

Final Planning Statement

As this application reaches determination, I would respectfully ask that it is considered not only against individual planning policies, but against the Development Plan as a whole and the wider planning balance required by law.

Throughout the application I have sought to demonstrate that the proposal is capable of delivering meaningful public benefits, including support for tourism, recreation, biodiversity, local employment, sustainable business, community wellbeing and improved public enjoyment of an area that has remained largely unused for many decades.

I fully acknowledge that Policy SS4 is an important consideration. However, I respectfully submit that it should not be viewed in isolation. The Development Plan contains a range of complementary policies which actively encourage visitor facilities, sustainable communities, biodiversity enhancement and the visitor economy. It is the role of the decision-maker to consider all relevant policies together and to undertake a balanced planning judgment.

In my respectful opinion, the central planning question is not simply whether the proposal introduces seasonal visitor facilities into the Green Gap. Rather, it is whether those facilities materially undermine the purpose of Policy SS4.

The purpose of the Green Gap designation is to preserve openness and prevent the coalescence of neighbouring settlements. This proposal does not seek to build housing, offices or industrial premises. It does not extend the urban edge of Worthing or Ferring, nor does it reduce the physical separation between those settlements.

Instead, the proposal consists principally of seasonal, largely movable and reversible facilities designed to support outdoor recreation and responsible enjoyment of the countryside. The land remains open in character and capable of reverting to grassland.

If the Local Planning Authority concludes that conflict with Policy SS4 nevertheless exists, I respectfully ask that the Officer's Report clearly identifies the specific planning harm arising from the proposal. In particular, I would ask that it explains:

- how the proposal materially reduces openness;
- how it contributes towards settlement coalescence;
- what aspects of the development are considered incompatible with the purpose of Policy SS4; and
- why any identified harm outweighs the considerable public benefits arising from the proposal.

This reasoning is important because planning decisions should explain not only the conclusion reached, but also the planning judgment which led to that conclusion.

I would also respectfully draw attention to the Council's wider strategic objectives for recreation, tourism and public open space. Whilst every planning application must be determined on its own merits, the Council has itself recognised, through proposals for visitor facilities within Brooklands Park, that designated Green Gap land can successfully accommodate recreational and visitor-serving uses where the essential function of the designation is maintained. I do not suggest that Brooklands Park determines the outcome

of this application. Rather, it demonstrates that the principle of visitor facilities within Green Gap land is capable of being compatible with planning policy where the planning balance supports that conclusion.

This proposal should also be viewed in the context of the realistic alternatives for the site.

One option is to leave the land unmanaged, providing little public benefit and allowing it to continue deteriorating. Another would be permanent built development, which would plainly conflict with the objectives of Policy SS4.

This application represents a significantly different approach. It proposes seasonal leisure use, environmental enhancement, biodiversity improvements, public access and modest visitor facilities which remain largely temporary and reversible. It seeks to retain the openness of the land while enabling the community to enjoy it in a responsible and sustainable way.

Planning is rarely a choice between perfection and refusal. More often, it requires a balanced assessment of whether a proposal delivers sufficient public benefit while avoiding unacceptable planning harm.

Throughout this process I have listened carefully to comments from officers, councillors and members of the public. The application has evolved in response to those comments, with the intention of minimising impacts whilst maximising community benefit. My objective has never been to urbanise Goring Gap, but to protect it through active, responsible stewardship and to create a place that encourages people to value, enjoy and care for this unique part of Worthing's coastline.

Ultimately, I respectfully ask that this application is determined on the basis of evidence, planning policy and the planning balance required by the Development Plan as a whole.

If the Local Planning Authority concludes that the proposal preserves the essential purpose of the Green Gap whilst delivering significant environmental, recreational, economic and community benefits, then I respectfully submit that planning permission should be granted.