

Damhead and Old Pentland residents in new warnings over company behind Planning Appeal for controversial "film studio" and power plant

- for immediate release -

20th February 2017 - Campaigners (1) against a proposed film studio and power plant on greenbelt land in old Pentland, Damhead warn that company directors behind this plan have been involved in multiple company bankruptcies.

Their investigations of Companies House records (2) have revealed that two of the directors of the property company PSL Land Ltd had previously been directors of five different companies at the time they were declared insolvent.

The original planning application for a film studio on prime agricultural land in Old Pentland, Damhead was submitted by Pentland Studios Ltd. However, a legally separate company PSL Land Ltd then appealed against Midlothian Council's delays in deciding on the application. A decision will now be made by Scottish Ministers. PSL Land Ltd's sole purpose is the "buying and selling of own real estate" (3). They claim to have been behind the film studio planning application from the start, stating that Pentland Film Studios had appeared on the application by mistake (4).

One of PSL Land's directors, James O'Donnell was director of two companies; one a consultancy and the other a property retail firm when they were declared insolvent (5). O'Donnell is also a director of Pentland Film Studios. Another PSL Land director, Phillip John Myerscough, was director of three other firms when those became insolvent (6).

Local resident Nathalie Holbrook said: "We hope that Scottish Ministers will look carefully at who is behind the planning proposal at Old Pentland, Damhead and refuse this application. Although local residents have been opposed to the plans from the outset, we appreciate that some people had originally been taken in by Pentland Studio's claims that they could deliver a large film studio. But there is no rationale for granting a planning appeal by a property retail company with no links to the arts. Doing so would make a travesty of the planning system".

Daya Feldwick from FoE Midlothian added: "Nothing should be built on Jim's farm; it is not worth losing for any other facility which could be provided elsewhere. The land in question has been farmed for over one hundred years by a family who fear eviction should this development be approved. Especially with the increasing threat of climate change and local food being one of the priority areas of the new 2017 'Good Food Nation' Bill" (6), it would be a tragedy for Edinburgh and Midlothian if prime agricultural land and soil was sacrificed for the sake of a questionable retail venture led by directors, some of whom have a long record involving company bankruptcies."

Mary Begbie, daughter of Jim Telfer, said "Gaining planning permission in principle will not secure the national film studio for Scotland. My family have made clear our intention to remain on the smallholding where we have lived and worked for over 100 years, and we are going to fight for our right to remain if necessary to the utmost. Why is government pushing for this film studio on agricultural land if other options are available, such as the Film Studio at Heriot-

Watt University Research Park which is commercially zoned land available for development now?"

Comments on the appeal have raised serious concerns over the suitability of the site at Old Pentland, Damhead for this development, as well as planning law and procedural improprieties.

Clare Symonds from Planning Democracy states: "Many communities across Scotland find themselves in similar situations, fighting controversial developments which are contrary to the Local Development Plan. The Government is currently putting a great deal of emphasis on ensuring communities get involved more proactively in their local development plans, but are not giving them any rights to challenge decisions that may run contrary to that plan at a later stage (7). Situations such as these only serve to create further distrust in the Government and the way development decision making occurs in Scotland. Unless the Government give communities real rights the situation will not improve."

Notes:

(1) Damhead and District Community Council, Protect Damhead's Greenbelt, Friends of the Earth Midlothian, Biofuelwatch, Planning Democracy

(2) The information in this press release related to Pentland Studios Ltd and PSL Land Ltd is based on records published by Companies House:
<https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/search/companies?q=> (website last accessed 1st February 2017)

(3) <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/SC491629>

(4) See the planning documents available at <https://planning-applications.midlothian.gov.uk/OnlinePlanning/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>, Ref 15/00364/PPP: those show that the original application was by Pentland Studios Ltd, and the Appeal by PSL Land Ltd. They include a letter submitted by the developer's Agent in July 2015 (uploaded 6th July 2015), which states that Pentland Studio Ltd's had been named as the applicant due to "an honest mistake" and that PSL Land Ltd should be regarded as the applicant. Although Midlothian Council did not agree to change the applicant's name, PSL Land Ltd subsequently lodged the planning appeal now being considered by Scottish Ministers.

(4) James O'Donnell was director of OPM Management Services (previously Prestonmill Ltd), an architectural and technical consultancy which became subject to a successful petition for insolvency in 2005. He was also a director of Senate (Haggs Road) Ltd, who went into administration in 2008. James O'Donnell holds "significant control" at PSL Land Ltd, through his shareholdings.

(5) Phillip John Myerscough was a director of Lower London Road Developments LLP, who went into administration in 2009. He was a director of Coopersknowe Developments LLP, who also went into administration in 2009, and of Reston

Developments Ltd (formerly Pacific Shelf Ltd), who went into administration in 2012.

(6) Becoming a Good Food Nation recognises the need to move towards a healthier, resilient and sustainable food system: [gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Food-Industry/national-strategy/good-food-nation](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Food-Industry/national-strategy/good-food-nation)

(7) The Scottish Government's Planning Review consultation is running until 4th April:

beta.gov.scot/publications/places-people-planning-consultation-future-scottish-planning-system/