**Proof of Evidence of Ms Wendy Megeney – on behalf of the Appellant (Derek Warwick Developments)**

**Appeal Reference: APP/Y9507/W/21/3289423**

**Local Planning Authority Reference: SDNP/20/04118/FUL**

**Address: The Queens Hotel High Street Selborne Alton GU34 3JJ**

**Description: *Conversion and extension of the existing Queens building and barn to form 5no. aparthotel suites (C1), a field study centre and tap room (mixed class F.1 and sui generis) and 1no. detached dwelling (C3) within the grounds, with associated parking and landscaping.***

**Date: Tuesday 24 September 2024**

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**1.Introduction & Background**

My name is Wendy Megeny. I have been a resident in the village of Selborne for 30 years; my children attended the primary school and I have been on the WI committee for 10 years and am a Parish Councillor. The following is written in my private capacity as a resident.

**2. Proof of Evidence**

This submission is by way of highlighting some of the issues and contradictions that have been put forward in the facts and evidence in relation to this application for the assistance of the Planning Inspector and Inquiry.

The Tap Room has been developed and is successfully in operation. It seems there is no contention in relation to this aspect of the application. It seems to be in contention as to whether the development of apart-hotels is C1, which it appears to be.

Grounds for refusal of permission by the SDNP Planning Committee 1.10.21 were that:

1. (It was)‘Not demonstrated that proposed alternative community facilities would be inclusive and available and of an equivalent or better quality to those lost’

BUT this flies in the face of the finding of their own Officer’ recommendation and finding that:

*‘The development proposals are for equivalent or better community facilities tied in with use by the Gilbert White Museum that will provide a bar, educational and community space which is supported by planning policy’*

(CD12)

A question for the planning Inspector would be whether, in his view, the Officer’s finding was correct and whether there have been any changes to local or planning policy since, which would now impinge upon that Officer’s finding?

2. ‘The proposals, by virtue of the new building, additions, increased parking provision, landscaping and access alterations, would amount to overdevelopment of the site, most notably in relation to Huckers Lane, and would therefore have an unacceptable impact on the landscape character of the area…contrary to Policies SD(4), SD5 and SD 15(1) of the Adopted Soth Downs Local Plan and the NPPF’

BUT this also flies in the face of the Officer’s finding/report which said:-

*‘The scale and design of the scheme is also acceptable insofar as it is in keeping with the character of the area ( subject to conditions relating to materials, parking, and landscaping). It is also acceptable in regard to other matters such as highway safety, impact on surrounding amenities, as well as providing visitors with opportunities to enjoy the National Park.’*

(CD12)

NB the SDNP Planning Committee decision against the application was by one vote only and a formal complaint was made against one of the committee in respect of the possibility of predetermination, as when members were invited to make comments at discussion stage, she read from a pre-written script. In addition, the committee did not give a proper reason for their decision at the time but left it to the Officers to formulate the wording after the meeting - thus the meeting was on 9.9.21 and written decision on 1.10.21.

The finding of the first Planning Inspector as to loss of amenity is also contentious. In light of these contradictions and subsequent ambiguities and the fact that any previous decision is not binding ,it is respectfully suggested that the Planning Inspector should not be persuaded by any of the arguments or rhetoric hitherto but make his/her own assessment of the situation as it is now (Buxton’s solicitors themselves state in their letter of 21 May that’ the new Inspector will have to reach an independent and fresh planning judgment on every element of the appeal proposal having regard to factual matters as they stand in 2024 (and not in 2022)’).

One of the factual issues, referred to in Buxton’s letter, is that of loss, or otherwise ‘of a cherished community facility’ and that the Queens ‘operated as a thriving pub until 2016, providing hospitality and event space for our client group and the wider public’

I would invite the Inspector/Inquiry in this context, to look at the findings of the Inspector in 2019 in relation to repeated applications to have the Queens listed as an asset of community value (ACV), which were refused. Whilst not looking at planning criteria per se, those inquiries looked in detail at the evidence surrounding community value and past and proposed future use of The Queens, including submissions by the group represented by Buxtons ( known as Save The Queens, headed by Dr Caroline Rye, referred to as the Nominator) and the Selborne Parish Council.

The Inspector found, in her decision dated 20th May 2019 that “I cannot conclude there is evidence of a time in the recent past when an actual use of the Quens, which was not an ancillary use, furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community…….There are some assertions of a use of the Queens, however these are not really supported. I also have to question whether the stated use within the Nomination was as significant as described. There is a second pub in the village and there has been no deprivation to the village because of the closure of the Queens.’

In relation to Planning Policy and Selborne VDS, Buxtons state that the Selborne Village Design Statement (VDS) *was* available to the Government Inspector at the time of her considerations in 2022 and it was *not* an issue before the High Court that quashed that Appeal, indicating no contradiction with the VDS. Should it therefore be an issue at all and/or affect any decision now? The Planning Inspector can take cognisance of the design guidelines at the rear of the statement in any event. With regard to the issue of tree felling, which appears to have been undertaken with permission, the outlook from the rear of the Queens and the view of the fields beyond is, arguably, in fact, much enhanced from the previous very closed in and crowded aspect.

What specific local or (updated) national planning policy is the planning proposal said to be in contradiction of now?

The Inquiry will know that basic material planning considerations, as well as planning history, include:-

* A positive benefit for local infrastructure ( the adult education centre proposal has apparently had interest from local universities, which will impact positively on other local businesses by increased footfall, in addition to much needed extra attraction and income for the Gilbert White Museum which is struggling; the Tap Room is a popular social hub; the existing apart-hotel rooms provide a very high standard of accommodation, catering so far for 6-8 people .It should be noted that there is other accommodation e.g. Airbnb, available locally, so the Queens is far from the sole provider)
* That the development will resolve a long standing problem with a site e.g. that has been derelict ( in this instance, when the Queens closed under the last owners Nick and Eric, it was on its knees with staff and suppliers unpaid, not ‘thriving’ as some claim. The whole property has been carefully and traditionally refurbished and is in much better condition than previously)
* Harmful effect on an important social/ economic objective ( addressed earlier)

Non-material planning considerations include:-

* The number of people who object or support ( many objections on the portal are in fact repeated)
* That the construction is temporarily inconvenient ( The argument about it being an eyesore as it sat waiting for planning argument to be concluded seems to have gone)
* That the application is unpopular or has a bad reputation.

It is submitted that constant carping and division over what might have happened in the past, the could or should haves and what ifs, are not the way forward. We are where we are and the application, taking into account planning and policy considerations and the overall commercial decline in the village, should be looked at in the light of prevailing economic and social conditions, and the best development possibilities for the future of the village as a whole, the SDNP and wider community.

It might be considered that appropriate conditions attached to planning consent could address remaining accommodation or overdevelopment concerns eg that the demolished part of the premises previously used as a kitchen could be used for additional single en suite rooms rather than another building within the grounds/garden at the rear of the premises.

Thank you for our consideration of this submission.

For the above reasons, it is respectfully requested that the appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted.