

Peat digging approval 'is a giant leap in the dark'

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Plans to dig 20,000 tonnes of peat from the Somerset Levels have been approved despite opposition.

The decision by the Somerset County Council Regulation Committee to give peat firm Durston's Garden products the go-ahead to dig the Cradlebridge site near Glastonbury was made on September 2. The site covers approximately 30 hectares (a hectare is equivalent to 10,000 square metres or 2.471 acres), with around 24 hectares designated for peat extraction.

Residents living near the site have opposed the plans because they fear they will cause subsidence and damage to the landscape and their properties, as well as contributing to climate change through the release of greenhouse gases caused by the digging of peat.

Former mayor of Glastonbury Tom Billing, who spoke against the plans at the regulation board meeting, said: "It is too close to where people live.

"The planning application will, in the long-term, end up with Manor Farm (the home of Briony Lazirides) being surrounded on three sides by water.

"They dig down to clay and use it to fill a bund to stop water seeping out of the surrounding farmland but this has not worked in trials in a ditch near the proposed dig.

"The decision was passed on less

than convincing evidence and there seemed to be confusion in several areas. What they have done at the stroke of a pen is condemn Briony Lazirides to having her house surrounded by water and put the surrounding farmland at risk of drying out.

"The Sharpham and Glastonbury parish clerk spoke out against the peat digging plans at the meeting and MP for Wells Tessa Munt wrote a letter supporting the opponents of the plans, which was presented to the committee, saying the plans were not in line with government policy.

"Experts on the panel did not give a firm commitment that the digging would not affect the surrounding land and property.

"The measures to prevent damage sound convincing on the face of it but no one even knew if there was clay there and it seems it would be years before a bund was put in place, by which time it would be too late.

"The quality of the land for grazing will drop immediately. The regulation committee should bow their heads in shame. The decision is a giant leap in the dark."

Local farmer Henry Tinney of Cradlebridge Farm has also been an opponent to the Durston's peat digging plans.

He is concerned that it will dry out his land and cause subsidence to his home and farm buildings.

Derek Yeomans, chairman of the Regulation Committee, said: "The county council's Regulation Committee considered and refused planning permission for a similar peat extraction proposal at this site in 2007, as we weren't convinced that the development would adequately protect adjoining water tables and would not have a harmful effect on the stability of neighbouring land and property.

"That decision was upheld on appeal. Since then, extensive field tests and assessments have been undertaken and checked rigorously.

"In the views of officers and the committee, these documents robustly demonstrated and convinced us that subject to the implementation of certain physical measures, some of which have been improved to enhance the boundary protection measures and further mitigate risk, no effects on land and property stability or water tables beyond the site should be felt, and the residual risks to neighbouring properties will be reduced to an insignificant level."

Fancy a cuppa to help a good cause?

A leading cancer charity is urging people in Somerset to help raise £8.3 million - by taking part in the World's Biggest Coffee Morning.

Macmillan Cancer Support wants people across surrounding areas to take part in the event to help raise millions of pounds to fund local cancer services.

In 2009 there were 900 Macmillan coffee mornings held across both counties raising a total of £130,000.

But this year the charity is hoping more people will hold a coffee morning to help fund local cancer services.

Macmillan's fundraising manager for Somerset, Claire Allen, said: "Macmillan is there to help from the



Macmillan's fundraising manager for Somerset, Claire Allen, promotes the World's Biggest Coffee Morning on top of Glastonbury Tor

moment someone is diagnosed with cancer and the support we provide is vital.

"Our doctors and nurses offer specialist medical care and emotional support,

while our benefits advisors help cancer patients get the government money they are entitled to.

"We have just agreed to fund two Macmillan benefits advisors based at Yeovil District Hospital along with another advisor to cover West Dorset. Macmillan helps to provide grants to people with cancer who are struggling financially.

"All the services we offer are essential, and we rely on the money raised from events like the World's Biggest Coffee Morning to fund them.

To take part in the World's Biggest Coffee Morning on Friday, September 24, go to www.macmillan.org.uk/coffee or call 0845 070 1315.

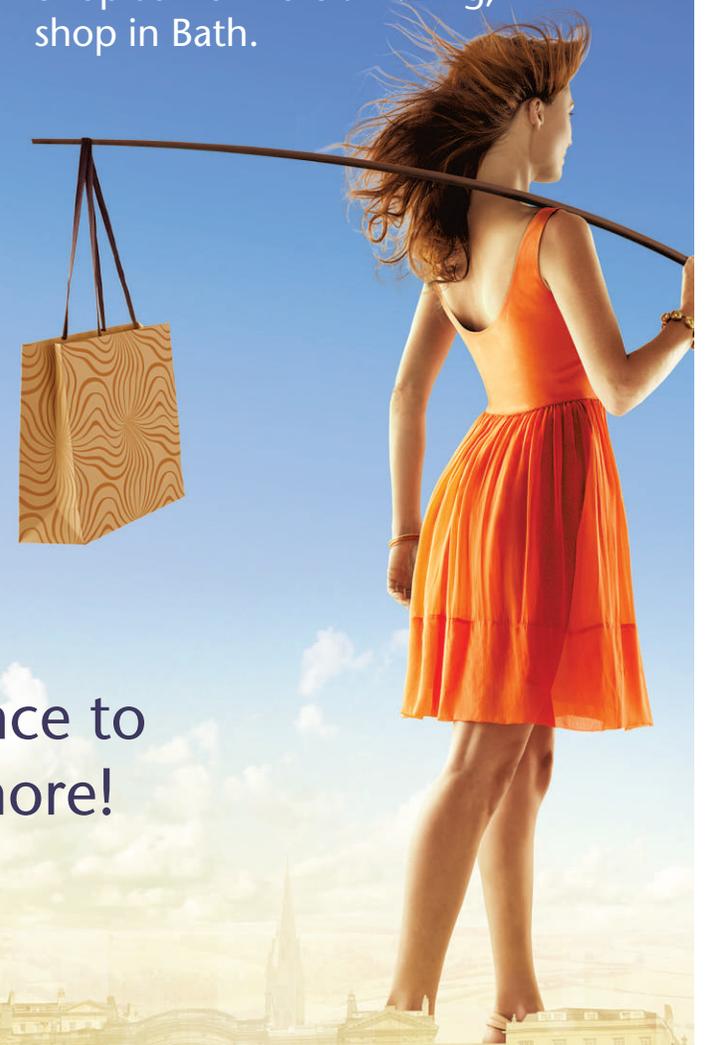


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