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PRESS RELEASE: Charity backs calls to save Bewl Water

'Drip fed' planning applications threaten a treasured Wadhurst wildlife haven.

CPRE Sussex is backing an online petition to protect a Wadhurst wildlife haven from inappropriate development.

The charity says Bewl Water, a unique and beautiful part of the High Weald AONB, is under threat from 'drip fed' planning applications.

It is asking its members and the public to support a petition which aims to stop the site being used for tourist accommodation.

More than 77,000 people have already signed.

"Bewl Water is a wildlife haven which has long-been treasured by the local community as a place to connect with nature, learn to row and sail and enjoy the tranquillity of the High Weald AONB," said Nick Daines, CPRE Sussex lead on planning for Wealden North.

"However, unchecked commercialisation, including a large inflatable water park built without planning permission and applications to convert buildings used by sailors, rowers and anglers into tourist accommodation, are destroying the character of this site and threatening biodiversity."

The Bewl Water Reservoir was built in the 1970s by the then Southern Water Authority to boost the supply of drinking water to the Medway Towns and Hastings.

It soon had thriving sailing, rowing and angling clubs.

Later, mountain bike hire joined the water-borne pursuits, educational facilities and a visitor centre opened and Bewl became a popular spot for walkers.

However, in 2016, the lease covering the operation and management of recreational activities was assigned to Bewl Events and Waterpark Ltd.

Since then, there have been a series of planning applications, despite the fact holiday villages are not permitted within the AONB.

They include: an application for 58 earth lodges, dismissed due to significant harmful effects on the AONB; a temporary permission for an 80-place campsite, which was granted; and an application to convert a fishing lodge into tourist units, refused by Wealden District Council and now subject to appeal.

Applications to convert the former clubhouse and sailing hut into tourist units remain undetermined.

“Tourist accommodation at Bewl would have a significant impact on biodiversity due to the 24-hour-a-day, seven day-a-week occupancy,” said Nick.

“Currently, visitors use the site during daylight hours. Night-time occupation and its inevitable lighting and noise would disturb wildlife, including bats and roosting birds.

“There are questions around whether the activities offered by Bewl Events are suitable for a local wildlife site containing areas of ancient woodland.

“Bewl Events has also shown it is not rigorous in adhering to current conditions on its permissions.

“Yurts have been advertised for use during the supposed off-season and no application has been submitted for the aqua park.”

Anyone who would like to support the campaign to save Bewl Water can sign the petition at change.org/p/save-bewl-water-local-wildlife-site-from-development-protect-wildlife-and-natural-beauty

-ENDS-

For press inquiries and interview opportunities contact sheena.journalism@gmail.com.

Notes for editors:

About CPRE Sussex

CPRE Sussex is shaping a greener future for Sussex. Our priorities are:

- Beautiful landscapes, rich in nature and greener towns and cities
- Countryside and green spaces which are accessible to all, enriching lives and health
- Sustainable development for thriving communities
- Effective responses to the climate emergency

We engage with decision makers, influencing them and challenging them to protect the Sussex countryside and green spaces. We inform on environmental issues and empower individuals and communities with robust evidence to defend and enhance the green spaces they love. We believe in collaborating with others to ensure a greener future for our county. We research and provide advice on planning issues. Together we can shape a greener future for Sussex.