

## Boathouse Bistro application WD/2025/1539/MAJ

### An examination of the officer's report



**Emily Craig MBE at Bewl Water with her Olympic gold medal**

**Bewl Water is one of the most important inland water sport sites and a critical sanctuary for red listed birds**

#### Background

1. The Friends of Bewl Water continue to object to the Boathouse Bistro application WD/2025/1539/MAJ (misdescribed as Boathouse Bistro as it has hardly ever been a Bistro and is a purpose-built water sports clubhouse - not a boathouse for storing boats).
2. The officer's report makes interesting reading. It is a masterclass of inflating the reasons for a grant of planning permission and downgrading the valid objections. It also contains many errors.
3. The Friends of Bewl Water have been told that in March 2026, DEFRA will decide that Bewl Water should be listed as a Special Protection Area (SPA). The Friends of Bewl Water is seeking clarification about this. It is inevitable that Wealden District Council would have been in correspondence with Natural England. The public had already been told that the site was being considered as an option for SPA status. There is no mention of this in the report. The impending decision may imply the very short gap between the report being published and the committee hearing. If it is true about Natural England, these matters should have been made known in the report and not completely ignored.
4. Some of the report's conclusions need examination. There are no paragraph or page numbers in the report, so they have been added in the table below.

	<b>The claim</b>	<b>The reality</b>
Page 1-2	The councillors are only able to consider the light pollution	This approach is unlawful. The Inspector's decision was based on the information before him (in 2024) and was a guide to some of the principles involved. It cannot be

	objection, because of the reasoning of the Inspector in the earlier application.	directive. The councillors are required to consider all planning factors that they consider relevant, particularly the material planning considerations that have arisen since then.
Page 2 para 5	The proposal is an upgrade of current <b>water sport facilities</b> .	The proposal removes a clubhouse and puts at risk all the water sports clubs. How damaging the proposals are to the facilities can be seen in the accompanying Comparison schedule.
Page 28 para 5	The agents amended floorplan shows the same level of provision being retained with equal size changing room facilities on offer.	This is the opposite of a truth. The facilities would be seriously damaged, see the Comparison schedule.
Page 28 para 7 and 8	There is no loss of facilities. The water sport facilities are being retained.	Ditto
Page 33 para 1	The activities, facilities and events available at Bewl are constantly improving.	Everything is in decline. It is believed the visitors numbers have over the years fallen from 200,000 to 100,000. This is because the managers have little or no interest in the visitors. Their plans in 2022 showed their interest was in hotels. The sporting facilities are now much worse. The café has become unattractive. The Wadhurst Parish Council survey showed the extent of the local community's unhappiness about the declining facilities.
Page 33 para 8	The proposals allow an upgrade.	This is again the opposite of the truth. The proposals are a destruction of an important facility.
Page 3 para 1	Existing water (sic) facilities would be retained and upgraded.	Ditto. This is the opposite of the truth. (Sports clubs need space for safeguarding so they can train young people. There are no 'upgraded' facilities. They need adequate changing room facilities that aren't going to be shared with the public as per this proposal.)
Page 2 para 8	The fresh submission includes a detailed <b>lighting assessment</b> .	The lighting assessment fails to collect the required evidence. The measuring devices were put in the wrong place. It fails to mention the ability of the doors and windows to open and the light from the hot tubs on the balconies. The lighting report's conclusions are not capable of belief.

Page 19 para 3	The Council has been provided with a robust lighting assessment.	The lighting assessment is long but has no proper analysis and is missing very important evidence and proper assessments.
Page 33 para 4	The scheme will provide <b>valuable tourism facilities</b> .	Nearby there is popular and better overnight residential accommodation. There is local over capacity for such accommodation. However, the loss of the important club house for the vast number of recreational users is a far bigger loss for tourism than eleven unattractive holiday lets.
Page 33 para 7	The eleven units will provide high quality tourism accommodation.	Looking at the extract from the plan of the main submission, one can see how unattractive the eleven rectangular box units are. Many of the nearby overnight accommodations have the proper facilities that tourists expect and are nearer to village centres which helps promote and sustain our local village high streets and hospitality businesses.
Page 3 para 1	The development would <b>not be harmful to the National Landscape</b> .	The National Landscape includes both its physical aspects and the wildlife and ecological features. Eleven holiday lets right next to the water's edge would destroy the peace and quiet of this wildlife sanctuary.
Page 18 para 2	The proposal conserves the character of the National Landscape.	Ditto
Page 4	<b>Relevant planning history</b>	The author declines to list the Downash appeal decision, APP/U1430/W/25/3372099. In January 2026, the planning Inspector dismissed an appeal for the development of a holiday let near Bewl Water. He made some very important observations about the importance of Bewl Water. The findings are highly relevant to this planning application.
Page 5	Statutory Consultees: <b>Wadhurst Parish Council</b>	The conversion of Wadhurst Parish Council's objections into trigger points strips them of their meaning and significance.
Page 18 para 3	<b>External lighting</b> can be controlled by conditions.	The managers at Bewl Water have a long history of failing to comply with the conditions attached to grants of planning applications. Conditions cannot prevent holiday makers opening windows, opening doors and the lighting on the balconies. Neither can it control the cars

		and motorbikes which would arrive and leave the scene at night damaging this most important dark sky area.
Page 25 para 8	Where strict rules relating to <b>evening or overnight disturbances</b> are in place and adhered to that are deemed to be little or no dissemble impacts on the gull roost and other wildlife usage of the site	The author of the report fails to deal with the issue when inevitably the strict rules are not adhered to. The conditions in place for noise at the campsite are routinely ignored and visitors say that is because there is no staff to enforce them. The report should be based on an assessment that holiday lets will inevitably generate night time noise. Only dealing with the occasions when the rules are strictly adhered to is an irrelevant assessment.
Page 29 para 2	Bewl Water owners would be happy to discuss facilities [with the clubs].	Over the last few years the managing company has refused to talk to the clubs and has asked them to speak to an affiliated company which has no ability to make any decisions. Despite the frequent discussions the managers are declining to give any water sports club security of tenure which means that they are not able to obtain grants or loans. No club has made any progress. A commitment to discuss is a PR statement of no value, and carries no weight in planning terms.

5. On pages 24 to 27 of the report is an assessment of the expert ornithologists based on the Phelps and Campbell reports. Having listed some of the dangers to the endangered birds, the planning officer simply says they are all dealt with by conditions. A set of rules in a managers office's file can never ensure that the obvious dangers to the environment that have been listed, will cease to exist. Nighttime tourist behaviour, when there are no staff on duty, will always be a danger to one of the most critical wildlife sites in the Wealden District
6. It can be seen the misstatements are significant and serious. What is particularly unattractive is that all the misstatements are in favour of the applicant which shows a complete lack of balance.
7. The councillors are invited to take these matters into account when considering the future of his exceptionally important international wildlife and recreational centre.

Claire Moore  
Friends of Bewl Water

23 February 2026