

**PROPOSED EVENTS / FUNCTION BUILDING AT HOBBIT HILL  
WEDDING, EVENTS & GLAMPING SITE, FOXFIELDS FARM,  
WHALLEY ROAD, CLITHEROE, LANCASHIRE, BB7 9PN.**

## **BUSINESS JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT**

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## **History**

Foxfields Farm is located at Whalley Road, Clitheroe, Lancashire, in the Ribble Valley and has been under the ownership of the Wilkinson family for four generations: John Wilkinson (the current owner and operator), his grandparents, parents, his five grown-up children, and in the future their own young families. For most of this time the farmland has been rented from the nearby Stonyhurst College, however five years ago in 2014, John was given the option to buy the farm, before the land was to be offered on the open market.

John thus took out a seven-figure mortgage to fund the purchase of the farmland. Unfortunately, farming alone cannot support this. The farm business has had to diversify and generate alternative sources of income, which led to the development of the 'Hobbit Hill' rural wedding, events and glamping business.

## **Hobbit Hill – Existing Facilities**

The Hobbit Hill site presently includes; five glamping pods each providing comfortable sleeping and camping facilities, a small facilities building, providing WCs and single shower; an open camping space for tents; an area of hardstanding for marquees; and associated access and ample car parking space. Since opening in December 2017, the glamping business has proved very popular, with consistent interest throughout the year. This resulted in full occupancy last year and is close to being fully booked for this year.

In addition to regular holiday bookings, marquees / tepees are used to offer spaces for larger events throughout the year. Marquees are erected when necessary for up to five days at a time on an area of designated hardstanding near to the pods and are used for a variety of events. These are predominantly for rural weddings and usually in connection with the glamping pods, where the wedding party or guests make use of this accommodation.

Currently the glamping business alone provides employment for two part-time staff. It supports the use of a local I.T. company for website and booking management systems and attracts both national and international visitors. In addition to this, the single events business employs a further

two people part-time and provides support to many local businesses such as florists, entertainment companies, catering suppliers, confectioners/cake bakers, photographers etc.

Throughout the operation of the events and glamping business over the last few years, the operation has never had problems with traffic - there is suitable existing access from Whalley Road with seven large passing places over a short distance along the driveway, and ample car parking is available on hardstanding within the site. This provides more than enough car parking for large functions and allows access, turning and parking space for large vehicles such as coaches, articulated lorries and farm vehicles. These would be retained as part of the proposal. It is noted that previous business unit rental traffic had no problems with site access; at one time, 30 staff were arriving and departing Foxfields Farm at the same time each day without any problem.

### **Drawbacks**

However, the current provision within the existing site has its drawbacks, which affect the satisfaction of guests and thus the ongoing viability and continuing success of the business. The facilities building provides only a single shower for up to 16 guests in the glamping pods, plus any campers using the site (there can be as many as 30 adults and children with 1 shower available between them). Online feedback from holiday makers and other guests often state the need for more than a single shower. Thus the submitted scheme will provide much needed additional facilities.

Most visitors are delighted and very complimentary about the site, with the suggestion most frequently received though concerning the need for additional space, such as a dedicated function room facility, in particular during bad weather. With the changeable nature of the British weather as it is, even in the summer months when it is windy or raining, guests can be disappointed / inconvenienced by not having an indoor function area for eating their meals, dining together with members of their group, providing a children's activity indoor play area, or for relaxing. Guests love the site, but this key element is missing.

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For marquee / tepee weddings and events, Hobbit Hill continuously receive lots of enquiries and viewings; guests really love the setting and location, affordability and what is on offer. However the lack of permanent facilities means that everything must be either rented as part of an events package or procured by the client, including the marquees / tepees themselves, catering provisions, portable WCs, furniture and audio visual equipment. Often bookings do not come to fruition when clients realise the daunting prospect and costs of arranging this. It also has an effect on the profitability of the events hosting business and requires much more organisation. If there were permanent facilities in place, it would be much easier for clients / guests to hire the venue and organise events, and would greatly increase the appeal and popularity of the whole Hobbit Hill venue business.

Additionally, business opportunities are potentially being lost by the lack of further onsite indoor spaces. There is no building for Hobbit Hill's own meetings / discussions when showing people around the site to hire the glamping pods, or when showing people the venue for marquee / tepee hire functions. They are also often asked if they could hold group glamping bookings for yoga retreats / wellness groups / wild food foraging courses / cookery course weekends / Duke of Edinburgh stop overs – but cannot offer this as there is no building to hold the activities in.

### **Proposal**

The proposed solution to address the existing issues above is for a new events / function building. This will provide additional sanitary facilities for glamping guests, a permanent indoor space for day-to-day guest use and facilities for hosting larger events / functions, including disabled facilities. The 'barn' type building proposed will be more in keeping with the surroundings and will fit better within the local area, surrounded by woodland. This will provide improved and more attractive facilities to prospective clients than marquees, which will increase the popularity, quality and number of function bookings that can be made and held throughout the year.

The impact of the proposed building on the surrounding landscape has been considered and will be carefully managed. The proposed building and its surrounding vicinity are encompassed by that of the family themselves and their farm estate, meaning neighbours are already some distance from the proposed events / function building. Investment is proposed in non/low-

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reflective glass on the outside of the proposed building, to minimise glare on the surroundings. In the evenings when the space is used, blinds can be put in place on all windows if required to minimise light spillage. We also expect that any noise impact on the surroundings, occasionally caused by events in marquees, will be improved by hosting events within a permanent enclosed structure, and thus lessening any potential impact.

At present, 28 functions for marquees / tepees are permitted per year with erection and take down days, (usually 5 days per event in total) therefore there are approximately 140 days a year where a large white marquee or tepee can be in-situ, having a significant visual impact on the surrounding area. A new event / function building will make the use of temporary marquees unnecessary on the existing hardstanding area and will improve this situation by providing an attractive 'barn' type building in-keeping with the surrounding woodland. The hardstanding area will be reverted to grass if the proposed building is approved, also helping improve the appearance of the immediate area.

Traffic related to the existing site is managed at present with staggered arrival and departure times for glamping, which would be unchanged by the proposal. Marquee events arrivals are also staggered over two days for each event, including for the venue hire, deliveries and guests using the accommodation. Staggered arrivals would still be used for any deliveries for events, (without the need for marquee delivery) and guest arrivals would remain the same. All vehicles would use the ample existing car parking and vehicle turning space provided. The nearby access to local bus routes and ample space for coaches on site will continue to encourage the use of public and shared transport options.

The appearance of the proposal will be a rustic / natural look, including plenty of wood and a shingle roof. Overall the proposal will add-to and improve the already successful glamping business facilities, improving the guest experience and thus the popularity of the site. The proposal will allow Hobbit Hill to host better-quality functions, more easily, which will greatly increase the booking potential and viability for clients. Having permanent facilities, rather than continuously renting everything for events will improve both the organisation time required and the profitability of the business. This will also give a space to discuss functions with potential clients and market the venue more effectively, further assisting the already extremely popular site.

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### **New Opportunities**

It is anticipated that the addition of improved facilities to the already successful events and glamping business will open up new opportunities within the area and allow for a greater range of uses. As previously stated, Hobbit Hill are often asked if they could hold group glamping bookings for yoga retreats / wellness groups / wild food foraging courses / cookery course weekends / Duke of Edinburgh stop overs, of which they would now be able to take full advantage.

New local housing development volumes are increasing rapidly; even in Hurst Green itself there will be approximately 42 extra families in new housing currently under construction. The proposed events / function building would be ideal to be able to offer somewhere local and affordable for families to hire for functions, children's birthday parties, exercise classes, mother and toddler groups etc.

The proposed building would also make a great affordable alternative venue option for local high school events / proms. In particular for the nearby Stonyhurst College, with which the farm already has a historical link. Within the Ribble Valley area there are increasing levels of tourism. Many events locally, including those at Stonyhurst College such as their new museum and the nearby 'Tolkien Trail' are very popular. This increase requires better facilities on offer for accommodation with which improved glamping facilities could be a part.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 a wedding, events and glamping open day at Hobbit Hill was held, where approximately 250 people came to view the venue. The day was a resounding success, but people were eager and waiting to know if the events / function 'barn' building will be in-situ before booking.

As part of the proposal, the improved facilities will allow for further local jobs to be created. This is anticipated to include up to 15 people on a part-time basis and a further two full-time employees. For the glamping and events / functions uses, this will variously include bar staff, waitresses, caterers, events planner, website IT staff, marketing staff, printing suppliers, cleaners, laundry service, maintenance staff, gardener, administration assistant, etc.

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The Hobbit Hill glamping and events site currently supports local businesses, for example the numerous local suppliers used for the functions; caterers, wedding celebrants, entertainment, florists, transport, events decor stylists, hair and beauty, confectioners/cake bakers, laundry services, equipment hire etc. This will only be further reinforced by the proposal, allowing for greater support to the local community, enhancing farm diversification based on our established practices. This will result in further strengthening of the wider rural and local economy. Additionally, it is anticipated that local suppliers and craftsmen will be employed in the construction of the proposed building, in supplying materials and in the furnishing and future maintenance of the venue.

To help fund the proposal, John has two sales currently in process with solicitors for two small parcels of land. This will release funds providing for the construction and fit-out of the proposal. It is hoped to start construction in 2019, subject to receiving planning approval. Construction should ideally occur over the autumn/winter period, when there are fewer large events bookings, however the existing glamping and events business will remain unaffected by construction works and both will function throughout.