

Report to	<b>Planning Committee</b>
Date	<b>13 December 2018</b>
By	<b>Director of Planning</b>
Local Authority	<b>Horsham District Council</b>
Application Number	<b>SDNP/18/01189/FUL</b>
Applicant	<b>B D Harris Farm Trust</b>
Application	<b>Erection of 3 visitor accommodation pods and 1 service pod and associated works, including erection of 1m high wooden and wire fences and creation of new access footpath</b>
Address	<b>Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm, Truleigh Hill, Shoreham, West Sussex, BN43 5FB</b>

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**Recommendation: That planning permission be granted subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 10.1 of the report.**

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### **Executive Summary**

The applicant seeks permission for the erection of 3No visitor accommodation pods and 1No service pod on a working farm within close distance of the South Downs Way (SDW). The proposal is a farm diversification scheme that will assist the long-term viability of the award-winning farming business, which has a 10 year Higher Level Environmental Stewardship (HLS) agreement with Natural England.

The proposal would provide 'eco' accommodation for up to six adults with parking for up to three cars provided on an area of existing hardstanding to the south of a large agricultural barn to the west of the proposed pod location.

The pods would be sited in view of the SDW, albeit close to an existing bund, tree belt and a group of existing agricultural buildings.

It is clear that the scheme would accrue a number of benefits that would align with the Second Purpose of the National Park, including the provision of tourist accommodation, opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park's special qualities, and would benefit the rural economy. It would also arguably continue to provide the applicant with the opportunity to steward her land and enterprise creating wider landscape benefits. The main considerations of the scheme therefore are focussed on the assessment of the specific landscape impact of the development in question alongside the benefits outlined above. It is acknowledged that concerns have been raised by a number of parties in relation to the landscape impact.

On balance, officers are of the view that the proposals would conserve the landscape character of the area, given their location against the existing tree line, and any environmental harm would be limited. Whilst it is arguable whether the scheme would enhance the landscape character it is considered that the wider benefits of the scheme are such that the Purposes of the National Park are broadly met, and the wider landscape conserved.

This application is being placed before Members due to the level of interest in the application and the unique policy considerations, having regard to the purposes of the Park.

## **1. Site Description**

- 1.1 Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm is a mixed farm comprising 610 hectares, located on Truleigh Hill on the SDW National Trail between Upper Beeding and Fulking. Truleigh Hill is an important point along the National Trail due to its intrinsic downland character. The area has been subject to piecemeal development over time, including a number of dwellings immediately to the north and south of the trail, and a radar station to the east.
- 1.2 The site itself is a 0.16ha elevated area on the western edge of a 3.9ha field immediately to the south of the SDW. To the west of the site there is a planted stand of immature, non-native trees that form part of a landscape mitigation scheme for the large steel barn known as Summersdeane Barn.
- 1.3 The site is accessed via a narrow road leading northwards from Mill Hill, and then directly via the SDW, which is a restricted byway (No 2760). Aside from the SDW, public bridleway 2750 runs southwards parallel with the site some 50m to the west, and public footpath 2750\_1 runs northwards towards Truleigh Hill. Truleigh Hill Youth Hostel is sited some 250m to the west.

## **2. Relevant Planning History**

- 2.1 The most recent planning history relating to the site is as follows:

DC/10/1469 Temporary stockman's dwelling. Approved March 2011.

DC/11/1278 Minor material amendment to permission DC/10/1469 consisting of changes to layout of mobile home and consequent relocation of doors, windows and veranda. Approved 05.08.2011.

SDNP/14/01799/CND Removal of Condition 1 of DC/10/1469 (Temporary stockman's dwelling) to allow for a permanent 2-bed mobile home on site for an agricultural worker. Allowed on Appeal 24.09.2015.

SDNP/17/04638/PRE Visitor Pods. Advice provided 07.11.2017.

The advice stated that whilst the proposal for new tourist accommodation could be acceptable, the proposed siting (on a plateau in open downland) was unlikely to be supported. The pods should be located where they have minimal visual impact, and a range of locations should be considered that have a close relationship with existing buildings and rights of way, with minimal impact to the visual amenity of the SDW and bridleway to the south.

The current application has responded to the above advice in that the proposed positioning is not so remote within the field and close to the existing buildings.

## **3. Proposal**

- 3.1 The proposal seeks to provide 3 No visitor accommodation pods and 1 No service pod, which would be located against a backdrop of an existing bund and tree belt which serve to screen Summersdeane Barn. The pods would be arc form in shape and constructed using sustainable UK timber incorporating sheep's wool insulation and a living split log 'brown' roof, with the rear of the pod designed to resemble a log pile. All four pods would be 2.75m at the highest point, and would be constructed from timber. The pods are lightweight and would be sited using a 'no dig' technology on a level chalk pad that would require turf removal only.
- 3.2 The northernmost pod would be the smallest, service pod located approximately 35m from the SDW, and would be 12.5sqm in size (2.4m x 5.2m). The service pod would provide storage of supplies, an honesty store with basic provisions and a selection of items for visitors to borrow during their stay such as binoculars and telescope. The accommodation pods would be sited in a linear position some 20m further to the south and faced at an angle such that the glazed entrances would face south west. The smallest accommodation pod would be 21 sqm in size (5.2m x 4m) with two slightly larger 26 sqm pods (5.2m x 5m) to

the south. The accommodation pods would provide twin accommodation with a kitchenette, en-suite toilet/shower facilities and outdoor sitting area.

- 3.3 Services would be brought in via a dug trench to the east of the pods outside the root protection area of the tree belt. Access would be provided via a new path from the bridleway to the west which also serves as the main access to the farm, the surfacing of which would be secured through condition. Three parking spaces would be provided in an area of existing hardstanding to the south of Summersdeane Barn, however it is anticipated that most visitors would arrive by foot or cycle. New post and wire fences would separate the pods from the remainder of the field which is used for grazing. An area of wildflower meadow is proposed to be sited to the north of the pods up to the existing field boundary with the SDW.

#### 4. Consultations

- 4.1 **Archaeology:** No objection, subject to condition.

- 4.2 **Ecology:** No objection, subject to condition.

- 4.3 **Environmental Health:** No objection, subject to condition.

- There is a private water supply at Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm which provides potable water for the adjacent properties.
- Details of the proposed drainage and external lighting for the visitor pods may be secured via condition.

- 4.4 **Highways:** No objection.

- The parking area is large enough to park 3No vehicles without prejudicing any existing parking and turning arrangements and is acceptable.

- 4.5 **Landscape:** Objection.

- The landscape pre-application advice largely stands.
- The change in location of the pods is a slight improvement, however it continues that this proposal is contrary to the evidence and recommendations in the landscape character assessment, and re-asserted in the pre-application advice.
- A landscape objection is therefore retained.
- The mitigation measures proposed are also contrary to the evidence generating harm themselves, do not successfully mitigate the proposal and do not serve to conserve or enhance this open landscape.

- 4.6 **SDNPA Access:** No objection (provided pods are moved in towards the tree belt), subject to condition. Comments:

- Support the provision of more low cost visitor accommodation along the SDW National Trail, however the siting of the proposed camping pods would have a detrimental impact on visitors' enjoyment of the SDW.
- The proposed site is in an open location away from all the existing buildings and would have a detrimental impact on visitor's enjoyment of the SDW [Officer comment: this comment refers the initial position of the pods, which has subsequently been moved in towards the tree belt].
- The pods should be relocated to sit closer to the existing farm buildings, for example near to the existing screening that surrounds the large barn.
- The access path should be a 1.2m width and formed to be suitable for disabled access; there is no need for two separate access paths to the site.
- The provision of cycle racks is welcomed; these should be of a rustic nature (e.g. wooden posts) and positioned either in a location adjacent to each pod or grouped together in a single location such that the visual impact from the SDW is zero or reduced.

#### 4.7 **SDNPA Tourism:** No objection

- Proposal aligns with the aspirations of the South Downs National Park Authority Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2015 – 2020.
- The location site is well suited for active and nature based tourism, where the special qualities of the National Park can be accessed and there is direct access to the SDW.
- The land use would support farm diversification.
- Can deliver all year round tourism offer and encourage visitors to stay overnight in the National Park.
- Promotion of sustainable travel when in the area - promotion of cycling and walking on the SDW.
- Links between local produce and the visitor economy including locally sourced hampers.
- Promotion and interpretation of the special qualities of the National Park.
- Welcome folder will provide information on the farm business and conservation work carried out, landscape, history & culture, flora & fauna and dark skies in the context of the 7 special qualities of this National Park.
- Pods are made of sustainable materials.
- Meets the need for accommodation in the South Downs National Park along the SDW.
- There is a rise in demand for glamping, eco lodges and camping pods as a new rural accommodation trend.

#### 4.8 **SDNPA Woodland and Biodiversity Tree Officer:** No objection, subject to condition.

- The trees are 30 years old and located on a bund so the rooting zones of the trees will need protection as they will have grown into the area where the pods would be located.
- The amenity value of the trees is somewhat limited by species selection and planting for function as a screen rather than with landscape considerations in mind; however the stand serves a function, and it is important for the longer term, safe, use of the site that the trees are not damaged.

#### 4.9 **Upper Beeding Parish Council:** No objection.

- The Council sees no reason to recommend refusal of the application; however, a request should be made that the new units be constructed in a manner sympathetic to the downland landscape.

### 5. **Representations**

#### 5.1 14 Letters of objection were received in regard to the initial proposal, raising the following concerns:

##### Principle

- The proposal is contrary to National Park principles and countryside policy concerning development in sensitive areas.
- The fields either side of the SDW should be kept for agricultural use and livestock.
- The addition of man-made structures would detrimental to the landscape character.
- Undesirable precedent.
- There is already visitor accommodation within a 3-4 mile radius, including the youth hostel.
- The Nature Reserve, with its accessible track and renovated dewpond, already serves as a honeypot for Truleigh Hill visitors.

##### Ecology and Landscape

- The Pods would be clearly visible from the SDW as isolated development in a field, and impact far reaching views.
- The pods are not farm buildings and could be better sited where they would not harm views.
- Land to the south of the wooded copse and farm dwelling could provide a less intrusive location within the curtilage of the farm.

- Disruption of wildlife natural habitat
- The floor level of each pod should be dug in so as to appear no higher than the lowest point of the natural slope.
- Increased light pollution affecting dark night skies.

#### Parking, Access and Traffic

- The road access is a narrow restricted byway with few passing places.
- The additional use implicates higher maintenance which has not been considered.
- The Youth Hostel has encouraged more traffic (including minibuses and coaches) to access the Truleigh Hill area.
- Increased vehicular traffic and deliveries would impact amenity and generate traffic volumes beyond capacity.
- Traffic pollution will increase.
- The site is unsuited to those with mobility issues.
- The proposed disabled access would not be convenient for residents or farm traffic.
- Will cause danger to horse riders and pedestrians.

#### Amenity

- Will impact upon visual amenity from SDW and bridleway running south-north, including views of the skyline and downland the coastline.
- Disruption of the tranquility enjoyed by the visitors and residents which has been eroded by development in and around Truleigh Hill.

5.2 19 representations in support of the application were received, raising the following:

- There is a shortage of tourist accommodation in the SDNP and little available from the SDW itself.
- Due to its strategic location directly next to the SDW, the proposal offers minimal, eco-friendly accommodation for walkers and cyclists whilst completing the route.
- The pods are constructed of natural materials and have a small footprint, and as such “sensitive to the character and setting” of the site, relative to more permanent structures.
- Serve a genuine need over and above current accommodation offerings because the small, simple and secluded set up proposed cannot be substituted by the busier environments provided by youth hostels, hotels or bed and breakfast.
- Will support health and wellbeing, public education about wildlife and the countryside, and opportunities to increase visitor awareness of the special qualities.
- Will support local businesses.
- Will allow the farm to develop an additional income stream and build more resilience into their business model.
- The downland landscape has been created by man’s relationship with stock and the environment.
- The farm has a clear passion for farming and biodiversity conservation and contributes to the first purpose of the National Park through their land management activities.
- The design of the new buildings are sensitive to the character of the area and located near to other existing buildings.
- The addition of the wildflower meadow will improve biodiversity.
- Will give visitors a sense of staying on a farm with stock grazing in the surrounding fields and educate generations on the necessity of keeping the countryside alive and valuing the work of British farmers.

5.3 Following amended drawings revising the siting of the pods, a further 8 objections were received, raising the following concerns:

- Will create a lasting detrimental impact on the landscape, views, peace and tranquility adding more manmade constructions that will set a precedent for increasingly larger developments and open up the area to more vehicular traffic.
- There is no need due to other visitor facilities being sited close by.

- Cumulative impact of tourist accommodation in a small area.
- Other than the specialist access path no other provisions are made for disabled users.
- The new location is no less intrusive and still in full view of the SDW. The pods will dominate the uninterrupted view of the dry valley from both directions.
- A less obvious relocation should be sought that is concealed from view from the bridle paths.
- There should be binding commitments on traffic, noise and light.
- The siting of the pods which are 2.75m high on top of rather than down into the ground will increase visual impact.
- The wild flower meadow will not mitigate the overall development or visual impact.

5.4 One further letter of support was also received, stating that the development will encourage visitors to the area, in line with Experience West Sussex.

## **6. Planning Policy Context**

6.1 Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant statutory development plan is the saved policies of the Horsham District Local Development Framework (Core Strategy and General Development Control Policies) (2007). The relevant policies are set out in section 7 below.

### National Park Purposes

6.2 The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas;
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty upon the Local Planning Authority to foster the economic and social wellbeing of the local community in pursuit of these purposes.

### National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 2010

6.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (2018) is considered holistically although the following sections are of particular relevance to the applications:

- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Section 6: Building a strong, competitive economy
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

6.4 Government policy relating to National Parks is set out in English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 and the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued on 24 July 2018. The Circular and NPPF confirm that National Parks have the highest status of protection, and the NPPF states at paragraph 172 that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in national parks and that the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations and should be given great weight in National Parks.

6.5 The development plan policies listed in Section 7 have been assessed for their compliance with the NPPF and are considered to be compliant with it.

### Major Development

6.6 Officers are of the view that the proposal does not constitute major development for the purposes of paragraph 172 of the NPPF (2018), and accompanying footnote 55, advising that 'major development' in designated landscapes is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.

## The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan 2014-2019

6.7 The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (SDPMP) (2014-2019) is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, as outlined in national planning practice guidance, and has some weight. It outlines a vision and long term outcomes for the National Park. The following policies are relevant:

- 1: conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities of the landscape;
- 3: Protect and enhance tranquillity and dark night skies;
- 13: Support the financial viability of farm businesses through appropriate infrastructure and diversification developments;
- 29: Enhance the health and wellbeing of visitors by encouraging, supporting and developing the use of the National Park as a place for healthy outdoor activity and relaxation;
- 30: Raise awareness and understanding about the National Park;
- 41: Influence visitor behaviour in order to reduce impacts on the special qualities and increase visitor spend in and around the National Park;
- 43: Support the development of appropriate recreation and tourism facilities, including a mix of quality accommodation which responds to market demands and supports a sustainable visitor economy;
- 44: Encourage and support tourism providers to develop sustainable business practices and increase knowledge about the National Park's special qualities;
- 55: Promote opportunities for diversified economic activity, in particular, where it enhances the special qualities.

## **7. Planning Policy**

7.1 The following saved policies of the Horsham District Local Development Framework (2007) are relevant:

- CPI – Landscape and Townscape Character
- DC1 – Countryside Protection and Enhancement
- DC2 – Landscape Character
- DC4 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)
- DC5 – Biodiversity and Geology
- DC6 – Woodland and Trees
- DC9 – Development Principles
- DC39 – Tourism
- DC40 – Transport and Access

## The South Downs National Park Local Plan Submission (2018)

7.2 The South Downs Local Plan: Pre-Submission Local Plan was published under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for public consultation between 26 September to 21 November 2017, and the responses considered by the Authority. The Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in April 2018. The Submission version of the Local Plan consists of the Pre-Submission Plan and the Schedule of Proposed Changes. It is a material consideration in the assessment of this planning application in accordance with paragraph 48 of the NPPF, which confirms that weight may be given to policies in emerging plans following publication. Based on the current stage of preparation, and given the relative age of the saved policies within the Horsham District Local Development Framework (2007) the policies within the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) are currently afforded considerable weight, depending on the level of objection received on individual policies. The relevant policies are:

- SD1 – Sustainable Development
- SD2 – Ecosystems Services
- SD4 – Landscape Character
- SD5 – Design
- SD7 – Relative Tranquillity

- SD8 – Dark Night Skies
- SD9 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- SD11 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- SD16 – Archaeology
- SD17 – Protection of the Water Environment
- SD19 – Transport and Accessibility
- SD20 – Walking, Cycling and Equestrian Routes
- SD22 – Parking Provision
- SD23 – Sustainable Tourism
- SD25 – Development Strategy
- SD34 – Sustaining the Local Economy
- SD48 – Climate Change and Sustainable Use of Resources
- SD49 – Flood Risk Management
- SD50 – Sustainable Drainage Systems.

## **8. Planning Assessment**

8.1 The main considerations to be determined as part of this application are:

- The principle of development in the countryside to provide new tourist accommodation;
- Design, landscape and visual impact;
- Impact on ecology and trees;
- Dark night skies;
- Highways and access;
- Drainage and the water environment;
- Neighbour amenity.

### Principle of development

- 8.2 The site is in a countryside location and part of the designated rural area, where development is generally restricted. The development plan policies and the NPPF place ‘great weight’ on conserving the landscape and the scenic beauty of National Parks, which have the highest status of protection.
- 8.3 In terms of relevant development plan policies, saved policy CPI ‘Landscape and Townscape Character’ of the Horsham District Development Framework (2007) states that the landscape character of the district will be maintained and enhanced, and that activities which may influence character should only take place where protected landscapes, habitats and species are properly protected, conserved and enhanced. Saved policy CPI5 ‘Rural Strategy’ supports development in the countryside that maintains the quality and character of the area. Any development should be appropriate to the countryside location, contribute to diverse and sustainable farming activities, and should not harm the rural character of the area by virtue of the nature and level of activity involved. Saved policy DC1 ‘Countryside Protection’ states that outside built up area boundaries development will not be permitted unless it supports the needs of agriculture and does not lead to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside.
- 8.4 Emerging policy SD25 ‘Development Strategy’ of the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) carries considerable weight and sets a clear distinction between land within and land outside a settlement boundary. Exceptionally, development will be permitted outside of settlement boundaries where it complies with other relevant Local Plan policies, responds to the context of the relevant broad area, and there is an essential need for a countryside location.
- 8.5 In addition to the above policies which restrict development in the countryside there are a number of policies which seek to encourage rural development, including the provision of appropriate tourism facilities, and support the rural economy.
- 8.6 Saved policy DC39 ‘Tourism’ supports the provision of small scale new facilities if the proposal is appropriate in scale and level of activity, and in keeping with its location and



surroundings. Policy SD23 'Sustainable Tourism' of the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) carries considerable weight, and supports proposals that will provide opportunities for visitors to increase their awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities; minimise the need for travel by private car and encourages access by sustainable means; and will not detract from the experience of visitors. Furthermore, proposals must demonstrate access by sustainable means, and be closely associated with other attractions, tourism uses, and the PROW network.

- 8.7 The findings of the South Downs National Park Visitor Accommodation Review 2014 also indicate that there is a lack of tourist accommodation across the National Park, especially close to the SDW. The Review also states the wider benefits of supporting tourist accommodation schemes where these improve farming and country estate incomes, thus supporting agriculture and landscape management. The shortfall of accommodation along the SDW is highlighted in the South Downs Partnership Management Plan (SDPMP) (2014-2019), and Policy 43 supports the development and maintenance of appropriate recreation and tourism facilities and visitor hubs in and around the National Park including a mix of quality accommodation which responds to market demands and supports a sustainable visitor economy.
- 8.8 The submitted information states that there are no redundant farm buildings which could be repurposed. The proposal is small scale, and the target market includes walkers and cyclists completing the SDW, and short stay visitors. The aim is to provide sustainable tourist accommodation for a maximum of 6 people per night. Car free days would be encouraged.
- 8.9 In terms of the rural economy, saved policy DC23 'Sustainable Farm Diversification' supports proposals for new rural enterprises that form part of a comprehensive farm diversification scheme. Emerging policy SD34 'Sustaining the Local Economy' also carries considerable weight, and supports proposals that foster the economic well-being of local communities and promote businesses linked to tourism, which is a key sector for the National Park. Policy SD40 'Farm and Forestry Diversification' supports proposals which provide long-term benefit to the holding and comprise activities that are subsidiary to the main agricultural business. SDPMP Policy 13 also states the SDNPA's support for the financial viability of farm businesses through appropriate infrastructure and diversification developments, particularly those that will support sustainable farming.
- 8.10 Paragraph 83 of the NPPF (2018) also supports the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings, and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Sustainable rural tourism, which respects the character of the countryside, is similarly supported.
- 8.11 There is also a wider, strategic consideration that the iconic landscape of the South Downs has been shaped by traditional farming over many generations, and the practice of farming continues to contribute to the landscape character, biodiversity and ecosystem services intrinsic to the National Park. The submitted information includes a Farm Diversification Plan stating that the proposal is a modest long term investment which 'fits' with the family business and would be subsidiary but vital to the farm operation going forward. The chosen site is related to, but will not detract from, the day to day running of the core farm business. Furthermore, Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm has entered a 10 year Higher Level Environmental Stewardship (HLS) Agreement with Natural England and has received local and national awards for its environmental conservation efforts.
- 8.12 The SDNPA Sustainable Tourism officer is supportive of the proposal which is located in an area well-suited for active and nature based tourism, experience of the special qualities of the National Park, and direct access to the SDW. The proposal supports farm diversification, delivers a year round tourism offer and encourages overnight visitor stays, and would promote cycling and walking the SDW. The provision of locally sourced hampers would support the rural visitor economy and the proposed welcome folder, providing information on the farm business, the local landscape, flora & fauna, dark skies and the conservation work carried out by the farm, would assist in promoting and interpreting the special qualities of the National Park.

- 8.13 The SDNPA Access team are also supportive of the proposal which will provide low cost visitor accommodation along the SDW National Trail where there is an identified lack of camping and camping pod accommodation.
- 8.14 Concerns have been raised by members of the public in regard to the need for the development, given the location of Truleigh Hill Youth hostel some 300m to the west along the SDW. However it is considered that the offer is sufficiently different to that of the youth hostel in providing a markedly different visitor experience and would neither compete with existing business nor saturate the market to the extent of being unnecessary or redundant. Furthermore, the level of accommodation, which would provide 3 No useable pods with space for up to 6 adults, is not considered to be of such a scale that would increase activity in the area to an unacceptable level. It is the view of officers that this matter of scale is a factor that weighs in favour of the application.
- 8.15 In summary, the scheme would provide clear tourism and rural economy benefits that align with the second purpose of the National Park by virtue of providing sustainable, year-round tourism accommodation that would improve the rate of overnight stay in an area where more types of tourist accommodation are needed. The proposal would also allow visitors to experience some of the special qualities of the National Park. Given the broad policy support for the type of development proposed, the development is considered to be acceptable in principle.

#### Design, Landscape, and Visual Impact

- 8.16 In terms of relevant policies, saved policy DC2 'Landscape Character' supports development that protects and/or conserves and/or enhances the key characteristics of the landscape character including the development pattern of the area and sensitivity to change. Saved policy DC23 'Sustainable Farm Diversification' supports proposals for new rural enterprises that are in scale with the surroundings and would not harm the countryside's rural character, landscape, historical landscape features and wildlife by the nature and level of activity.
- 8.17 Emerging policy SD4 'Landscape Character' of the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) carries considerable weight and supports development that conserves and enhances the existing landscape character features which contribute to the distinctive character, pattern and evolution of the landscape; and safeguards the experiential and amenity qualities of the landscape. Emerging policy SD5 'Design' also carries significant weight, and supports development that demonstrates a landscape-led approach and respects the local character of the area. Proposals should both integrate with, respect and sympathetically complement the landscape character and utilise architectural design which is appropriate and sympathetic to its setting. Policy SD23 'Sustainable Tourism' supports proposals that will not adversely affect the character, historical significance, appearance or amenity of the area.
- 8.18 The pods were originally sited further out into the field to avoid what the applicant thought would be a negative impact to trees and ecology. However, in response to initial officer and neighbour and public concerns in regard to the more prominent siting of the pods, and following further consultation with the County Ecologist, they have been re-located further in towards the tree belt. The area out of view to the south of Summersdeane Barn was discounted by the applicant due to this being within the working area of the farm, and the unacceptable conflict of use that would arise as a result. Although there were less objections following the re-siting of the pods, concerns still remain from interested parties in regard to a perceived detrimental visual impact on the landscape.
- 8.19 The Landscape officer has objected to the proposal and is concerned that the scheme does not respond to the evidence and recommendations of the Adur to Ouse Open Downs Landscape Character Assessment. These support efforts to maintain the essentially open, undeveloped landscape character, restrict further built development, and reduce the impact of existing visually intrusive elements. The Landscape Officer's pre-application advice notes that a significant amount of development has taken place in the Truleigh Hill area, in the form of formalised tracks, fencing and enclosure, scrub and tree screen planting, communications masts, dwellings, and equestrian land management, which has had a negative

cumulative effect upon the landscape character such that its open downland character is on the verge of being lost. As a result, the SDNPA is dedicating resource to ensure to address these negative effects and avoid impact in order to improve the condition of the whole area for residents and visitors alike. The landscape officer objection therefore focuses on the proposal's lack of attempt to reinstate any of the area's positive landscape characteristics and thereby make a positive contribution to the landscape character of the area.

- 8.20 The SDNPA Access team objected to the original siting of the pods in a prominent, open location as this would have had a detrimental impact on visitors' enjoyment of the SDW (Restricted Byway 2760). Officers therefore recommended that the pods be sited closer to the existing farm buildings and tree screen.
- 8.21 It is acknowledged that the pods themselves are of a standard design and do not have any specific local reference or relevance in terms of materials or form. Although the wood will be sustainably sourced, it will not be locally sourced and this is considered to be a missed opportunity however it is not considered that this in itself would be a sufficient reason to refuse the application.
- 8.22 Nonetheless, the pods are of a compact, utilitarian design, require minimal construction and serve a functional purpose. They provide a practical solution for farms wishing to diversify without investing significant sums in designing bespoke new buildings. The scale of development in this instance is also relatively low and the form of the pods is considered to be simple and modest.
- 8.23 Siting the pods closer in to the tree belt and adjacent to Summersdeane Barn is considered to be an improvement in terms of landscape impact as they become more closely related to existing development and built form. Seen within the context of agricultural buildings, there is a risk that the non-agricultural building form could perceptually add to the already confused settlement character experienced at Truleigh, as highlighted by the SDNPA Landscape officer. However, the pods will be seen primarily in the context of the functional tree belt rather than that of hard built agricultural form or in an open field, such that the landscape impact will be softened. Of itself, the tree belt is considered to be of low landscape amenity or value being one of the more inappropriate landscape interventions that has taken place in the area. Planted to screen the barn, the trees are a mix of non-native species that are an incongruous feature within an open downland landscape; however they have been in situ for some time, provide an existing function and have some habitat value, which is considered in more detail in paragraphs 8.25-8.30 below.
- 8.24 In summary, the proposal is considered to be acceptable on balance in terms of landscape impact given the location of the pods and context in relation to the tree belt. Details of hard and soft landscaping, including boundary treatments, any path surfacing and planting (as well as a long-term landscape management plan for the site) could be secured via condition.

#### Impact on Ecology and Trees

- 8.25 Part 15 of the NPPF (2018) draws attention to the duty to protect the natural environment and to the opportunities for its enhancement. Paragraph 170 states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity value in a manner commensurate with their statutory status.
- 8.26 Saved policy DC5 'Biodiversity and Geology' states that development will not be permitted unless it includes measures to protect, conserve or enhance biodiversity. Emerging policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' received 41 representations, with objections in regard to the HRA and Ashdown Forest, resulting in changes being made to the policy wording, however it carries some weight. The policy supports proposals that conserve and enhance biodiversity, and should retain, protect and enhance features of biodiversity and supporting habitat and ensure appropriate and long-term management of those features. Policy SD11 'Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows' carries considerable weight, and supports development that will conserve and enhance trees, hedgerows and woodlands.
- 8.27 The County ecologist has reviewed the submitted information, and advises that the site is of

low ecological value. The trees do provide some limited ecology habitat however, and a number of badger setts are now sited along the bank.

- 8.28 Following the relocation of the pods further in towards the belt of trees there are no significant ecology concerns in regard to the proposals, which will have minimal impact on existing biodiversity and provide suitable mitigation including a buffer zone to protect the badger sett. The protection measures during construction are considered to be acceptable, and may be secured via condition.
- 8.29 The SDNPA Woodland and Biodiversity officer is satisfied that a pre-commencement condition to secure a detailed tree impact and protection plan and method statement will ensure the trees will be protected during both construction and operation phases.
- 8.30 In summary, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in terms of both ecology and trees, subject to conditions.

#### Dark night skies

- 8.31 Policy SD8: Dark Night Skies of the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) carries considerable weight. The site is located within the Dark Skies Intrinsic Zone of Darkness (E1a), which is classified as 'dark sky' and includes isolated areas that may not be connected to the main core. In these areas, glazing and particularly rooflights should be kept to a minimum, and external lighting should be limited to timed and/or sensor-controlled lighting designed and shielded to minimise light spillage. External lighting should only be used when needed.
- 8.32 The submitted information states that there will be no external lighting aside from soft down lights within the pod porches. Guests will be encouraged to arrive before dark and will be provided with a torch to ensure that they experience and dark night skies. Lighting details, including the proposed solar powered lighting may be secured through condition to ensure these comply with Dark Night Sky requirements and prevent harmful impact on habitats and species.

#### Highways and Access

- 8.33 WSCC Highways have advised that given the scale of the application it is not anticipated to have a severe impact upon the maintained highway network. The parking provision for 3 vehicles sited on existing hardstanding to the south of the existing barn is also considered to be acceptable.
- 8.34 It is considered that the majority of visitors will be arriving by sustainable means via the SDW either walking or cycling and that the impact from traffic would be limited to those arriving by car for short stays. The SDNPA Access team welcome the provision of cycle racks which should be of a rustic nature (wooden posts) and positioned either in a location adjacent to each pod or grouped together in a single location ensuring that the visual impact from the SDW is minimised. Details of cycle storage may be secured by condition.

#### Drainage and the Water Environment

- 8.35 The submitted information states that a clargester or similar water treatment plant would be installed. As the site is close to a borehole which serves nearby properties this would be subject to a permit from the Environment Agency. Surface water drainage would be dealt with via small gravel filled drainage channels.
- 8.36 Horsham Environmental Health have no objection to the proposal. Details of foul and surface water drainage may be required through conditions.

#### Archaeology

- 8.37 The County Archaeologist has advised that the submitted Heritage Statement outlines the potential for prehistoric activity in the immediate area and ground levelling for the proposed pods may expose bedrock chalk and hitherto unrecorded archaeological features that may exist. Although the pods have been re-sited and will require no-dig method of construction to be employed due to the proximity of tree root protection areas, there will be some levelling works required, and excavation of the services trench.

- 8.38 A condition requiring a Written Scheme of Investigation is therefore recommended to set out the methodology for the archaeological monitoring of all ground works associated with the construction of the visitor and service pods to ensure that any archaeological remains encountered are recognised, characterised and recorded.

#### Neighbour Amenity

- 8.39 Given the relative distance of the site from residential development, the development is not considered to raise any material issues in regard to noise or disturbance.

### **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1 It is acknowledged that there is a tension between the relevant saved and emerging policies which seek on the one hand to conserve the countryside and on the other to promote low key, limited accommodation that is well-connected to public rights of way, and support the rural economy i.e. sustainable tourism.

- 9.2 Whilst the concerns of the SDNPA Landscape Officer are noted, it is considered that, on balance, the revised location of the pods allows for the structures to be seen in context of existing farm buildings and the planted tree screen rather than in open downland, and would therefore conserve the landscape character of the area. The proposal would promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park and would not have a detrimental impact on the amenity of local residents. In addition, it is acknowledged that the scheme will provide a much needed form of diversification for the existing agricultural enterprise. It is recognised that the Sandford Principle comes into effect, however any perceived limited harm caused in the immediate vicinity by this proposal can be mitigated against by way of suitable conditions and is outweighed by policy considerations taken in the round, and the wider benefits that would accrue such that the Purposes of the National Park are broadly met.

- 9.3 Notwithstanding the tension between the relevant policies, officers consider that on balance the application is acceptable in both policy terms and in relation to detailed matters, and therefore would accord with the NPPF (2018), the Horsham Local Development Framework (2006), the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (2014-2019), the Submission South Downs Local Plan (2018) and the DEFRA Circular, and National Park purposes. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

### **10. Reason for Recommendation and Conditions**

- 10.1 The application is recommended for approval subject to the following conditions:
1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.  
  
Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)/ To comply with Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
  2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed below under the heading "Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application".  
  
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.
  3. The residential accommodation hereby approved shall be occupied as holiday accommodation managed in accordance with the following:
    - i) The accommodation shall be occupied for holiday and short-term let purposes only;
    - ii) The accommodation shall not be occupied as a person's sole, or main place of residence;
    - iii) The accommodation shall not be occupied by any one person for a period exceeding 28 days in any calendar year;
    - iv) The accommodation shall at all times be managed and supervised by the occupiers of Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm;

- v) The owners/operators shall maintain an up-to-date register of the names of all owners/occupiers of the accommodation on the site, and of their main home addresses, and shall make this information available to the Local Planning Authority upon request.

Reason: To maintain the availability of the site as short term holiday tourist accommodation.

- 4. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of the camping pods, including manufacturing details and materials and finishes, for all roof materials, walls, glazing, flues and rainwater goods shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the amenity of the landscape character of the area.

- 5. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a detailed scheme of hard and soft landscaping works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All such works as may be approved shall then be fully implemented in accordance with the approved development. The scheme shall include details of:

- i) Existing trees and other vegetation to be retained in the scheme;
- ii) Proposed planting plans, including written specifications, cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment; schedules of plants, noting species, plant sizes; and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate;
- iii) Boundary treatments (including fencing and replacement hedgerow planting) and other means of enclosure including any gates;
- iv) Treatment of surfaces including the new access path (which should be 1.2m in width and formed to be suitable for disabled access), any access to the pods, and areas around the pods, to include materials, permeability;
- v) Ancillary structures.

Thereafter the development shall be undertaken in full accordance with the agreed details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

All soft landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the first occupation of the building, or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner. All shrub and tree planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity and the amenity of the landscape character of the area.

- 6. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a BS5837:2012 compliant Arboricultural Method Assessment and Tree Protection plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include details of:

- i) A plan drawn to scale indicating the precise location of the root protection area and services trench;
- ii) Method of construction to minimise impact, and the extent of any levelling work that will occur as a result of development;
- iii) Avoidance of soil compaction within the root protection area during construction and operation, to include no vehicles;

- iv) BS5837 compliant protective fencing and ground protection to avoid damage by heavy plant;
- v) The development shall subsequently proceed in accordance with any such approved details.

Reason: To protect trees adjacent to the proposed development that provide an important landscape function.

7. Works shall be carried out in full accordance with the ecological mitigation and enhancement measures set out within sections 10.2 to 10.5.9 inclusive of the Biodiversity Statement (Enviroworks, July 2018), the measures within the for proposed development at Freshcombe and Summersdeane Farm report (Enviroworks, October 2018) report and the badger mitigation measures as set out within the Clarification to Revision (Enviroworks, 24th October 2018).

Reason: In the interest of biodiversity and to provide sufficient ecological mitigation and enhancements.

8. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) setting out the methodology and timetable for an archaeological watching brief of ground works connected with the construction of the proposed pods so that any archaeological remains encountered are recognised, characterised and recorded, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Provision should also be made for the public dissemination of any results and the WSI should satisfy the Local Planning Authority that the scheme is sustainable under the terms of NPPF.

The works shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To enable the recording of any items of historical or archaeological interest.

9. Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of internal and external lighting that complies with the SDNPA Dark Night Skies Technical Advice Note (2018) and designed and shielded to minimise light spillage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The lighting shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and thereby retained as such unless a variation is subsequently submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. No further external lighting shall be installed anywhere within the site.

Reason: To minimise impacts of lighting on the ecological interest of the site, and protect the South Downs International Dark Night Skies Reserve.

10. Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, details of secure cycle storage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The cycle storage shall be:

- i) Of a rustic nature and appearance;
- ii) Positioned either adjacent to each pod or grouped together in a single location and ensuring that visual impact from the SDW is minimal.

The development shall subsequently proceed in accordance with any such approved details.

Reason: To provide alternative travel options to the use of the car in accordance with current sustainable transport policies.

## **11. Crime and Disorder Implication**

- 11.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

## **12. Human Rights Implications**

- 12.1 This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

### **13. Equality Act 2010**

- 13.1 Due regard has been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010.

### **14. Proactive Working**

- 14.1 In reaching this decision the South Downs National Park Authority has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive way, in line with the NPPF. This has included the provision of pre-application advice and seeking amendments during the determination of the application to ensure that the development brought forward conserves the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.

#### **TIM SLANEY**

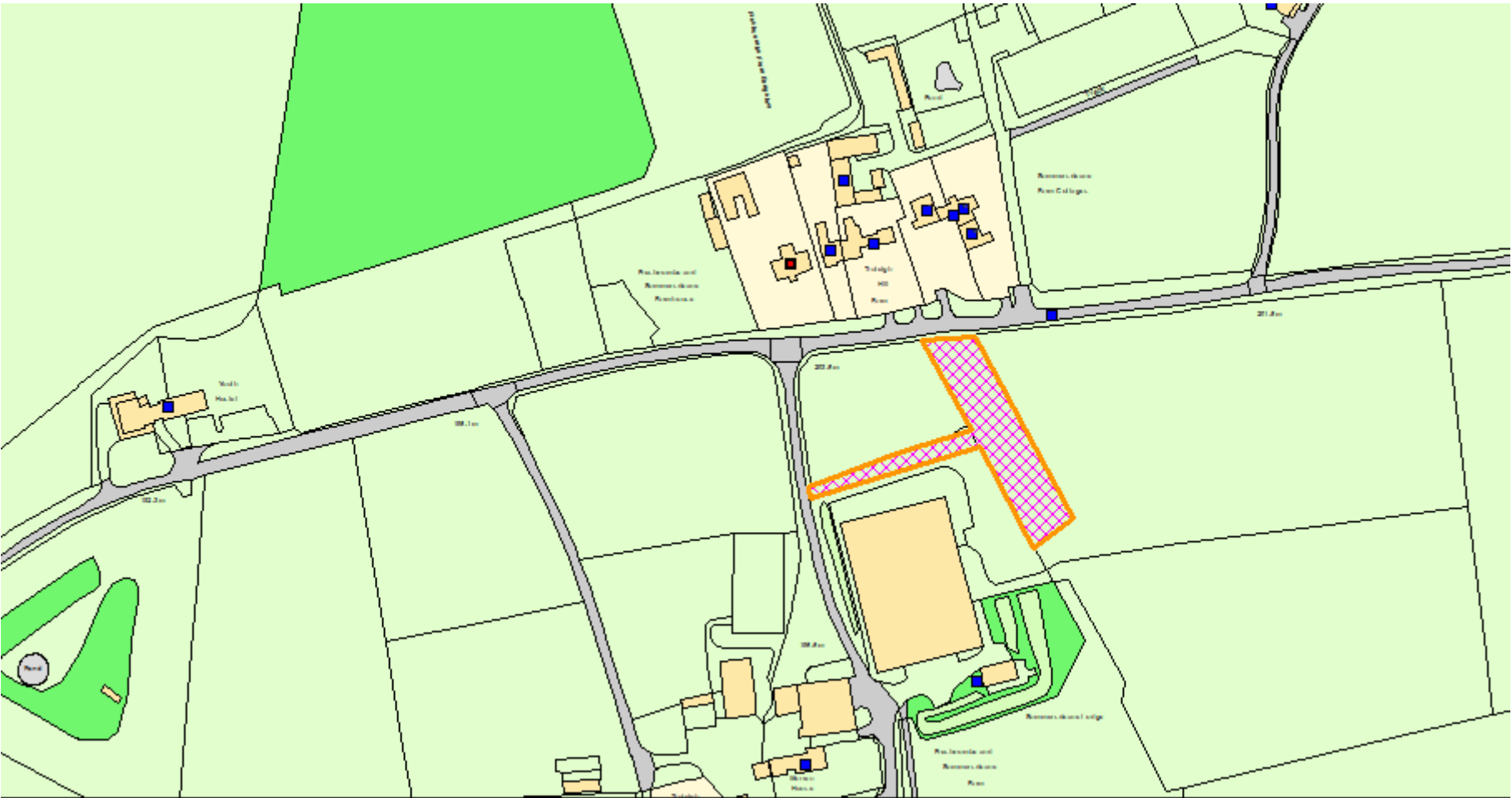
##### **Director of Planning**

##### **South Downs National Park Authority**

Contact Officer: Stella New  
Tel: 01730 819216  
email: [stella.new@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:stella.new@southdowns.gov.uk)  
Appendices I. Site Location Map  
SDNPA Consultees Legal Services, Development Manager  
Background [All planning application plans, supporting documents, consultation and third party responses](#)  
Documents [National Planning Policy Framework \(2018\)](#)  
[Horsham District Local Development Framework \(Core Policy and General Development Control Policies\) \(2006\)](#)  
[Submission South Downs Draft Local Plan \(2018\)](#)  
[South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan 2013](#)  
[South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2005 and 2011](#)



Site Location Map



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