

Note FAO Steven Sims, Wiltshire Council.

Ref: 16105\_Thoulstone\_PL\_Note\_on\_Staff\_Accommodation

**7<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

The detailed and carefully-considered proposals which are described in the Planning Application for the Thoulstone Eco-Leisure Proposal (Ref: 18/05086/FUL) include four staff accommodation units, which are fundamentally important to the project, and essential to the viability of the proposed development. Each of the four units is proposed on the basis that their use would be 'tied' to the holiday / leisure use of the proposed project, and to this specific site.

The following statement establishes further justification (following that described in the Planning Application, particularly the Planning Statement and the Natural Retreats Supporting Statement) for the four proposed staff accommodation units; describing first the two units required for the Holiday Accommodation Operator, and secondly the two units required for the Estate Management Team.

This justification addresses the stipulation in Core Policy 48 that proposed dwellings in the countryside meet a clear and demonstrable need for housing for employees who are required to reside on site.

### **1.0 Justification for Operator Staff Accommodation (Two Units)**

As detailed previously in the Natural Retreats Supporting Statement the proposals contain 28 high quality, self-catering holiday properties; a farm shop café and restaurant; a leisure and community space; a sustainable golf course, and conference spaces. All of these are anticipated to create up to 30 full time roles.

All components will operate all year round with opening hours in keeping with typical leisure operations to suit customers and guests.

### **1.1 Operations: General Manager and Assistant General Manager Roles**

Key to the provision of a high-quality operation, is the ability to employ the best staff for the key roles. This means being able to attract candidates from far and wide and owing to the rural settings in which these operations are set this will typically involve key staff having to relocate.

The unsociable hours and moderate salary levels will see key staff accommodation being provided onsite, in close proximity to the operation that helps alleviate any travel and increase safety and security of the guests.

Staff accommodation is provided for key personnel at every Natural Retreats location around the UK. Accommodation is typically provided for the **general manager** and **at least one assistant general manager**. Onsite staff accommodation is also provided where site operations include the management of other specialised operations such as food and beverage and leisure facilities. This is also likely to involve a broader recruitment strategy and the need for the suitable candidates to relocate.

Also owing to the rural setting of the operations there is not always suitable or affordable local housing provision for key members of staff.

Having key management on site on a 24/7 basis ensures the continuity of the service to guests which is often lacking in typical self-catering operations. This is a distinct benefit Natural Retreats offers its guests - combining the freedom of self-catering with the reassuring levels of luxury hospitality.

Owing to the remote locations our onsite staff have often been the first responders to health and safety incidents out of typical working hours. They provide a known point of contact during the day but also a reassuring point of information should any problems arise. The provision of management based permanently on site is often an insurance stipulation for the safety of guest and protection of property in event of emergency.

Having staff based permanently on site allows the onsite operation to function when required beyond typically working hours in extreme situations this allows the capture of walk in guests who arrive without bookings but can then be accommodated at very short notice. This is particularly effective during the off-season periods and allows the operation to capture maximum guests.

Furthermore, when hosting events, weddings and celebrations where attendees are staying on site, the management team on site can easily be present beyond the completion of events to ensure all guests return to their properties.

At the opposite end of the working day the permanent onsite management will allow for deliveries to take place outside of peak hours minimising impact on local infrastructure and traffic.

Natural Retreats locations have been able to fully integrate into local communities and strengthen community relations. This happens when guests visit local businesses but is underpinned by our general managers who live onsite spending their downtime within the local communities in which they “live”. This has a multitude of benefits but ensures clear lines of communication and a known, direct point of contact.

## 1.2 Natural Retreats – On-site Staff Accommodation - Precedents

### **John O’Groats**

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### **3 Staff Properties. General Manager and Assistant General Manager living on site and a designated seasonal staff living quarters**

John O’Groats is one of the most northerly points on mainland Britain and the small coastal village in Caithness, Scotland is home to 23 unforgettable five star, sea-view lodges with contemporary interior design. In addition to the lodges are 18 - 1, 2 and 4 bedroom apartments in the restored John O’Groats Inn.

Tucked away in an area of outstanding beauty and wild Scottish landscapes, Natural Retreats John O’Groats offers luxury, self-catering stays and provides five star service levels to our guests. This includes offering 24/7 accessibility to our friendly and professional Retreat Managers supported by the services of our dedicated central Concierge Team.

### **Trewhiddle Village – 2 properties for members of staff living on site + designated seasonal staff living quarters**

#### **3 Staff Properties. Retreat Manager and Assistant Manager living on site with a designated seasonal staff living quarters**

Trewhiddle village has a total of 32 luxurious 2, 3 and 4 bedroom self-catering cottages and villas less than five minutes from the gentle waters and soft sands of the Cornish coastline. Trewhiddle offers peaceful coastal living alongside the incredible attractions, activities and adventures Cornwall has to offer.

### **1.3 Tourism Futures Report**

Findings in the Wiltshire and Swindon Visitor Accommodation Futures report conducted by Hotel Solutions supported the provision of onsite staff accommodation; “There is also a need to recognise that rural hotels and accommodation businesses may need some form of permanent on-site staff accommodation to support year round operation and assist in attracting and retaining key staff.” *(Source: Wiltshire and Swindon Visitor Accommodation Futures 2014).*

### **2.0 Justification for Estate Management Staff Accommodation (Two Units)**

The Estate Management Team (two roles requiring accommodation: Estate Manager and Assistant Estate Manager) will be primarily responsible for managing security operations, animal husbandry, and landscape management across the site.

#### **2.1 Security Operations**

The first critical aspect of the Estate Management remit is security, which requires a strong permanent presence on-site. Security is central to the successful operation of the

proposed development, and is particularly pertinent in the context of some of the anti-social and unlawful behaviour which has been previously encountered on the site.

The existing derelict golf club building has suffered ongoing incursions and vandalism, the site was recently occupied unlawfully by members of the travelling community, and there has been occurrences of rough shooting and poaching on the site. This, along with other acts of petty crime, has shown that security is a fundamental consideration. The importance of security on site has also been raised by Police Liaison Officers when they were consulted on the planning application.

Security Operations across the development will include the following:

Responding to any security concerns raised by holiday guests: Residents in the holiday accommodation will be able to contact the on-site estate management team directly at any time. It is essential that management staff are on-site to be able to quickly react and address security concerns swiftly and effectively.

Ongoing site surveillance: The on-site estate management team will be responsible for monitoring any CCTV installations on the site. They will also carry out regular walks across the site to deter the kind of anti-social and unlawful behaviour that the site has suffered.

Operation of out-of-hours entrance: Following the planning application consultation response from police liaison, we are proposing an out-of-hours bollard security line at the main entrance, operating through the night. The on-site estate management team will respond to the call point for this entrance as necessary. This will assist with security (particularly in the car park) and will enable out-of-hours access by holiday guests.

Liaison with local community: The on-site estate management team would be available at any time to discuss concerns raised by the local community, either on general issues or to address specific concerns.

Liaison with local police officers: The on-site estate management team will be the first point of contact in liaising with police officers in relation to police responses to security issues.

Landscape Assets: As opposed to the previous consent on the site for a hotel, this application is focussed on the landscape context of the wider site (covering an extensive area beyond the proposed buildings). While enabling the access which is described in the application, it is important that there is an appropriate security regime to maintain and protect the integrity of the site and its considerable landscape assets, which are spread widely across the site. This will require a team of staff which will be coordinated by the Estate Manager.

Animal welfare: There are security risks associated with the care of grazing animals on the site. Refer to the note below on animal husbandry.

## 2.2 Animal Husbandry

The on-site estate management team will coordinate the husbandry of animals on the site, particularly grazing sheep. This will involve monitoring the health and wellbeing of

the animals, managing the rotation of grazing grounds, and ensuring the security of the animals. The sheep on the site are subject to significant security and safety risks at all hours; they may be stolen or let out on to roads (either by accident or deliberately) – so this requires constant monitoring.

This operation can only be managed properly by staff who are continuously resident on site; after all, farmers typically live close to their animals.

### 2.3 Landscape Management

The landowner has a profound appreciation of the inherent value of the landscape at Thoulstone Park, and is determined to protect and enhance that environment. The importance of this has driven the ideas which have evolved into the final proposals described in the Planning Application. It is fundamentally important that the proposed development preserves and enhances that landscape – and this approach has been supported by the Wiltshire Council Landscape Officer – whose positive response to the planning application vindicates the approach taken by design team.

It is clearly understood by the landowner that the ongoing mission to protect and improve the landscape character and biodiversity of the site must be supported by a commitment to provide appropriate resources for the management of landscape across the site – the on-site accommodation is critical in providing those resources.

Landscape Management across the development will include the following:

Protection of habitats and biodiversity: Protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats across the site has been a fundamental aspect of this development from the start, and will represent a permanent, ongoing stream of work to be controlled by the on-site estate management team. The need for full-time on-site presence is highlighted by ongoing issues of rough shooting and poaching on the site.

Market garden: The market garden will be operated to provide fresh produce for the restaurant and farm shop. The on-site estate management team will be involved in monitoring the output of the garden and in coordinating the ongoing work carried out by different parties within the garden.

Sustainable golf course: This will offer an informal, accessible source of recreation for guests and the local community. While the maintenance requirements are less than a conventional golf course, there will be a requirement to maintain the course, to carry out daily greenkeeping, and to manage access and use.

Sport / recreation area: Within the former driving range, adjacent to the market garden, there is an open area for sporting activities (including two tennis courts) which will require maintenance as well as management of access and use, and coordination of activities.

Landscaped garden areas: The attractive landscaped gardens around the holiday accommodation are an important part of the proposed design. The daily maintenance

and rubbish-picking in these gardens will be an ongoing full-time operation – which will require careful coordination by the on-site estate management team.

Existing public rights of way: The proposed development will maintain the existing public rights of way. Where these routes cross the site the estate management team will ensure that these routes are appropriately maintained, including management of dogs being kept on leads to avoid nuisance and damage to wildlife.

New path network: The new paths proposed within the application are an essential aspect of the improved access around Thoulstone Park for the wider community as well as guests at the holiday accommodation – this path network will require continuous maintenance, and management of dogs being kept on leads to avoid nuisance and damage to wildlife.

Existing semi-mature trees: The existing trees are fundamentally important to the landscape character of Thoulstone Park. It will be important that these trees are maintained to ensure they continue to thrive.

Existing wetland: There is a large existing pond within the park, which will require maintenance and supervision in relation to enhancing biodiversity, ensuring safety of visitors, and preventing anti-social behaviour.

New tree planting and landscaping works: The proposed planting is essential to the quality of the proposed design, and will be a long term operation. These areas will require ongoing management, particularly as they become established, which will be coordinated by the on-site estate management team.

It is critically important that the individuals who are employed to manage this maintenance regime are resident on site, to enable them to maintain an ongoing, continuous overview of the work which is being carried out, as well as an understanding of work that will be required in due course. Given the time and work demands of these roles, it is clear that two dwellings would be required – for an Estate Manager, and for an Assistant Estate Manager.

## 2.4 Summary

The 24 hour / 365 day on-site **security, animal husbandry and landscape management operations** are critical to the viability of the proposed development. Clearly many of the various roles described above will operate simultaneously, and will require dedicated management. The Estate Manager and the Assistant Estate Manager will work on a shift pattern to ensure 24 hour coverage – and they will also be required to cover the holiday entitlement (up to six weeks p.a.) of their counterpart. Consequently, and based on all of the above notes, it is essential that each of these two individuals are able to reside on the site, in two dwellings, to be able to carry out their roles as required.

**The above notes, in accordance with Core Policy 48, clearly demonstrate justification for the four staff accommodation units (two for operations and two for estate management) which are proposed within the planning application ref: 18/05086/FUL.**