The Threat to Rural Tourism on The Lizard Peninsula

I have just learnt that the DEFRA Committee will meet on Wednesday to discuss Rural Tourism and that Cornwall Council will be a witness. I would be grateful therefore if you could take the time to read about the proposed threat to our Rural Tourism on The Lizard Peninsula, our sustainable local economy and The Manacles Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). Perhaps you could then question Cornwall Council as to why they seem determined to permit the industrialisation of one of the most remote and protected peninsulas in their care? This will be to the detriment of both the rural tourism and the new sustainable businesses that have grown up in the area – much of which depends upon the quality of the environment. How many times have you booked a holiday in the vicinity of a superquarry?

A Little History:

In August 2015 the disused, small coastal Dean Quarry was purchased by Mark Shorrock of Shire Oak Energy Ltd (also CEO of Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay and associated companies). The last blasting at Dean was back in 2005 before the quarry finally closed its gates in 2008. Mr Shorrock now wishes to reopen and massively upscale productivity from a historic high in the 1980’s of 200,000 tonnes to around 2 million tonnes per annum, this is to provide 30m+ tonnes of rock armour for his proposed fleet of tidal lagoons. This will effectively create a superquarry within an AONB and the quarry also abuts The Manacles MCZ where Mr Shorrock wants to build new harbour installations and breakwater on an enormous scale reaching out across this inshore MCZ to facilitate the 24/7 loading and transportation of rock to Wales. The building of Tidal Lagoons however does NOT depend on rock from Dean Quarry, alternative sources of rock are available from existing coastal superquarries. In this day and age we should all be in favour of renewable energy sources but the green credentials of the lagoons will be blighted if they wreck environmental and economic havoc elsewhere.

A modern quarry of the size proposed will only provide around 12 jobs at the quarry (not all local), with the profits leaving Cornwall. While historic, small time quarrying has been welcome in the past, nowadays increased rural tourism and new clean businesses such as The Cornish Sea Salt Co. and The Cornish Seaweed Co., situated beside the old quarry, who between them employ more than 50 people and would like to expand, are helping to provide a sustainable future with long-term, local employment. The sustainable jobs directly put at risk by the re-opening and supersizing of Dean Quarry far, far outnumber those on offer at Dean Quarry.

Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay is currently awaiting the outcome of the Hendry Review and negotiations with the Government over the CfD and loan that it will require to make it attractive to investors. We are well aware however that even if the tidal lagoons are not given the public subsidy to make them financially viable that we will still be under threat as there are numerous other projects on the horizon that may require rock armour.

This development, if permitted, will result in the industrialisation of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and of course the adjacent Marine Conservation Zone. There are also Special Areas of Conservation (SAC’s) on each side of The Manacles and the recently extended Lizard Natural Nature Reserve nearby. The proposed quarry
development is close to the Trebarveth Scheduled Monument, a prehistoric and medieval field system and saltworks from the 2nd Century. Historic England consider that there is the potential for the harm to be significant to this site due to its close proximity and The Rt. Hon. Greg Clark, agreed with this conclusion. The impact of this industrialisation cannot be overestimated, both the seascape and landscape would be disrupted by the intrusion of a man made excavation with associated quarry and marine works on a vast scale, doing irretrievable environmental damage to this area, both at land and at sea. The damage to the natural attractions above will in turn have a catastrophic effect on our rural tourism which has increased greatly over the last decade since the quarry ceased working.

Rural Tourism:

Tourism on The Lizard takes the form of quiet, rural tourism which works in harmony with nature and depends upon the protected status of its environment. There are no vast hotels, fun parks or night clubs, instead we offer holidaymakers peace, clean air, dark skies, beautiful landscapes, glorious beaches, a stunning marine environment and the South West Coast Path National Trail (Lonely Planet now rate this as one of the best walks in the world). Surely Cornwall Council cannot believe that, under any circumstances, we should trade this in for noise, air pollution, a scarred landscape and loss of our marine biodiversity?

If this development goes ahead we are likely to lose much of the area’s tourism which is currently the main source of income and one which has increased over the past decade, and now extends throughout all the seasons with many people preferring to holiday during the quieter months. This in turn enables many previously purely seasonal businesses to remain open throughout the year, even if on reduced hours.

The Lizard is unique and that is why our visitors return year after year, we are very proud of our environment. Cornwall Council should be proud too. Fewer visitors will equal less money in the local economy, less expenditure on accommodation, on food and drink, in the general shops, windsurfing, kayaking etc. etc., that then has a knock on effect on the money available to be spent on property maintenance, accountants, website designers, garden centres etc. Tourism here has a very low impact on the environment and returns the revenue generated directly to the community.

One or two bad reviews on Trip Advisor regarding noise from blasting, heavy machinery and the loading of the rock armour into metal ships and barges 24/7 to suit the quarry will not only decimate tourism in the immediate area (Coverack, St. Keverne and the adjacent hamlets) but will have a negative effect on the whole of the Lizard Peninsula which will inevitably become associated with the new superquarry in people’s minds. Indeed the knock on effect may be felt further afield as our holidaymakers visit attractions around the county.

When the Prime Minister, David Cameron and his Chancellor unveiled the Government’s Long Term Economic Plan for the South West early in 2015 one of the main points was “to support the tourism sector to draw more people to the south-west’s beautiful countryside and coastlines, with the aim of increasing the number of annual overseas visits to the south-west to 3 million by 2020, creating around 7,000 more jobs”. How exactly are Cornwall Council planning to achieve this on The Lizard?
Local business turnover supported by tourism (figures from 2014) is worth over £51m per year to the TR12 postcode area (Lizard Peninsula) with more than 1,000 jobs directly generated by it. The estimated local gross wage income is over £13m. This makes Mr Shorrock's claim that his plan to re-open Dean Quarry is worth £190m to Cornwall over 20 years look ludicrous – the figures above show that in the same time frame tourism is worth in excess of £1b to The Lizard Peninsula ALONE. We cannot afford to let this development decimate these figures with the loss of many of the associated jobs.

The half way point of The South West Coast Path is near the quarry, indeed the Coast Path passes through the outer edge of Dean Quarry which will have to be closed to walkers while blasting takes place and there will be health and safety issues about the quarry traffic crossing the footpath to allow for the proposed loading of the ships and barges. In 2012, following investment through the Rural Development Programme, detailed research showed that the SW Coast Path brings £439m into the South West region (up from £15m in 1990) and this sustains nearly 10,000 jobs.

There are some people who think that tourism is a dirty word, not a proper industry, and they hark back to Cornwall’s mining and quarrying heritage calling them the “good old days”. The truth however is that those times were not so good for the majority – think lung disease, accidental injury/death, extreme poverty and big profits for the few (no change there then!). Although there is still one small working quarry in the area, The Lizard itself has never been heavily industrialised and Cornwall Council need to accept that nowadays the Tourist Industry is hugely important to Cornwall, they should embrace and support it (as they do in Wales and elsewhere), along with all the offshoot businesses that depend on it for their survival. Long before the issue of the superquarry reared its head we had always found that, compared to other parts of the UK, Cornwall Council has been somewhat half hearted about encouraging tourism and seem to be content to rest on their laurels from days gone by. This simply is not enough in the digital age where people want to be able to find everything on-line without expending too much effort.

The Manacles MCZ and their added value to Rural Tourism:

The Manacles Marine Conservation Zone abutting Dean Quarry is one of the original 27 designated by the government in November 2013, well after the quarry was last worked. The Manacles are renowned for their fast flowing tidal currents and clear waters which are home to a great biodiversity of marine life including protected species such as pink maerl and sea fans. Cetaceans such as the protected Harbour Porpoise, Risso and Bottlenose Dolphins and Grey Seals are all seen regularly in the waters just off Dean Quarry, they use the ebbing tide on The Manacles Reef to feed. Minke Whales are seasonal visitors and this is one of the UK’s four top hot spots for seeing Basking Sharks. Recent research shows that cetaceans, particularly the Harbour Porpoise are very susceptible to underwater noise and may well be driven away. Yet all this is an added incentive for people to holiday here and visitors are truly awestruck to be able to see these creatures in their natural habitat, our holidaymakers often tell us that it is the highlight of their stay. Dr Lindsay Dodds of The World Wildlife Fund UK describes The Manacles as the “Jewel in the Crown of Britain’s MCZs”.

Surely Cornwall Council should want to promote The Manacles MCZ as another aspect of rural tourism here and protect it for future generations?

The Manacles has a notorious reputation and is the site of over 100 historic wrecks such as The John which went down in 1855, The SS Mohegan, The Andola, The Spiridian Vagliano and The HMS
Primrose. This is an extremely treacherous shipping area so ships and unmanned barges all laden with rock armour navigating the Inner Manacles several times a week, in all but the calmest seas, is surely an accident waiting to happen with the oil spillage causing pollution along the coastline – again this would threaten tourism in the area.

These famous shipwrecks have led to another tourist attraction - diving. Porthkerris Divers is just around the corner from Dean Quarry and The Manacles and there are other centres around The Lizard as well. The diving community says that the clarity of the water and visibility on The Manacles Reef has increased substantially since Dean Quarry finally ceased operating in 2008 and the clear dust free atmosphere unquestionably play a role in the abundance of the marine life found there. This has become a popular training area for university clubs and schools and nowadays people come from around the globe to experience the world class diving around the wrecks and reefs of The Manacles. This niche tourist trade in turn feeds many other local businesses, without a doubt the increasing popularity of The Manacles as a tourist destination has had a massive economic benefit to the local economy.

The Manacles has for centuries been an area used by local fishermen and is an important and now flourishing Sea Bass breeding ground (nationally stocks of this fish are already in peril), this massive development will have a detrimental effect not only on the Bass but also on other fish, crab and lobster stocks which currently provide a viable living for local fishermen, who with the improvement in the water quality, are now slowly growing in number. Their income is boosted by sales to holidaymakers and by providing fishing trips for them.

Other issues surrounding the potential Superquarry that will affect Rural Tourism

Since Dean Quarry was last operational there has been much research done into health issues around the microscopic PM2.5 particulates which the WHO believe to be a ‘major cancer risk’. It would be highly inappropriate therefore to elevate Dean to a superquarry so close to residential communities and primary school regardless of the effect that the associated dust and noise pollution will have on the tourist trade.

The infrastructure in this area is simply not suitable for this scale of development. The narrow, single track country lanes struggle with the tourist traffic, they will not be able to cope with the increase in quarry traffic and the size of the trucks and tankers.

Astronomer Bob Mizon, MBE, FRAS, co-ordinator of British Astronomical Association’s Commission for Dark Skies, has expressed concern about light pollution from the proposed Dean Superquarry saying “The loss of rural dark skies is as damaging to the rural quality of life and tranquillity as are more conventional and less measurable issues of visual intrusion, and this fact is too often not taken into account when assessing environmental impacts. The number of sites in the UK where dark night skies, free from excessive light pollution, may be found is shrinking, we would earnestly request that environmental concerns should in this case over-ride arguments for industrial expansion into the countryside, and that our heritage of starry skies above should be a priority in this matter”. Our holidaymakers love the dark skies – especially as most of them live in cities and it is something that they can rarely experience.
Roskilly’s Organic Farm, adjacent to the quarry, is a much loved family business welcoming around 50,000 visitors per annum. They have 35 permanent employees rising to 60 employees in the summer and a £700,000 wage bill that goes straight into the local economy. They are famous for their ice creams, children can watch the cows being milked or walk around the ponds before having a meal. Their trade would be devastated by a superquarry and the jobs there would gradually disappear. The quarry traffic would have to go along the narrow rural lane through their farm, between their car park and restaurant, with literally only inches to spare. You would no longer wish to sit outside there to enjoy a meal or an ice cream. Just between Roskilly’s, Cornish Sea Salt Co. and Cornish Seaweed Co. 85 – 110 truly local jobs may be at immediate risk which makes the offer of a few jobs for less than 20 years at the quarry look insignificant by comparison.

Nearby farmers are very concerned about the dust settling across their fields and have worries about the cattle ingesting the PM2.5 particulates. There have been no studies to show how this might affect both the animal’s health and their milk yet 4,000,000 litres of milk per annum are produced within a mile of the quarry – much of it organic. Currently we have a thriving monthly farmer’s market in St. Keverne that holidaymakers love and it is local events like this that all add value to rural tourism.

Our MP Derek Thomas is firmly in support of us and says that we are right to object to the huge upscaling of a dormant quarry for use in the Swansea Tidal Lagoon. His statement in August 2015 says “Why am I convinced that the Dean Super Quarry idea is not super at all? Because I have not yet seen any evidence that proves that the proposed breakwater, jetties and manoeuvring activity of the barges will not have a catastrophic impact on the Marine Conservation Zone. I have not seen evidence that the new jobs created at Dean Quarry will adequately compensate for the negative impact on the local tourism industry and the many families that rely on tourism to earn an income. I am not satisfied that enough has been done to understand the extent of the air pollution, noise and light pollution that is inevitable and I am convinced that there is a more suitable, competitive source of rock available for the Swansea Tidal Lagoon elsewhere. For years, as our core industries have declined including farming and fishing, we have been encouraged to diversify and find new ways to make a living. The community of St Keverne Parish has done this and it would be more than a slap in the face to compromise this good work now”.

Cornwall Council should also be aware that if they permit this industrial development it will compromise the very essence of marine conservation. The Manacles MCZ will be a test case for the integrity of the protected status of the whole of the MCZ system and if allowed to fail we must assume therefore that any MCZ is expendable.

Supersizing Dean Quarry will turn a thriving community that has worked hard to attract rural tourism and the sustainable local economy that it supports, into a blighted backwater with high unemployment. Cornwall Council should be asked just how they can equate their support of Mr Shorrock’s proposed superquarry with the challenge of promoting Rural Tourism on the Lizard Peninsula?

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