

572

**I, Georgie Sayle, have prepared this statement for the planning inquiry into the appeal against the refusal of planning permission for The Queens Hotel SDNP/21/00069/REF. In preparing this statement, I have read the SoCG and the parties' Statements of Case.'**

I moved to Selborne, with my two children, in 2016 and lived there for six years, We now reside in the neighbouring village of Blackmoor, within the Parish of Selborne. Both my children have attended Selborne Primary School. I worked as the Wedding Event Manager at the Gilbert White Museum between May 2022 and October 2023 and before that helped out at the Museum in a volunteer capacity. I run a fitness group that uses the community facilities in Selborne; the Recreation Ground and the Village Hall, on a weekly basis and continue to be an active member of the local community. I was made redundant from the Museum in October 2023 due to lack of funds for my role because of a sharp decline in future wedding bookings, this change in circumstance allowed me to focus on my other business, I have an amicable relationship with the Museum and use its facilities for client groups.

In my experience as a business owner that uses local facilities and as a member of the community there seems to be little justification for the proposed facilities; we already have a number of hireable spaces in the village and the existing FSC can continue to accommodate education uses particularly given its declining number of "other" uses such as weddings/talks/corporate events. To my mind one of the reason for the decline in wedding bookings specifically was the lack of short term serviced accommodation in the village. Part of my job at the Museum was the marketing of the aparthotel suites in The Queens to wedding parties, I received floor plans, a rate card and visualisations of the apartments that I emailed to interested parties. During my employment as Weddings Manager the aparthotel was managed by the Appellant directly. The marketing materials instructed interested people to email the Appellant for inquiries and bookings. There seemed to be confusion during my employment within Gilbert White itself as to who was meant to be managing the aparthotels. Initially the aparthotel marketing provided by the appellant had myself as the point of contact until I questioned whether this should be the case and it was changed.

In my opinion this accommodation was marketed at a rate that was not reflective of the quality of the apartments and facilities offered. The minimum night stay was marketed at 3 nights which was unappealing to wedding guests most of whom declined the rooms due to wanting 2 nights only. I requested that this be facilitated and was told by the Appellant it was not possible. Where wedding parties were interested they complained to me that when they contacted the Appellant they received no response. To my knowledge between May 2023 when the apartments were opened and October 2023 when I ceased employment, only one wedding group had been accommodated at The Queens, I believe through a personal arrangement with the Museum Directors.

In general, the visitor trade in Selborne consists in the most part of 'one off' visitors to the village. They come to walk and visit the museum in the main part. There were very few returning visitors. Returning visitors tended to be local residents from surrounding villages or those visiting friends and family within the village. I have direct experience of

the visitor trade, as while I was a resident I rented out a space that was fully occupied every weekend for 2 night stays by weekenders, London people looking for a short weekend break, tradesmen needing a local space to stay, wedding guests, couples and small families. People visit for short periods of time and the summer months are busier with walkers, but visitors do not tend to return to the area unless they have reason to (family/friends). Visitors were often unaware of what Selborne had to offer and would comment on the lack of accommodation nearby. I operate a small business which is based in Selborne for 2 sessions a week. My members will often comment on 'having never visited Selborne before' despite living within a 5 mile radius due to its lack of facilities for visitors. There is a decline in visitors in the winter but a small flow of walkers who start out from Selborne or walk through Selborne on the longer distant paths Writers Way and Hangers Way. Selborne would be a natural overnight stay on this route if it had more facilities as it is a popular walking route.

In my opinion Selborne desperately needs some more and better facilities, like short stay serviced accommodation and a significant hospitality venue that is open throughout the day and into the evening to attract and retain visitors to the village and support the Museum, including its wedding offering.

