

**ref: 325/PS:****Planning Statement****Worth Forest Glamping, High Street, Balcombe, West Sussex, RH17 6QG****1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this planning statement is to support the application for the variation/removal of condition No.3 on Planning permission ref: DM/16/3532, 'No tents shall be on the site between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> March' in the succeeding year, to allow year-round (12 month) tourism use.

The proposal does not seek any physical expansion or intensification of built development, but purely change the operational period to 12 months/all year round due to demand for Glamping stays as well as Glamping stays incorporating wellness retreats.

**2.0 Site Use**

The site lies within the countryside well screened from the road by a combination of mature trees and bushes and a high boundary wall at the entrance to the site. In addition, it is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The established existing glamping business, licensed by Mid Sussex District Council, operates within the woodland, incorporating the following:

- 2No. tents sleeping a maximum of 6 people
- 1No. pod sleeping a maximum of 4 people
- An intimate woodland wedding venue, licensed by West Sussex County Council

**3.0 Scale**

The proposal is not looking to increase the scale of the approved plans, but to extend the months of the year that the glamping site can be used. Currently the 6-month restriction reduces the off-season potential, particularly around the October half-term and the Christmas holiday period.

**4.0 Site Proposal Relevant Planning History**

REF: DM/16/3532 - permission for the change of use of part of the land to enable the provision of a private camping facility

REF: DM/21/0240 – permission to add two camping pods to the existing private camping facility

REF: DM/23/0273 – permission for existing glamping site to host weddings within the existing boundary

## 5.0 Relevant Planning Policy

### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF:

- Supports sustainable, rural tourism and leisure developments
- Encourages farm diversification and rural enterprise
- Requires that development in AONBs conserves and enhances landscape and scenic beauty

Importantly, the NPPF does not impose seasonal restrictions, but instead focuses on impact.

### Mid Sussex District Plan

#### Policy DP 12 Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside

Requires development to:

- Maintain landscape character
- Avoid urbanisation

The proposal makes no physical changes and therefore, the landscape effects remain unchanged.

#### Policy DP14 – Sustainable Economic Development

Supports small-scale economic development in the countryside including tourism.

The proposal contributes to the local economy through increased visitor spend in local shops, restaurants, services and tourist attractions e.g. Balcombe stores, The Cowdray Arms, Tulley's Farm, Tilgate Park and Ardingly Reservoir to name a few.

#### Policy DP16 High Weald AONB

Requires:

- Conservation of natural beauty
- Consideration of cumulative impacts

Requires high-quality, context-responsive design

The proposed extended use does not materially increase harm. The natural timber of the pods and the natural tones of the tent structures blend in with the surrounding woodland. Existing log piles around the site have been left naturally on the forest floor to provide habitat for

wildlife. Being open all year round would enable visitors to enjoy the changing seasons, of the both forest and fauna, as well as the wildlife.

### **Policy DP19 – Tourism and Leisure**

Supports proposals that:

- Strengthen the rural economy
- Provide sustainable tourism opportunities

The proposal directly aligns by improving economic viability and important year-round contribution to local and rural businesses. As part of the Glamping site's social media campaigns, #visit sussex, #supportlocal, #bookdirect, are all used to promote the ethos of supporting the rural economy.

### **Policy DP29 – Noise, Air and Light pollution**

- The impact on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation areas of artificial lighting proposals is minimised, in terms of intensity and number of fittings

The activity in the off-season months will be no more than during the existing 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September. As the guests come to experience the peaceful and tranquil setting, noise from guests is not a consideration. Wellness stays in particular support this low impact offering.

The lights are solar powered and on low level posts, which are motion sensed and stay on only for a brief period of time, lighting the pathway at night as the pathways are used.

## **11.0 Conclusion**

The proposed variation/removal of Condition No. 3 attached to planning permission DM/16/3532 seeks only to permit the continued operation of the established glamping site throughout the year. No additional physical development, increase in accommodation numbers, or alteration to the approved layout is proposed. The application therefore represents a modest operational change only.

The glamping site has operated successfully for the last ten years within the woodland setting and High Weald AONB, with no material harm arising to landscape character, ecology or the wider countryside. The existing screening and low level lighting strategy ensure that the character and tranquillity of the area are preserved throughout the year.

Many Glamping stays include wellness and well being sessions, such as yoga, healing circle etc. which are low impact with no noise or light effect on the setting. After being established for ten years, the popularity and importance of wellbeing has been seen to increase dramatically and is in demand. They are popular all year round, incorporating the spring and autumn equinox and summer winter solstices.

The proposal would support the continued sustainability and viability of the business by enabling use during the increasingly popular autumn and winter periods, it would provide ongoing support to the rural economy through visitor spending at nearby local businesses and attractions.