

Gareth Johnson
Member of Parliament for Dartford



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

6 January 2022

Rynd Smith
Lead Member of The Examining Authority
The Planning Inspectorate
National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

By email to: LondonResort@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

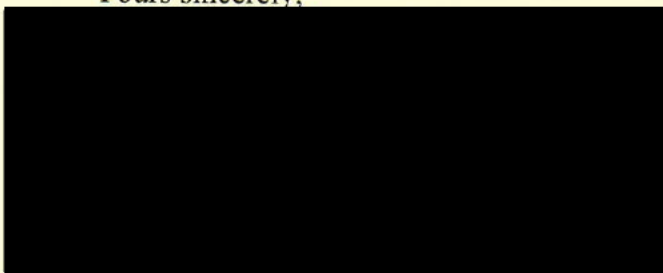
GJ31674/SB

Dear Mr Smith

I write in relation to the London Resort and your request for a response to a series of questions by 10th January 2022 as outlined in your correspondence of 21st December 2021.

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter I have today sent to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP.

Yours sincerely,



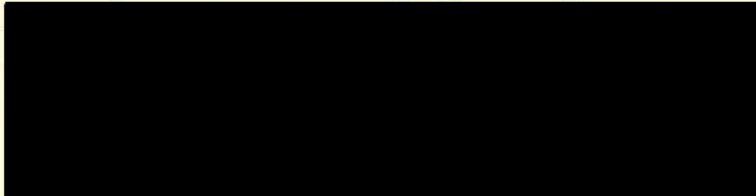


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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities



GJ31674/WJ

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing regarding the above project in my constituency. As you are aware, the London Resort is classified as a NSIP and is therefore dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate as Examining Authority.

The land on which the Theme Park is proposed to be built was designated as an SSSI by Natural England on 10th November 2021. The boundary of the SSSI had only minor changes to the original notification awarded by Natural England on 11th March 2021.

I have always taken a balanced and pragmatic approach to the proposals for the London Resort. There is no doubt that such a project would bring significant investment into the area and create many thousands of jobs both directly and through the wider supply chain. I have also publicly stated my concerns about the environmental impact this project will have, both in terms of the natural environment and increased traffic.

Much of the proposed land required for the theme park is occupied by businesses. These businesses have had the threat of compulsory acquisition hanging over their heads for nearly ten years since the proposal for the theme park was first announced. They have been unable to invest and expand and have no certainty over their future. You will note from the representations received from these businesses to the Planning Inspectorate, the very real problems they have. I have, over the years, visited many of the businesses under threat from the theme park and all desperately need certainty about their future.

In late December 2021, the Lead Member from the Planning Inspectorate changed. The new Lead Member, Rynd Smith, has written to consultees and asked a series of questions about the current timescales in place. These are focused on the examination of the application being unlikely to start before summer 2022. He has asked for a response to these questions by 10th January 2022.

I do not wish to be openly critical of the approach previously taken by the Planning Inspectorate but over recent months there has been increased uncertainty over the timescales involved in this project. London Resort indicated they need more time to finalise plans in light of the SSSI designation and advised the Planning Inspectorate they were unlikely to be able to submit amended material until April/May 2022. The Planning Inspectorate, under the leadership of the previous Lead Member, determined that as a result the examination would be unlikely to commence before June/July 2022.

It is pleasing to see the new Lead Member look again at the timescales in this case. There needs to be a clear deadline set for final submissions by London Resort. It would be wrong to simply accede to a request of submission by April/May 2022. As the new Lead Member has pointed out, this delay is well beyond the DCLG guidance "*which observes that submitted applications for development consent are generally deemed to be ready for Examination and that the pre-Examination period should not normally extend for more than three months.*"

It is understandable that London Resort need time to revise their plans following the designation of the SSSI, the original notification was in March 2021. It is however concerning to see that, according to the Planning Inspectorate in the document linked below: "*the applicant in recent weeks has not provided the ExA with any more than the most basic information about its intentions in respect of possible changes to the application to respond to the SSSI designation. Nor have the requested four weekly updates been provided since September 2021 in a manner that records specific changes or timescales for anticipated changes to the application document set and associated consultation. A partial basis for the ExA's initial agreement to an initial delay included an understanding that the applicant would provide progress reports demonstrating that the extended time was being put to positive use in the public interest. The conduct of the applicant in this respect is also a relevant consideration.*" BC080001-001046-The London Resort PD 21-12-21.pdf (planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

You will also note the recent comments of local council leaders over the conduct of London Resort, expressing concerns over the delays to the project and the lack of engagement from them; London Resort bosses accused of 'failing to engage' with authorities over concerns relating to 'UK's Disneyland theme park' plan (kentonline.co.uk)

The local community must be given clarity on the future of the Swanscombe Peninsula. A final deadline for the submission of plans by London Resort must now be forthcoming and a firm date be given for when the examination will commence. I recognise that you do not have any jurisdiction over the Planning Inspectorate, but I would ask if you agree with me that this project has now reached the point where the examination stage needs to conclude as soon as possible and absolute deadlines be given and complied with.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Planning Inspectorate.

Yours sincerely,

