

The Boathouse Bistro WD/2025/1539/MAJ
(However, it has hardly ever been a Bistro)
The Friends of Bewl Water
Objection



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One of the most important sites for community activity and ecological safeguarding, which would be destroyed by the inappropriate conversion of the boathouse to a series of residential buildings undermining the whole principle of the community being able to use the area for daytime recreational activity

Introduction

- 1) A near identical scheme was rejected by the local authority and also on appeal In July 2024. The Inspector dismissed the appeal predominately because of light spillage. The applicant claims light spillage is dealt with by the use of SmartGlass. Wadhurst Parish Council has commissioned an ecologist to look at the planning application. The expert found serious faults with the applicants findings and approach (more detail below).
- 2) The applicant's report fails to properly deal with the issues (more detail below).

Background

- 3) This is a new planning application to convert the old clubhouse at Bewl Water with its almost exclusively daytime activity to 11 holiday lets. There will be an extra floor with new windows and openings. The floor space will increase by 30%.
- 4) The original plan for Bewl Water was that the area should be open for recreational events during the day and be a sanctuary for wildlife at night. This policy helped with the security for the reservoir and attracted birds which are on the endangered lists (red list). Bewl Water is now a wildlife haven and is being considered for a Special Protection Area (SPA) designation, see The Status of UK SPAs in the

2000s: The Third Network Review (Phase 2), by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the public body that advises the government.

- 5) During dry weather there is less food for the birds and because of the water at Bewl Water, the reservoir provides an important source of food for the birds. Light at night is so dangerous to the wildlife that Bewl Water's manager's own ecologist, Sean McMinn, recommended that 'because of the internationally important roosting gulls, water based activity at Bewl Water should be restricted between October and March each year to 9 am and 3 pm. Further the use of torches at the shoreline should be prohibited during periods of darkness.'
- 6) The local community want to protect the wildlife there and reintroduce the daytime recreational activities that have been restricted by the manager's desire for nighttime holiday occupation. In 2000, there were 1,250 dinghies and 30 other boats using Bewl Water. The rent on their club house was doubled and the Sailing Club went into liquidation. The premises were lined up for residential occupation. The high car parking charges deter people on low incomes and others from visiting the site.
- 7) The Friends of Bewl Water and Ticehurst and Wadhurst Parish Councils object to the over-development of the site and the proposed overnight residential developments.

The principal objections are as follows.

Objection 1 The damage to the ecological balance and the ornithological threats

- 8) Bewl Water is a site of international importance, because of the protection it gives to endangered birds, particularly those on the Red List (the most at risk) which roost there. The proposal threatens the birds because of the inevitable nighttime light and noise from this shoreline development. Unlike many of the previous applications, this application is on the shoreline next to where the endangered birds feed and roost.
- 9) As already stated, Bewl Water is being considered for a Special Protection Area (SPA) designation, see The Status of UK SPAs in the 2000s: The Third Network Review (Phase 2) , by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the public body that advises the government.
- 10) The Campbell report considered the threats to the birds from development at Bewl Water. It was a recent report dated May 2025. It was of course written before the most dangerous of developments, this clubhouse conversion application. The author found:

'16. In light of proposed developments at Bewl Water, this report presents gull roost count data from the site and other key water bodies around the UK alongside an overview of recreational activities at these sites. This is in order to inform decision makers on the potential ecological impacts of these developments at Bewl Water.

17. Reliable food sources and roost sites over the winter influence the breeding success of female gulls (Ankney & MacInnes 1978 per Clark 2014, in Phelps 2023). As gulls return to the same wintering sites annually, significant changes in food availability or disturbance at roost sites could push them to relocate,

potentially reducing breeding success in subsequent years (Clark 2014 per Phelps 2023).

18. The roost is critical due to the lack of alternative sites nearby. Unlike other large inland water bodies, Bewl Water does not have comparable nearby secondary roost sites.

19. The effects of specific disturbances (e.g. new recreational developments) on gull roost sites remain for some types of disturbance largely speculative given the lack of controlled studies. However it is possible to make informed estimates about some types of disturbance. Sudden and unexpected noise events – as opposed to steady background noise such as from traffic, or routine maintenance operations– are the most likely to cause gulls to flush from feeding or roost sites (Hickling 1957). If allowed to continue unrestricted through the night during the winter months, noise events have the very real potential to cause total abandonment of a roost site (Hockin et al 1991, Gosler et al 1995 per Phelps 2023).

20. Where gull activity is deemed to be a threat to human Health and Safety, ensuring gulls abandon rooftop roost sites can be ‘as simple as walking on the rooftop with a bright light several times in consecutive nights (Deacon 2019).’

11) The paragraph numbers 16-20 are from the report.

12) The Campbell report built on the work done by Matt Phelps, who reported in July 2023. He was asked to consider the ecological impact of the 2023 Boathouse conversion application (the previous application) and the development of the fishing lodge application. His conclusions were as follows.

Page 13 section 6 ‘As discussed earlier in this study, roost sites seem primarily to be chosen based on their proximity to feeding areas as well as their respective size and levels of disturbance. Gulls prefer larger bodies of water where they can roost a safe distance from the shore, as well as offering them plenty of space to perform social displays prior to roosting (Hickling 1967). What all the sites included in this report have in common (including Bewl Water) is such an open area of water, largely safe from shoreline disturbance events, in order to roost undisturbed during winter nights.

Were disturbance events to increase for any reason at Bewl Water, it is clear that the likelihood of gulls temporarily or permanently abandoning the reservoir as a roost site would be a more probable outcome. With sometimes tens of thousands of both amber-listed Common Gull and Black-headed Gull gathering here in the winter months, this sort of site abandonment would have potentially internationally negative ramifications when it comes to the populations of both these species.

Sudden and unexpected noise events – as opposed to steady background noise such as from traffic, or routine maintenance operations, for example – are the most likely to cause gulls to take flight from feeding or roost sites (Hickling 1957) and, if allowed to continue unrestricted through the night during the winter months, have the very real potential to cause total abandonment of a roost site (Hockin et al 1991, Gosler et al 1995). Indeed, where gull activity is deemed to be a threat to human health or safety – on airport building rooftops, for example – concerted attempts to cause gulls to abandon such roost sites can be as simple as walking on the rooftop with a bright light several times in consecutive nights (Deacon 2019). This kind of

sustained yet relatively low-level disturbance could unintentionally be seen as a likely consequence of further development along the shoreline of any major gull roost site, especially when one considers the various noise and lighting impacts presented by the introduction of overnight accommodation on the site.

Of particular concern must be the proximity of the proposed development to the central area of the reservoir favoured by the gull roost. As has been discussed earlier in this report, gulls choose sites where they can safely gather in open water away from any potential disturbance at or near the water's edge. As highlighted by Richard Cowser in his letter to the Wealden District Council Senior Planning Officer, dated 27th September 2022, the proposed development of the existing Boat House Bistro and other buildings on the northern shoreline at Bewl Water will inevitably increase the potential for noise and lighting disturbance both during and after the construction process, within just 300-400m of the favoured gull roost area (M Phillips, pers. comm. 28th June 2023).

In the event of any proposed further development of tourist and recreational infrastructure at Bewl Water or any similar site – and the likely increase in human disturbance that would occur as a result – it would be prudent, at the very least, to install rigorous measures to minimise or prevent any such disturbance events. This could include further zoning of areas of the reservoir and surrounding landscape, no-go areas, soundproof screening and strict curfews on noise levels and general activity close to the shoreline, perhaps enforced by on-site security staff (though evidently there have already been issues controlling the behaviour of existing summertime visitors to the site).

Ideally though, any development that could allow or promote increased disturbance on the shoreline should be discouraged entirely.'

- 13) Wadhurst Parish Council has commissioned an ecologist, Charmaine Noel MSc CMLI MCIEEM and an arboriculturist, Ian Noel NDAH FdSC (Arbor) to look at the planning application. Their principal findings were as follows:

Approach failures

- a) The application conflicts with national and local policy on dark skies, biodiversity requirements and Bewl Water's ecological sensitivities.
- b) The application is not supported by adequate ecological information. No desk study using the Local Environmental Records Centre (Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, SxBRC) has been used to fully inform the applicant's Provisional Ecological Appraisal (PEA) report findings. The site survey work was undertaken in January when there would be no/fewer field signs of mammals (bats, badger, otter, water vole), reptiles (slow worm, common lizard, grass snake), and other likely present species, such as invertebrates, and birds. This is contrary to industry standard practice for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. A recent SxBRC search for the site area (Ref. SxBRC/24/109, 29/05/2024) evidenced extensive protected/priority biodiversity interest that the application has not addressed, including Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 1 Part 1, which is birds recorded within the last 10 years and other legally protected species. On this basis, the application cannot demonstrate that impacts have been identified, avoided and mitigated.

- c) The SxBRC report confirms the site lies within High Weald National Landscape and overlaps two Local Wildlife Sites (Nos CR44 and CW83 – Bewl Water Reservoir), emphasising sensitivity. The SxBRC desk study for the site area reports 479 protected/designated species (12,298 records), indicating high ecological sensitivity that must inform surveys and mitigation. Table 3 of the PEA repeats the word not significant, and downplays the significance of the site's location, despite adjacent Local Wildlife site (LWS) and potential Special Protection Area (SPA), including ancient ghyll woodland and deciduous woodland, as well as the open water of Bewl Water, which are Section 41 habitats.
- d) SxBRC explicitly state their data should be used with PEA site visits and appropriate surveys to judge presence/absence issues and guide further survey needs (i.e., a desk study is a prerequisite to scope surveys). However, otter and badger records are withheld from SxBRC reports for confidentiality; therefore, absence of records in an application is not evidence of absence and cannot be relied upon to screen out impacts.
- e) The application does not address the evidence of key protected species.
- f) Without up-to-date Local Environmental Records Centres (LERC) data, particularly SxBRC data and a desk-study-led Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) survey scope, the application fails to identify reasonable likelihood of offences (e.g., Schedule 1 disturbance; damage to places of shelter for protected reptiles, mammals, birds) or to design proportionate avoidance/mitigation. This is particularly acute given the site's Local Wildlife Site (LWS) coverage and its National Landscape location.
- g) In the applicant's Biodiversity Net Gain report, the metric used is out of date, and the results are thus unreliable. The application form points to a metric sheet and baseline area of 0.5941 ha, but the biodiversity submission must demonstrate ≥10% gain and 30-year management under Wadhurst's Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) WAD12. It is necessary to include all affected land namely the shoreline, the woodland edges and include ancient woodland which will be effected by the lighting.

Dark skies

- h) National and local planning policy requires great weight be given to protecting dark skies and expressly cautions against large, reflective glazing near water because it can change natural light and affect wildlife behaviour WNP Policy WAD16. It requires applicants to demonstrate all opportunities have been taken to reduce light pollution, to prevent spillage beyond the site, and to minimise impacts on wildlife, with careful control/positioning of luminaires and glazing WNP Policy WAD16 A–D.
- i) For dark skies and glazing, WNP Policy WAD16 requires minimising light pollution and specifically flags risks from large expanses of glass near water. The submission relies on switchable glazing but does not fully assess ecological receptors (gulls and bats) or glazing reflections. Lighting after dark-(from torches, car headlights, spillage from illuminated windows and hot tub lights on the balconies) would be intermittent and unenforceable by condition.

Birds

- j) Bewl Water is identified locally as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area and 'a site of international significance' for gulls. The reservoir lies within one of the darkest sky areas in the northern Rother and Wealden districts. The Third UK SPA (Special Protection Area) Review (Phase 2) is actively considering Bewl Water for new/added SPA features for non-breeding gulls, signalling national-level importance and the need for Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) grade caution. HRA is a legally required process to determine if a plan or project could significantly harm a European site, such as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA). The HRA involves stages like screening to identify likely significant effects and an Appropriate Assessment to examine impacts in detail, ensuring the integrity of the designated site.
- k) Bewl Water has a nationally significant winter gull roost. The winter roost has more than 10% of the national Common Gull roosting population (on the red list for birds), and hosting total gull numbers with more than 100,000 in some years. This makes it among the most important roost sites in the UK. (The common gull is not in fact common and is not the type that is unpopular because of its aggressive behaviour.)
- l) The proposals would introduce intermittent lighting after dusk, intermittent noise after dusk, both influences known to adversely affect winter roosting gulls. The absence of alternative roost sites nearby (other water bodies suitable for roosting) makes the stability of this significant gull roost vulnerable to effects by lighting and noise, due to absence of alternative roosts nearby.
- m) Despite this, no Phase 2 bird surveys, vantage counts or disturbance assessment were provided, and cumulative effects with nearby uses (e.g. those at Fisherman's Lodge) are not assessed. These are required. Table 3 of the PEA repeats the word not significant, and downplays the significance of the site's location, despite adjacent LWS's and potential SPAs, including ancient ghyll woodland and deciduous woodland, as well as the open water of Bewl Water, which are Section 41 habitats.

Bats

- n) The bat report shows only one dusk survey and no dawn/bat activity. This should include the bat's commuting, foraging and flightline with mapping, This is required because of the adjacent areas of ancient woodland and deciduous woodland. This is required. Table 3 of the PEA repeats the word not significant, and downplays the significance of the site's location, despite adjacent LWS's and potential SPAs, including ancient ghyll woodland and deciduous woodland, as well as the open water of Bewl Water, which are Section 41 habitats.
- o) Despite the applicant's own bat report recording mature trees and recommending tree-mounted bat boxes. Table 3 of the PEA repeats the word not significant, and downplays the significance of the site's location, despite adjacent LWS's and potential SPAs, including ancient ghyll woodland and deciduous woodland, as well as the open water of Bewl Water, which are Section 41 habitats.

- p) A BS 5837:2012 Tree Survey and Tree Protection Plan are required. This should include the ancient woodland (LWS) which is adjacent to site and the access road to site.

Trees and Hedges

- q) The Trees and Hedges answers on the application form are inaccurate as both boxes are ticked 'No'.
- 14) The ecologists will send their report to the Council shortly.
- 15) The dangers to the bird life are clear, well researched and documented, which should not be ignored by people who consider this application.
- 16) The planning inspector did not rely on the effect of the birds as a reason to dismiss the appeal. Since then there has been more research revealing more dangers. The Inspector did rely on the fact that the Wealden District Council did not rely on it. He was unaware that Wealden District Council have a poor track record in protecting Bewl Water and the officers restricted the reasons for refusal.
- 17) Relevant policies: Wildlife and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85 (1A) and many other ecological policies.

Objection 2 Light pollution

- 18) The similar application was rejected both by the planning authority and on appeal in July 2024. The Inspector, who refused the last attempt to approve the designs referred to the light spillage from the development and that there were new windows and openings. This includes the inevitable light generation at nighttime.
- 19) As already stated light at night is so dangerous to the wildlife that Bewl Water's manager's own ecologist, Sean McMinn, recommended that 'because of the internationally important roosting gulls, water based activity at Bewl Water should be restricted between October and March each year to 9 am and 3 pm. Further the use of torches at the shoreline should be prohibited during periods of darkness.'
- 20) The important features of the new application include:
- The doors and windows of the development open next to the shoreline. Once open, the type of glazing is irrelevant. This is not addressed by the applicant or their lighting specialist.
 - There are balconies with hot tubs. These will inevitably generate noise and light. If permission was granted, the hot tubs, which are outside, will be lit, see para 9.3.2 No 4 of the author of the lighting report. Hot tubs can be dangerous especially if those using them have taken considerable alcohol or are trying to show off. It is anticipated that Health and Safety officials would not permit a hot tub to be operated in an area that has no light at night. This is confirmed by the author of the lighting report. He or she says:

9.8.2. Lighting to the hot tub to be provided to ensure that the area under the water is visible. This is required for safety purposes so anyone under the surface can clearly be seen.

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- The applicant relies on SmartGlass. The last application had SmartGlass, which was specifically mentioned by the Inspector. He was of the view the SmartGlass did not provide sufficient protection. SmartGlass of course is no

protection for noise and light pollution for residents when they are outside the premises or when they're on the balcony or when the doors and windows are open.

- Cars and residents will inevitably move around the site creating noise and light spillage.
 - The winter months are critical for the birds. During the dark late afternoon and evenings of these months, the proposed residential units would generate noise and light pollution.
 - The author of the applicant's lighting report concentrates on how much better SmartGlass is to ordinary glass. That is irrelevant because no one is suggesting having ordinary glass. The issue is whether SmartGlass offers sufficient protection. This issue is side stepped by the lighting expert.
 - There are no suggested restrictions on the café hours of use.
- 21) Wadhurst Parish Council has commissioned an ecologist to look at the planning application, their findings are listed in the previous paragraphs and relate to light pollution.
- 22) The applicant has engaged DFL who deal with lighting design but they are not claiming to have ecological lighting experience. Design is not the issue. They say they are concentrating on impact assessment, but in fact they are concentrating on measurements, whereas those who considered the application will need to concentrate on the impact the lighting would have on the surrounding wildlife. The report is interesting reading partly because it is in such a tiny font it's almost impossible to read. One can speculate why that was the font used.
- 23) The company lists its aims for the lighting. They are:
- 9.2. Aims of the Proposed Lighting
- 9.2.1. The core aims of the proposed lighting seek to ensure:
- To provide a safe and comfortable environment for those using the Proposed Development
 - To ensure that the proposed lighting does not significantly impact sky quality
 - To ensure the proposed lighting does not significantly impact the surrounding area and to be unintrusive within the national landscape
 - To ensure that the surrounding dwellings are protected from any negative effects of light pollution
- 24) At para 8.2.3, the report says, 'The human immunity receptors are detailed in error. Reference source not found.' This shows that no one read the report carefully after it was written and very little effort went into it. In fact, the receptors are relied on by the author. However, it's clear that the receptors have been chosen to provide favourable results. Having a receptor at Hook Place, see PHAR 004 below, which is a considerable distance away is of no assistance. The receptors were in the following places, see page 36 of the report.



- 25) The receptor that matters are those in the wildlife areas. The report concentrates on humans and residences, see the only significant paragraph in Section 8 of the Identified Receptors section.

8.2. Human Amenity

- 8.2.1. There are several dwellings located in the area surrounding the Application Site. Those dwellings closest to the Application Site have been selected as receptors. This is because as the distance from any installed lighting increases the effects of lighting will reduce, therefore these identified receptors provide a reasonable assessment for all surrounding dwellings.
- 8.2.2. These receptors are assessed for potential changes in views and the direct effects of lighting as are defined within GN01:2021.

- 26) The author of the report rather wisely declines to give their name. The author does not claim to have any qualifications at all or any experience. Their report is so irrelevant and so misses the issues but it seriously damages the application.
- 27) This application's attempt to overcome the light problem is unsuccessful. It does not deal with the real issues.
- 28) Relevant policies: Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85 (1A), the dark skies policies and many other ecological policies.

Objection 3 The damage to the High Weald National Landscape

- 29) The residential units would damage the tranquillity and beauty of the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) (previously known as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The appeal Inspector said 'Bewl Water reservoir makes an important contribution to the open landscape, tranquillity and intrinsic beauty of the HWNL.' He was right.
- 30) This application is a breach of:
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85(A1) (as amended),
 - National Planning Policy Framework 2004 para 189,
 - High Weald Management guide,
 - Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan 2024 part B,
- and all the principles about protecting our landscapes.

Objection 4 Noise pollution

- 31) The community has discovered that the nighttime activities at Bewl Water, namely the campsite and the Yurts attract people who make noise and light pollution. Many choose not to come back because the nighttime activities are unsupervised. Across the world people realise that tourists generate considerable problems for local residents. This is because they often arrive in groups, have time on their hands and many of them like to show off, particularly after drink and drugs have been taken. Groups of individuals can choose to be competitive in their noisy behaviour. Bewl Water should not be threatened by nighttime tourist activity, when there are no staff around.
- 32) Experience and research indicate that light and noise travel easily over open water. The shape of the Bewl water valley acts as an amplifier for the noise. Noise pollution is one of the most important problems when protecting birdlife.

- 33) The planning Inspector did not consider that noise was a problem. He was misled in relation to this. He was led to believe that the noise management plan had been effective in managing noise at Bewl Water. He did not have the details about the noise at the campsite and the lack of supervision. He was too trusting about the assurances from the applicant. He considered that the units would be likely to be used mostly by couples and families. As the majority of the units are one bedroom accommodation this conclusion is untenable. He also had little information about the noise and was too trusting about tourist behaviour.
- 34) Relevant policies: Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85 (1A) and many other ecological policies.

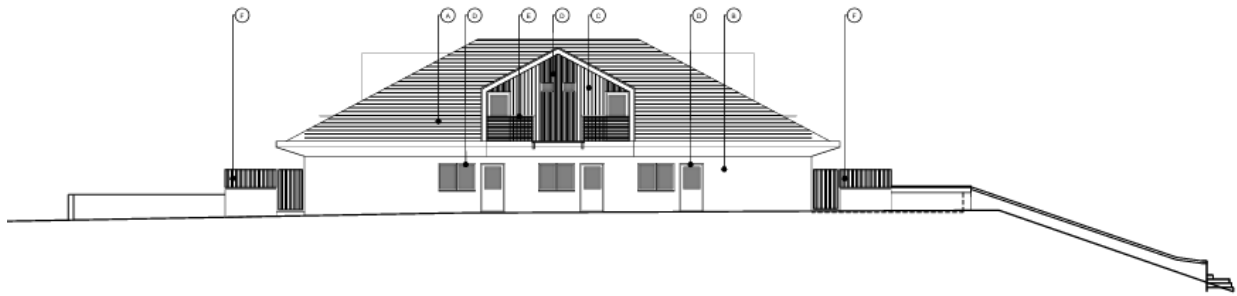
Objection 5 The design of the building is contrary to the High Weald management plan and does not conform to the local design palette



The agent's picture of the existing building

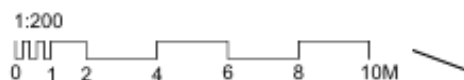


The proposed building from the shoreline



The back of the building is just as ugly

- 35) Relevant policies: Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85 (1A) and many other ecological policies.
- 36) The current building is ugly and the proposals appear no better, see above. The design does not follow the Wealden Design Guide or Wadhurst Design Code as it is required to. The proposal is a poor mix of a Swiss chalet design and an American condominium. The windows and walls are unbalanced. The attic windows are out of proportion with the roof.



Apartments 6, 7 and 8 and the scale of the drawing

- 37) Apartments 6,7 and 8 show just how inappropriate the accommodation is for human habitation. The bedrooms are only three metres by three metres. There is hardly any room to walk round the bed and no storage space. There are no side windows. Staying in these units would be like living in a tube with restricted light at the ends.
- 38) Relevant policies: The key policy is National Planning Policy Framework 2023 Section 12. Achieving well-designed places

‘Para 124. The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.’




‘Para 135 Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and **add to the overall quality of the area**, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) **are visually attractive as a result of good architecture**, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d-f) [Not so relevant].’

Objection 6 Planning creep

- 39) Step by step the applicant, a hotelier, has tried to convert Bewl Water from a tranquil site for visitors and wildlife, particularly birds into a Center Parc-style resort. Part of the planning creep is to covert the daytime leisure facilities, like this former boathouse, into residential units.
- 40) From 1976 to 2011, there is no record of a planning application for residential development at Bewl Water. In 2016, Elite Leisure (Salomons UK Ltd), part of Markerstudy group, became the managers. They own a hotel and a hotel/wedding venue in and near Tunbridge Wells. A spokesman said their long term plan was to build a Center Parc style resort. It was quickly denied.
- 41) Their subsequent planning activity below continued the recent trend and undermines the denial.

 <p>2012 Application for 13 holiday lodges made. Refused</p>	 <p>2012 The Fishing Lodge was closed and an application was made to convert it into two holiday lodges. Application granted, but the planning permission lapsed.</p>	 <p>Elite's first application Step 1 2017 Application for 58 Earth lodges. Refused. Appeal dismissed</p>
 <p>Step 2 2020 Application for a three year campsite with 80 pitches, (when there are so many other better sites nearby). Approved.</p>	 <p>Step 3 2020 or before Two Yurts (overnight holiday lets) were built without any permission</p>	 <p>Step 4 2021 Application to convert the fishing lodge into four holiday lets. Application refused. Appeal allowed.</p>
 <p>Step 5 2021 Application to turn the sailing hut into holiday accommodation. Application withdrawn.</p>	 <p>Step 6 2021 Application to convert the old boathouse to 11 holiday lets. (Same design as the current application, but with minor differences.) Application refused. Appeal dismissed.</p>	 <p>Step 7 2023 Application for two more Yurts and permission for the two Yurts already built, with WC and washing facilities. Application refused. Appeal allowed. Decision affirmed by the High Court.</p>

 <p>Step 8 2023 Application for a permanent campsite with 80 pitches, (when there are so many other better sites nearby). Application refused. Appeal allowed. Decision affirmed by the High Court.</p>	 <p>Step 9 2025 This application. Converting the old boathouse to 11 holiday lets and cafe. (Same design as the 2021 application, but with minor changes.) The floor space will be increased by nearly 30%.</p>	 <p>Step 10 There will be more applications.</p>
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- 42) A developer should not be able to achieve by stealth what he or she cannot achieve by being honest in his purpose and honest in his applications.
- 43) The relevant policies are the policies against holiday villages as this is part of the steps to create one.

Objection 7 There is no tourist need for the units

- 44) There is no tourist need for new holiday lets as there are so many similar sites nearby which are underused and more suitable for tourists.
- 45) This objection is relevant background for the other objections.

Objection 8 The damage the proposed development will have on the recreational leisure facilities

- 46) From the inception of the reservoir, there has always been the belief that daytime leisure should be at the heart of this project. Those who trained there have gone on to win medals at Olympics. The sailing club used to have over 2,000 members. For many Bewl Water is one of the few places they have to enjoy outdoor leisure activities. The campaign to use the leisure facility buildings for residential development has gathered pace.
- 47) Bewl Sailing Association committee puts the case well in their objection.




Bewl Sailing Association

bewlsailing.club | sail@bewlsailing.club
facebook.com/BewlSailing | twitter.com/BewlSailing



‘Bewl Sailing Association **objects strongly** to this Application and the consequent, permanent loss of availability of the Clubhouse building for water-based recreational facilities following on from the original application WD/2021/2924/F.

A couple of months ago Bewl Water held a presentation of their potential proposals for further buildings/ development at Bewl Water and [part of] one of the display boards is [below].

 **Bewl Sailing Association** - With a membership of 600-800 members and year-round sessions, there's something for everyone. They're focusing on welcoming younger families and expanding their training space, so that even more people can experience the thrill of sailing.

It describes each of the community sports clubs at Bewl as it says that BSA has 600-800 members and carries out training etc. **This is not the case.**

Currently we have about 120 members and don't carry out training etc. I expect this detail came from a meeting with Bewl Water around the requirements of each community sports club needs at Bewl.

To achieve what is on the display board BSA said it would need;

1. The old club house back, which is the very building this application wants to convert into holiday accommodation.
2. Security of tenure to get grant funding
3. Use of facilities a price point that enables the clubs to operate with a membership fee that is in line with the other inland water sports clubs in the area. Currently BSA has **NONE** of the above three points.

Bewl Valley Sailing Club (BVSC) was formed in 1976 before the reservoir was completed. The Clubhouse was approved in 1978 and was fully used by the sailing club and other water users. BVSC grew quickly to become a thriving sailing club with a national presence and over 2000 members. Racing took place at the weekends and on Wednesday evenings. Numerous families regularly attended the club to support the races and participate in club-organised training evenings and weeklong events.

There were Open Meetings where visiting sailors from all over the country came to sailing regattas regularly throughout the year. The Clubhouse, excellent changing facilities and Race Box were all important elements in the profile and successful growth of the sailing club. Southern Water, the then landlords, were supportive and assisted the growth of the club.

However, when the shore-side facilities were sold into private commercial tenure the club was no longer given the same priority and new financial burdens meant it became financially unviable and had to be put into liquidation. BSA is the regeneration of the old BVSC and by buying essential equipment from the Receivers and committing to a regular racing programme a group of former BVSC members have kept the activity alive and this has now grown to a total of 150 members. The aim is to continue this growth back to former levels but the lack of a clubhouse, now a failed and vacant former restaurant, and the reduction in the capacity of the changing rooms, has severely hampered these efforts. The lack of basic facilities, which would normally be expected for a sailing club on one of the largest reservoirs in the country, seriously affects the ability of the club to attract new members and to host national sailing events.

There are also a number of other water related organisations who have benefitted from the use of this clubhouse in the past, including fishing, rowing, disability sailing and sail training. Each of these organisations have been emasculated by the loss of the clubhouse.

BSA met with representatives of Bewl Water and expressed the above concerns, stressing how vital the clubhouse and Race Box and store were to the club's operations and whether they would consider a different approach of using the buildings to promote water related activities. However, this was not a proposition that the current leaseholders were prepared to pursue.

[Section omitted to keep this objection brief.]

The change of use and extension of the fishing lodge to form 4 x 1-bed tourist units (Application No. WD/2021/0638) was refused by your Council on the 4 February 2022. for the reason that:-

[reasons omitted for the same reason.]

The same issues arise in the case of the clubhouse conversion proposal but the impacts will be even more significant and severe and the reason for refusal therefore applies with even greater force to the current proposal.

With regard to the particular interest of the sailing club, which has been, and continues to be, one of the key water related uses at Bewl Valley Reservoir, the clubhouse is of fundamental importance to the operation of the sailing club and is an essential element in its ability to attract new members and host sailing regattas.

The conversion proposal does claim to provide some changing facilities for water-based users and offers joint use of the proposed café. However, having considered these proposals carefully it is clear that this is a token gesture and the changing and showering facilities are much too small to serve the potential level of use from all water related activities and to meet the requirements of visiting sailors at a regatta. Furthermore, joint use of a commercial café is not a suitable substitute for a clubhouse facility to meet the social, administrative and training requirements of a proper sailing club.

The interests of appropriate and economically beneficial tourism are better served by encouraging BSA's efforts to grow the sailing club back to previous levels rather than by putting further obstacles in the way of that growth. The conversion of the clubhouse building in the manner proposed would permanently remove the opportunity for use of the building as a clubhouse to the serious detriment of the sailing club and other water related activity organisations.

The refusal of this application will send a clear message to the leaseholders that their commercial aspirations are not acceptable in this location and are harmful to a wide variety of very important environmental and recreational qualities that exist at Bewl Valley Reservoir. It would also encourage them to enter into meaningful discussions with the water related activity organisations in order to come to an agreement about the appropriate use of the clubhouse building to the mutual benefit of all parties involved.

For the above reasons BSA sincerely request that Wealden District Council Members should refuse planning permission for this speculative proposal.'

- 48) Each of the organisations that help with the other water based activities are in similar situations, now that managers of Bewl Water have removed their tenure, They can be asked to leave when it suits the managers, who will then seek to use their facilities for residential occupation. There appears to be no proper relationship between the managers and the groups who fear for their future. One problem is to

develop the amenities the group needs funding. However, unless you have security of tenure the funds will not be forthcoming. If its development goes ahead one by one the organisations can be destroyed.

- 49) Wealden District Council is committed to supporting 'local leisure resources', see Wealden Core Strategy 2013 para 7.25. Wealden District Council is required to improving the quality of recreational opportunities, see Wealden Core Strategy 2013 para 7.28 Part 7. Closing them down cannot be part of improving them.

Objection 9 The prohibition on removing recreational buildings

- 50) There is a requirement that before recreational buildings can be removed an assessment has to have taken place. The requirement is as follows.

National Planning Policy Framework 2024 para 104. 'Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless.'

a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or

[b) and c) do not apply].'

- 51) It cannot be said the building is surplus to requirements, as it was very much in use until the managers raised the rent and forced its closure. In any event no assessment has been made.

Objection 10 Sewage leaks

- 52) Last year there were 68 sewage leaks from the Tinkers Lane in Ticehurst sewage works into Bewl Water. They lasted 777.07 hours. The sewage system at Bewl Water is inadequate. In a letter dated, 31 July 2025, Southern Water said, when commenting on this application, that there was 'insufficient information provided for foul and surface water disposal'. Untreated sewage should not be allowed in the reservoir used for drinking water.

Objection 11 Health and Safety concerns

- 53) As has already been stated, tourists frequently behave badly, especially after drink and or drugs have been taken. Tourists often feel their holiday is an opportunity when they can forsake some of the conventions on how to behave, partly because they're not in their home area.
- 54) It has long been considered that the shoreline which is unfenced is dangerous for overnight visitors. This is because one does not consider the majority of tourists one has to consider those who are likely to misbehave. Health and Safety requires that planners to take into account the inevitable behaviour of even a very small group of people. The shoreline has to be unlit. All these matters put together show that overnight visitors staying on the shoreline are at risks from accidents and drowning.
- 55) There are both national policies and local policies dealing with this issue. Safety is a corner stone of Wealden's Core Strategy.

The claimed consultation

- 56) This is dealt with in a separate submission.

Conclusion

- 57) There were very good reasons for both the Wealden District Council and the inspectorate to reject the previous application. The inspector rejected the application as recently as July 2024. There are even more reasons to reject this application.

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Chairman

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Warning:

Since May 2024, Friends of Bewl Water has had regular correspondence with Elite and a meeting with them using our name Friends of Bewl Water. The company then set up a group called Friends of Bewl Water, the same as our name. To start with the web page introducing their group indicated nothing about the group. In the following weeks it became clear that the applicants group was no more than a discount scheme, with an annual fee of £75. Their group appears to have nothing to do with the groups using the word, Friends, which invariably have volunteers and a charitable element etc. Our group has served a barrister's cease and desist letter on them. The company just ignored it, no doubt in belief that the group did not have the funds for a court action. If you seek to use the website you should make sure that you are not using Elite's web pages as they seem to have spent a lot of money trying to disable us from both fund raising and also having a web presence.