Submission ID: S99849A4C

The importance of Conisbrough Parks to our running community

1. Conisbrough Runners is a local running group that aims to be welcoming and inclusive, encouraging people of different abilities to enjoy running, improve their physical fitness, support their mental wellbeing and spend time together outdoors.
2. Conisbrough has limited opportunities for safe, accessible, free off-road running away from busy traffic. The public rights-of-way network through Conisbrough Parks is particularly valuable because it allows our members to enjoy the countryside, exercise together and escape the pressures of everyday life.
3. Many of our running routes pass through Conisbrough Parks. Once we have crossed the busy A630, we can use a connected network of bridleways and footpaths, including Conisbrough Parks Bridleways 2, 4, 13 and 14, and Footpaths 3, 4 and 6. These routes allow us to create enjoyable runs of approximately 10 kilometres without repeatedly returning to busy roads.
4. These routes are also shared with walkers, cyclists and horse riders. This is part of what makes the network special. It provides free recreational access to the countryside for different members of the community, helping people stay active and connected.

Rowbotham's Round Rotherham 50-mile race

5. The importance of this network extends beyond our local running group. The long-established Rowbotham's Round Rotherham 50-mile event, which has taken place for decades, follows routes through areas affected by both Whitestone 1 and Whitestone 2.
6. The section from Micklebring through Firsby towards Hooton uses Conisbrough Parks Footpath 4 and Bridleways 14 and 13. These routes form part of a much longer recreational journey and demonstrate the wider importance of the connected public rights-of-way network.
7. We respectfully request that the Examining Authority includes this section of the Round Rotherham route in its site inspection programme, particularly the changing elevations, extensive views and historic landscape experienced by runners.

Peace, tranquillity and the effects of infrastructure

8. One of the greatest benefits of running through Conisbrough Parks is the peace and quiet. Once away from the A630, our members can enjoy the sounds of the countryside rather than traffic and machinery. This provides an opportunity to unwind, talk with fellow runners and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of exercising outdoors.
9. We are particularly concerned about the proposed electrical substation in the vicinity of Conisbrough Parks Bridleway 4, together with the potential operational noise from inverters and transformers elsewhere within the development. We ask the Applicant to identify the locations of this equipment, the predicted noise levels along the public rights of way and whether the assessment properly considers people running or walking past these installations.
10. The prospect of running alongside large areas of solar panels, security fencing, CCTV, access tracks and electrical infrastructure is very different from running through the open countryside we enjoy today. We fear that sections of the network could become enclosed corridors or tunnels between infrastructure, losing the openness, tranquillity and sense of freedom that make these routes attractive.
11. We are also concerned about the construction period, including possible path closures, diversions, construction traffic, noise and disruption. These could prevent our group from using established running routes safely or require us to divert onto roads that are less suitable for group running.
12. Even after construction, the changes to the landscape, potential operational noise and enclosed nature of the routes could mean that our running club no longer considers parts of Conisbrough Parks suitable or enjoyable for its regular activities. The loss of recreational value should not be overlooked simply because a path remains legally open.

Landscape, heritage and changing views

13. Our running routes cross an open, historic Green Belt landscape between Rotherham and Doncaster, with changing elevations and extensive views towards Conisbrough Castle and other important heritage features, including the wider archaeological landscape associated with the Roman villa.
14. We are concerned that the Applicant's selected landscape viewpoints do not adequately represent the continuous experience of runners, walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The views change significantly as people move through the Parks, particularly between elevated locations and lower ground around Firsby.
15. We ask the Examining Authority to consider the cumulative effects of solar panels, fencing, substations, inverters, construction activity and changes to tranquillity along entire recreational journeys, rather than assessing individual viewpoints in isolation.

Request for an accompanied site inspection

16. Conisbrough Runners respectfully requests an accompanied site inspection covering representative sections of our regular 10-kilometre routes and the Round Rotherham 50-mile route between Micklebring, Firsby and Hooton.
17. We particularly ask the Inspectors to visit Bridleway 4 in full which is in the vicinity of the proposed substation and main infrastructure, together with Bridleways 13 and 14 and Footpath 4 and 6 up to Clifton, to understand the existing tranquillity, open views, topography and connected nature of these routes.
18. We would welcome the opportunity to identify suitable viewpoints and explain how the proposed development could affect the practical use of these routes by an inclusive community running group.

Conclusion

19. Conisbrough Parks is an important free recreational resource for our community. It provides opportunities for exercise, social interaction, improved physical and mental wellbeing, and enjoyment of peaceful countryside close to local communities.
20. We are concerned that construction disruption, operational noise and the transformation of open paths into enclosed routes between solar infrastructure could result in our running club being unable or unwilling to continue using parts of this network.
21. We respectfully ask the Examining Authority to examine whether these effects have been adequately assessed and whether the harm to the landscape, tranquillity, heritage setting and recreational value of Conisbrough Parks justifies removing Whitestone 1 from the proposed development.

Submitted on behalf of Conisbrough Runners