

Friends of Penrith Beacon's Comments on Proposed Policies for Beacon Hill

For the attention of:

Mr John Slater, BA(Hons), DMS, MRTPI

John Slater Planning Ltd

Firstly, we would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to comment on the two proposed policies for Beacon Hill. However, before we comment on individual policies of Lowther and PTC re. the Beacon Hill, it is worth re-stating the aims of the Friends of Penrith Beacon which were drawn up and agreed at a public meeting in 2018:

To safeguard all the Beacon forest area for the use of future generations - to help the owner of the forest to protect this precious environment.

- The Beacon should remain a wild place and the forest should not be urbanised.
- There should be **no building** within the forest area.
- The visibility of the Beacon monument and the views out to the surrounding area are important.
- An accessible path in keeping with the natural environment to the Beacon monument is a very good idea.

Thus any policy to develop any part of the forest, outside its current use as a commercial forest, is liable to conflict with our aims.

Now to comment on the policies as sent to us:

Lowther's Policy

In our view, their policy statement is very skimpy and appears designed to allow them to maximise development potential without any serious restriction, so we have several concerns, both general and specific.

1. Any development will impact on the hill's immense ecological and recreational value to the people of Penrith, both as a vital recreational green space and as an ecological haven. The peace and tranquillity to be found up the Beacon is very much valued by locals- the ability to walk and be surrounded by nature has helped everyone keep both physically active and as well as being of great benefit to our mental well-being. The forest proved vital during lockdowns for the citizens of the town.

As you are aware, the Beacon forest has elements of both heathland as well as forest habitat, which means a greater range of plants and wildlife is supported than you would see in some other forests. The heathland habitat is a remnant of the heathland that Wordsworth wandered over in 1775 when it was common land, before being acquired by the Lowther family through an Act of Enclosure in the early 19th century. Development will damage and potentially destroy some elements of this fragile balance of the eco-system, resulting in loss of the trees, habitat, and the bio-diversity.

2. The feedback and analysis of EDC's previous Masterplan's engagement process highlighted how important the Beacon hill is considered locally and how any development would impact on the community's sense of attachment to the place and recommended that this should be considered in any future development:

'Whilst there was recognition that the Beacon was private land, there was a strong sense that this was a community asset and was de facto under public/community ownership. This was also 'forward-looking' perspective; the Beacon should remain 'wild for generations to come', 'unspoilt for future generations'.

We would add to this, although there is only one 'permitted path', to our knowledge, the entirety of the Beacon hill has been used by the community for at least half a century and probably longer. It is certainly extremely well-used now. Gates and fences have often not been replaced or repaired around parts of the forest, so people have felt permitted to access the whole forest. Therefore, there is a huge sense of place and attachment.

3. We believe that the proposed development of tourist pods and lodges would have a hugely detrimental effect on the woodland whether they have their own curtilages or are set up within one defined unit. Given tourist expectations, it is highly likely that they will require vehicular access, car-parking, utilities such as electric, water, toilet, laundry, waste disposal etc. None of this can be achieved without destroying those aspects the community finds of value. Development may also impact on the view of the Beacon from the town and surrounding area.

Furthermore, any form of overnight stays will presumably require some form of lighting which will be harmful to the wildlife of the Beacon. *"Given the effects of light on living organisms, it is plausible, and even probable, that introduction of artificial light into the natural light regime will disturb the normal routines of many plants and animals."*ⁱ

Additionally, situated above the town on the front face of the Beacon, this lighting will inevitably shine down and across the town causing unavoidable light pollution.

4. It follows any other type of commercial development could potentially cause similar or greater damage to the forest.
5. Finally, if they are allowed to get approval for small scale development, there is a concern, that they will use that as a precedent for larger schemes, having even greater impact on the community.

PTC's Policy

PTC's policy is much more detailed and descriptive. We can see what they might allow. Although we gather, there was no negotiation between the two parties, we notice that PTC have taken on board a lot of what Lowther said they wanted in their initial meeting they might wish for developments (*for example, a forest school, car parking, cycle tracks, and footpaths etc*). What PTC has excluded is overnight accommodation facilities.

If **all** the potential developments PTC listed were permitted in this specified area, we believe, it would negatively impact the forest. For although in planning terms this may be described as a large area, in relative forest terms (for example compared with Whinlatter or Grizedale), it is not.

Although we want the forest to remain a wild place for future generations and so have reservations on some of the measures the town council has suggested, it appears to us, that they have tried to suggest a compromise between the wishes of the local population, and the landowner.

If you consider, there has to be development of the forest, we are in agreement with the town council's restrictions to their listed potential developments, because we feel they have been carefully considered to minimise damage to the forest. In particular, we agree that any development 'should conserve and enhance the recreational value, biodiversity, heritage and

cultural value, woodland character, important views and contribution of the area to a wider landscape character and sense of place.

We strongly believe that PTC is correct in that any development proposals that would provide accommodation for overnight stays (e.g. chalets, pods or camping) should not be permitted.

Concluding Remarks

Due to the proximity and the importance of the Beacon Hill to Penrith, we feel that any policy to be approved, should not adversely impact on the lives of thousands of local people including current and future generations. We would hope that a Neighbourhood Plan could keep the benefit of the local community uppermost by safeguarding the forest.

ⁱ Artificial Light in the Environment, Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 2009. p14