

Task 3

After watching a video discussing the Park and Ride debate issues, we held our own debate in class to find out how different groups of people might react to a Park and Ride being built in the top part of the Cheddar Gorge. There are a number of groups of people who would be in favour of this scheme including the relatives of accident victims, The National Trust, The Park and Ride employees, and the local Climbers. There are also a number of groups of people who would not be in favour of a Park and Ride scheme including The Longleat Estate, the local shop owners, local residents and, to a degree, The Somerset County Council.

The group with probably the most potent views towards a Park and Ride project are the families of the accident victims. These families have lost people or suffered injury due to the falling rocks from the gorge. So far there have been 3 deaths in the gorge in recent years and numerous injuries from falling rocks. The latest death was that of a young Geology graduate 22 years old called Philip Robinson, there was a death 8 years before that and another, 30 years before. Philip was killed whilst sitting in his car in the High Rocks car park by a rock fall. This car park is run by The Longleat Estate and even with these losses of life they are still encouraging people to park under the cliff faces, well aware of the danger present and not putting up any warning signs. Even now there are still people being hit by falling rocks, in September of 2003 a woman was hit by a rock thought to have fallen from the National Trust side of the gorge. I found out from the West Eye View video that independent Geologists hired by the families have found that the Buns put down by The Longleat Estate to protect people from rock falls in fact make it worse and make it easier for rocks to bounce into the road. The traffic survey I conducted shows that there is a large amount of traffic travelling through the gorge each day, at midday there were 330 vehicles travelling through in one hour. Imagine the amount of people who could be hurt if rocks fell into the road at a peak time such as this.

Another group of people with a strong argument in favour is The National Trust. The National Trust owns the North side of the gorge and believes that the gorge must be preserved for future generations. It has closed some of its car parks next to the cliffs as part of its “duty of care responsibility” to the visitor’s safety. Each year to try and keep the gorge safe there is an annual rock clearance, which involves blasting loose rock and damages the gorge. On the West Eye View video I noticed that to help with stopping rock falls they have introduced a sustainable way of clearing the shrubbery which can cause rock falls by biological weathering (that is the roots finding nooks and crannies in the rock and

widening them, loosening the rock), in the form of goats. This clearance of shrubs also helps to restore the gorge to its former state. In my questionnaire survey I found that 9 out of 10 people will visit the gorge so it is imperative that the gorge is made as safe as possible for visitors, as soon as possible, and to protect the gorge from blasting because of these visitors. The National Trust believes that closing down the gorge to all through traffic and providing a Park and Ride service is a suitable course of action.

The climbers in the gorge also have some poignant views on the subject. They as climbers are aware of the dangers in the gorge from falling rocks and as such have restricted their climbing to the winter months when there are few visitors so that if they dislodge any rocks there is a low chance of hitting anyone. In the West Eye View video they believe that car access should be restricted to help prevent accidents and that the natural erosion of the cliffs is accelerated by the cliff clearance, thereby reducing the life of the cliffs.

The Park and Ride employees have some important views on the subject also. They believe that the cliffs can be saved from further erosion by the Park and Ride service that they wish to give and that there would be no damage from exhaust fumes due to the fact that will use electric buses. There will be stops outside the caves and near the shops so that the local shop owners would not lose custom, and that with no traffic travelling down the gorge (see Traffic survey) the risk to visitors would be drastically reduced.

The group with the most important views against the Park and Ride scheme is the Longleat Estate. The Longleat Estate owns the south side of the gorge and the show caves. In response to the recent deaths incurred by rock falls The Longleat Estate has spent £500 000 on Geotechnical work (West Eye View video) including 300m of bunding, 500m of avalanche fencing and gully catches, along with an annual rock clearance. The spokesperson for The Longleat Estate, Hugh Cornwall, said that their side of the gorge had been made "As safe as I think it is humanly possible" in addition Limestone is a Friable rock and will fall occasionally. He also said that "it is safer to use the current car parks as car parks rather than as picnic areas" in response to criticism over the safety of the car parking and that they have fulfilled their "Duty of care". The Longleat Estate owns the show caves in the gorge and insist that they will lose business if people are unable to park close to the caves at the base of the cliffs. The proposed site of the Park and Ride is 3km from the caves (see location map). In my questionnaire survey I found that 9 out of 10 people will visit the caves and this represents a lot of business that could possibly be lost due to the Park and Ride.

Another group with strong views against the proposal are the Local Residents. The local residents will be seriously inconvenienced by the closure of the road through the gorge and will have to take alternate routes around. These routes will add time to journeys and cost more money in petrol. Normally from the M5 junction 22 get on A38 to Axebridge then A371 to Cheddar, this is a 12km journey (see map). But if the B3135 is closed you have to travel either further along the A38 or the A371. You can travel North to Churchill, a very difficult route (the western route), or travel on the A371 to Wells then north on the A39 then along the B3135 (Eastern route). In addition all the roads along the A371 through the Mendip hills I found out were not suitable for the traffic using an OS map because they are all very steep and they are all lanes. From Cheddar to Wells to Green Ore is 15km whereas direct from Cheddar to Green Ore via the B3135 is only 10km, an increase of 5km.

Another group with an argument against the proposal are the local shopkeepers. The shopkeepers rely on passing trade to keep their businesses afloat and believe that if the parking close to the town at the cliff base will “kill trade stone dead” (West Eye View video).