

SnOasis Report

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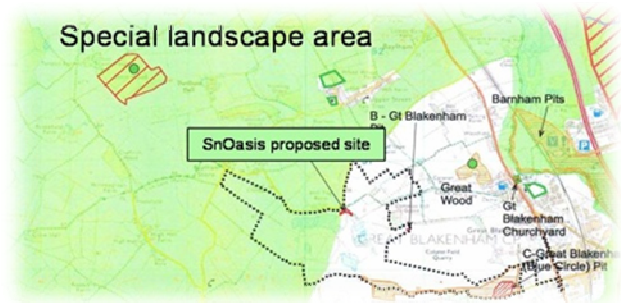
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1.1 Introduction

The site, previously used as a cement works and masons quarry, was purchased in 2001 by Onslow Suffolk Ltd from the Blue Circle cement group. Planning permission for a development known as SnOasis, an indoor winter sports resort, was applied for in 2004 by Onslow Suffolk Ltd. Local planning permission was granted by the local authorities on 21st April 2006, however, a public enquiry was announced on 26th July 2006 which upheld the decision. Government approval was finally granted on 6th November 2008 given that all the conditions were met. This report aims to revisit the decisions made to construct this leisure centre and understand the issues and impact factors faced by the local area.

1.2 The Site

The site is situated in the village of Great Blakenham, Ipswich, Suffolk which is found off junction 52 off the A14. The site is situated near the Gipping Valley Special Landscape Area and over a third of the development will have a direct impact. It has brownfield site status which means that it has a history of industrial usage.



1.3 The Developers

The developers behind SnOasis are a company called Onslow Suffolk Ltd who are based in London. A property company whose managing director is Godfrey Spanner whose majority shareholder is Irish private equity group First Equity Group which has a 70% stake in the development.

1.4 SnOasis

SnOasis is the trading name of Onslow Suffolk Ltd and sits within the leisure and tourism category. SnOasis sets out to be the world's first indoor winter sports resort offering a



variety of indoor and outdoor activities, a new experience of a family holiday. SnOasis say that their development will be Europe's largest indoor ski slope, measuring 415

metres long by 70 metres wide, with a 100 metre vertical drop. The resort itself is branded as a ski village with various different activities such as a cinema and an ice climbing wall inside. This attraction will be unique to the area and UK itself.

1.5 Infrastructure

The site itself was already used as a cement works and has access via the B113. The road was upgraded to 'B' road status by request of Blue Circle as main access to their site. Therefore, a history of heavy traffic has already been established, given this, construction of the site will have little impact on the local transport network. The site is self-contained therefore the actual construction will have no or minimal impact on the surrounding area. SnOasis have approved plans to build a rail link via Liverpool Street Station, London (expected journey time: 70 minutes). Therefore this will attract overseas visitors to the site. The development of this link will disrupt the locals however it will give the local community a valuable link to London and possibly an economic benefit for the local housing market.



1.6 Infrastructure – Local Concerns

- The locals are not confident that the minor 'B' road will not be able to cope with an estimated 850,000 visitors a year.
- They say that the rail link will only serve 8% of visitors and feel that it will be an unnecessary scar on the local countryside.
- The Ski Dubai slope which is half the size of SnOasis and has over 1 million visitors a year compared to SnOasis which project having a mere 850,000. The locals fear that these figures have been given misleadingly so to lower the councils concern.
- They are also worried about the carbon emissions given by the cars and the site itself.
- It has been estimated that over 34,000 tons of Co2 will be created.

1.7 Environmental Issues

Currently, the site is a nature enriched area and has been given a conservation status by Natural England who are the governments body for conservation areas. The site has some very rare species including a pond bat, Great Crested Newts and over 17 sets of badgers. The developers will endeavour to relocate the directly affected wildlife to a 50 acre ecological migration area. In addition, over 130,000 trees are to be planted within the site, this will have environmental benefits as it will reduce SnOasis carbon footprint. Within the site, nature corridors are to be installed. The developers are going to use light deflectors so not to disturb the nocturnal animals. Ponds are to be established for safe nesting sites. A sustainable development policy is to complement the development which includes waste to energy, recycling and prudent use of resources. The developers have ensured the integrity of the environment.



1.8 Environmental Issues – Local Concerns

- The general feeling among local wildlife protection groups feel that the move of such wildlife will not be successful and the remaining wildlife will most probably suffer as a consequence.

- Concern has also been expressed about the welfare of the rare breeds such as the pond bat, great crested newt and badgers and their future.
- The scenic view will be devastated.
- Light and noise pollution is an issue.
- The planting scheme is insufficient.

1.9 Visual Impacts

Every care has been taken in the actual design process of SnOasis to blend in with the local landscape.

2.0 Visual Impacts – Local Concerns

- The huge buildings proposed at SnOasis are planned to soar to the height of over 70 metres above the surrounding land.
- Suffolk is a relatively flat county, but the quarry lies on a ridge making it already higher than much of the area of the Gipping Valley where the site is.
- The huge buildings will be visible from many miles around Suffolk.



2.1 SnOasis and the UK

SnOasis will be the UK's only indoor ski resort and so exclusive to the UK's tourism and leisure industry. Due to the potential influx of tourists to the UK, commerce will almost certainly benefit. This will have a beneficial impact on the local and surrounding community as SnOasis will become one of the major employers in the region. 3,500 people will need to be employed during the construction phase and the operational site will employ 1,800. It will be a significant boost to the local and East Anglian economy. In addition, there will be support industries as a direct result of this development again a benefit to the locals. It provides private investment opportunities. The centre will be used to benefit young people in winter sports and could provide a suitable site for such an event. The transport link will also provide a valuable service not only to the site but give the region further housing development opportunities. East Anglian tourism will benefit from the new visitors to the area as they will not just be confined to the SnOasis village. The location is ideal for UK and overseas visitors. The financial benefits are immense. It will also reduce people's carbon footprint as they may wish to visit this site rather than traveling abroad.

2.2 My Opinion

I feel that SnOasis will be a great addition to the UK's tourist industry as it offers the 'world's first' indoor skiing village. The developers seem to have taken all concerns into consideration whilst planning the site. I like the fact that the village is self-contained and has many other facilities on offer. In this economic crisis, we need major investment to kick start local economies

and I feel that SnOasis would be a good example. Although there are local concerns, I feel that the benefits definitely outweigh the negatives.