

Judith Bowles and Steve Green

**Former Co-Directors, Gilbert White's House & Gardens – statement to SDNP
Appeal enquiry**

23rd October 2024

We are Judith Bowles and Steve Green, ex Co-Directors of the Gilbert White's House and Gardens, and we are submitting this statement as we believe our situation was misrepresented in Caroline Rye's written evidence. At no point has Ms Rye asked us about the circumstances of our departure from the Museum and she appears to be misrepresenting this occurrence in her evidence. We were not 'let go' (as stated in paragraph 18 of E10-Proof-of-Evidence-Caroline-Rye) that is a complete fabrication; we chose to leave our job-share post in August 2024 to return full time to our consultancy business after nine years leading the museum executive.

Similarly, she appears to have jumped to the conclusion that because the museum announced a £1,000,000 fundraising campaign - that its costs are of that magnitude (also stated in paragraph 18). The museum's report and accounts which are published annually, and which are available on the Charity Commission and Companies House websites show that this is not the case.

Like many independent museums, the trust is seeking to build an endowment fund. The money the museum is now raising is a responsible way of investing for the future to ensure that it can cope with new economic or other shocks and increase its reserves to provide matched funding for future investments - it is not for covering costs.

We were instrumental in the introduction of Guy Macklin to the SDNPA CEO (at the time) Trevor Beattie, with diversification and partnership in mind, to secure new income streams to the Museum and positive outcomes for biodiversity and climate.

We also applied for the grants to fund the Taproom from SDNPA and others, which were successful so much so that the Taproom is promoted as a successful community project on SDNPA's website.

The Tap Room is very much a social hub in the village and well-used. Hours were limited in due consideration of the existing provision including the Selborne Arms and other businesses in the village so as not to unduly compete, and for commercial reasons - trends in demand for evening

hospitality have changed considerably since the Queens operated as a hotel. Again here Ms Rye's evidence is untrue. In paragraph 15 of E10-Proof-of-Evidence-Caroline-Rye, Ms Rye states that the tap room is open for 3.5 hours, three days per week. In fact, the tap room is open from 5.30pm until 9pm on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays (^{currently} ~~4.5 hours each day~~), and during the summer months, it is open from 12 noon until 9pm on Saturdays (~~11~~⁹ hours) when there is demand.

The holiday lets are used by villagers to hire for their friends and relatives at Christmas and for celebrations such as weddings. As tourism professionals we fully understand the decision to encourage longer stays in the accommodation at the Queens. From a commercial perspective, single night stays are challenging, and economic impact is limited, not to mention the obvious impact on the environment. Those who stay longer are more likely to spend money in other businesses on the village and the surrounding area.

Ms Rye's comments about the unclear intention of the museum in relation to education is also confused. She rightly states that the museum's intentions for the education space changed over time. This is normal during a development project as the business case process is followed and more detailed information is garnered to inform decision-making. The position in August 2024 was quite clear and had been the case for some time - the space in the Queens would become an adult education centre in partnership with the Natural History Museum, the University of Winchester and others. It would also be available for hire when not in use for education. This conclusion was reached because it was not possible to accommodate formal school education (currently at 5,000 pupil visits a year), functions/meetings/weddings business and adult education within the existing Field Studies Centre. Education diversification of this nature will enrich our community through courses for individuals interested in nature conservation and living sustainably and bringing high profile museums/universities into the village will enhance the vibrancy the village and bring business opportunities for others beyond the museum.

This significant project, which is supported by respected institutions, will attract investment in the fabric of the village and the National Park, but it is currently stalled and, in the meantime, the museum is deprived of important income and limited in its contribution to addressing the biodiversity and climate emergencies.

...And so to the future one has to ask the question, what does Save the Queens want the Queens to be? It cannot regress to a coaching inn serving a bygone demand that no longer exists. The Museum has provided a Taproom selling beer and Mr Macklin has provided accommodation to a high standard which meets current day customers' needs.

Is there any way of getting through this impasse? How can we move forward? Losing this valuable consent will result in loss of vital income for the museum and will be to its detriment. The last thing anyone wants is another empty building on the high street. Surely a better way forward would be to stop this costly and divisive confrontation, which has also occupied an inordinate amount of planning officer time, and for all parties to engage to find a positive outcome.

For the above reasons we ask the Inspector to grant the appeal.

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