

Black Wood, Bradley, Micheldever

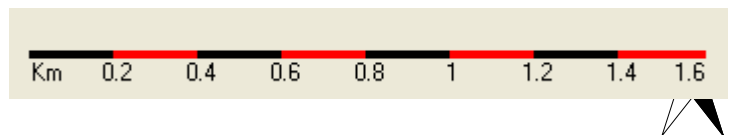
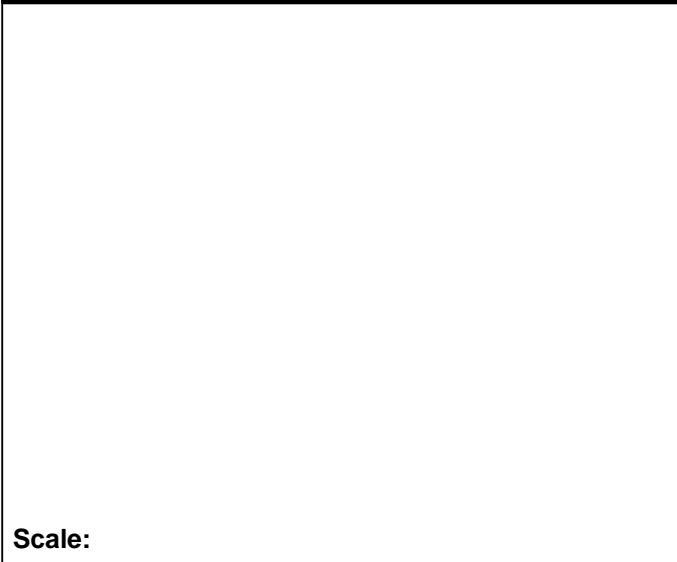
10/03109/FUL



Winchester
City Council



Legend



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Organisation	Winchester City Council
Department	Development Services
Comments	
Date	06 April 2011
SLA Number	00018301

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DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE AGENDA 31 March 2011

Item No: 1
Case No: 10/03109/FUL / W21368/06
Proposal Description: Resubmission of an application for improved public access including new vehicular entrance and 20 space public car park, 60 wooden holiday cabins (38% and 54% less than previously refused schemes), a facilities building (comprising reception, shop, cafe, WCs, forest experience room, managers accommodation, cycle hire, back office and storage), maintenance yard, boiler room, sewerage plant and electricity sub-station, access tracks, walking and cycling routes, cycle stands and car parking, and enhanced woodland management plan.
Address: Black Wood Bradley Basingstoke Road Micheldever Hampshire
Parish, or Ward if within Winchester City: Micheldever
Applicants Name: Forest Holidays
Case Officer: Nick Parker
Date Valid: 8 December 2010
Recommendation: Application Permitted

General Comments

This application is reported to the Committee because of the number of objections received. In addition, Micheldever Parish Council has requested that the application be considered by Committee. Their comments are attached at Appendix A.

The application represents a resubmission of an earlier planning application (ref. 10/01077/FUL) which was refused planning permission by the Planning Development Control Committee on 8th November 2010, due to concerns with the scale of the development and the impact on the landscape setting of the wood. The current proposal reduces the number of holiday cabins from 98 to 60. The decision notice of 10/01077/FUL is attached at Appendix B. In addition, an earlier planning application for 130 cabins (ref. 09/00186/FUL) was refused planning permission on 18th May 2009.

Site Description

Black Wood is located 8km south west of the town of Basingstoke and 12km north of the City of Winchester. The site is bounded to the north by the A303 and to the south east by the M3 and A33. The Larkwhistle Farm road runs to the west of the site, where existing access is taken from. The closest settlement to the site is Micheldever Station, which is located approximately 2km to the north west of the site.

Black Wood is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission and is currently used for commercial forestry and local informal recreation. The wood is open to the public for informal recreation use and measures approximately 266ha (650 acres) in area. However, there is no public right of way or formal parking facility associated with the site. The existing primary access track passes north/south through the wood, terminating to the west of the central meadow. To the east of the meadow is Black Wood Cottage, currently fenced off due to its derelict state. The wood also has a number of existing

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desire line tracks/cycle paths meandering through the wood that are accessible to the public all year round.

The wood consists of predominantly 20th century beech plantation with other native broadleaves. Part of the site is designated ancient woodland, although much of this is replanted; a few ancient woodland blocks and a number of veteran trees remain. There is a grassy open meadow towards the centre of the site. Key landscape features within the woodland include occasional veteran oak and yew trees, large swathes of bluebells, forest rides, and a shallow valley running north-east to south-west on the west side of the wood.

The wood is designated by Hampshire County Council (HCC) as a "Site of Importance for Nature Conservation" (SINC), due to a significant element of ancient semi-natural woodland. The designation was based upon the HCC survey of October 1987 and the criterion used was: "1B Other woodland where there is a significant element of ancient semi-natural woodland surviving". The presence of AWVP flora, veteran Yew and Beech, areas of ancient semi natural woodland and the survival of wood banks are listed as factors contributing to the designation of the wood as a SINC.

The Forestry Commission have a "Forest Design Plan" setting out their vision for Black Wood (and other nearby woods) which contains detailed proposals for felling and restocking of trees over the next 10 years, in addition to maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the site.

Existing operations

The wood is currently used for commercial timber harvesting and general woodland management and is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission. The estimated yield is around 2,000 cubic metres of timber per year. The wood is also open to the general public and used mainly for informal leisure activities, including walking, dog walking, jogging, horse riding and occasional biking. In addition, formal recreational activities take place with the permission of the Forestry Commission, including one-off events and regular or periodic repeated events such as orienteering, nature conservation and husky training. The applicant has estimated that approximately 10,000 visitors visit the wood on an annual basis. Blackwood, in combination with other woods in the area, is subject to The Micheldever Forest Design Plan (MFDP) 2007-2037, which represents a 30 year vision for the woodlands. The objectives of the plan include:

- Sustainable use and management of the woodlands;
- Support and enhance biological diversity;
- Protect and enhance special sites for conservation;
- Encourage people to appreciate and enjoy in a sustainable way;
- Protect and preserve archaeological interest;
- Ensure forestry operation take place at a scale and frequency in keeping with the surrounding landscape;
- Provide income from the marketing of timber products and provision of recreation facilities;
- Provide further opportunity for partnership working.

In particular the management strategy for the conservation of the woodland habitat aims to prevent any further loss of the surviving wildlife and historic features that exist within Ancient Woodland sites and for the gradual restoration of native broadleaf woodland, to

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dramatically enhance biodiversity (ref: MFDP 6.0). The restructuring of the woodland edge, which is described in the forest design plan, has already begun, as demonstrated by the recent felling of a large area of woodland to the north of the site, bordering the A303. The Forest Design Plan also recognises that Black Wood is highly valued for informal public access.

Proposal

The proposed development relates to the development of the site for:

- 60 timber holiday cabins arranged in 5 linked clusters of 9 to 17 cabins centred around a sinuous central access track. The cabins would be positioned on average 25m apart, 50m from any replanted or semi-natural ancient woodland and 25m from existing woodland paths. In total, it is proposed to provide 25 two bed cabins, 28 three bed cabins and 7 four bed cabins;
- A 323 sq. m facilities building incorporating a reception, shop, café, forest experience room, teaching room, manager's accommodation and cycle hire. This building would be located adjacent to the central meadow area;
- A wood chip boiler building, located north of the central facilities building in the centre of the site;
- A maintenance yard, containing the main recycling centre, house keeping building, parking, and the clean-down area for the on-site maintenance vehicles. Located south of cluster 1;
- An underground sewerage plant located adjacent to the maintenance yard
- An electricity sub-station located adjacent to the maintenance yard;
- 124 car parking spaces, comprising 83 spaces distributed at each cluster, 20 public parking spaces close to the wood entrance, and 21 spaces close to the central building for staff and visitors;
- 364 cycle parking spaces distributed at each cabin and including 40 spaces at the central building for staff and visitors;
- The proposals involve improved public access including access tracks, walking and cycling routes, cycle stands and public car parking.

The cabins would be suspended on pre-constructed steel piles to minimise disturbance to the ground area and constructed of Forest Stewardship Council certified timber. The central building would consist of a mono-pitched timber framed structure over the central reception/forest experience space. The cabins and central area are to be designed to meet BREEAM excellence standards, with a woodchip heating system, pile foundations, sustainable sourced timber and clay roof tiles, high levels of insulation and thermal efficient glazing.

It is intended to accommodate vehicular circulation on existing tracks, wherever possible. Existing tracks would be upgraded, where necessary, using similar material used previously by the Forestry Commission elsewhere on the site, using compacted small stone particles with a wood chip finish. It is proposed to move the site entrance 25m to the south to improve highway safety at the junction with Larkwhistle Farm Road. An additional 20 spaces dedicated to visitor parking would be provided at the site entrance. Beyond the junction within the site, the main access road would use the existing forest track and would be altered to provide passing places and a regular mowing regime of the grass verges on either side. The entrance track would have a bituminous surface finish. New gravel tracks are proposed to provide access into the individual chalet clusters. It is

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proposed to provide a shuttle bus from Micheldever railway station to provide transport to the site. Emergency access is proposed to the north of the site onto the A303.

It is proposed to promote recreation to the eastern side of the woodland for visitors staying in the cabins and the general public. It is also proposed to retain a hierarchy of forest tracks for use by pedestrians and cyclists. Signage marking circular routes of varying lengths, with options for connections to footpaths and bridleway routes to the wider countryside, would be provided. Some of the existing tracks within the woodland to the east of the development area would be upgraded to conservation rides. Visitors will be discouraged from using quieter routes to the north and south, by promotion of way-marked routes within the east of Black Wood.

The application is supported with the following documents:

- Environmental Statement covering the following topics:
 - Population
 - Land Use
 - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
 - Ecology and Biodiversity
 - Ancient Woodland
 - Archaeological Assessment
 - Hydrology and Geology and Hydrogeology
 - Noise and Vibration
 - Climate and Air Quality
 - Traffic and Transportation
- Tourism Need and Impact Statement
- Tree Survey, Arboricultural Implications and Method Statement Principles
- Black Wood Management Plan – Landscape, ecological, visitor and woodland management (see below for detailed description)
- Construction Management Plan
- Transport Assessment
- Sustainability Design Plan and Sustainability, Design and Access Statement
- Planning Obligation covering the Black Wood Management Plan and transportation matters.

The application is accompanied with a completed Unilateral Undertaking to secure the Travel Plan and the Black Wood Management Plan (BWMP). In addition, a financial contribution is secured towards highway improvement works at the Larkwhistle Farm Road and the A33 and/or local access improvements for pedestrians and cyclists. The Travel Plan is aimed at encouraging access to the site by means other than the private car, including a shuttle bus link to and from Micheldever train station. The BWMP would provide enhancements to the landscape and ecological diversity of the existing woodland.

The following objectives are contained within the BWMP:

- Restore semi-natural woodland vegetation from plantation forestry;
- Enhance and increase the area of dormouse habitat;
- Enhance and increase the grassland habitat to benefit species of sunny habitats such as reptiles, invertebrates and flora;
- Create attractive linear routes for walking and cycling whilst maintaining parts of the wood with little human disturbance;
- Maintenance of existing semi-natural ancient woodland and other areas of

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younger native broadleaf trees through coppicing rotation to benefit ground flora, invertebrates, breeding birds and, possibly, dormice;

- Expansion of the deadwood resource, to the benefit of wildlife;
- Protection of existing features which contribute to the landscape and amenity value of the woodland, i.e. bluebell swards, veteran oak and veteran yew trees and meadow areas;
- Visitor management.

The implementation of the management measures would be phased for the pre-construction, construction and long-term management stages of the development and would relate to specific types of management of the wood. The BWMP also sets out a monitoring regime for all aspects of the plan.

Relevant Planning History

A planning application (ref. 10/01077/FUL) for 98 cabins was refused planning permission by the Planning Development Control Committee on 8th November 2010. The reasons for refusal are reproduced below:

1 - By virtue of the scale of the proposed development, the existing landscape setting of the woodland would be significantly harmed by the proposed development. Due to the numbers of cabins, design and concentration within the wood their visual impact from within the forest would be substantial and detract from the special qualities of the woodland as a whole. In addition the significant increase in recreation use of the woodland by occupants of the cabins and general visitors would significantly reduce the existing tranquillity and seclusion experienced from within the woodland. The proposed development is therefore contrary to policies RT.18 and CE.5 of the WDLPR and contrary to the objectives of PPS1 and PPS7.

2 - In the absence of a legal agreement, or other appropriate legal mechanism, to secure adequate ecological mitigation measures for the development the extent and scale of the proposed scheme is of a level and significance that would cause significant direct and indirect harm to the ecology and biodiversity of the site through the loss of habitat within the SINC designation and deterioration of the ancient semi-natural woodland and replanted ancient woodland. The development is therefore contrary to policy CE.9 of the Winchester District Local Plan Review and contrary to the objectives of PPS9.

3 - In the absence of a legal agreement, or other appropriate legal mechanism, to secure a financial contribution towards sustainable transport infrastructure measures in line with the Transport Contributions Policy 2007 and a travel plan and a shuttle bus link to the railway station the development would result in an unacceptable increase in the number and length of car journeys where alternative means of travel would otherwise have had less environmental impact, which would be to the detriment of the environment and the locality and is contrary to policies T.1 and T.5 of the adopted Winchester District Local Plan Review and contrary to the aims of PPG13.

Consultations

WCC Strategic Planning – No change from previous response (to previous application for 98 cabins).

The previous application was considered acceptable in landscape and ecological terms

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and I would expect this reduced scheme to have less impact. If so, it would accord with Local Plan Policy RT18. The reference to 'small-scale' in Policy RT17 is not a policy requirement for permanent tourist accommodation and is not relevant.

WCC Economic and Cultural Services – Very supportive of scheme in terms of impact on local economy.

Although this impact is reduced (compared to the previous proposal) it will still be very significant for Winchester District. Hopes that reduction in chalet numbers will also prove more acceptable to residents in the area. Refers to submission in support of previous application, which stated that the developers have taken significant care to address concerns as they have arisen, and have, throughout the submission process, done their utmost to identify solutions to the practical and policy issues raised, whilst retaining the character, quality and vision of the scheme as a whole.

Conscious that local residents may be concerned about the negative impacts of the scheme (e.g. noise, traffic, harm to wildlife), but the site visit, our knowledge of the operation of such sites elsewhere in the UK and our understanding of the mitigation measures proposed by the developers, all lead us to conclude that these should not be major concerns. Moreover, there are new community benefits proposed, including the 'Forest Experience' facility and improved access for leisure users of the wood.

In addition, and at a difficult time for the economy which is likely to last for some years to come, this scheme brings the advantage of new jobs during construction and operation, £millions to the local economy during the construction and operation. The development at Blackwood would play a major role in increasing high-value trips to the District, and – given the length of stay in holiday chalets of this kind – helping to boost overnight stays. Overnight visitors are of far higher value, economically speaking, to the District than day visitors and generate fewer vehicle movements.

The provision of a shuttle bus to Micheldever Station; promotion of on-site activities such as cycling and ranger walks, and signposting of local businesses (e.g. pubs, shops) to provide for day to day purchases, should all contribute to ensuring that this development enhances its sustainable design credentials with sensitive operational practices.

WCC Environmental Protection – No objection, subject to land contamination condition. (Condition 12)

WCC Landscape – No objection, subject to conditions (Conditions 6, 7 and 8) and securing Blackwood Management Plan through Legal Agreement.

The proposals for a much reduced development, from 98 to 60 cabins, provide additional key measures that are considered to have positive benefits in terms of existing landscape character. In summary, the proposals do not have any adverse visual impact on the woodland when seen from public viewpoints within the surrounding landscape (as previously confirmed in the Environmental Statement) and are not considered to be harmful to existing landscape character or have adverse visual impact when seen from main paths within the woodland.

Proposal, as outlined above, further strengthen previous measures for maintaining and enhancing existing landscape character, with responsible long term management of the

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woodland secured through provision of a Section 106 agreement. Proposals are also considered to have significant benefits for the local community, including improvement of public access within a carefully managed environment, which will increase opportunities for people to experience the natural woodland without harm to existing landscape character.

WCC Trees – No objection subject to tree protection conditions (Condition 18)

WCC Archaeology – No objection subject to a condition securing a programme of archaeological work (Condition 15).

WCC Drainage – No objection on drainage grounds, provided drainage layout does not interfere with trees. (surface water drainage scheme secured through Condition 16 and tree protection scheme secured through Condition 18)

HCC Tourism – Supports the application.

Proposals support HCC's Strategic Priorities for the Visitor Economy 2007-2012, namely, Strategic Priority 2 to develop a strategic, market-focused approach to product development, place-shaping and destination management by supporting investment in the sort of places, products and experience that our target markets want, investing in rural tourism to attract higher-spending, environmentally aware, staying visitors, year-round, and managing visitors well with good signs, interpretation, information and facilities for visitors to targeting markets most likely to visit outside peak times.

Although the County Structure Plan has been superseded, HCC's Tourism policies still support the idea of a holiday village in north-east or south-east Hampshire. The applicant has provided a detailed and thorough feasibility which stands scrutiny, recognizing that this type of development will meet the needs of the visitor market over the long term and plug a gap in provision in this part of the county.

HCC Rights of Way – Welcome the provision of way-marked circular walking and cycling routes within the site and the improved facilities for public access to the site.

The Holiday Park would be ideally situated to provide access to the rights of way network in general, and to several County Council maintained routes that are present in the immediate vicinity, including Micheldever Restricted Byway No 25b, which runs along the western boundary of the site; The Wayfarers Walk, a County Council long distance path (70 miles), which lies to the south-east; and Two County Council promoted off-road cycle routes, which lie to the south east and to the west of the site.

The Park would bring additional pressure onto the network through increased use and we would therefore wish to secure funding from the applicant towards future maintenance of these paths. We would also be happy to be involved in any discussions that may be required as part of any recreational promotion of the site and its surrounding area, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the provision and marketing of these facilities.

HCC Highways – No objection, subject to conditions and S106 Agreement to secure a financial contribution of £16,850, a Travel Plan bond of £30,300 and associated assessment and monitoring fees, inclusive of provision for a further contribution to the County Council, should the minibus measures not be fully implemented.

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Supports relocation of site access 25m south along Larkwhistle Farm Road to improve junction safety. Supports the provision of a Travel Plan to secure a Travel Plan Co-ordinator and a shuttle bus, which is considered an essential part of the application. The £16,850 will be spent on improvements to the highway network, including the junction of Larkwhistle Farm Road and the A33 and facilities for non-motorised users to access the site (Conditions 13 and 14 relate to access details)

HCC Ecology – No objections, subject to appropriate conditions and the S106 Agreement submitted with the application, which secures the Black Wood Management Plan. (lighting management strategy secured through Condition 19; construction management plan secured through Condition 10)

The proposal has further evolved, with an even greater reduction in scale, whilst providing the same package of mitigation, compensation and enhancement. This incorporates habitat and visitor management and provides confidence in the extent of works proposed. The measures seek to minimise the impacts and to provide an overall enhancement to the site. The measures (as included in the Management Plan) have been secured thorough the accompanying legal agreement.

Natural England – No objection; proposals will not have an adverse impact on the nearby Micheldever Spoil Heaps SSSI.

Reminds the Council that it should ensure proposals accord with the key principles set out in PPS9, including paragraph 9 in relation to the SINC, and that HCC Ecology and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust should be consulted in this respect.

Part of the site is ancient woodland and the Council needs to ensure that there will be no damage from the proposed development or increased visitor pressure. Recommends that Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, County Wildlife Trust and County Ecologist should be consulted in this respect.

References submission with regard to previous scheme, in which NE stated it was satisfied that the development would not have an adverse impact on protected species and, in particular, the dormouse population, provided conditions are imposed in relation to mitigation measure, and that the developer is reminded that a European Protected Species Licence will be required in order to undertake works lawfully at this site.

The Woodland Trust – Fully supports the concept of sustainable forest holiday development, with the level of interpretation that would enable the users of the site to fully appreciate their surroundings and the wider environment.

Satisfied that the proposed development should not cause significant negative effects on the ancient woodland. Recognises the efforts that have been made to alleviate some of the issues raised in former objections, and that every attempt has been made to develop the holiday concept in a sustainable way, sensitive to the conservation interests of the site, in particular, reducing the number of cabins and siting them all at a distance of greater than 50m, and in most cases much further, from the ancient woodland.

The cabins, facilities building, associated services and tracks have also been designed to minimize the physical footprint of the development on the woodland. Suggests further

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measures to reduce light pollution, and that the Council should ensure the Management Plan is binding and funded over its lifetime.

However, it remains for the planning authority to decide the appropriateness of allowing development to take place within one of its own SINC sites.

Forestry Commission – Forest Holidays proposals for Black Wood have been presented to the English National Committee, to make sure that it supports the objectives of the Commission, and approved for submission as a planning application. Forest Holidays have an excellent track record in developing environmentally friendly holiday cabin sites in other sensitive areas within the Forestry Commission estate, including the ancient woodland of the Forest of Dean and three National Parks.

Hampshire Wildlife Trust – Objection.

Recognises that Forest Holidays have worked hard to minimise the potential impacts to biodiversity and the proposal and incorporated many excellent ecological enhancements which will benefit, in particular, the ancient semi-natural woodland element of the site. The Trust understands that the various measures for ecological mitigation, compensation, enhancement and long-term management will be secured by a legal agreement.

However, remains concerned that approval of this application could set a precedent for similar developments within SINC, and therefore maintains an objection to the proposals.

Environment Agency – No objection, subject to a condition securing surface water drainage details (Condition 16).

Southern Water – No objections raised. Advice regarding proposed sustainable urban drainage system.

Test Valley Borough Council – No objection.

Tourism South East – Support proposals which are entirely in accordance with their aims and objectives to establish a quality rural tourism product, in an area of tourism demand.

The South East has considerably less self-catering accommodation stock than other parts of the UK, despite increasing popularity. Tourism South East has therefore identified the further development of rural self-catering accommodation as a priority for investment. Self-catering is emerging as an increasingly popular form of holiday accommodation, and appeals to a range of markets.

Visitors using self-catering accommodation represent a high spending market, mainly due to average length of stay in an area being longer than hotel and B&B accommodation. Demand for self-catering accommodation remains buoyant due in part to the 'staycation' effect.

Representations:

Micheldever Parish Council – Strongly objects, for the following reasons:

- Totally unsuitable location for a significant Forest Holiday Park in a small area of

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- woodland unable to cope with intended use; unacceptable numbers of people (240 people at any one time based on 75% occupancy) and vehicle movements;
- Traffic safety; concerns over the danger of use of Larkwhistle Farm Road (LFR) by cyclists, narrow road with bends and dips and used by HGVs, tractors, trailers and grain lorries, possibly fatalities; junction of LFR with A33 major concern, serious accidents have occurred, turning right across a dual carriageway; vehicles moving at great speed; concern at use of A303 by pedestrians seeking Popham Services, risking serious injury;
 - Loss of peace and tranquility of this small area of accessible woodland; contravenes Policies RT.1 and RT.2 of the L.P.R. and contrary to 'Open Spaces' designation in Village Design Statement; one of the few types of ancient woodland in Hampshire; should be protected and not exploited for monetary gain; impression that the wood is used heavily for logging purposes is incorrect; 'Forestry Commission' already committed to a plan of mixed woodland improvement;
 - Size and nature of the wood conflicts with woodland experience FH are seeking to achieve; site wedged between A303 and M3; contrasts with other existing holiday sites - Scottish Lochs, Yorkshire Moors, Cornwall - that adjoin National Parks and remote countryside and have fewer cabins 35, 59, and 43; amounts to a large 'hotel' in the woods – people using it as a base; unsuitable choice of Black Wood, should not be chosen because there are no other suitable alternatives;
 - Visitor management; how will sensitive area be safeguarded with only one site manager to control the movements of the occupants of 60 cabins; history of antisocial activity; concern that security measures would impact on local walkers, riders and other woodland users, and would not be consistent with the rural character; unacceptable impact on surrounding farmland and privately owned property; rural community already plagued with criminal damage, poaching, damage and theft; police already fully stretched; site is bound to lead further problems e.g. the SCATS lorry park; Black Wood is totally inappropriate location for families to relax and appreciate beautiful countryside.

Steventon Parish Council – Objects: Unspoiled area of natural woodland, rich in wildlife and greatly valued. Any development can only be harmful. Natural value of Black Wood when condition imposed on Popham Airfield preventing overflying.

Dummer Parish Council – Objects: Erodes the environmental value of the site, both as a habitat and tranquil recreational amenity; access from the M3 or A303 is congested on Friday evenings and summer weekends; introducing more traffic will lead to increased hazard at A30 and A303 accident sites.

Candovers Parish Council – Objects; other FH sites are in larger woods; peace and tranquility loss; traffic; dangerous nature of LFR; reduction in economic benefit.

Overton Parish Council – No objections.

Overton Parish Council has considered an application for this site on a number of occasions and, despite the many changes, has no objections to the proposed plan. Initially, there was concern that this development would increase the traffic through Overton and the surrounding country, but, following a presentation by Forest Holidays, these fears have been allayed. We do not feel that this development would be to the detriment of the wooded area, and it would have a commercial benefit for Overton.

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The Dever Society – Objects to the development for the following reasons:

- Location and Scale; decision to reduce number of cabins from 130 to 98 to 60 makes no difference, still a major incursion on an unspoiled wood. 60 cabins more comparable to other FH sites, but would still be in a wood that is smaller than any other site apart from Deerpark. Questions land take of 3.8ha or 1.5% of wood and makes own calculation that development, including land between the buildings, will take up nearly 20ha or 7.6%. Black Wood is different to other locations where FH operate that are close to, or within, some of Britain's most beautiful and publicly accessible landscapes. In comparison, BW is surrounded by major roads or agricultural fields, with no right to roam. Other than the right of way adjacent to the site, which terminates at the A303, all other rights of way are some distance from Black Wood and access is nearly all via busy roads. Concerned that the development will not be economically viable and will fail.
- Impact on Black Wood and District; planning statement's use of the word 'commercial logging' is misleading, as BW is a quiet and largely undisturbed woodland. Peaceful and tranquil nature is recognized by the Forestry Commission in its Forest Design Plan. This tranquil and secluded asset would be lost if this major development went ahead. 60 cabins and associated infrastructure will have an adverse impact on character of wood and its wildlife. FH has clearly put considerable effort into adapting its proposal to address these concerns, but massive disturbance would be caused by the construction, operation and enormous increase in visitors. Counter-intuitive to believe that mitigation measures can reduce impacts or improve biodiversity in presence of this amount of disturbance. BW is a SINC due to its ancient woodland. The SINC will be damaged, contrary to Policy CE9 of the WLPR. No need for the development, which is simply an attempt by Forestry Commission for financial gain. Potential economic benefit was the only strong argument in favour of the larger schemes, however, this benefit has declined with the number of cabins, while the harm remains the same.
- Traffic and transport Issues – question the likely use of the railway station at Micheldever Station by customers, and sceptical of the Transport Assessment claim that traffic generation from the site will be minimal, as comparison with FH Keldy site shows that trips on Saturdays were higher than Friday, even though Friday is changeover day. Only right of way from site leads directly to A303 verge, which will result in holidaymakers using unsafe route to M&S and Little Chef at Popham Services. Concerned at FH's continued failure to recognise the dangerous nature of LFR, which is considered one of the most dangerous local roads in the area. Road is totally unsuitable for walking or families cycling and there are concerns that, if development goes ahead, the result will be severe, or even fatal, road accidents.

The Sylva Foundation – Support.

- Proposal would foster greater environmental awareness;
- Educational benefits of the forest trail, interpretation panels, multi-purpose classroom and ranger service;
- Wood fuel heating system has both environmental and educational benefits;
- Black Wood is of a sufficient scale and robustness to support the development, particularly with the amendments and mitigation package proposed.

County Councillor Jackie Porter – Objection, for the following reasons:

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- Building in the Countryside - This series of chalets, albeit reduced in number, remains a hotel, to be built on countryside. This is clearly against policy to build in the Countryside;
- Light pollution - These buildings will have associated public lighting for health and safety reasons. The owls and other night-time wildlife will be disturbed and light pollution will increase. Not only at night, the current environment of the wood at dusk and dawn will be irreparably damaged;
- Noise - The site does have a unique quality, unlike more popular woods such as Micheldever Wood. Noise of cars driving through, and machinery working, will pierce the stillness of the wood;
- Public Safety - Currently, no vehicles use the wood: the cars of users remain outside the entrance gate. This proposal will bring cars into direct contact with casual users on the feeder roads. If the application is truly green, then appropriate measures should be taken to keep cars right at the entrance of the wood, and use electric buggies (or suitable alternative) to transport holidaymakers to their chalets, this preserving the atmosphere and environment;
- Reducing reliance on public transport - A minibus service to other facilities out of the wood is also a clear requirement to reduce the number of car movements to the site. This bus should be conditioned to include use by local groups to visit the woods on a day to day basis;
- Highways - use by pedestrians - Because of the poor position of the wood in relation to public transport links and other tourist attractions, and the site is also within some miles of the Proposed National Park, it is anticipated that the increased traffic will bring visitors onto local roads. These roads are all without footways (excepting Overton Road) and pedestrians share the routes. The need to separate pedestrians and vehicles, particularly at the entrance, and as far as possible along the length of Larkwhistle Farm Road, is vital.
- Highways - safe car access. The junction of Larkwhistle Farm Road and the A33 is barely adequate during the day, and very difficult at half light. This application is not satisfactory unless there are measures under an agreement to make changes to the A33, and the roads off, at this point

174 individual letters received objecting to the application (61 being standard letters and a number from separate individuals at the same address). Reasons given for objection, similar to those given by the Dever Society and Micheldever Parish Council (as detailed above), are summarised below:

- Damage to natural environment;
- Peace & tranquility would be lost forever;
- 60 cabins no different in principle to the 130 and 98 rejected by the Council;
- Site will be used as a hotel in the woods and visitors will travel by car to points of interest, increasing the volume of traffic on local roads;
- Larkwhistle Farm Road is an accident waiting to happen for strangers on bicycles and in cars, particularly the junction with the A33;
- The cabins will not bring significant employment to the area to offset the intrusions into the countryside;
- The argument that tourism will bring income to Hampshire may be relevant, but at what cost to our precious woodland;
- The Forestry Commission is engaged in selling its forests in England to private owners, so it is even more important we protect what little we have now;

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- Wildlife, including endangered species, will be disturbed and put at risk;
- Proposal will destroy the character of the woodland;
- Site is not sufficient size, with insufficient infrastructure in place;
- Would not provide sufficient employment to overcome impact;
- Proposal will lead to increased problems of trespass onto private property;
- Other FH sites developed in larger woodlands;
- Disturbance to neighbouring residential amenities;
- Loss of enthusiasts cycle trail.

7 letters of support received, highlighting the following issues:

- North Hants has a huge amount to offer the tourist;
- Scheme offers many benefits to local people, the economy and long term health of the woodland;
- Low impact, high quality tourist development should be encouraged and welcomed;
- Job creation will replace jobs that are being lost in other sectors and should be seen as a priority;
- Boost for the local forestry sector - provision of woodfuel system will add momentum to local wood chip supply chain;
- Provision of public car parking, signs and interpretation will benefit general public;
- Greater understanding and experience of woodlands.

Relevant Planning Policy

South East Plan 2009:

The South East Plan was adopted by the Secretary of State on 6th May 2009 and supersedes the Hampshire County Structure Plan and RPG9. The Coalition Government's revocation of the Plan in July 2010 has been found to be unlawful, so the document remains part of the Development Plan at this time. Relevant policies include – CC.1 (sustainable development), C.4 (landscape and countryside management), NRM.11 (energy efficiency/renewables), TSR.2 (rural tourism), TSR.5 (tourist accommodation)

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Policies relating to countryside recreation RT.17 and RT.18, countryside protection policies CE.5, CE.9, CE.11 and CE.28, archaeological policy HE.1, design policies DP.3, DP.4, DP.5, DP.9 and DP.10 and transportation policies T.1, T.2, T.3, T.4 and T5

Emerging Core Strategy

The Council is in the process of producing the LDF Core Strategy. This reached the Preferred Option Stage in 2009. The Preferred Option seeks to resist development outside built-up areas unless it has an operational need for a countryside location or uses existing buildings (Policy MTRA.3). However, tourism is one of five key economic sectors identified and encouraged in Policy CP.3. The Core Strategy is a strategic document and does not contain any site-specific policies relating to this area.

National Planning Policy Guidance/Statements/Practice Guides:

The following PPS's and PPG's are relevant to the development proposal:

- PPS1 – Sustainable Development
- PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Development

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- PPS5 – Planning for the Historic Environment
- PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- PPS9 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
- PPG13 – Transport
- PPG17 – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation
- PPS22 – Renewable Energy
- PPS24 – Planning and Noise
- PPS25 – Development and Floodrisk
- Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism

Supplementary Planning Guidance
Micheldever Village Design Statement

Other Planning Guidance
Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan
Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCS): Winchester District
Winchester District Landscape Assessment

Planning Considerations

The main planning considerations relate to whether the proposed development is appropriate for this site, taking into consideration its impact on ecology, landscape, traffic, and other material planning considerations.

Principle of development

The site lies in a countryside location, as defined in the adopted Winchester District Local Plan Review (WDLPR), therefore the general principles of development restraint apply to this area. The adopted WDLPR does cater for tourist and leisure facilities in the countryside, but highlights, in the supporting text, that such proposals should generally be small-scale and re-use existing buildings, to ensure that activities are maintained at a level that can be accommodated without harm to the local environment (para 9.57). The WDLPR does not define what level of development is considered “small-scale”, either in terms of number of units or size of site. However, it is noted that the scale of the development has been reduced in comparison to the earlier applications, from 130 cabins and 98 cabins to now just 60 cabins.

The Head of Strategic Planning maintains his view (as he advised on the two previous applications for this site) that a refusal of permission based solely upon the scale of the proposed development would be difficult to justify. Consequently, it is considered that the principle of development is not unacceptable, although permission should only be granted if the proposal meets the requirements of other planning policies and is acceptable in all other respects.

Para. 9.59 relates to Policy RT.18 and clarifies that the development of sites for more permanent holiday accommodation, such as chalets or mobile homes, is less acceptable in the countryside than when compared to touring sites. This is because the accommodation tends to be present all year round and the intrusion into the countryside is, therefore, greater. However the text does then go on to state that:

“Such development (permanent holiday accommodation) will only be permitted where a

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site is so well screened from public viewpoints that it is not visible at any time of the year. Only woodland sites are likely to be suitable, subject to the conservation of their forestry, historical and ecological importance”.

It is therefore clear from Policy RT.18 that permanent holiday accommodation located in the countryside is only acceptable if it is totally screened from public viewpoints throughout the year, and that the woodland interests of a site, including conservation of its forestry, history and ecology, are protected. These issues are explored in detail in subsequent paragraphs. Policies CE.5 (Landscape Character), CE.9 (Protection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation), and CE.11 (Enhanced Sites of Nature Conservation Value) of the WDLPR are relevant in these considerations.

Current scheme compared to the refused application

The impact of the proposed development on the environmental interests of the site and surrounding area has been comprehensively addressed through the submitted Environmental Statement and other supporting documents. The changes to the current scheme are an attempt to overcome the objections to the earlier refused scheme, which was considered to be unacceptable due to concern with the scale of the development and its impact on the landscape setting of the wood.

The current proposals result in a reduction in the number of holiday cabins from 98 to 60 (a 38% reduction). The number of clusters of cabin groups have also been reduced from eight to five and this, together with a shortening of some of the remaining clusters, has resulted in a reduction in land take for development, down from approximately 5ha to 3.8ha. The clusters are positioned in roughly the same locations as before, as it was determined through the Environmental Impact Assessment that these positions were the least environmentally damaging. As before, the submitted plans indicate that there would be no cabins within 50m of the replanted ancient or semi-natural ancient woodland, no cabins would be sited within areas of potential dormouse habitat, cabins would be spaced on average 25m apart and the number of two storey cabins reduced from 15 to 7. As before, the current proposal offers a comprehensive landscape and ecological enhancement package, including the creation of conservation rides and clearings, regeneration of the forest floor around cabins, a mowing regime for the central meadow and strategic areas of planting aimed at aiding the woodland diversity and important forest habitat. It is proposed to provide a programme for the implementation and maintenance of these measures through the Black Wood Management Plan (BWMP), to be secured through the S106 agreement.

The applicant has estimated (within the submitted Need and Impact Assessment document) that the total number of additional visitors generated by the development over a period of a year would be 19,413 (compared to 29,632 visitors for the previous 98 cabin scheme). In terms of numbers of guests on any given day, it is recognised in the application documents that this would fluctuate on a seasonal basis but that, on average, there would be 179 sleeping on the site on any given night (60 cabins x 74.4% average letting x 4 persons per cabin). In any event, it is accepted that not all those sleeping on site will be active within the site at all hours of the day. Many will be off-site walking, cycling and visiting the surrounding area, and others may be relaxing within the cabins or using the central facility.

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Ecology and Biodiversity

Policy CE9 of the WDLPR makes it clear that development likely to harm a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the need for the development outweighs the harm to the nature conservation value of the site. Policy CE9 clarifies that, where development is permitted that may harm a SINC, the Council will need to be satisfied that there is sufficient provision to minimise the damage, and to provide appropriate compensatory measures.

The impact of the proposed development on ecology and biodiversity has been assessed and the results are contained within the Ecology and Biodiversity chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES). In addition, the ES assesses the impact of the development on the ancient woodland (both semi-natural and replanted) within the site.

As before, Natural England, Hampshire County Council Ecology and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HWWT) have assessed the scheme. In addition, nature conservation groups, including the Woodland Trust and the Silva Foundation, have commented on the proposed scheme. The current scheme is generally supported by the statutory consultees and the other conservation groups, with the exception of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, who continue to object to the principle of developing the site, which is a SINC, for holiday accommodation.

HWWT recognises the efforts that the applicant has made in terms of reducing the impact of the development on the wood, but remains concerned that approval of this application could set a precedent for similar developments within SINC.

Notably, the Woodland Trust has removed the previous objection on the earlier scheme and is now satisfied that the proposed development should not cause significant negative effects on the ancient woodland. The Trust also recognises the efforts that have been made to alleviate some of the issues raised in former objections and that every attempt has been made to develop the holiday concept in a sustainable way, sensitive to the conservation interests of the site, in particular, reducing the number of cabins and siting them all at a distance of greater than 50m, and in most cases much further, from the ancient woodland.

The ES confirms that the development would have both direct (construction and buildings) and indirect effects (recreation activity) on the ecology of the site, in relation to the ancient woodland and protected species.

Direct impacts on ecology - In terms of the direct impact of the development on the ancient woodland, the development footprint avoids the area of the wood that contains ancient woodland, with a proposed buffer zone of 50m between all buildings and these areas. With the exception of a short stretch of the new access road, no new development will take place within 50m of the replanted ancient woodland. This compares to the guidance issued by Natural England, which advises that development should be at least 15m from the edge of ancient woodland. As such, it is considered that the proposals allow sufficient space between the development and the sensitive woodland, and this separation distance exceeds Natural England guidance.

The reduction in the number of cabins, the separation space between buildings and their containment within the central area of the site, has also helped to reduce the direct impact of the development on the ecology of the wood. Furthermore, measures secured

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in the proposed Black Wood Management Plan are aimed to improve the biodiversity of the woodland as a whole, including the ancient, replanted, and non-ancient parts. In terms of the protected species contained within the site, the central building and boiler house have been moved away from potential reptile habitat to an area much closer to the central point of the cabin clusters. Natural England is satisfied that the development should not have a negative impact on any protected species and, in particular, the dormouse population of Black Wood, subject to the proposed mitigation measures being secured. On the above basis, it is therefore considered that the development would not have a direct harmful impact on the ecological interests of the site.

Indirect impacts on ecology - The ES also assesses the indirect damage and disturbance to the ancient woodland caused by the increase in visitors associated with the development. The ES finds that the reduction in numbers of visitors to the wood, when compared to the previous scheme, will further reduce the likelihood of trampling damage to the woodland. The ES concludes that there is still likely to be a minor adverse impact from visitor pressures, which will need to be mitigated with improved woodland management, which should restore the structural diversity of the woodland. The purpose of the Black Wood Management Plan (BWMP) is to set out management objectives and proposals for the wood which will ensure the long term protection and enhancement of the woodland's amenity, ecology, landscape and other features. The BWMP will also allow for improved public access and enjoyment of the wood, the management of the new holiday development, the continuation of normal forestry operations over the remainder of the wood and additional management measures to enhance the woodland

Detailed comments have been received from Hampshire County Council's Ecologist in relation to the impact of the development on the ancient woodland and protected species. The County Ecologist acknowledges that the proposal has evolved, with a reduction in scale and a more robust package of mitigation, compensation and enhancement is now proposed. The County Ecologist confirms that the mitigation package incorporates habitat and visitor management and provides confidence in the extent of works proposed, and that the measures seek to minimise the impacts and provide an overall enhancement to the site, mainly by securing appropriate management of all of the land.

The County Ecologist clarifies the relationship between the existing Micheldever Forest Design Plan (MFDP) and the set of mitigation measures proposed through the BWMP. The County Ecologist confirms that strategic management of the woodland is already set out in the existing MFDP. The County Ecologist acknowledges that this explains the aspirations for ongoing works to be carried out by the Forestry Commission, and that the implementation is dependent upon funding being available. The County Ecologist confirms that, through the revised application and what is described in the BWMP, it is apparent that the development would secure:

- works specifically relating to the development within the footprint of the physical development;
- targeted habitat works and measures for particular species in defined wider areas of the site (beyond what is proposed by the MFDP); and also
- the aspirational works throughout the woodland, as set out in the MFDP (in what is termed the 'general woodland' in the ES and Management Plan).

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Therefore, the County Ecologist agrees that the proposed development should enable the management of the whole woodland (as set out in the BWMP secured through the S106), and raises no objection to the proposed development.

It has been confirmed by the County Ecologist and Natural England that a European Protected Species licence will be required in relation to the development impacts on the dormouse population contained within the wood, as the proposed entrance track will affect the dormouse population. Under the Habitats Regulations, the Council needs to be satisfied that the three derogation tests of those regulations (shown below) will be met.

1. *the consented operation must be for 'preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment';*
2. *there must be 'no satisfactory alternative'; and*
3. *the action authorised 'will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range'.*

The ES addresses these tests and concludes:

1. Overriding public interest – The proposal raises issues of overriding public interest of an economic and social nature. This has been demonstrated within the supporting documents accompanying the planning application, including the needs assessment, which looks at the social demand for holiday cabins in south-east England and the economic benefit of providing the cabins.
2. Alternatives - The Environmental Statement (ES) considers all the woodlands owned or managed by the Forestry Commission in Hampshire (excluding the New Forest National Park and sensitive coastal areas) as possibilities for the development. The ES concludes that Black Wood best meets the essential and desirable criteria for the proposed development and the alternative woods are not satisfactory for a variety of reasons, such as soil type, high nature conservation constraint or poor vehicular access.
3. Favourable conservation status - The ES confirms that the area of dormouse habitat to be lost is approximately 0.05ha, with a further 0.25ha isolated from adjacent woodland, but re-linked to adjacent woodland with a rope bridge. The ES confirms that the Black Wood Management Plan would secure 11.6ha of semi-natural woodland restoration from plantation forestry, with enrichment planting of shrubs to suit dormice and 5.7ha of shrub enrichment planting to naturally regenerate woodland which was felled in 2007. The ES states that this management is in the northern part of the site, close to the existing population centre of dormice in the wood. The ES confirms that this makes a total of 17.3ha of new habitat for dormice as a result of the development, over fifty times the habitat to be lost or isolated.

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It is considered that sufficient justification has been given to meet the first two tests in relation to demonstrating an overriding need for the development and looking at alternatives to using Black Wood for the development. The County Ecologist is satisfied that the mitigation measures proposed are sufficient to meet test 3 of the Habitat Regulations. Furthermore, Natural England is satisfied that the development should not have a negative impact on any protected species and, in particular, the dormouse population of Black Wood, subject to the proposed mitigation measures being secured.

It is clear from the above analysis that the current planning application is accompanied with a comprehensive assessment of the potential impact of the development on the ecological interests of this sensitive site. The reduction in scale, numbers, extent and siting of the proposed cabins, and the ecological mitigation measures now proposed, result in a scheme that is acceptable from a nature conservation perspective. On the above basis, the development is considered to comply with Policy CE9 of the WDLPR.

Landscape Impact

The application is supported with a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment examining the character, condition, sensitivity, magnitude of impact and potential mitigation measures appropriate for the development. The assessment examines the impact of the development from within a 3.5km radius, from within and outside of the site. It is accepted that the local landscape has a strong rural character, with a robust framework of mature woodlands. The proposed development does not significantly affect the woodland edge surrounding the site, as it is proposed to retain a minimum 70-100m buffer of undeveloped woodland around the perimeter of the site. It is also proposed to provide additional shrub planting on the western side of the site and off-site (within applicant's ownership) planting to the northern edge of the site, to further reinforce the woodland edge and reduce potential visibility of the scheme from outside of the site.

The position of the group of clusters of cabins and associated infrastructure is considered sufficiently contained within the site so as not to be visually intrusive from viewpoints outside of the site, and in this respect the development is considered not to have a wider adverse visual impact on the surrounding area, subject to the enhanced planting and recognition of a need for the woodland buffer zone.

Notwithstanding the limited visual impact of the development from outside of the confines of the wood, the visual impact of the development from within the existing wood and its effect on the existing seclusion and tranquillity experienced from within the wood, is considered an important factor and was previously raised as the main reason for refusal on the 98 cabin scheme. It was concluded on the previous planning application that the visual impact of 98 cabins from within the forest would be substantial and would detract from the special qualities of the wood as a whole. In addition, the Committee concluded that the significant increase in recreational use of the woodland by occupants of the cabins and general visitors would significantly reduce the existing tranquillity and seclusion experienced from within the woodland.

The Council's Landscape Officer has assessed the latest revised application and considers that the proposals comprise a significant number of changes to the previous refused scheme in terms of addressing any potential impacts of development on visibility and landscape character when seen from paths and public viewpoints within the woodland. The Landscape Officer considers that the key positive measures include the following:

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- Removal of cabins from around the central meadow (clusters 5 and 8 in the 98 cabin scheme); this leaves only the main central building as proposed within the vicinity of the meadow. Remaining cabins nearest to the meadow are located to the west on the far side of valley slopes, therefore any visual impact would be negligible. It should be noted that no cabins are proposed within a radius of 120m from the meadow and, in most areas, the distance to the nearest cabin is considerably greater.
- Increased distance between the main public tracks through the woodland and the proposed cabins. There is now more than 100 m between the main circulation track and the nearest cabin in clusters 1 and 3 and at least 40m between the existing east-west path leading to Larkwhistle Farm and the nearest cabin. In the 98 cabin scheme, all of cluster 2 has been removed, cabins from the northern end of clusters 1 and 3 have been removed and further cabins from the southern ends of clusters 1, 2 and 3 (NB numbering of clusters has changed between schemes).
- Reduction in the number of two storey cabins from 11 to 7.
- Introduction of areas of strategic regeneration between the cabins and main public access routes. These are areas where pockets of woodland will be thinned to increase light levels reaching the woodland floor, to promote rapid regeneration of shrub and ground flora species, providing additional screening between the cabins and adjacent recreational woodland areas.

In summary, the main positive changes with the 60 cabin scheme are:

- Cluster 1: the closest cabin to the main circulation track is now 105M;
- Cluster 1: the closest cabin to the path to the south is now 85M;
- Cluster 2: the closest cabin to the path to the south is now 90M;
- Cluster 3: the closest cabin to the main circulation track is now 105M;
- Cluster 4: the closest cabin to the main circulation track is now 60M;
- Clusters 2, 5 & 8 as shown in the 98 cabin scheme have been completely removed, reducing number of clusters from eight to five.

The landscape officer points out that, in addition to the above, the scheme retains measures incorporated in the former 98 cabin scheme to reduce any potential landscape and visual impact, .i.e.

- Generous spacing between cabins (average 25m between each cabin), allowing trees around and between the cabins to be retained;
- Location of two-storey cabins within the site's natural valley where they can be set into the slope;
- Use of natural construction materials for the cabins, which blends with the woodland setting;
- Dispersed location of the cabins in a number of different clusters;
- Augmentation planting along the western woodland edge;
- Encouragement of natural regeneration around cabins to provide natural screening;
- Additional native shrub planting around the proposed site infrastructure facilities, to provide screening;
- Phased replacement of existing single species plantation areas in Black Wood with mixed deciduous woodland. This, combined with encouragement of natural regeneration as proposed, will enhance existing landscape character and improve biodiversity.

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It is considered that the visual impact of the proposed development from within the wood itself has been carefully addressed through the current application, and several positive measures have been put in place to reduce the impact of the development on the special qualities of the wood to an acceptable level. It is acknowledged that the development would alter users' experience from within the wood, but that the proposal now represents a sensitive approach to the development of the site and, in this respect, is considered acceptable.

The submitted Black Wood Management Plan is to be secured through the S106 Legal Agreement and should ensure that the measures proposed to protect and enhance the landscape setting of Black Wood can be delivered by this development. On this basis, it is now considered that the overall visual impact of the development on the surrounding environment, both from within and outside of the wood, is acceptable and accords with Policies RT.18 and CE.5 of the WDLPR.

Transportation and highway safety

The application is supported with a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan compiled by ARUP dated November 2010, which has been assessed by Hampshire County Council Highways (HCC Highways), who do not raise an objection to the proposed development. The site is located approximately 2km to the east of Micheldever Station, approximately 12km north of Winchester and 8km to the southwest of Basingstoke close to junction 8 of the M3. The site is located within 2km of a railway station and the closest village of Micheldever Station contains a village pub and recreation area. A new access is proposed, which would be located approximately 25m to the south of the existing access onto the Larkwhistle Farm Road.

It is proposed that the site access is relocated 25 metres to the south in order to achieve maximum visibility. HCC Highways confirms that the proposed access will improve the safety of the junction and is therefore supported. The works will be subject to the County Council's design check process and it will be necessary for the developer to enter into a Section 278 Agreement with the County Council. Appropriately worded conditions are recommended to ensure that the highway works are implemented (Conditions 13 and 14 relate).

The Transport Assessment submitted with the application considers the likely impact of the proposed development on the local highway network and has been assessed by HCC Highways, who do not object to the proposals. HCC Highways confirms that modelling of the A33/Larkwhistle Farm Road junction has revealed that there are no existing capacity issues at this location and this junction is able to operate within capacity inclusive of the traffic generated by the development. HCC Highways also considers that the A33 can accommodate the development traffic satisfactorily and does not object to the proposed development on traffic impact grounds.

As part of the sustainability package, the proposals include measures to enhance the accessibility of the site by more sustainable methods of transportation, including a shuttle bus from the railway station, and the encouragement of cycling/walking within the site through the provision of dedicated cycle ways/pathways and facilities for cycle hire and parking. HCC Highways considers that the on-site facilities, including the on-site shop and cafe to serve the large element of "self-catering" customers, should reduce the need for off-site shopping travel. The nature of the development does also

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limit the number of sites that are suitable and, in sustainability terms, this site is considered better than others assessed by Forest Holidays, due to its location close to the train station. The provision of the shuttle service, cycle hire service and on-site leisure, shopping and cafe facilities and travel plan are proposed as part of the S106 legal agreement, which has been agreed in principle with HCC Highways. In addition, a financial contribution has been secured through the legal agreement to provide improvements to the existing access arrangements at the Larkwhistle/A33 junction and/or other local highway improvements.

Concern has been expressed by the Parish Council and others that the proposed development would encourage inexperienced cyclists, including small children, to use the Larkwhistle Farm Road, which is considered unsuitable for such use. It is intended that the shuttle bus facility will have a cycle rack and will transport visitors with their bikes to off-site locations where required. HCC Highways have confirmed that they will be responsible for the approval and monitoring of the Travel Plan, and will not support the promotion of Larkwhistle Farm Road or the A33 for inexperienced cyclists. Mindful of this, and the fact that accident data obtained to cover the last 3 years reveals no recorded injury accidents at the junction of Larkwhistle Farm Road and the A33, it is difficult to demonstrate that sufficient harm will occur in highway safety terms. As a result, it would be hard to sustain a highway reason for refusal on this issue.

Archaeology

The historic value of the ancient woodland is recognised through its designation as a SINC and the issues surrounding the impact of the development on the SINC have been considered above. Archaeology is among a number of issues which have been assessed as part of an ES and detailed in Section 3.6 of the ES submitted by the applicant in connection with this application, as are historic woodland features (Section 3.5). A detailed baseline study (archaeological desk-based assessment) and a report on the results of an archaeological evaluation have also been submitted as part of the ES (Appendix 8).

- Gifford, 2008, 'Blackwood Forest, Micheldever, Hampshire: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment'. Report No. 14783/R01Arch.
- John Moore Heritage Services, December 2008, 'Interim Report on an Archaeological Test Evaluation in Black Wood, Micheldever Parish, Hampshire'

The desk-based assessment highlights the archaeological potential of the application site. It was known that the area of the proposed development did not contain elements of well-preserved earthworks, which are present within other areas of Black Wood. However, no detailed information on the impacts of the proposed development on any buried archaeological remains was known. Consequently, an archaeological evaluation was commissioned by the applicant in order to enable a fuller assessment of the impacts of the proposed development to be made. As detailed in the ES, the archaeological evaluation has identified that significant erosion, due to ploughing, has occurred across that part of Black Wood replanted in the 1930s, within which the proposed holiday park facilities are located. Furthermore, few buried archaeological features were identified during the evaluation.

Given the findings of the archaeological evaluation, it is not considered that archaeology is a significant constraint at this site. Further archaeological monitoring and recording in mitigation of the impacts of the proposed development on archaeological remains could

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be secured via a planning condition (Condition 15).

Crime, security and safety issues

Concerns from local residents have been raised over security and safety issues resulting from the increased use of the site by members of the public, and that inadequate measures would be put in place to prevent trespass on adjoining land and anti-social behaviour. Clarification has been provided by the applicant in relation to the management of the site. A 24 hour ranger would live on site and additional staff would help to manage the facilities. The existing use of the wood is accessible to the general public and there is currently no on-site residential presence, which offers no on-site management occupation to provide security. Whilst the levels of visitors and holiday makers would be significantly higher than the existing low key use, it is considered that sufficient measures would be put in place to manage security and safety to an acceptable level.

Sustainability measures

The proposals incorporate a number of sustainable development measures aimed at reducing the impact of the development on the environment. These measures include:

- Provision of a wood chip boiler system to heat the cabins and central facilities building;
- Sourcing wood fuel locally;
- Provision of a shuttle bus between the site and Micheldever Railway Station;
- Segregated on-site waste management policy to ensure high level of recycling;
- Highly insulated cabins and central buildings;
- Use of Forest Stewardship Council sourced timber;
- Thermally controlled underfloor heating system to ensure efficient use of energy;
- Natural ventilation, using the high volume to promote passive stack effect through high level openings;
- Use of energy efficient lighting and appliances, installed as standard;
- Prefabrication construction methods to limit waste and disruption to woodland.

Through these measures, it is proposed to achieve BREEAM excellent standards for the proposed development. These measures are considered to reduce the level of impact of the development on the environment in terms of carbon dioxide emissions, and it is recommended that the package of measures will be secured through Condition 17.

Residential amenity

The wood is located in a fairly isolated location and the closest residential properties are located adjacent to the A33, which borders the south east boundary of the wood. The closest building to the neighbouring properties relates to the cabins located within cluster 2 of the development, which would be located approximately 700m from the south east boundary of the wood. Given the high level of intervening tree screening, it is considered that the impact of the presence of the buildings within the site on residential neighbours would be negligible.

The proposals will increase the number of visitors using the site. Typical activities within the site would include walking and cycling and this would take place within the existing track network within the wood. Some of the tracks to be used are located adjacent to the residential properties to the south east, but it is not considered that the types of activities associated with the development and the numbers of visitors within any one area would cause significant disturbance to be harmful to residential amenity.

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Furthermore, the Black Wood Management Plan would help ensure careful and appropriate visitor management for the site.

Benefits of the proposed scheme

It is acknowledged that the proposed development would bring about significant positive benefits to the local economy through increased tourism and spending in the local area, and that the proposed scheme is considered to satisfy a particular market in the region for high quality self-catering accommodation. It is noted that the proposed scheme has the support of Tourism South East, the Hampshire County Council Tourism Office, the Assistant Director for Economic Prosperity and many local businesses, in relation to the tourism and economic benefits associated with the scheme. The associated benefits include:

- Responds to a growing visitor trend towards high end and environmentally-friendly accommodation;
- Reinforces the District's commitment to 'green' tourism;
- Reinforces the District's positioning for rural holidays and activities in a market for 'outdoor' holidays that continues to grow;
- Increases options for affordable family holidays in the district, which are at present poorly provided-for by the existing range of visitor accommodation;
- Provides a modern and well thought-out visitor product which will support the economy and provide local jobs at a time when the economic downturn may lead to job losses in our rural areas;
- Encourages outdoor activities and countryside access for local residents in support of local health and well-being objectives;
- Educational benefits through the creation of wider public access to the forest and the provision of the "forest experience" room.

The positive benefits of the scheme that are outlined above are material planning considerations when weighing up the main planning issues associated with the proposed development.

Conclusion

It is considered that the revised scheme addresses the reasons for refusal raised on the previous application in relation to its overall scale and impact on the wood. The package of mitigation measures secured through the legal agreement overcome the ecological, landscape and travel impacts of the development. The positive benefits associated with the proposed scheme in relation to local employment and green tourism are considered important factors in favour of the development. On the above basis, the proposed development is considered acceptable and complies with Policies RT17, RT18, CE9, T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5 of the WDLPR and is in line with the objectives set out in PPS4, PPS7, PPS9 and PPG13.

Planning Obligations/Agreements

In seeking the planning obligation to secure the implementation of the mitigation measures contained within the Black Wood Management Plan and Travel Plan and the financial contributions for sustainable transport, the Local Planning Authority has had regard to the tests laid down in Circular 05/2005, which requires the obligations to be necessary; relevant to planning; directly related to the proposed development; fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development and reasonable in all other respects.

Recommendation

That, subject to the applicant agreeing to enter into an agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to secure the following matters to the satisfaction of the Head of Legal Services:

1. The agreement, implementation and monitoring of landscape and ecological management measures, as contained within the Black Wood Management Plan.
2. Provision of a Travel Plan, including a shuttle bus service. The Black Wood Shuttle Bus Service will provide:
 - A shuttle bus service free of charge for daytime use by visitors to the Black Wood site between the site and Micheldever Station railway station and for other journeys within a five kilometre radius of the site;
 - A shuttle bus service free of charge for use by members of staff arriving for work by rail at Micheldever Station railway station and travelling between Micheldever Station railway station and the site;
 - A shuttle bus service for longer journeys to and from the site.
3. A Travel Plan bond of £30,300 and associated assessment and monitoring fees, inclusive of provision for a further contribution to Hampshire County Council should the Travel Plan measures not be fully implemented.
4. A financial contribution of £16,850 for sustainable transport measures, as agreed with Hampshire County Council.
5. Provision of a facilities building to include cycle hire, leisure, shop and café facilities

(Note: If the Legal Agreement is not completed within 6 months, then the application may be refused without further reference to Committee)

the application be PERMITTED, subject to the following conditions:

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).

2. The proposed accommodation shall not be used other than for holiday purposes and shall not be used for any individual's main or sole residential dwelling. The holiday accommodation shall not be occupied for a period exceeding 4 weeks for any single letting, shall not be occupied for more than 3 times per year by the same occupier, and there shall be no return within 4 weeks by the same occupier. A register of all occupiers, detailing dates, names and usual addresses, shall be maintained by the owner and shall be kept up to date and available for inspection at all reasonable hours by officers of the Council.

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Reason: The site is located within an area where permission for permanent residential accommodation would not normally be granted and therefore the Local Planning Authority wishes to retain control over the use of the site.

3. No more than 60 holiday units shall be on site at any one time. The site shall not be used for any camping or caravanning whatsoever.

Reason: In order to prevent the establishing of additional tourist accommodation, this may have an additional impact on the environmental interests of the site.

4. The occupation of the manager's apartment hereby permitted shall be limited to a person solely or mainly working in connection with the holiday park and any resident partner or dependant.

Reason: The site is located within an area where permission for independent residential accommodation would not normally be granted and therefore the Local Planning Authority wishes to retain control over the use of the approved residential accommodation

5. No development shall take place until details and samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the cabins, central facilities building, wood chip boiler building, maintenance yard buildings, electricity sub-station hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development presents a satisfactory appearance, in the interests of the amenities of the area.

6. No development shall take place until details of both hard and soft landscape works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and these works shall be carried out as approved. These details shall include the following, as relevant:

- existing and proposed finished levels or contours;
- means of enclosure;
- car parking layout;
- other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas;
- hardsurfacing materials;
- minor artefacts and structures (eg. street furniture, play equipment, refuse or other storage units, signs, lighting etc);
- proposed and existing functional services above and below ground (e.g. drainage, power, communications cables, pipelines etc, including lines, manholes, supports etc.);
- retained historic landscape features and proposals for restoration.

Soft landscape details shall include the following, as relevant:

- planting plans;
- written specification (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment;
- schedules of plants, noting species, plant sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate;
- retained areas of grassland cover, scrub, hedgerow and woodland;

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- manner and treatment of watercourses, ditches and banks;
- implementation programme.

Reason: To improve the appearance of the site, in the interests of visual amenity.

7. All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out before the use hereby permitted is commenced and prior to the completion of the development, or in accordance with the programme agreed with the Local Planning Authority. If, within a period of five years after planting, any tree or plant is removed, dies or becomes, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, seriously damaged, defective or diseased, another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally approved shall be planted at the same place, within the next planting season, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of a reasonable standard of landscape, in accordance with the approved designs.

8. A landscape management plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for Black Wood, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the occupation of the development or any phase of the development, whichever is the sooner, for its permitted use. The landscape management plan shall be carried out in accordance with the details hereby approved.

Reason: To ensure that due regard is paid to the continuing enhancement and maintenance of amenity afforded by landscape features of communal, public, nature conservation and historic significance.

9. Prior to the commencement of development details of all signage and interpretation, site furniture and features, and play area shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These works shall be implemented in full before the site is brought into formal public use by either the occupation of the first holiday unit or the opening of the public car park (whichever the sooner)

Reason: To achieve an acceptable balance between the provision of necessary apparatus to serve the site, whilst limiting the proliferation of unnecessary clutter within this sensitive woodland.

10. All construction and pre-construction preparation works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Construction Management Plan produced by Holder Mathias Architects dated November 2010 ref. PL(90)118 and the approved Black Wood Management Plan, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the protection of the ecological and landscape interests of the site.

11. No noisy activities associated with construction shall take place outside the following hours, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

Monday – Friday 08:00 -18:00

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Saturday 08:00 – 13:00

No work shall take place on Sundays or public holidays

Reason: To protect the amenity of the area.

12. Development shall cease on site if, during any stage of the works, unexpected ground conditions or materials which suggest potential contamination are encountered, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. Works shall not recommence before a site assessment has been undertaken and details of the findings along with details of any remedial action required (including timing provision for implementation), has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not be completed other than in accordance with the approved details. NB - potentially contaminated ground conditions include infilled ground, visual evidence of contamination or materials with an unusual odour or appearance.

Reason: In order to secure satisfactory development and in the interests of the safety and amenity of future occupants.

13. No development shall commence until a plan of the improved access to the site with Larkwhistle Farm Road has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety

14. No development shall commence until the improved access to the site with Larkwhistle Farm Road has been constructed to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority and in accordance with the approved plans.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety

15. No development, or site preparation prior to development which has any effect on disturbing or altering the level or composition of the land, shall take place within the site until the applicant (or their agents or successors in title) has secured and implemented a programme of archaeological work, in accordance with a written scheme of investigation to be submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the archaeological interest of the site is properly safeguarded and recorded.

16. Development shall not begin until a surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall also include details of how the scheme shall be maintained and managed after completion. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding, to improve and protect water quality, improve habitat and amenity, and ensure future maintenance of the surface water

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drainage system.

17. The development hereby permitted shall be built, implemented and operated in accordance with the approved Sustainability Design Document compiled by Arup and dated 21st April 2010, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to provide a development that minimises energy and water consumption, in the interests of the environment.

18. Prior to the commencement of development (including any site preparation works) details of the nature, location and phasing of tree protection barriers shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved tree protection barriers shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed phasing. The Arboricultural Officer shall be informed once protective measures have been installed so that the Construction Exclusion Zone (CEZ) can be inspected and deemed appropriate. Telephone 01962 848317.

Reason: To ensure the protection and long term viability of retained trees and to minimise the impact of construction activity

19. Prior to the commencement of development a lighting management strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved lighting management strategy, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the landscape and ecological interests of the site.

Informatives

1. This permission is granted for the following reason:

The development is in accordance with the policies and proposals of the Development Plan set out below, and other material considerations do not have sufficient weight to justify a refusal of the application. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning permission should therefore be granted.

2. The Local Planning Authority has taken account of the following Development Plan policies and proposals:

South East Plan 2009:

Policies – CC.1 (sustainable development), C.4 (landscape and countryside management), NRM.11 (energy efficiency/renewables), TSR.2 (rural tourism), TSR.5 (tourist accommodation)

Winchester District Local Plan Review

Policies relating to countryside recreation RT.17 and RT.18, countryside protection policies CE.5, CE.9, CE.11 and CE.28, archaeological policy HE.1, design policies DP.3, DP.4, DP.5, DP.9 and DP.10 and transportation policies T.1, T.2, T.3, T.4 and T5

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