

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Held at: 10.00am on 9 September 2021 at The Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre.

Present: Heather Baker (Chair), Barbara Holyome, Gary Marsh, Robert Mocatta, Andrew Shaxson, Thérèse Evans, Diana Van De Klugt and Richard Waring

Officers: Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), Robert Ainslie (Development Manager), Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager), Lucy Howard (Planning Policy Manager), Rebecca Moutrey (Senior Solicitor), Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer), and Sharon Libby (Governance Officer).

Also attended by: Graeme Felstead (Development Management), Stella New, (Senior Development Management Officer), Vicki Colwell (Principal Planning Officer), Kevin Wright (Planning Policy Officer), Kirsten Williamson (Planning Policy Lead), Chris Paterson (Planning Policy Lead), Jessica Riches (Planning Officer), and Kelly Porter (Major Projects Lead).

### **OPENING REMARKS**

56. The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and informed those present that SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthered the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority, and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.

### **ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

57. Apologies were received from Alun Alesbury and Janet Duncton.

### **ITEM 2: DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

58. Diana van der Klugt declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 9 as a Horsham District Councillor.
59. Robert Mocatta declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 7 as an East Hampshire District Councillor and a personal-non prejudicial interest as he was acquainted with one of the speakers, Councillor David Ashcroft.
60. Barbara Holyome declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 7 as she was acquainted with one of the speakers, Councillor David Ashcroft.

### **ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12 AUGUST 2021**

61. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 August 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

62. There were none.

### **ITEM 5: UPDATES ON PREVIOUS COMMITTEE DECISIONS**

63. SDNP/19/03160/OUT – Lower Yard, Selborne Road, Newton Valence June 2020 was subject to a complex legal agreement which had now been agreed and the decision was issued on 20 August 2021.

### **ITEM 6: URGENT ITEMS**

64. There were none.

### **ITEM 7: SDNP/20/04118/FUL – QUEEN'S HOTEL SELBORNE**

65. The Case Officer presented the application, reminded Members of the report content and referred to the update sheet. Additionally the Case Officer advised the Committee that further comments had been received from the Sustainable Economy Officer with no

objections, and from the Landscape Officer with a holding objection, but it was considered the objections could be overcome through conditions.

66. The following public speakers addressed the Committee:

- Councillor Joanna Clay spoke against the application as a Selborne Parish Councillor.
- Geraldine Dawson spoke against the application on behalf of Community Interest Group "Save the Queens".
- Andrew Roberts spoke against the application representing himself.
- Councillor David Ashcroft spoke in support of the application as an East Hampshire District Councillor for Binsted, Bentley & Selborne Ward.
- Wendy Megeney spoke in support of the application representing herself.
- Khalid Aziz spoke in support of the application on behalf of Gilbert Whites & Oates Collections.

67. The Committee considered the report by the Director of Planning (Report PC 21/22-08), the updates, and the public speaker comments, and requested clarification as follows:

- The Update Sheet referred to a 99 year lease for the ground floor, with the option of a five year break, what would happen if Gilbert White Museum used the five year break option?
- Could it be confirmed, in accordance with SD43(c) that prior local community engagement had taken place?
- Was the link between the hospitality units and the museum supported by a condition?
- A public speaker mentioned that this was an Asset of Community Value but had been previously refused recognition by East Hampshire District Council, could the detail be clarified?
- Had a robust marketing campaign been conducted under SD43 2a?
- Did the Committee have the authority to issue a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) as suggested by one of the speakers?
- The recommendation stated that planning permission be granted subject to a Legal Agreement agreeing "The use of the Queens Hotel tied to the Gilbert White Museum and the Wider Community". How would this be tied to the wider community?
- When the Field Study Centre was used for pupils, it was assumed that parking would be required for school transport, did the facility have sufficient parking space?
- Was the tourist accommodation first come first served, or did the public have to wait to see if Gilbert Whites had a pending engagement?

68. In response to questions, Officers clarified:

- The Business Plan referred to the five year break itself only, with no further detail. If the applicant exercised the five year break the legal agreement would have to be revisited.
- Engagement took place in the form of a leaflet drop with online updates and a facebook group with responses had been completed. These were considered prior to the application being submitted.
- The detail surrounding the Asset of Community Value being refused was not known. However, it was confirmed that the Queens Hotel was not recognised by East Hampshire District Council as an Asset of Community Value.
- A marketing campaign was not requested, nor conducted as the proposal was considered to satisfy policies SD23 & SD43 as officers considered there was no loss of, or an unacceptable impact upon community facilities given what was proposed was

considered to be of equivalent or better quality than that existing as commented on in paragraphs 7.5 and 7.6 of the report.

- The SDNPA did have the authority to issue a CPO, but it was not considered appropriate or likely to be successful in this case.
- The use of the Queens Hotel tied to the Gilbert White Museum and the Wider Community would be implemented via an S106 agreement which included a management plan. This would include details of operational hours and availability of the Field Study Centre and the TAP room.
- There were no suitable parking facilities on site for larger vehicles, however there was no objection from the Highways Authority. There was parking in the area, and potentially space for a drop off point in front of the newly refurbished building.
- For tourist accommodation availability, Gilbert Whites had priority, but would make vacant units available on cottages.com. It was confirmed that planning permission existed to Gilbert Whites for 25 social events annually, of which no more than 10 could have amplified music, which gave clarity to the approximate number of events that Gilbert Whites could host per year.

69. The Committee discussed and debated the application, making the following comments:

- It was not felt that the replacement facilities were equivalent or better, than those offered when previously open as a hotel.
- As the Queens Hotel was a historic coaching inn it was not felt this application conserved or enhanced the cultural history of the national park, and therefore did not meet the first purpose of the SDNP.
- There was concern about the overdevelopment of the site, particularly around the development that would take place along Huckers Lane, the proposed removal of the existing hedge and its replacement with a smaller hedge or wall climbing plant, neither of which were considered appropriate.
- The combination of the uses for the building for school children and the general public was considered to possibly be incompatible and may raise child protection issues.
- The fact that the village hall, an already existing community facility, was only a few doors away seems not to have been considered. What effect would an additional room for hire have on the community, particularly as the Field Study Centre's hours of use would be restricted?
- Although the development may work for Gilbert Whites Museum, it was felt that it may not work for the village of Selborne.
- Concern was expressed that with the five year break agreement, the developer could change its purpose and bring forward a new proposal.
- This did not seem like the right location for an educational facility given the risks of children by the busy road and no dedicated parking for school visits.
- As the building was not considered an Asset of Community Value, if this application was declined there was no mechanism to make the developer return with a more suitable application.
- Tying this proposal into the Gilbert Whites Museum made the proposal innovative including the enhanced education centre and the TAP room which encouraged workshops. With the enhancement of disabled access it was a good way of reviving an old public house. This was a good opportunity for both the local and wider community.
- This approach seemed to be an appropriate, sustainable and the most viable use of this building which would work well for the community.

- The development along Huckers Lane could be considered typical of a small lane in a village.
- Although there was some desire to see the building returned to its previous use as a hotel it was considered very unlikely this would come forward.
- There were two main reasons to visit Selborne, one was the cycling and walking routes in the area, the other was Gilbert White and the excellent facilities put in place by the trust. This Committee had an obligation to encourage businesses such as these to be as viable as possible, which this application supported.
- It was appreciated the village was divided over this issue, however, the solution before the committee was appropriate and the village should support this to help both the building and village move forward.
- The engagement of the local community seemed to be limited; the postcard drop only asking for support and no public meeting being held. The significant amount of correspondence received against this application demonstrated that leaflet drops were not the answer to community engagement. It should be reconsidered whether this application had the support of the local community or not.
- Whether this development was in line with Policy SD43 was a judgement call and some Members felt it did satisfy the policy.
- Could the developer be made to return the building to its original state, both externally and internally?

70. Members were further advised:

- The Authority only had the power to request a developer restore a building if it was a listed building and certain inappropriate actions had taken place. If a site became extremely unsightly a S215 discontinuance notice could be used, but that was only external works in the interests of public amenity.

71. It was proposed and seconded to vote on the officer's recommendation.

72. The recommendation was not resolved.

73. It was proposed and seconded that planning permission be refused for the following reasons with the final form of words delegated to the Director of Planning in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee:

1. The proposals would amount to an overdevelopment of the site, notably to Huckers Lane, and would therefore have an unacceptable impact on the landscape character of the area and the Conservation Area.
2. It had not been demonstrated that the proposed alternative community facilities to be provided were of an equivalent or better quality to those lost and the proposal was therefore contrary to Policy SD43 of the South Downs Local Plan.

74. **RESOLVED:** That planning permission be refused for the following reasons:

1. It had not been demonstrated that the proposed alternative community facilities to be provided were of an equivalent or better quality to those lost and the proposal was therefore contrary to Policy SD43 of the South Downs Local Plan; and,
2. The proposals would amount to an overdevelopment of the site, notably to Huckers Lane, and would therefore have been an unacceptable impact on the landscape character of the area and the Conservation Area.

The final form of words delegated to the Director of Planning in consultation with the Chair of the Planning Committee.