relation to water supply at 3 above). Since 2018 the importation of 45,000 cu.m. of material by the applicant has disordered and defaced a site in a beautiful and environmentally sensitive landscape between Bush Wood and Rokey Wood. There has been no activity on the site over the last 18 months. As a result, the adverse environmental and aesthetic impact has been mitigated by a natural process of re-wilding. Despite the applicant's references to landscaping as a concomitant of the new works proposed, people in this area deprecate further earthmoving and engineering works on the site. The fear is it would once more disorder the landscape and do so without producing a viable reservoir or an alleviation - within a predictable timescale - of the visual and environmental disorder attendant on such works.

Conclusion

Reed Parish Council asks that this application be refused for the planning reasons detailed here and notably because it is deficient in the information required to enable the Planning Authority to make a properly informed decision on the application.