

BY EMAIL:

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP

Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

My Ref:

Your Ref:

Date: 06 July 2020

Dear Sirs

Camping in the New Forest (CITF)

It is with great concern that I feel it necessary to bring to your attention the implications of the decision taken by **Camping in the Forest (CITF)** to close all their campsites in 2020. I am sure you are aware that CITF are a company formed by a partnership of Forestry England, an agency of the Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs. In total they operate 16 campsites in the United Kingdom of which 10 are located in the New Forest.

The 10 New Forest campsites provide a very significant contribution to the local economy. Our estimate of the impact on the local economy from lost discretionary guest expenditure (50% occupancy of 3105 pitches over the 87 days between 4th July and 28th September) is a "conservative" **£16 million**, which is a staggeringly large figure. If you then add the cost of the associated loss of local employment, supply chain costs, their own revenue (a large proportion also spent locally by their staff), the impact is much greater.

The decision not to open the 10 New Forest campsites is both bizarre and irresponsible given the situation we all face at this time, particularly as our community tries to recover from the devastation of the pandemic. In addition, the risks to the natural environment from uncontrolled wild camping in this special environment is also of great concern. Therefore, the decision has the potential not just to be a disaster for the local tourism and hospitality industry, at this most difficult of times, but also threatens the special characteristics of the forest itself and the quality of life of everyone who lives here.

CITF's Board made their decision without any engagement with us as the local authority. We therefore have had no opportunity to see if we could have supported the operation in any way. Our understanding is that their financial appraisal was based upon a very pessimistic cost benefit analysis of the additional operational implications for them in a COVID-19 marketplace which we are not certain related to the reality of the situation. We are witnessing a particularly high level of visitor numbers to the New Forest and surrounding areas at this time, and it is important they are able to utilise facilities like managed campsites, avoiding a potentially greater adverse impact created by their closure.

We are keen to work with our local partners (who are also cc'd into this letter) to find solutions. So, I ask that you use whatever pressures are available to you to bring to bear on the company to reconsider their decision. This is a critical moment for everyone who cares about the visitor economy in the New Forest and the very fabric of the forest's cultural heritage.

Yours sincerely

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c.c. Julian Lewis MP
Sir Desmond Swayne MP
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