

Ringmore Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation with Local Businesses

Business: Bigbury Bay Holiday Park

Date: 27th January 2020

A delegation from Ringmore Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group consisting of Mr Richard Baker, the Steering Group Chairman, and Dr Malcolm Findlay, visited Bigbury Bay Holiday Park on the afternoon of 27th January 2020. They met with Steve and Mark, who co-manage the park.

Richard Baker opened the meeting by giving an overview of the Ringmore Parish Neighbourhood Plan and how it would be used in making decisions related to planning and development once it passes through the various stages and comes into force. Steve and Mark kindly responded to a series of questions, the answers to which form the basis for meeting notes that follow:

Background Information

Bigbury Bay Holiday Park is a large static caravan holiday park which is wholly within Ringmore Parish. The park occupies part of the western slope of the Challaborough Valley and is accessed via a turn-off from the Challaborough Hill road, to the south of Ringmore village. All traffic related to the site passes through Ringmore, with the exception of caravan removals and deliveries, which are made using a track on private land owned by Mount Folly Farm.

Bigbury Bay Holiday Park is licensed for 149 caravan units but this licence dates back to a time when the average length of static caravans was much less than it currently is, thus the actual number of caravan units, as of January 2020, is 100. All static caravans on Bigbury Bay Holiday Park are single units, rather than double ones which are often referred to as "lodges". The park does not operate a hire fleet of caravans so all of the units on the park are privately owned, with the owners attending to their own cleaning and upkeep. Owners do have the option of renting out their caravans but this is not encouraged by the park management and, in any case, most owners prefer to retain their caravans for personal holiday use.

Caravan owners on the park may keep their caravans for up to fifteen years, at which point the caravan must be replaced. The park operates a trading relationship with Surf Bay Caravans, Ltd, based in Winkleigh, central Devon, toward servicing this contractual requirement. Twenty new static caravans were sited on the park in 2019 as part of this arrangement.

Business ownership, management and staffing

Bigbury Bay Holiday Park is owned by Iford Caravans Ltd., which is a private limited company based in Poole, Dorset. Steve and Mark explained that representatives of the owners visit the park only rarely, preferring to devolve all aspects of management to local staff. They noted that, as a management team they are sub-contracted by Iford Caravans Ltd. so are not, strictly speaking, members of park staff. Only one part time administrator is directly employed by the park and this person commutes into Ringmore Parish from a town that is 12 miles distant.

While Steve and Mark are experienced and skilled across a range of areas and carry out as much of the work on the park as is feasible, other aspects of management that are beyond their capacity, including refuse removal, electrical work, craning, etc, are devolved to sub-contractors from outside Ringmore Parish

Infrastructure

The park managers explained that all of the sewerage from the site runs downhill to finish in the SW Water pumping station situated in the neighbouring Parkdean Holiday Park, from where it is pumped uphill to the Bigbury-on-Sea treatment works. They noted no particular problems to date with this arrangement.

Mobile phone reception was reported as being "patchy" across the park, with the signal being lost where the land slopes down towards the base of the valley. This is countered by caravans in the park having access to landline provision with accompanying broadband availability.

The managers commented on traffic problems generated by the pressure exerted on the road system within the parish, particularly during holiday periods. In their opinion, however, traffic accessing Bigbury Bay Park was fairly steady year-round and the vast season fluctuation is more likely to be related to Parkdean's hire fleet operation. They agreed that anything that can be done to ease this pressure and to improve safety on the parish road system would be welcome and not impinge upon their business operation.

Steve and Mark had no other comments on Infrastructure.

Environment and ecology

It was explained to the management team that one emerging aspect of the Neighbourhood Plan is the desire to see an approach to lighting in the parish that addresses the problem of light pollution. Steve and Mark noted that most of the outdoor lighting on the park is already "low-level" and they have no plans to install any high-level lighting so any related restrictions that might ultimately feature in the Neighbourhood Plan would not present a problem for the business. They did note, however, that some owners like to occupy their caravans around the Christmas vacation and are prone to putting up temporary decorative lighting displays in this context.

Steve and Mark noted that the park does not receive any grants or other funding for improving the environment but that they do take this aspect seriously. They promote wildlife habitats, eg by nurturing hedges and trees, wherever possible, and schedule maintenance programmes around the need to preserve habitats wherever possible.

Future development plans

Steve and Mark explained that they have drawn up a five-year plan for the holiday park and that the bulk of the work involved in this is based on improving and updating of existing facilities and services. They were clear that the focus of their plan is upon improving the quality of holiday experience rather than expanding the scale of the business. In this context, it was reported that a decrease in the number of caravan units is quite likely. They agreed that the inclusion of policies in the neighbourhood plan that were designed to limit expansion of caravan parks in Ringmore Parish would not compromise their business.

Richard Baker thanked the Bigbury Bay Holiday Park managers for hosting the visit and for providing comprehensive information on their business.

Key points to emerge from this meeting were:

- Bigbury Bay Holiday Park is operating to 5 year plan which aims to improve quality of the holiday experience rather than expanding the park in any sense.
- No residents of Ringmore Parish are employed by the park
- The park managers believe that running their business does exert year-round pressure on local roads but is not responsible for major spikes in traffic during holiday periods. They would welcome traffic management measures
- Other than the above, the park does not experience any business-limiting infrastructure issues
- The park is committed to reducing light pollution
- The park is committed to maintaining wildlife habitats
- The park managers do not feel their business would be compromised by planning policies that limit expansion of caravan parks in terms of area or number of caravan units