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Further Objection to Supplementary Design Submission

Planning Application AWDM/0737/26 – Goring Gap

Dear Planning department,

I have reviewed the applicant's latest supplementary documents submitted in support of application AWDM/0737/26.

I wish to make clear that my objection is **not primarily an objection to the quality of the proposed design**.

That distinction is important.

The latest submission risks framing the planning issue as though the principal question is whether the applicant can design the access, parking, landscaping, structures and operational arrangements sufficiently well to make the development acceptable.

That is not the fundamental planning question.

The first question must be whether this land is an appropriate location for the proposed development at all, having regard to its designation and the purpose for which the Goring-Ferring Local Green Gap is protected.

Only if that fundamental principle is established should the detailed design of the proposal become the determining consideration.

1. The purpose of the Local Green Gap must remain the starting point

The adopted Worthing Local Plan is explicit about why the Local Green Gaps have been designated.

The Plan identifies the Goring-Ferring Gap as a Local Green Gap and states that these areas are open and either undeveloped or managed landscapes for recreational use. It describes them as creating a sense of travelling between urban areas and as a critically important component of Worthing's landscape setting.

More importantly, Policy SS5 states that the four Local Green Gaps are designated and protected **“to retain the separate identities and character”** of the settlements.

The Goring-Ferring Gap is therefore not simply land upon which development can take place provided that the development is attractively designed.

Its designation exists because of the strategic planning function the land performs.

The Plan expressly identifies the wider strategic objective as preventing settlement coalescence and protecting settlement identity.

That principle must remain at the forefront of the Council's assessment.

2. This is not fundamentally a design assessment

The applicant's latest submission concentrates on matters such as:

- visibility splays;
- pedestrian segregation;
- vehicle gates;
- internal circulation;
- parking;
- servicing;
- campervan pitches;
- positioning of containers and concessions;
- access arrangements; and
- vegetation management.

These may all be legitimate considerations **if the principle of development on this land is first established.**

They do not, however, answer the fundamental question of whether introducing this development onto the Goring-Ferring Gap is compatible with its protected strategic function.

A well-designed development can still be in the wrong location.

A development can have an acceptable access arrangement and still be unacceptable in principle.

A development can contain landscaping and biodiversity measures and still compromise the integrity of a protected gap.

Good design does not automatically make an inappropriate land use appropriate.

That distinction appears to have become increasingly important as the application has developed.

3. The latest document actually demonstrates the scale of development and activity being proposed

The supplementary submission should not be regarded simply as a series of minor technical improvements.

It identifies a development requiring:

- **a 7.4 metre vehicle entrance;**
- a separate pedestrian gate;

- pedestrian segregation and protective infrastructure;
- vehicle circulation;
- a dedicated **21 metre service-vehicle turning area**;
- provision for **up to 100 customer parking spaces**;
- five staff spaces;
- **five campervan pitches**;
- visitor cycle facilities;
- containers, concessions and service points.

This is important because it reinforces the distinction between the applicant's description of the proposal as modest, seasonal and reversible and the actual infrastructure and activity required to operate it.

The Council is not simply being asked to approve an attractive temporary structure in an otherwise untouched landscape.

It is being asked to approve the establishment and operation of a commercial leisure destination requiring significant supporting infrastructure and visitor access.

That is precisely why the **principle and location of the development** need to be considered before the detailed design is allowed to dominate the assessment.

4. The design submission cannot be used to reverse the planning test

There is a danger that the assessment becomes:

Can the applicant design the development so that its individual components appear acceptable?

That is the wrong sequence.

The proper question is:

Is this type of development, in this location, compatible with the purpose and integrity of the Goring-Ferring Local Green Gap?

Only after that question has been satisfactorily answered should the Council move on to whether the detailed access, parking, landscaping, structures and operational arrangements are acceptable.

Policy SS5 itself reinforces this approach.

It requires **all applications for development within Local Green Gaps** to demonstrate, individually or cumulatively, that the development:

1. would not undermine the physical and/or visual separation of settlements;
2. would not compromise the integrity of the gap;
3. conserves and enhances the benefits and services derived from the area's Natural Capital; and
4. conserves and enhances the area as part of a cohesive green infrastructure network.

The applicant cannot satisfy those tests simply by producing a better site plan.

The design must be assessed **in the context of what it introduces into the Gap and what that means for the Gap's strategic function**.

5. "Design mitigation" is not the same as demonstrating compliance with SS5

This is particularly important in relation to the applicant's repeated use of mitigation measures.

For example, the new document proposes visibility splays, pedestrian segregation, controlled vehicle movements and parking arrangements.

Those measures may address individual highway or operational matters.

They do not establish that the resulting development will not compromise the integrity of the Local Green Gap.

Similarly, positioning containers and concessions away from access areas does not demonstrate that the introduction of those structures, together with the activity they support, is compatible with the strategic purpose of the Gap.

The distinction is fundamental:

Mitigating the effects of a development is not the same thing as demonstrating that the development is appropriate in principle.

6. The proposal cannot be considered in isolation from the existing land

The design appears to assume that the appropriate planning baseline is the proposed development and asks whether it can be fitted into the site satisfactorily.

The Council should instead start with the **existing planning function of the land**.

The Local Plan identifies Local Green Gaps as areas which provide separation between settlements and contribute critically to Worthing's landscape setting.

The planning question is therefore not simply whether the proposed structures can be physically accommodated.

It is whether the **introduction of the use, the associated structures, parking, vehicles, visitors and activity changes the contribution that this land makes to the protected Gap**.

That is a much wider consideration than architectural appearance.

7. This objection is not about the applicants particular business

It is also important to make clear that this objection is **not directed at the applicant personally or at one particular business**.

The planning principle is much broader.

If this application were for a different commercial leisure business proposing substantially the same use, infrastructure and activity on the same land, the fundamental planning concern would remain.

Equally, if another applicant came forward in the future with a different but similarly intrusive commercial use, the Council should not be prejudiced by having accepted the principle of development on this site through the current application. A previous application has already been rejected, I believe in 2014.

This is therefore about protecting the **Goring-Ferring Gap as a planning asset**, not about preventing one particular business from operating.

The question should be:

What precedent would approval establish for the future use and development of this protected gap?

If the principle is established that commercial development can be introduced provided that it is sufficiently well designed, the protection afforded by SS5 risks becoming progressively weaker through incremental development.

That is why the policy requires consideration of effects “**individually or cumulatively.**”

9. The cumulative issue is particularly important

The word “**cumulatively**” in SS5 should not be overlooked.

The Council is not required to consider only whether one individual structure, one access arrangement or one element of landscaping causes harm.

It must consider what the proposal as a whole contributes to the development and urbanisation of the Gap and how that affects its strategic function.

The relevant cumulative effect includes the combination of:

- commercial activity;
- customer parking;
- vehicle movements;
- servicing;
- campervan accommodation;
- structures and concessions;
- pedestrian infrastructure;
- access works;
- visitor activity; and
- the physical and operational presence of the business.

Taken individually, each element may appear capable of mitigation.

Taken together, they constitute a substantial change in the nature and intensity of activity on the site.

That cumulative effect is precisely why a design-led assessment alone is inadequate.

10. The applicant's previous arguments remain unresolved

This latest design submission does not resolve the fundamental evidential issue raised in my previous representation.

The new plan does not turn those conclusions into evidence.

A better access arrangement does not demonstrate that the Gap's integrity will be preserved.

A greater number of parking spaces does not demonstrate that settlement separation will be protected.

Landscaping does not automatically demonstrate enhancement of Natural Capital.

Pedestrian segregation does not demonstrate compatibility with the green infrastructure function of the Gap.

The applicant still needs to demonstrate the fundamental proposition that **this development, in this location, does not undermine the purposes for which the Goring-Ferring Gap has been designated and protected.**

Conclusion

I therefore strongly object to any approach which treats the latest plans primarily as evidence that the proposal has now been sufficiently well designed.

The issue is not whether the applicant can improve the design of the development. The issue is whether the development should be located on this land in the first place.

The Goring-Ferring Gap has been specifically identified by the adopted Worthing Local Plan as a Local Green Gap and protected in order to retain the separate identities and character of Worthing and Ferring.

The Plan also identifies these gaps as critically important components of Worthing's landscape setting and recognises their strategic role in preventing settlement coalescence and protecting settlement identity.

That protection cannot sensibly become a question of whether each successive development proposal can be designed attractively enough to fit into the landscape.

The better the design of an inappropriate development, the more important it is not to lose sight of the fact that it remains development on protected gap land.

I am not arguing that the adopted SS5 amounts to an absolute prohibition on every conceivable form of development within a Local Green Gap. The policy does not say that, and I have already acknowledged the correction concerning the discarded draft wording.

What I am arguing is more precise:

The applicant must first demonstrate that the principle of introducing this development onto this land is compatible with the purposes and tests of SS5. Detailed design cannot be used as a substitute for that demonstration.

The latest submission does not provide that demonstration.

Indeed, it reinforces the scale of the proposed commercial operation, including provision for up to 100 customer parking spaces, five campervan pitches, staff parking, service-vehicle circulation, concessions and associated infrastructure.

It also acknowledges that important elements of the proposed access arrangement remain subject to future measured survey and highway-engineer validation.

The application should therefore **not be allowed to become a design exercise** in which the fundamental question of whether this land is suitable for the proposed development is displaced by consideration of how effectively the applicant can arrange its component parts.

This is not about whether **Mr Dixon's business** can be made to work on the site.

It is about whether **commercial development of this nature, and the cumulative activity and infrastructure required to support it, is compatible with protecting the Goring-Ferring Gap.**

That principle must apply equally to this applicant and to any future applicant seeking to develop the same protected land.

The Goring-Ferring Gap should be protected as a whole, rather than being progressively eroded by assessing individual development proposals solely on the quality of their design.

For those reasons, I maintain my objection to AWD/0737/26 and ask that the latest design submission is given appropriate weight only in assessing detailed matters **after, and not instead of, the fundamental planning question of whether this development is acceptable on this protected Local Green Gap land.**

Yours sincerely,

Colin McKail