

REPRESENTATION TO PENRITH TOWN COUNCIL FROM KEEP PENRITH SPECIAL FOR MEETING OF 30/3/21

We understand the planning inspector or examiner is conducting the examination of the Penrith Neighbourhood Plan and that an area of Beacon Hill might not meet the National Planning Policy Framework criteria of local green space designation as it may be deemed to be too extensive a tract of land. Instead, the examiner suggests a policy is developed in the Neighbourhood Plan which would protect the Beacon from inappropriate development.

We welcome a policy in the Neighbourhood Plan specifically for the Beacon area as an alternative mechanism for protecting it and we hope the Town Council will see that it should be straightforward to draw up policies from existing plans, coupled with the community's reasons as to why the area is important to them.

As a reminder to the council, we list some of the reasons why Beacon Hill should be left free of any building development. It makes an important contribution to the character of Penrith; it is much valued by the community for its essential recreational and wellbeing opportunities; also, its biodiversity, woodland character and rarer flora and fauna should be conserved.

If the policy is not rigorous, we have concerns this could leave Beacon Hill open to development, especially given the examiner's words in his Post Hearing Notes: "The owners were candid that they did not have major development aspirations but did point to the potential for small scale tourist development such as forest lodges, pods or glamping facilities, which it was stated would be policy compliant were the land not designated local green space, which may be prejudiced by a LGS designation." This suggests that if there were no local green space or equivalent protection to the site, it would be the thin end of the wedge regarding the future development of a holiday resort and possible housing.

The examiner also says the landowners had a concern such a designation could affect future felling licences. According to a chartered forester, this would not be the case – the designation wouldn't preclude good forest management, even if the forest itself were the designated area.

We would like to remind Penrith Town Council of the overwhelming opposition to the landowners' last attempt to put a holiday resort and houses on and behind the Beacon via the Masterplan. There were nearly 7,000 objections to the Masterplan, which for a small population is a considerable number.

The message is clear that the protected status of this area of Beacon Hill is essential and non-negotiable. Indeed, we would go further and urge the Town Council to

consider ways to protect the entirety of Beacon Hill. That way, we won't have to keep coming back to the table to have the same conversation over and over again.