

Knoll House Hotel, Studland
Heathland Mitigation Coordinator Comments

Thank you for giving the Natural Environment Team the opportunity to provide advice for Planning application P/FUL/2022/06840:

Redevelopment of existing hotel to provide new tourist accommodation including: 30 hotel bedrooms, apartment and villa accommodation and associated leisure and dining facilities.

Location: Ferry Road, Studland

Heathland Mitigation Coordinator Recommendation: More information required.

It must be noted that this application site falls within 400m of designated heathland. This application must be treated in line with The Dorset Heathland Planning Framework 2020-2025 SPD.

Part of the proposal includes new accommodation that falls within C3 use class. I advise that this element of the proposal should not be permitted under the stipulations laid out in 4.5 and appendix B of the Heathland SPD unless Natural England advise otherwise. I am unable to conclude that the suggested villas and holiday apartments would attract the same level of visitor pressure as hotel type accommodation.

Having read through the current information provided I have made some observations (detailed below) and further information is required to ensure that there will be no adverse effect on the neighbouring heathland. Nevertheless, the application history has included consultation with Natural England and therefore with their greater understanding of the background of this scheme I suggest their advice should be sought for more detail on the suitability of the measures being suggested.

Enhancement measures comments:

1. An overall reduction in the total maximum occupancy:

Within the shadow HRA 5.19 it states that the existing occupancy is 339 people including staff. That the proposed development will have a maximum occupancy of 296 with no resident staff. However, staff could still access the heath before and after work or at lunch times for recreation. Therefore, I advise that staff figures should still be included when assessing the recreational impact.

The survey showed that of the existing staff non kept cats or dogs in the staff accommodation. From the information supplied there is currently no clear limit on the number of dogs that will be allowed per new visitor accommodation. It would be reasonable to advise no pets should be allowed for at least the equivalent number of accommodation suites to ensure there is no increase in pressure.

The times that staff access the heathland varies across the week and is mostly to enjoy exercising and nature, not for dog walking. In fact, the survey showed that 53.8% used the heathland for recreation. The results also suggest that this was an underestimate due to later responses indicating they did in fact use the site and therefore its more likely to be 80.8%. Just under half of the respondents visited site at least weekly. This could suggest that despite there being no staff accommodation in the new plans staff will continue to access the heathland as a direct result of already being in the location for work. That theory may be additionally supported by the widely recognised desirability of the area particularly in summer months, when the heathland is most vulnerable, the seeming availability of free parking for staff and travel time to alternative sites.

Therefore, I advise 296 guests plus staff attracted to the area should be assessed for recreational impact to the heathlands against the existing 273 guests plus total current staff. Unless there is more information able to be provided to support staff acting differently if they live off site as opposed to on-site accommodation.

2. The promotion of a circular walk

The circular walk is less than 2.3km (the suggested average route of dog walkers using the heathland) and is not necessarily a better option than the heath as it is unlikely people will let their dogs off lead so close to the road and other people's leisure space.

3. Removal of existing direct access

This is a welcomed consideration. Robust measures may be required to prevent the access from continuing.

4. Dog walking area

The inclusion of a dog off lead area is appreciated. Further details of this space including the size, fencing specification, and any other infrastructure or planting to attract people to use the space would be useful.

5. Restrictions of number of dogs

Again, this is a welcome inclusion and I advise seeking Natural England's advice on final figures.

6. Reinstatement of mire

Whilst I recognise the wide benefits of this there is no comment from myself with relation to heathland recreation mitigation.

7. Improvement to onsite facilities

I understand that the suggestion is that this will increase the amount of time visitors spend on site rather than on the heath. However, it is difficult to determine exactly how much, if at all, this would alter the level of recreation on the heathland in such a desirable area.

8. Engagement materials

Should the application progress I would advise conditions as suggested to secure correct and suitable information and engagement materials.

Additionally, I would recommend appropriately worded conditions to restrict the use of Class C3 dwellinghouses to use as holiday accommodation only, to include monitoring of the mitigation and to limit the number of pets allowed.

Jade North
Heathland Mitigation Coordinator

15/12/2022

