

Press information

10 September 2007

National Trust responds to Ministers' statements on Giant's Causeway

The National Trust has expressed grave concern at today's announcement by Environment Minister Arlene Foster that she is 'of a mind to' grant planning permission for an additional visitors centre on a greenfield site beside the Giant's Causeway.

The conservation charity, which owns and provides access to Northern Ireland's only World Heritage Site, said it strongly believes that pursuing a separate, private, planning application for a greenfield development is not the right solution for Northern Ireland's most visited tourist attraction and one of Northern Ireland Tourist Board's signature projects.

The Trust's Director for Northern Ireland, Hilary McGrady said the charity would be astounded if planning permission could be granted to the private developer. Any development so close to the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site – and particularly on previously undeveloped land – would fly in the face of planning policies for the area. Such a decision by the Minister could immediately put the World Heritage Site status of the Giant's Causeway at risk.

Responding also to the statement by the Environment Minister's DUP colleague Nigel Dodds, Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment, Hilary said 'The National Trust has been and remains committed to working with all stakeholders, including Moyle District Council and DETI, to achieve world class, sustainable and economically viable visitor facilities on the existing site at the Causeway, without violating the principle that there should be no further greenfield development in the area.

'A huge amount of money and time has already been invested in working towards an agreed solution to the development of new visitor facilities. If Mr Dodds is saying that the existing stakeholder process is dead, we are very disappointed. We do not believe that the private application currently being considered is the appropriate solution,' Hilary added.

'Given our conviction that a second visitor facility, on a greenfield site, would be wrong and would set a disastrous precedent for development so close to the World Heritage Site, we will now be seeking advice on all our options.'

The Director concluded: 'The over-riding concern for the National Trust is the protection of the World Heritage Site and its setting, and to achieve the right solution for visitors to the site. In this context we remain committed to working with all stakeholders to achieve the right solution.'

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