



Community Council of the Royal Burgh of Peebles & District

23 September 2024

Planning Department
Scottish Borders Council
Council Headquarters
Newtown St Boswells
Melrose
TD6 0SA

Dear Sirs

Letter of support

Reference: Appeal on Decision 23/00524/FUL – Whitebridge Park, Peebles

Peebles Community Council (PCC) strongly supports Irvine Plant Ltd in their application for retrospective change of use and this subsequent appeal of the decision to refuse. Although the decision is technically understandable, it appears that it was made on limited grounds and did not consider the wider issues and mitigating circumstances which in this case are of considerable importance.

The Company

Irvine Plant limited is a well-regarded contracting company operating out of its yard at Whitebridge Park, Peebles. The company bought the premises from a local joiner and building contractor seven years ago and its operations on this site had never generated any complaints from either the local population to the company or to SBC or from SBC itself. Access is directly from the B7062, Peebles, to Cardona Road via a wide entrance with excellent visibility. The company provides unique and vital services to Scottish Borders Council including snow clearing, as well as to other councils and the public. As well as employing 14 permanent staff and up to six others part time, it is important to note that the company has a policy of employing young people and providing training for them that result in nationally recognised Qualifications. The company presently employs three young people under 20 and in the last 5 years, Irvine Plant Limited have spent circa £20,0000 on staff training and



development. For example, in June last, 11 employees were provided with emergency first aid courses.

Peebles Demographics

Although the Peebles “Place Plan” is still in draft form and is yet to be approved by SBC and published it has identified the following which strongly bear on this issue.

- Peebles has a need to increase employment within the town and to generate quality jobs with higher-than-average incomes.
- Peebles is very limited in its employment opportunities
- Peebles youth urgently require opportunities for local employment and advancement.
- Peebles requires more land for a wide mix of industrial uses, but this land is not easy to find and is certainly not currently available.
- Limited job opportunities in Peebles drive people out of the area and increase commuting and car use.

Officer’s Report and Decision to Refuse.

In considering the planning history, it is important to note that the site in question is separate from Cavalry Park and that Cavalry Park’s class 4 status has been subject to many planning approvals for different classes of business. Cavalry Park is also home to Stanley Brash Construction and all construction companies have plant and machinery. Changes of use in Cavalry Park have and continue to set a precedent.

The fact that planning permission for houses was refused some time ago is immaterial and the fact that the application for workshops in 2007 was against recommendation is also immaterial. The application was approved and by implication the planning officers’ recommendation was judged incorrect at that time.

The visual impact noted has been discussed widely amongst Peebles residents recently and the majority of feedback has been positive. Only two respondents demonstrate concern over traffic. Most people consider that the site is ideally situated for this business, not visibly a problem and that little would be needed



to shield it further from view. There are many worse farmyards visible in the countryside. Much has been made about the site detracting from the attractive nature of the entrance to the town. This B Road is not a major entrance to Peebles and isn't of visual note anyway. The officer's report states: [The nature and scale of activity associated with a builder's yard and plant hire business is not one which is appropriate to the rural character of the area. Those developments are instead reasonably suited to sites within the settlement envelope.](#) The former point we have argued against and the latter, we disagree with completely.

The officer's report also states: [The applicant has not advanced any economic or operational need for this location, nor has it been demonstrated that there are no suitable alternatives allocated in the LDP or identified in the employment land audit.](#) We will consider these points later.

The Planning officer states that the "site is greenfield". Patently, this is not correct as it was originally approved for a joiner's business and buildings have stood there for approximately 20 years. Visually, the impact claimed in the report appears exaggerated and could well be mitigated.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that the company and its legal advisors did not identify the class designation issue when the site was purchased. All the present difficulties stem from this. Indeed, had the company not applied for the construction of storage bins and in so doing demonstrated "good faith", then the issue would have remained unknown and in less than three years' time would have been outside the 10 years limitation. The officer's report identifies that the woodland removed amounted to 0.2Ha which is tiny, less than half an acre. The woodland removed included some diseased unsafe broad-leaved trees and scrub. There is no argument that any legislation was breached with the removal of the trees. There is still a woodland barrier between the site and the river Tweed.

We do not say that all the issues identified in the officer's report are incorrect, many are. However, it should be possible, working with the company to provide mitigation and indeed improvements. We believe that approval with suitable conditions is the pragmatic and sensible approach, particularly when the wider implications are considered. Should Irvine Plant hire be forced to vacate this site, then it is very unlikely that any mitigation measure will be taken, and the site will likely remain derelict.



Peebles has few major employers and with around twenty jobs being tied to this company, then Irvine Plant Ltd, can be considered a major employer. Few local companies recruit young people or spend significant monies developing and training them. This company does. This company provides vital services to Scottish Borders Council and reacts quickly to emergency call outs. The existence of the company and its support to SBC has allowed SBC to reduce its permanent staff roll and equipment pool and thereby create substantial savings. The company has invested in snow clearing plant specifically to provide support to SBC in winter. It is not an exaggeration to say that the company plays a vital part in the local economy. The company also provides assistance to SBC and the local flooding resilience group and with the known flood risk, this is deemed essential.

It is also worth noting the part plays within the local community in its support for charitable causes and events as per the appendix.

The decision to refuse the application means that the company must relocate or close. There is nowhere suitable in Peebles or its surrounding area to relocate to. It is this writer's understanding that if upheld, the ruling may be a death sentence for the company. The site, far from returning to woodland will very likely stand empty and visually deteriorate. The judgement, far from making an improvement will damage employment, reduce youth opportunity, cause difficulties for volunteer groups such as the Beltane and put additional pressure on SBC, and achieve little of value. An approval with conditions, can protect these important benefits and just as importantly, reduce the visual impact further, enhance the wildlife corridor and generally improve the ecology of the area.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Maudsley
Chairman



Appendix

List of charitable sponsorships provided by Irvine Plant Ltd in the last year.

- Peebles Rugby Club Season 2024/2025 Sponsorship to cover strips, buses etc. - £3,000.00
- Peebles Colts Rugby 7s Tournament 2024 Sponsorship - £450.00
- Peebles Rovers Football Club Sponsorships for ¼ zip tops for the 2024/2025 & 2025/2026 Seasons - £800.00
- Tweeddale Rovers Football Club Sponsorship - £1,000.00
- Peebles Women's Hockey Club Sponsorship - £500.00
- 'Let's Stop Bullying' Campaign Sponsorship -£670.00
- Peebles Agricultural Society Annual Show 2024 - £50.00
- Gary French Memorial Golf Day Sponsorship - £120.00
- At the beginning of this year Ewan and 5 of our men worked on a Saturday as volunteers to help our local group 'Bonnie Peebles'. They installed 4 new benches, which require concreting into the ground, to make a new seating area at Peebles Swimming Pool.
- Annually Irvine Plant provides vehicles and assistance at our Beltane Festival which is a big week in our calendar.