Tree Top Trek / Zip World

I make this statement in support of an application for planning permission to erect a new fence around Zip World, formerly known as Tree Top Trek.

My name is Ben Lough and I am the Anti-social Behaviour Service Manager for Manchester City Council. Part of my role has involved close oversight of the anti-social behaviour problems that have been reported at Tree Top Trek over the years. I have been a Team Leader since 2017, and a Service Manager since 2020, and Tree Top Trek has always been on the agenda. The pressure from partner agencies and stakeholders has always been requesting that a more robust fence be installed so as to prevent the repeated trespass on site.

The current fence is not fit for purpose and a child can easily access the site. The fact that it is basically a free adventure playground for them obviously adds to the attraction.

The reports have included, threats, racist abuse, verbal abuse, weapons, refusing to leave, criminal damage, dangerous risk-taking behaviour, inappropriate behaviour and overall, massive safeguarding risks for the children who persistently enter the site.

I have chaired a multiagency meeting involving Parks, GMP, Tree Top Trek, and Mitie Security since May 2021, with the sole purpose of getting all the relevant stakeholders to agree to invest in a new, more robust fence. Whilst this process has been ongoing, we have had to put pressure on all stakeholders to make significant changes to the security and safety of the site, make alterations to the nets/course so as to limit access to the height risks, increase security patrols, CCTV, lighting, and get legal advice on corporate liability for site.

Since April 2021, we have opened 40 ASB cases related to issues at the site. This is disproportionately high for one business premises. As a result, this is a large demand generator for our service. For every case opened, we may be required to try to identify a large number of children or young adults from the images captured, and then liaise with GMP and local schools to see if we can identify the children who are putting themselves at risk. If we are able to identify them, we would then write to their parents and invite those individuals to a warning interview.

Since April 2021 we have completed 58 interventions for individuals associated with ASB at Tree Top Trek.

In light of these statistics and the current situation, I wholly support the application to improve the fence line for Tree Top Trek so as to reduce the likelihood of children and young adults being able to access the course. This will reduce the likelihood of anyone coming to harm and will also reduce the need for all of the current security measures.

Signed:

Ben Lough

Dated: 1/7/23