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## HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Site Viewing Working Party held on 24 August 2023

Present

Councillor: Keast (Chairman)

Councillors: Coates, Rason and Weeks

Officers: Ernest Lam, Democratic Services Officer  
Steve Weaver, Development Manager

### 39 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Linger and Patrick.

### 40 Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interests relating to matters on the agenda.

### 41 APP/23/00076 - Tournerbury Woods, Tournerbury Lane, Hayling Island

Proposal: Change of Use of land and woodland (retrospective) as a wedding and events venue, including retention of permanent ancillary buildings and structures, the erection of removable structures (including marquees and temporary facilities), and the use of the land as a campsite in association with events. Construction of vehicular track from the public highway to the proposed wedding and events venue at Tournerbury Woods.

The site was viewed at the request of the Executive Head of Place.

The Working Party received a report by the Executive Head of Place.

The Working Party was accompanied around the site by the Site Manager, who was available to answer any factual or technical questions.

The Working Party viewed the site, the subject of the application, to assess whether there were any additional matters that should be considered by the Planning Committee.

RESOLVED that, based on the site inspection and information available at the time, the following additional information be provided to the Planning Committee:

- (a) Evidence of evacuation exercise undertaken at the site
- (b) Evidence of emergency lighting at the site

The meeting commenced at 1.15 pm and concluded at 3.15 pm

.....  
**Chairman**

29<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Application No: APP/23/00076. Tournerbury Woods

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This application has been subject to intense scrutiny over very many years; attracting comment from many quarters. Despite these, the officer report confirms that there are no material planning matters to indicate the presumption in favour of permission should be set aside, and it can be determined objectively through a positive planning balance, not negative subjective opinion.

Any potential harm generated can be mitigated and enforced; with environmental mitigation subjected to more regular review than required by statute.

Originally a small, permitted development activity, the venue is now a significant local business contributing positively, economically, socially and environmentally to the local area.

The environment, a fundamental asset of Tournerbury's attraction, requires management. The applicants' management of Tournerbury is positively endorsed by Natural England's detailed site review of October 2022. Drawing special attention to the venue area and uses, the report confirms a lack of harm, and positive enhancement.

Noise disturbance and environmental damage is continually levelled against the operation, but exhaustive reassessment, proves any harm to be the consequence of activities at other sites.

Determination must be on fact not conjecture. The proposal is supported by accurate, tested evidence which is supported by all statutory consultees.

The officer report applies an appropriate planning balance to reach a positive recommendation. It notes comprehensively all concerns raised by consultees and third parties, references the extensive work undertaken by the applicants in response, and provides an appropriate assessment of each. It demonstrates the officer's thoroughness to ensure the views of all are understood and considered.

Application APP/21/01310 was found similarly acceptable, but its reliance on an existing access was perceived to give rise to potential, but limited, harm to private amenity at Tournerbury Farm. That application is held in abeyance, while delivery of an alternative access was explored. It is that access which is the key focus of this application. All other matters are unchanged, but the opportunity is taken to enhance the applicant's robust response to environmental matters.

The revised access route has planning permission and is part implemented. With almost all matters resolved, a private agreement with its landowner is close to completion, meeting planning requirements and providing confidence to allow the application to be determined.

Opponents suggest the application cannot be determined because of:

- lack of additional information
- a need for other permissions,
- failure to meet management requirement, and
- outstanding planning enforcement

All necessary information has been provided in response to all material considerations and has been assessed repeatedly. Potential permissions from other bodies may be required, but impacts site management not development principle.

The application must be treated on planning merit balanced against the development plan, with the Council reaching its decision on the weight of evidence before it, not unevidenced speculation or preference,

The application presented to Committee, is policy compliant and a positive response to all material considerations. Approval will ensure a successful business and its local contribution continues to evolve. Importantly it will deliver significant environmental and social benefits for the long-term.

It will regularise the planning status of the site and bring uses under appropriate planning control.

It will allow extant enforcement and appeal action to be withdrawn, avoiding very substantial expenditure of Council finance and staff resources.

Refusal on grounds of a limited number of mis-leading, personal, unproven and subjective concerns is untenable. A costly appeal will ensue where it will be proven that the continued support offered by officers, statutory consultees and experts, and the significant economic, social and environmental benefits of the proposal, significantly and demonstrably outweigh the unsubstantiated claims, and personal interests of a few opponents.

The enforceable conditions and mitigations proposed by officers to address potential harm are acceptable to the applicants, and will be delivered.

The applicants have worked closely with officers to ensure that all material considerations are addressed positively and that no party has, or will be disadvantaged in respect of permission being issued. That co-operation will continue during the transitional period of the new permission being implemented, to ensure the new access road is provided and brought into use quickly and without harm to the local environment, community, neighbours or the applicants' business.

Use of the existing access track serving the business will cease when the new route is available. It will remove the potential for harm to private residential amenity; the only planning matter unresolved from APP/21/01310.

The officer report confirms the development is acceptable in planning terms and there is no sound planning justification why permission should be withheld.

Chairman, fellow Councillors,

I would have liked to make a verbal deputation to you at your Committee meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> in support of this application, however I am in Ukraine helping with humanitarian aid and I am told by our Democratic Services that as I am not physically present I will not be allowed to remotely call in.

Therefore I am supplying you with my deputation below that I would otherwise have said at Committee –

I am in complete support of this application today.

I want to address our Regeneration Strategy, our environmental and economic priorities. Also our responsibilities as Councillors to the Public Interest and weighing the planning balance in the Public Interest.

I wanted to speak because I imagine much like you, I became a Councillor to try, where possible and practical, to help make this Borough better.

Better for our hard working residents and their families.

Better for our unique environment.

Better for our businesses that are the backbone of local prosperity and job opportunity, especially for our younger residents, and especially small family run businesses like Tournerbury Woods.

Our adopted Regeneration and Economy Strategy 2022 – 2036 states this clearly on the front page –

**HAVE SUCCESS WITH HAVANT**

SUSTAINABLE PLACES

SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE

BETTER BUSINESS

When you make your decision today I hope you will think carefully on those ambitious goals and aims of the Council.

The introduction to that adopted strategy states boldly in its foreword –

*“We need an environmental, social, cultural and economic recovery which is sustainable. The strategy sets out our ambitions to create sustainable places, successful people and better business across the borough so that all our communities can share in our future economic growth and prosperity. The Council will work with commitment and conviction to lead this”.*

Chairman and fellow Councillors, what we have publicly stated as being our goals for this Borough are implicitly mirrored in what the Tournerbury Woods Estate does, in reality and on the ground, and what this application is asking the Council’s blessing for.

## SUSTAINABLE PLACES:

What is striking about this application is that as the Tournerbury venue has been so long established, having held weddings for over a decade, and other events and holiday lettings as far back as 2008, we can see empirically, with the benefit of history over the last 15 years that this venue has created a SUSTAINABLE PLACE. Not a moribund place.

Sustainable because every time Natural England assess Tournerbury's ecology in detail, it comes back as one of the only units in the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty SSSI which is time and again commended as FAVOURABLE status and to be in excellent ecological health for its flora and fauna. This totally bucks the trend of not only Chichester Harbour but SSSI's nationwide that are declining ecologically.

This exceptional and best in class environmental habitat management over a long period of time is solely paid for by the revenue from the success of the venue. Woodland and biodiversity habitat management is expensive. There is much objection 'noise' on ecological grounds from a small group of opposition but the data from the National experts and Statutory Consultee on ecology and the environment (Natural England) destroys this conjecture entirely.

## SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE & BETTER BUSINESS.

This application is not about one family and one business. The nature of the business, a wedding venue, means it is the engine of a whole economic food chain of other businesses in our Borough. It is the guest spend every year that is the extra taxi jobs, the extra hotel and bed and breakfast rooms booked, the money spent in our Borough's brilliant independent retailers and hospitality offerings from Tournerbury guests who have chosen to make their friend's or family's wedding day into a break of a few days.

It may be regrettable that this application is retrospective, but that is not unusual for rural businesses that start off under permitted development rights to see if they work and organically grow over time. Retrospective applications are a valid and lawful planning mechanism whether some may approve of it or not. Because it is retrospective, to determine against Tournerbury is actually to take away a substantial seven figure part of our local visitor economy that is already long established by the Tournerbury venue's existence over the last 10 years. This is the Council's opportunity to approve this application, make things right and take control of the land in planning terms by imposing the mitigations and controls that our officers have diligently worked on.

Can we, as Councillors, with hands on heart and clear consciences take away from our residents and the businesses that they own or are employed in, the financial input



and security to their livelihoods that Tournerbury has historically year after year put into their pockets and their family's prosperity and wellbeing. To vote against this application is to do that very thing, and it does not align us as a Council to fulfilling our stated aims of in our Regeneration Strategy of "working with commitment and conviction to deliver SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE and BETTER BUSINESSES".

To turn down this application today is to do the exact opposite of what we say we are going to do, as losing the Tournerbury venue would make our hard working residents less successful people and our businesses 'not better' but worse.

We should be clear that the Tournerbury wedding venue does not compete with other Borough wedding venues, it is in a different price bracket and is a different hospitality offering to our local hotels and clubs that offer weddings. Many of Tournerbury's customers may have a connection to the Borough but the majority are not resident here and these are the high spending visitors that we should be attracting, not turning away and telling to go and spend tens of thousands of pounds in other Boroughs. Economically, Environmentally and Socially the benefits of keeping this long established business cannot be in doubt and our officer in his report recognises this.

Chairman and fellow Councillors, to sum up –

Tournerbury is a licenced wedding venue by Hampshire County Council and the applicants have assured me they will serve our community, serve our environment and economy, their customers and the land they love and have looked after for three generations forevermore.

Chairman and fellow Councillors, you have the opportunity today to provide an amazing venue, under full Council control to many happy couples from all walks of life and all parts of the country, to join with their friends and families in joy filled celebration and their very presence and custom at Tournerbury and in our Borough fulfils all of our strategic aims of our own Regeneration Strategy and our promises to our residents. Is there any better advertisement than Tournerbury for our brilliant Borough as a destination for visitors, a Borough blessed with an exceptional environment and a place that we are proud of and where our residents can prosper? This application has my full support and I very much hope it has yours as well.

Chairman and fellow Councillors, thank you for reading this and I am very sorry I will not be able to be with you in person at your Committee meeting.

Councillor Imogen Payter

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**Deputation re. Retrospective Planning Application APP/23/00076  
for Tournerbury Woods to become a Wedding Venue  
to Planning Committee 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023  
on behalf of Havant Climate Alliance and Havant Friends of the Earth**

We object to this application which contravenes the National Planning Policy Framework.

As advertised on the RealWeddings website, the Venue's description and Unique Selling Point is that it is "a hidden gem of a venue" which "is the only Ancient semi-natural woodland and seaside wedding venue in England". Indeed it is, for nowhere else, with the same environmental conditions, would planning and environmental regulations have allowed it.

It is shocking that Havant Borough Council and Natural England have allowed a business to develop which entails damage and destruction to a legally protected SSSI site of special habitat. As such it should have been kept safe from any development or damage. However 175 trees have been removed, despite a Tree Protection Order, with much of the area now reduced to parkland with little habitat value. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable.

"Functionally linked land", which supports wildlife in Chichester and Langstone Harbours, is a finite resource. It provides essential habitat, without which the eco-system in and around the Harbours would fail. In recent years we have seen this being whittled away, mainly for housing developments. Mitigation by funding smaller sites as Nature Reserves will not adequately compensate. The amount of land available is important, given future losses which will occur due to rising sea levels.

Noise and disturbance from 70 weddings per year must inevitably impact remaining areas of the SSSI habitat and adjacent sites, deterring herons, bats and other wildlife. Wedding guests can quite often get rowdy later in the day and especially if they are staying overnight. The Noise Management Plan is unrealistic.

The advantage of the business to the local economy will have swayed councillors, but any work generated will be casual in nature. It is debatable whether wedding guests contribute much to the local economy outside the site.

The Wedding Venue could be moved to another site without environmental sensitivity.

Any donations to a local political party should certainly not be a consideration.

There is a history of mismanagement of this case whether deliberate or through incompetence. Why was the Council's Enforcement Notice of 2020 not acted upon? Why have Natural England failed to protect this SSSI site?

It will be argued that most of the damage has already been done, so why not grant planning permission. The applicant has cynically grown the business in full knowledge that they have been flouting planning and environmental laws. For the Council to grant permission in this case will create a precedent that other developers may seek to follow, leaving the local environment very vulnerable. Granting permission here will totally undermine the Council's claim of commitment to environmental protection. Councillors should refuse permission, following Chichester Harbour Conservancy in saying that this operation should STOP. The Applicants can go to Appeal if they wish and let the Planning Inspectorate decide.

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Dear Chairman & Committee Members,

I am writing to you to give my wholehearted endorsement of this application, both professionally and as a local resident.

Since 2000, I have been employed as one of the Hampshire Registrar's as part of the Hampshire County Council Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages service. I retired two years ago after 21 years of service.

I am also a Havant Borough resident, having lived on Hayling Island for the last fifty+ years since 1972.

In my capacity as a Hampshire Registrar, I have officiated at numerous weddings at Tournerbury and as you would expect, all other venues that are licenced by Hampshire County Council for legal wedding ceremonies to take place.

Tournerbury is without exception, and without doubt – THE standout venue in our area. I have witnessed nothing but extraordinary joy and happiness at this very beautiful place.

In a professional capacity, we Registrar's are always happy to go to Tournerbury to officiate wedding ceremonies. This is not just because of the natural beauty, but also the warmth of the welcome from the Tournerbury team who conduct themselves in an utterly professional manner. We see a great many different venues as Registrar's and get to see first-hand the way they are run and organised from general maintenance to health and safety etc. Again, Tournerbury is THE standout venue. The management and their team have a complete handle on guests and the happy couple and the professionalism with which Tournerbury is run on wedding days that I have witnessed many, many times is honestly second to none.

The wedding industry is not easy, there can be many stresses and emotions and family politics can be involved. It takes real passion and care to be able to oversee weddings and I have never encountered another team such as those that work at Tournerbury who do this so well and with such empathy and thoughtfulness.

I am terribly disheartened to see that there is still vociferous and rather dramatic narrative being promoted to you from less than a handful of objectors, whom seem to be solely focussed on trying to close this remarkable and brilliant venue down and have embarked on attempted character assassination of the applicants in a bid to discredit them. This is disgraceful behaviour and I hope you see it for what it is. Their motives do not sit well with me, and do not seem to be sincere, nor based in credible fact. I hope that you will take such objecting protestations with considerably more than a pinch of salt.

When a venue becomes licenced for weddings, an extensive exercise is undertaken by Hampshire County Council Registrars Service which includes Fire Risk, Health and Safety etc and onsite inspections. You should be aware Tournerbury has never

raised any red flags in this regard, either at the venue or the access to it from the County's perspective.

As a Hayling resident, I have also attended a function at the venue and even as a guest, as opposed to being a representative of the County Council, I observed the same passion and professionalism in the staff and the organisation that I have witnessed on a great many occasions in my professional capacity. It was a total joy to be at this stunning place as a guest as opposed to be working, and to see 'the other side of the coin' and it was immediately apparent why it has grown to be a success over the years.

This is such a 'good' (in the purest sense) 'use of land' that does so much more for our Island and our Borough than might at first appear on the surface. It is completely sustainable, wholly positive for our community, extraordinarily beneficial to our small businesses and all those that work in them and the income it generates sustains the ecological management of the rest of the Estate.

I think we should all be really proud that Tournerbury is here, it's a real strength in our hospitality offering as a Borough and a commendable example of good long-term land stewardship. To turn this application down would suggest that something is seriously wrong in the Council's aspirations, duties and commitments for the well-being, health, environmental and economic success of its residents.

I hope you will bear all of the above very squarely in mind when making your deliberations / considerations on this application.

Thank you.

Regards,

Alan Fine

**Written deputation in support of APP/23/00076 for Planning Committee meeting 31/08/23**

My name is Daren Ford. With my wife [REDACTED] we own and run Focus Commercial Cleaning. We are a Borough based family business that serves the Havant, Hayling, Waterlooville, Rowlands Castle and Drayton areas. Tournerbury is one of our most important clients.

We employ 14 people and our employees enjoy fair wages, holiday pay, uniform, training and rewards. The venue at Tournerbury is extremely important to us and is a way that we can employ so many. Their business has been a critical part of our expansion and without Tournerbury we would not be able to provide as much work for local people who rely on us for their wages to feed their families. The Committee should be aware that due to Covid we came within inches of closing our business. It was solely and only our contract with Tournerbury that kept us afloat and able to employ Borough residents. Our employees live in Emsworth, Waterlooville, Leigh Park, Hayling, all over the Borough.

Councillors, these are your hard working, dedicated residents and our Tournerbury contract makes their lives better. Approving this retrospective application today says you back these residents. It says you back local businesses in our brilliant Borough.

Havant and Hayling Councillors should be proud of this amazing venue and all it does to support the local economy through provision of jobs and support to other businesses. We must collectively take pride in our regeneration, not kill it.

Tournerbury is a sustainable place, employment opportunities at Tournerbury are helping to create successful people and through that opportunity better businesses are being built, such as us, in line with your regeneration strategy.

In the current economic climate, we should be supporting businesses and employment not considering limiting them or closing them.

We must recognise the importance of local family run businesses to the success of the Borough's prosperity – Tournerbury does that at the same time as investing significantly in protecting the environment of the site – it addresses our Boroughs economic priorities and is entirely aligned with Havant's bold and ambitious statement of intent.

Supporting Tournerbury today sends us and indeed all business decision makers - both those that are established here and those that might look to locate here a very positive message about how Havant Borough views businesses and job prospects.

Chairman and Councillors I urge you to support your residents, support your Borough's economic prosperity and environmental good management. You do that by supporting the Tournerbury wedding venue.

Kind Regards

**Daren Ford**

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Tournerbury has always been a big part of my life and is a place I feel a strong connection to. I live off of Tournerbury lane meaning it's just a stones throw away and it's a blessing to have it right on my doorstep. I love the peacefulness and tranquillity of the grounds and when I saw a job opening at Tournerbury a few years ago I knew I had to have it to be a part of this magical place. Tournerbury is now my main source of income throughout the summer months and it has been an absolute pleasure to experience the joy and benefit it brings to so many peoples lives. It is amazing to build long lasting relationships with all the local business that we work with. It creates a large portion of work for local people like myself and is a key part of Hayling Island.

Ella Barnett

Events Manager | Tournerbury Estate

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I have been employed by Tournerbury for over 5 years now, it is my primary source of income and I am so lucky to have my dream job so close to home (I'm born and bred in Hampshire). Myself and my team (of up to 12 during peak season) are all local to the venue, and would otherwise have to travel outside of the Borough (or even county) for work. We have a dedicated team of Grounds people as well who work all year round. I'm a huge nature lover, and one of the things that drew me to working at Tournerbury was Chris & Alice's complete dedication to ensuring the preservation of the natural surroundings. This is a special place that has been looked after and loved by their family for almost 100 years.

Without their investment, funded solely by the income from weddings, Tournerbury Woods would be failing rather than ecologically thriving as it is now.

Myself and the Tournerbury team are incredibly proud of the work we do to help so many couples (both local and from further afield) host their perfect wedding day. Tournerbury has supported so many small family Borough businesses in the area, with many relying on Tournerbury as a critical source of income. Many of these small business owners have become personal friends of mine, and we are all deeply concerned for our livelihoods should Tournerbury not continue in its current capacity, not only financially but also on a personal level.

Each wedding we host brings people into the area who may not have visited before, often not having heard of Hayling Island before. They then stay in local accommodation across the Borough, visit local restaurants, pubs, cafes and shops, often extending their trip for multiple days around the wedding. Many of our couples re-visit the Borough each year to celebrate their anniversaries and other life events, bringing more income and trade both to the Island and the Borough that would otherwise go elsewhere.

I fully support the recommendation proposed. Tournerbury supports so many including myself, my team, our couples and the local community and a multitude of supplier businesses. If Tournerbury is interrupted for the apparent benefit of a few residents with either misguided and ill-informed views or personal agendas, and who have never visited the venue, that would be catastrophic not only to me but to considerably more people and their families.

**Lucy Barwick**  
**Venue Manager, Tournerbury Woods Estate**

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To whom it may concern

This is a written deputation in support of APP/23/00076 for consideration at planning committee meeting on 31 August 2023. I do NOT wish to speak.

I was born and bred on Hayling Island and grew up in West lane. I returned to Hayling in the late 90's having spent a decade in London nursing.

I got married in 2005 and had 3 children in quick succession. Tragically, in 2016 the father of my children died from pancreatic cancer within 5 weeks. Tournerbury Woods offered to host my husbands wake and they were unbelievably empathetic towards me and my children (9,7 & 5 at the time). They were so sensitive to our needs and wishes and thanks to them, we have a positive memory from the wake as a memory for the future.

On 2nd October 2021, I got married again to Darren who had also been widowed in 2016. We chose Tournerbury as it felt naturally relaxed & we felt it would suit all our children, friends and family joining together for a gathering for the 1st time. And we wanted the occasion to be uplifting. Tournerbury is unpretentious, outdoorsy and natural. In addition I felt drawn to Tournerbury from my previous memories and the setting, which is beautiful & serene. And of course it is on Hayling, where we had chosen to live. We wanted to show off Tournerbury's unique beauty.

It turned out to be an extremely wet and windy day. However, it did not spoil our celebration at all because we were beautifully looked after and protected from the weather conditions with canvas covers on the deck and the stunning marquee.

Tournerbury employs helpful, friendly professional staff, welcoming to guests and suppliers. Nothing was too much trouble.

We were very impressed with the instructions given about how the day should run in relation to the weather but more importantly, access to Tournerbury and the woodland and being mindful of neighbours.

We used local suppliers for our catering, floristry & the entertainment.

We value this as a local venue and love looking at photos of our day.

It is an outstanding venue and we have told so many people about it.

Our guests came from far and wide (including abroad) – many who hadn't visited the area before (Darren's family live in Kent/East Sussex) and stayed locally and used local taxi services.

The venue should be celebrated and supported in every way – there's nothing quite like it locally.

Jane Batchelor

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1) The Planning Officer Report finally recommends granting planning permission for the above for the first time in 5 years and 5 failed applications, subject to Conditions 2 to 4 (pages 42 & 43) which state that the proposed use for the site will not commence until the alternative track, bypassing Tournerbury Farm, is ready and available for use and its construction complete in accordance with approved documents.

On the contrary, there is no mention in the Report of the ongoing non-prosecution agreement HBC made with the applicant regarding the January 2020 Enforcement Stop Notice. This effectively entitles the applicant to continue running and earning an income from his wedding business as if he had full planning permission, but on precisely the basis on which it has been repeatedly refused, namely, the unacceptable problems of amenity loss, security and farming issues caused by heavy volumes of wedding traffic accessing Tournerbury Woods through Tournerbury Farm. Not only does this non-prosecution agreement make a mockery of the entire planning process, it is also grossly unfair on the owners of Tournerbury Farm, who have had to endure increasing levels of difficulty and disturbance in 2021, 2022 and 2023, in addition to the previous wedding seasons between 2014 and 2019.

The existence of the non-prosecution agreement, and the time it has been allowed to continue unchallenged, also shows a callous and unjustified level of favouritism towards the applicant, and an equivalent disregard for Tournerbury Farm's own business, rights and wellbeing. It is imperative this disgraceful agreement is terminated forthwith, or at least at the end of the current wedding season so as not to ruin imminent events booked for the next few weeks. Whether permission is granted or deferred today, the further continuation of this agreement will effectively remove any possible incentive for the applicant to agree and sign a legal deal to switch over to the new track, to complete the construction works, to relinquish the old right of way, and to actually start making use of the new alternative track with an identical like for like right of way, as he has repeatedly reported he intends to do, but never does. The world of excuses to justify doing nothing, and the reasons behind them, is unfortunately infinite.

Please would the Planning Officer confirm to this meeting, and in writing, the date on which the non-prosecution agreement is to be terminated once and for all, so that there is a realistic chance that all wedding traffic will be exclusively using the alternative track before the 2024 wedding season begins.

2) The provisions for fire risk control caused by overnight camping in dry summer weather are inadequate to non-existent. The letter provided to campers on arrival is insufficient to guarantee safe and responsible behaviour amongst party goers who may have been consuming alcohol in unlimited quantities all day. The camping pitches themselves have been cleared of trees and vegetation but there are numerous mature trees surrounding them, and the compacted leaf and root litter below could very easily turn into a raging wildfire. No formal condition assessment has ever taken place, as is performed regularly at the 10 SSSI campsites in the New Forest.

3) Condition 11 (ii), page 45, states that a maximum of 88 camping pitches per annum will be permitted. This is an ambiguous number as it is the product of multiplying 11 nights maximum X 8 pitches a night maximum = 88, as shown in the Visitor Management Strategy. The permitted limit needs to refer to one or other of these two factors to cover the possibility of fewer than 8 tents on every one of the 11 nights. If "11 nights" is the correct limit, this would allow for 11 to 88 pitches per annum. If "88 pitches" is the correct limit, this would allow camping on up to 65 nights, being the maximum number of wedding events permitted per annum. The second is a much more dangerous option, exposing Tournerbury Woods to greater fire risk over a greater variety of risky weather conditions.

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### **Supporting deputation for APP/23/00076:**

My name is Shelley Meredith, with my partner I run the award-winning Island Catering Company. We are a Hayling based catering company providing event catering services across the region. The majority of our work though takes place at Tournerbury. Without Tournerbury we wouldn't be the business we have become and we wouldn't have been able to provide the covid support that we did to our local community at a time of crisis.

Our business not only feeds our family and keeps a roof over our heads, but also allows us to teach our two little daughters to take pride in our local community, our environment and gives them a sense of place and pride in this Borough where we are lucky enough to live and work. We provide employment for ourselves and many other local residents, we also rely on over 10 other suppliers from the area – this is real local economics – we keep people in work and help families to survive, and that's because of Tournerbury. Tournerbury is the beating heart of a sizeable, sustainable tourism economic eco-system in our Borough.

We love our business and the joy it brings to so many people that visit the Borough to create beautiful memories. Our clients love Tournerbury – we see first-hand the effect this unique venue has on people. We and our suppliers are struggling with the uncertainty of the current planning limbo which has been going on for years. It is not fair that hard working people (Borough residents) working either directly or indirectly through suppliers who rely on Tournerbury for their livelihoods have been placed in this position by a few vocal objectors who have neither visited the site (even though invited by the applicants) nor provided any proven evidence of their criticisms. All complaints have been scrutinised time and again and by experts in their relevant fields and the statutory consultees have all been consistently supportive of Tournerbury.

Criticism of the venue is coming from people who haven't even visited the venue, are not experts and in some cases are second homeowners (weekenders) and live in London.

Everyone in our community who loves Tournerbury (and there are a very great many of us) and all the good it brings, are appalled at the apparent hatred that a few residents from large properties opposite the venue appear to be whipping up.

We welcome the new access route, although as a regular supplier travelling along the existing access route we have never had any conflict with all the other diverse businesses that operate from the farm. The route is always clear, and I've never experienced any conflict or blocks to the route because of other vehicles. It's no different to the access we experience to many businesses locally where you have to travel between other businesses to reach your destination.

Tournerbury is a tiny family run business. They are simply trying to create something that is good for Hayling and the wider Borough, something that we should all be really proud of. The business ensures the beautiful environment there is maintained. The wildlife is incredible, and we have only witnessed it get better and better and more diverse in the years we have been supplying Tournerbury. It is one

of the only areas in Chichester Harbour that is environmentally thriving. That's because of the wedding business. The owners work incredibly hard, they are the third generation to look after Tournerbury and they are deeply passionate about the Woods and the business and without the venue Hayling will be a worse place and so will the Woods, and we won't be the business we are and won't provide the employment and contribution to the local economy that we do, including in times of difficulty.

Your decision on this application will impact real lives and young families of your hard-working Borough residents trying to survive the cost-of-living crisis. Please make a fair decision based on the planning merit facts provided to you by the thoroughness and professionalism of your Officers in their report rather than the catastrophising and histrionic comments of those who have failed to provide any objective or expert led evidence of their objections.

Thank you Chairman and Committee members.

**Shelley Meredith – Island Catering Company**

## Written Deputation

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**Application  
number:**

APP/23/00076

**Author:**

Nicola French  
MA(Oxon) MSc MRTPI CEnv

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**Subject:**

Retrospective planning application for a wedding & events venue

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## Introduction

I am a full member of Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Services (CIEEM) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and sit as part of the Nature Conservation Working Group of the UK Environmental Law Association (UKELA). I am the sole Director of Holbury Consultancy Services Ltd, and specialise in advising on the implications of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the Habitats Regulations) for development schemes. My specialism also extends to the statutory protections and policy frameworks relevant to other nature conservation sites, inclusive of the statutory protections afforded to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's). I have been advising Mr and Mrs Snell on the retrospective planning application for a wedding and events venue at Tournerbury Woods Estate since March 2020. I am one of three ecological consultancies that advise Tournerbury.

Documents submitted in support of the planning application demonstrate how Tournerbury Woods Estate has worked with Natural England, the statutory nature conservation body, to properly assess the scheme under the tests of the Habitats Regulations. These have shown that the wedding & events venue will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Chichester and Langstone Harbours Special Protection Area & Ramsar site, or Solent Maritime SAC<sup>1</sup>. An Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd has also been submitted. This has confirmed that the wedding and events venue has not had an adverse effect on the ecological interest features of the site, nor the interest features for which the Chichester Harbour SSSI is designated. Natural England agrees with these assessments and has no objection to the planning application in its proposed form.

Separate to the planning process, Natural England attended site on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022 to undertake an independent and objective assessment of the condition of

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<sup>1</sup> Holbury Consultancy Services Ltd, November 2021. Shadow Appropriate Assessment for Tournerbury wedding & events venue. For Tournerbury Woods Estate.

the SSSI designation where it extends to include land at Tournerbury. Natural England was given access to the full extent of the Tournerbury Woods Estate and the assessment reported in November 2022<sup>2</sup>. Extracts from the conclusion are set out below (see pages 8 & 9 of the report):

- *This assessment enables Natural England to conclude that the features of special nature conservation interest in unit 3 of Chichester Harbour SSSI meet the targets set for the various attributes used to measure condition and that they therefore remain in a favourable condition.*
- *The woodland is confirmed to remain intact and, based on available evidence and observation there is no evidence of loss of extent of woodland.*
- *No evidence was observed of detrimental impacts arising from the activity associated with the business amenity area taking place within the SSSI boundary which would pose a threat to the maintenance of the special nature conservation interest of this part of Chichester Harbour SSSI.*

The final point above is of particular importance, as it confirms that the operation of the Tournerbury wedding and event venue to date, has not caused harm to the ecological interest features within the SSSI boundary. This is important because normally, the impacts of a proposed development scheme on a habitat, species population or nature conservation designation must be predicted. By definition, they are potential future impacts that have not occurred. Here, because the application is retrospective, clear and objective evidence now exists to show that the operation of the wedding and events venue has not resulted in detrimental impact to the ecological interest feature of the Tournerbury Woods Estate, or the designated site. Furthermore, the successful operation of the wedding and events venue allows the continued conservation management of the woodlands that form this part of the Chichester Harbour SSSI and their supporting habitats.

Of 45 SSSI units in the Chichester Harbour SSSI, only nine units are assessed by Natural England as in favourable condition with no identified threats to that condition. The Tournerbury Woods Estate unit is one of these nine and is testament to the role of active and funded conservation management and good stewardship in securing the long-term future of these sites for future generations. It is an important example of how local business can support the conservation of a statutorily designated site to the benefit of both, and represents best ecological and business practice and management. Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Steven and Alex Foy, November 2022. A review of the condition of Tournerbury Woods, part of Chichester Harbour SSSI. For Natural England.

Dear Councillors

For anyone who comes to this matter fresh the question you are being asked to decide is apparently quite simple: should the owners be permitted to operate their wedding venue in the woods they own? If it were quite so simple it would be easy to decide.

Your Officer's report presents the matter in this way and sees no difficulty in rowing back from the position that the Council took in 2020 saying that the site was illegal and should be closed. It is understandable that the planning department would like to be rid of this matter as they have had to deal with 8 separate planning applications to regularise this site, all of which have either been refused, withdrawn or deferred. The planning department asked for a deferral on 2<sup>nd</sup> December so the problems could be 'solved': it should instead be asking you to decide on the application in front of you.

Unfortunately, the matter is not as simple as your Officer makes it out to be, as I will briefly explain.

Tournerbury Woods was legally designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1970. The Chichester Harbour Conservancy obtained a recent Legal Opinion, which shows that without a consent from Natural England (NE), the operations to create the venue by bulldozing car parks, filling in ponds and removing trees since 2013 would be criminal offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

NE made a management agreement dated 17/4/97 with limited consents to allow management of the woods, which was placed in the NE archives and the covering letter thanks the owner for their acceptance of the agreement. This document DOES NOT consent to the activities used to create the venue buildings and parkland in the last 10 years.

However, on 11/10/13 the owner sent NE an alternate copy of the management agreement. This version had no authenticating correspondence, nor any specific date. It is identical to the one in the NE archives except for one remarkable line that says- in what is now the wedding venue- anything is permitted! I do not believe either document has ever been posted on the planning portal: I obtained copies by FOI.

This is rather extra-ordinary as NE did not follow the specific procedure required if you remove all protections of the SSSI when they decided to accept this version in 2014. None of this remarkable saga has been posted on the portal for you to review.

As it is very important to know if there can be two versions of the management agreement that are both valid, and to get a definitive judgment on which version is valid I made a complaint against NE earlier this year. In their first tier local complaint response they repeat their original position. I have appealed this to the second tier national level, and they say they will respond by 5<sup>th</sup> September. I was surprised that officers rushed to schedule this meeting today because if the complaint is upheld then NE will have to withdraw consent, and you would not be able to approve any application.

There are two other complications for this case:

1 The current application requests that a significant upgrade to a track along the northern boundary of the woods be permitted. However, the application includes no drawings or specifications for the road that will need to be upgraded from a track with a bridge, widening and drainage work. The application simply copies drawings for the road across adjacent farmland as specified at 4.5m wide with 6m wide passing places to permit coaches to use it. NE say that they can only approve it if no material is imported into the woods and >150m<sup>3</sup> will be needed. In any case, both versions of the NE management agreement with prohibit the upgrading of this track from the earth track it was in 1997.

2 This application should have been rejected as the Council's Enforcement policy says that no further applications may be submitted after an Enforcement notice has been served. By making a secret non-prosecution agreement with the applicant to permit a single further application the Council sets a precedent that undermines the Council's administration of the planning process.

These complications mean that it is not safe to consider this application further until these matters are resolved. Planning permission at this site has no value without secure consent for activities within the SSSI which has the highest possible protection in England. I ask you therefore to refuse or defer the application.

Dear Planning committee

We are pleased the committee understand the affect the noise and disturbance and loss of our amenity, from the wedding traffic has had on our lives. All of which could be resolved should the alternative access track be brought into use.

We are fully committed to completing the track as in accordance with the approved details and acknowledge the planning conditions (6 -10) which relate to the track.

We welcome the case officers report and would like to suggest the following condition could be helpful and we agree with the dates.

*“Work to complete the access track hereby permitted shall commence within 28 days from the date of this decision, and shall be completed by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023. From the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 this track shall be the only access to and egress to the Estate and no staff or visitors attending events shall use the existing access through Tournerbury Farm after that date. In the event of the access track not being completed by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, no events shall be held after that date until the new access has been constructed and made available for use.”*

*Discussions are on going in relation to a like for like swop of the legal Right of way.*

This allows a period of approximately 4 months for any outstanding construction work to be completed but makes clear that any events in 2024 must only use the new track.

Condition 12 relating to monitoring of the number of events is welcome.

We are happy to answer any questions from the committee, should they be needed.

Many thanks

Kind regards

Grahame and Sue phillips

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