



Fao James/Tom Givons
Bucklands Farm
Brantridge Lane
Balcombe
RH17 6JT

29th August 2025

Dear James/Tom

Re:- Retrospective planning application for Glamping Pods in woodland at Bucklands Farm, Balcombe, RH17 6JY – Planning Ref: DM/22/1556

Further to your recent request I carried out a site visit at the above site on the 3rd April 2025 to determine if the recent placing of 2no glamping pods within woodland will have any detrimental effects to the Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) known as Burchett's Wood.

The retrospective planning application cited above is for consent to continue the placement of 2no glamping pods and associated works in relation to that use.

THE SITE

Burchett's Wood is a typical mixed deciduous woodland often found in the Wealden area of East Sussex. The species composition is a mix of English Oak, Ash, Hazel, Field Maple and other minor species. There is an extensive network of established forestry tracks throughout the woodland, most surfaced with recycled road plannings or crushed rubble. It is clear that the woodland has been regularly managed for timber and coppice products for some considerable time with evidence of felling during the last war (in-situ stumps) which would have harvested all mature Oaks and Ash. The present level of Oak and Ash timber standards is classified as 'Early Mature'; no tree within the wood seen during my site visit could be considered as 'Ancient' or Veteran'. However, Natural England has classified this woodland as an 'Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) due to continuous existence and use of the wood since circa 1660. This may be seen on their on-line mapping tool 'Magic Maps'

The two glamping pods (Photo1) were placed on a simple steel frame laid directly on the woodland floor adjacent to existing forestry tracks. The surrounding decking is supported on simple 4" x 4" wooden posts set into the ground. Ancillary services are provided without the need for excavation into the woodland floor. For constructional details please refer to the report by 'Glampitect' that forms part of this planning application.

Burchett's Wood and the adjacent woodland has recently been the subject of extensive forestry operations to remove Ash trees infected with 'Ash Dieback' caused by the fungus (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and conifers infected with Spruce Bark Beetle (*Dendroctonus micans*). The use of heavy forestry machinery to achieve these essential operations has caused substantial damage to the woodland floor and associated flora through heavy compaction of the soils (Photos 2 -4). The shrub understorey in these areas has also been substantially destroyed by these operations.

Standing Advice issued to LPA planners by Natural England and UK Gov in relation to planning applications that are within or in close proximity to any ASNW states that adverse effects of any development should be avoided. These are set out in ***“Direct effects of development can cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees by:***

damaging or destroying all or part of them (including their soils, ground flora or fungi)

damaging roots and understorey (all the vegetation under the taller trees)

damaging or compacting soil

damaging functional habitat connections, such as open habitats between the trees in wood pasture and parkland

increasing levels of air and light pollution, noise and vibration

changing the water table or drainage

damaging archaeological features or heritage assets

changing the woodland ecosystem by removing the woodland edge or thinning trees - causing greater wind damage and soil loss”

Present guidance from UK.Gov in their guidance to planners on **“How to assess a planning application when there are ancient woodland, ancient trees or veteran trees on or near a proposed development site”**.

Includes the following advice:-

“When making planning decisions, you should consider:

- conserving and enhancing biodiversity*
- avoiding and reducing the level of impact of the proposed development on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees*

You should refuse planning permission if development will result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees unless both of the following applies:

- there are wholly exceptional reasons*
- there’s a suitable compensation strategy in place (this must not be a part of considerations of wholly exceptional reasons) - see paragraphs 33 and 34 of the [planning practice guidance](#) on compensation guidance*

You should make decisions in line with paragraph 180 (c) of the NPPF.

Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees are irreplaceable. Therefore, you should not consider proposed compensation measures as part of your assessment of the merits of the development proposal”

The advice given above is entirely appropriate for developments as it is usually understood in the construction of new homes or other substantial structures where any woodland may be permanently lost or damaged. However, in this instance and given the extensive damage already caused by forestry operations any concerns about loss or deterioration fade into the background. The focus should now be on how this application provides an opportunity to substantially improve the present condition of the wood and restore the diversity that has been lost by the recent work. The placing of these two pods on a steel frame directly onto the woodland floor, in my opinion, does not fall into the category of loss or destruction.

The steel frames to support the pods are approx. 4m x 3m (12 sq metres) in area and are surrounded by raised timber decking supported on timber posts. This area, in relation to the overall area of woodland, is ‘de minimis’ and will not result in any overall deterioration of the woodland. Vehicular access to the pods is by established forestry tracks and did not require the construction of any new trackway.

However, as set out below there are a number of significant factors that mitigate or entirely negate the potential for adverse effects on this ASNW by the placing of the glamping pods.



Photo 1 – Glamping pods with associated decking adjacent to existing forestry track.

The present cabins and established trackways do not fragment the ASNW beyond that as established by historical usage. The access tracks are not wide, approx. 3m, and lie within the footprint of the pre-existing hardcore tracks used for forestry purposes. The earlier rubble surfacing may very well have generated significant levels of dust during the summer months which is usually described as an adverse effect on ASNW. The present scalping surfacing will significantly reduce the potential for dust/pollution generation.

At the time of my initial site visit I could see no evidence of recent tree felling to enable the placing of the pods; accordingly, the tree canopy had not been disturbed or diminished thereby maintaining the biodiversity within the woodland canopy.

As there has been no recent excavation of the soil horizons immediately adjacent to the pod locations or the trackways, the soil of the ASNW remains substantially undisturbed.

The new pods have been located on a steel framework placed directly on the pre-existing soil surface and thus no additional excavations into the original soil horizon adjacent to the pods was necessary. The surrounding decking is supported on timber posts which has created a dark shelter underneath the deck. This is an attractive habitat for many inhabitants of the woodland by providing a sheltered environment for many species and adds to the diversity of ecological niches within the woodland.

The new pods do have exterior lighting, but these are located so that the cone of light is directed down to the floor, thus unlikely to have an adverse effect on any foraging bat population. This view, is of course, subject to agreement from an ecologist.

No archaeological features or heritage assets have been damaged by the recent work.

There will be no public access to the woodland other than by the users of the pods. Thus, the potential for public access to the woods and associated disturbance is not increased over and above previous levels.

HARVESTING DAMAGE

The recent clearance of diseased Spruce was carried out as a statutory requirement by the Forestry Commission to control this notifiable pest. The Ash trees, infected with Ash Die Back, was removed on safety grounds as this species, from time of infection, rapidly becomes structurally unsafe. Harvesting was carried out with the use of heavy forestry vehicles in both the felling and extraction operations. This has caused extensive and significant damage to the woodland floor as may be seen in Photos 2 – 4 at the end of this report. This harvesting has destroyed a large part of the woodland soil structure and associated flora with undoubted adverse effects on invertebrates and small mammals.

Whilst there is an obligation imposed by the Forestry Commission to carry out some re-planting of trees removed, this is fairly limited and will not satisfactorily compensate for the loss or damage to the existing woodland. Thus, there is an opportunity to draft and implement a detailed woodland management plan to both mitigate the recent damage and ensure continuing improvements to the woodland soil structure. This can be assured by a reasonably worded planning condition attached to any planning consent.

SUMMARY

From the evidence seen of my site visit and the discussion above it may be seen that the feared negative impacts on the ASNW from the siting of the pods have not been realised.

No tree felling or removal of shrub understory has taken place to permit the siting of these pods. The overall connectivity of the woodland area had been maintained following placement of the pods.

There has been no loss or deterioration of the woodland by the placing of the pods , especially when compared to the extensive damage caused by harvesting operations.

The integrity of the tree roots surrounding the pods remains intact.

Any compaction of soils under the pods is minimised by the steel frame being placed directly on the soil surface and the decking supported on timber posts.

Due to the small area covered by the pods there will be no change to the hydrology of the local area.

No archaeological or heritage features were damaged.

There have been no changes to the woodland ecosystem by removing woodland edges. Tree thinning has, by default, been carried out by the recent harvesting operations.

The adverse effects on the ASNW, as listed within planning guidance has not been realised. The recent removal of the Ash within the woodland has substantially destroyed the majority of the soil horizons making any adverse effects by the pods diminish into insignificance.

It stands therefore that the usual constraints on development activity on or near ASNWs do not fully apply in this circumstance but should be looked at in light of 'ground truth'. From this it may be seen that the impact on the ASNW by the placing of the two pods is 'de minimis', especially when compared to the levels of recent damage by harvesting operations.

For these reasons, we consider that any objection to this application due to adverse effects on the ASNW is not substantiated and should not attract weight in the determination of this application.

Yours sincerely

David Archer | Practice Principal | M.Arbor.A.

Photos



Photo 2 – Damage following Ash clearance.



Photo 3 – Soil compaction and destruction of ground flora.



Photo 4 – extensive destruction of ground flora and fauna.