

From: **Simon Clarke**

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 2026 at 15:56

Subject: Objection to Planning Application AWDM/0737/26 – Goring Gap

To: <planning@adur-worthing.gov.uk>

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To: Adur & Worthing Borough Council

Re: Planning Application AWDM/0737/26 – Land South East Corner of Amberley Drive / Marine Drive, Goring Gap

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to register my strong objection to planning application AWDM/0737/26.

The Goring Gap is one of the last remaining undeveloped coastal green spaces separating Goring-by-Sea and Ferring. It is a unique and irreplaceable landscape that performs an important strategic function by maintaining the distinct identity of neighbouring communities, preventing coalescence between settlements, and providing a vital visual break along the Sussex coast. The value of the Goring Gap lies fundamentally in its openness, and once that openness is eroded, it cannot easily be restored.

While this application is presented as providing community, leisure and environmental benefits, the reality is that it proposes a significant intensification of activity and development on a site whose defining characteristic is its undeveloped nature. The proposal includes a wide range of uses and infrastructure, including commercial activities, food and drink provision, vehicle parking, overnight camping, toilets, showers, storage containers, advertising structures, flagpoles, animal-related attractions and other facilities. Collectively these represent a substantial urbanising influence on a landscape that has long been protected from development.

Although some of the individual elements may appear modest in isolation, planning decisions must consider their cumulative impact. Taken together, the proposed structures, commercial activities, visitor facilities and associated vehicle movements would fundamentally alter the character of the site. This is not simply a proposal to maintain open space; it is a proposal to commercialise and intensify the use of that open space.

The Council has consistently defended the Goring Gap against development because of its strategic importance. Previous planning decisions and appeals have recognised that development within the Gap causes harm through the loss of openness and erosion of the separation between settlements. Approval of this application would represent a departure from that long-established planning approach and could significantly weaken future protection of the Gap.

Precedent and Incremental Development

Perhaps the greatest concern arising from this application is not simply the development proposed today, but the precedent it would establish for future proposals within the Goring Gap.

The applicant may describe the proposal as low-level, temporary or community-focused, but planning decisions are determined by what is permitted on the land rather than the current intentions of any individual applicant. Once the principle of commercial activity, visitor infrastructure, vehicle parking, overnight stays, catering facilities, storage structures and advertising installations is accepted within the Gap, future applicants will inevitably point to this permission as evidence that such development is considered acceptable in this protected landscape. The proposal expressly seeks permission for a range of such activities and structures.

The danger is therefore not merely the direct impact of this proposal, but the gradual weakening of planning protections that have historically safeguarded the Gap. Future applications could seek larger café facilities, expanded parking areas, additional storage buildings, permanent commercial premises, larger events, increased visitor accommodation, renewable energy infrastructure or further ancillary structures. Each proposal may be argued to represent only a modest extension of what has already been approved.

Planning history repeatedly demonstrates that valued open spaces are rarely lost through a single major development. More often, they are eroded through a series of incremental decisions, each of which is justified by reference to previous permissions. The cumulative result can be the gradual urbanisation of land that was originally protected precisely because of its openness and undeveloped character.

Undermining Established Planning Principles

The Council has consistently recognised that the primary purpose of the Goring Gap is to maintain separation between settlements and preserve a strategically important area of open landscape. Approval of this application would risk undermining that long-established planning position.

If development of this scale and variety is accepted within the Gap, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that future proposals would cause unacceptable harm. The Council's ability to defend the Gap against subsequent applications could therefore be weakened, both practically and at appeal, because applicants would be able to rely upon AWDM/0737/26 as evidence that commercial and operational uses have already been accepted in principle on the site.

This is particularly important because the application extends beyond simple recreational use and introduces a wide range of operational and commercial activities. The cumulative effect is a significant shift from open green space towards a managed commercial and visitor destination. Such a change would represent a fundamental alteration in how the land is viewed for planning purposes.

The "Thin End of the Wedge"

Residents have witnessed repeated development pressures affecting the Goring Gap over many years. For that reason, this application cannot be viewed in isolation. It must be considered within the wider context of continuing pressure on one of the most sensitive and valued areas of open land on the Worthing coastline.

Many residents will see this proposal as the classic "thin end of the wedge" a scheme that may appear limited initially but which introduces uses, structures and activities that could justify ever greater development in the future. Once openness has been compromised and the principle of built infrastructure established, the threshold for further development inevitably becomes lower.

The Council should therefore consider not only whether the proposal causes harm today, but whether approval would make it more difficult to resist further encroachment tomorrow. In the case of the Goring Gap, protecting the principle of openness is every bit as important as protecting the land itself.

The applicant has publicly stated that there is no intention to pursue residential development and that the objective is to preserve the Gap as open green space. While those assurances may be genuine, planning decisions cannot be based on the intentions of current individuals or owners. Planning permissions attach to the land and can outlast those who seek them. Future landowners may have different objectives, and any decision must therefore be judged on the basis of the planning implications of the proposal itself and the precedent it establishes, rather than personal assurances.

The proposal also raises significant concerns regarding traffic, parking and residential amenity. The inclusion of vehicle parking, overnight camping and commercial visitor facilities is likely to attract additional visitors and increase

traffic movements in an area already subject to seasonal pressures. Increased vehicle activity, particularly during evenings and weekends, would inevitably affect neighbouring residents and diminish the peaceful character of the site. The prospect of overnight stays, food and drink sales, events and other leisure uses risks introducing noise, disturbance and light pollution into what is currently a relatively tranquil coastal environment.

Furthermore, the Goring Gap is valued not only for its landscape role but also for its environmental importance. The site provides habitat for wildlife, contributes to biodiversity and forms part of the wider ecological setting between the coast and the South Downs. While the application refers to biodiversity retention, it is difficult to reconcile this objective with the extensive range of recreational, commercial and visitor-focused activities proposed. Increased footfall, vehicle use, noise and general disturbance have the potential to undermine the very environmental qualities that the application claims to protect.

There is also concern regarding the breadth and lack of certainty within the proposal. The application encompasses an unusually wide range of activities and land uses, from renewable energy generation and water extraction through to tourism promotion, retail activity, camping and animal attractions. Such a diverse mix of uses raises legitimate questions about how the site will operate in practice, the intensity of future activity and the cumulative impacts on the surrounding area. In a location as sensitive as the Goring Gap, the burden should be on the applicant to demonstrate beyond doubt that the openness, character and environmental value of the site will be preserved. This application fails to provide that confidence.

The Goring Gap is not valuable because it contains infrastructure, attractions or commercial facilities. It is valuable because it remains open, undeveloped and distinct from the surrounding urban environment. The proposal would introduce unnecessary development into one of the most important remaining open spaces on this stretch of coastline and would undermine the longstanding planning objective of protecting the Gap from incremental urbanisation.

Conclusion

For all of the reasons outlined above, the application should be refused not only because of its direct impacts on landscape character, tranquillity, amenity, biodiversity and openness, but also because of the harmful precedent it would establish. The Goring Gap has been protected for decades because once development is allowed to gain a foothold, further development becomes increasingly difficult to resist. Approval of AWDM/0737/26 would risk opening the door to a gradual but irreversible process of urbanisation that would undermine the very purpose of the Gap.

I therefore respectfully urge Worthing Borough Council to refuse planning application AWDM/0737/26 and continue its longstanding commitment to protecting the Goring Gap for current and future generations.

The value of the Goring Gap lies in its openness. Once that openness is lost through incremental development, it cannot be restored.

Kind Regards

Simon Clarke