

Help save Bewl Water by taking part in the consultation exercise.



Photo: SuxxesPhoto

A sanctuary for animals and an important recreational site for visitors is in danger

Bewl Water is under attack.

- 1) Bewl Water was developed to provide water and also to create a haven for wildlife and enable sailors, rowers, canoers, walkers, birdwatchers, fishermen etc, to pursue their activities and enjoy the beautiful site.
- 2) All these activities thrived when the land was managed by a water board and when the water boards were nationalised. For many Bewl Water is one of the few places they can enjoy outdoor leisure activities. The interests of those with mobility difficulties were addressed with disability sailing training etc. Those who trained there have gone on to win medals at Olympics. The sailing club used to have over 2,000 members.
- 3) The Friends of Bewl Water believe that Bewl Water is an important centre for wildlife, particular birds. It has a very important gull roost and supports a number of birds that are on the endangered lists. Wadhurst Parish Council commissioned two reports about the dangers of overnight accommodation at Bewl Water for the wildlife. They were the Phelps report and the Campbell report. They confirm the importance of having no noise or light pollution, particularly near the shoreline.
- 4) The owner of the site is now Southern Water. They have leased the land to tenants whose major interest appears to be profit. The current tenant is Elite Leisure (Salomons UK Ltd). They are hoteliers. It is not surprising they seek to convert Bewl Water into a group of holiday lets which it is believed will later on be converted into a holiday village. One member of staff said they wanted to create a Center Parcs style facility. The remark was quickly denied.
- 5) The managers increased the rent on the boathouse and the sailing club went into administration. Applications have been made to convert the boathouse into 11 holiday lets, see Steps 6 and 9 below. The conversion proposal claims to provide some changing

facilities for water-based users and offers joint use of the proposed café. A user said that this was 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. An application was made to convert the sailing hut into holiday accommodation, see Step 5 below. The fishing lodge is being converted into four holiday lets, see Step 4 below.

- 6) The managers have taken away security of tenure for those groups which had it, which means they have difficulty in securing loans or grants. Many of the user groups have told us that they feel their group's future is not assured.
- 7) The Friends of Bewl Water believe that the facilities at Bewl Water need to be protected and enhanced. Further, they should not be converted for hotel and holiday let profit. Many of the visitors to Bewl Water do not have access to gardens and open spaces. This site is very important to them. However the group has heard many complaints that people are deterred from visiting the site because of the high car parking charges.
- 8) The managers of Bewl Water held a claimed consultation exercise for the continuation of the expansion of overnight accommodation at Bewl Water. Very few people were asked to attend and there was no literature available about the proposals. There was little information and some confusing statements on boards which were on display. No details of the responses have been released to the public as far as the Friends of Bewl Water know. However in a submission to Wealden District Council for the conversion of the boathouse into eleven holiday lets, it was claimed that their proposals had been well received.
- 9) Wadhurst Parish Council did not believe this accurately reflected the views of the local community either for those who had attended the consultation event and for those who were unaware of it. Wadhurst Parish Council decided to launch its own consultation exercise and unlike the managers of Bewl Water appointed an independent person to manage it, who has complied with the government rules for consultation exercises. Ticehurst Parish Council joined in to help support it. Everybody is invited to take part.

The pursuit for overnight tourist units

- 10) The steps the managers have taken to secure overnight accommodation at Bewl Water is depicted below.

 2012 Application for 13 holiday lodges made. Refused	 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.	 Elite's first application Step 1 2017 Application for 58 Earth lodges. Refused. Appeal dismissed
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 Step 2 2020 Application for a three year campsite with 80 pitches, (when there are so many other better sites nearby). Approved.	 Step 3 2020 or before Two Yurts (overnight holiday lets) were built without any permission	 Step 4 2021 Application to convert the fishing lodge into four holiday lets. Application refused. Appeal allowed.
 Step 5 2021 Application to turn the sailing hut into holiday accommodation. Application withdrawn.	 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.	 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.
 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.	 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%.	 Step 10 There will be more applications.

The sewage leaks

- 11) 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. Untreated sewage should not be allowed in the reservoir used for drinking water. It is only because of the dry weather this year, that there have not been more leaks. The sewage works is very close to the reservoir.

The managers response

- 12) From May 2024, the 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 their group. In the following weeks it became clear that the manager's group was no more than a discount scheme, with an annual fee of £75. Their group appears to be dissimilar to 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.

How can you help?

- 13) Please fill in the consultation paper either online or with the paper copy. Please invite those close to you to fill in the form and tell your friends and colleagues to help protect Bewl Water.
- 14) The Friends of Bewl Water need volunteers to help us function, conduct research and raise money to protect the site.

Please join us. Minimum fee £5 a year (£50 for corporate members). Visit our web site. www.friendsofbewl.co.uk

Donations are needed for our work. They can be made on our website.

There will be a meeting for new members.

Without a significant membership and more volunteers, the group will not reach its potential. Please share this leaflet with those who might support us.

Claire Moore

Chairman

The Friends of Bewl Water

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