

THE QUEEN'S APPEAL

22/10/2024

STATEMENT: SUSAN KNIGHT, ANTHONY EDYE, INTERESTED PARTIES, AS READ BY SUSAN KNIGHT.

In Support of the Application by Derek Warwick Developments.

From "Summary of Proof of Evidence of Michael De Courcey on Behalf of Save TheQueens":

Lawful Use: Pub with ancillary visitor accommodation of short-term holiday lets.

Proposed Use: Tap Room, Field Study Centre, holiday flats.

We moved into Selborne in 1997, 27 years ago. The Queens Hotel provided one of two pubs in the village. The hotel provided rooms in both the main property and in the nearby property called The Limes.

Selborne was not at that time part of a National Park.

We observed that the hotel rooms were frequently used by tradesmen, salesmen and businessmen passing through on work. They could also be rented by visitors to the area (fewer in those days before we became part of a National Park) and by locals' friends or guests. We rented rooms for visiting guests from time to time, usually in The Limes building as the rooms over the pub were very noisy and our guests complained.

The pub portion consisted of two areas, with the one facing the street also used as a restaurant – eg, for hotel guest's breakfasts and for other meals. The Buttery, the area adjacent to this bar area, was used for dining and for events. When the Selborne Wine Society was set up, they initially met in The Buttery. Some time later they moved to the village hall. The Buttery was also used for events such as birthday parties.

The Selborne Arms provided similar amenities and function areas. The village hall and the Recreation Field Pavilion could also be rented for functions for a small fee. The village was therefore well served with venues for socialising and recreation.

Over time, we observed that villagers became increasingly divided as to which of the two pubs they went to as the Queens became known for accommodating customers from outside the area who could engage in anti-social behaviour. We heard of at least one police visit. While we would purchase take away fish and chips (which

were very good) from The Queens on occasional Fridays, we frequented the Selborne Arms as a pub, as did most of our friends and neighbours then.

The Queens pub and rooms were not in very good condition. We vividly recall a friend's 40th birthday party in The Buttery when a dancing guest actually fell through the wooden floor. The rooms in The Limes and over the pub, while adequate, did appear old-fashioned and somewhat shabby. One overseas friend who visited annually eventually asked to stay in a hotel in Alton instead.

The Queens was then given up by its then proprietor. The Limes was sold separately and converted into a private residence causing The Queens to lose rooms from which to raise income from.

Some time later, a couple, Nick and Eric, took over the lease. They carried out a programme of redecoration but we are not aware of any significant structural work done to the property then. It certainly was redecorated. The Queens then operated as a pub, restaurant and hotel, the hotel having fewer rooms than previously due to the loss of the rooms in The Limes building. As such, there was less income obtained, and less accommodation available to villagers or others. Nick then sadly died, leaving Eric in charge. As we were very friendly with Eric and his mother and as at this time, the pub was attracting customers who were not anti-social and many of whom were locals and friends, we became regular customers having a meal there at least weekly and a drink on other occasions.

A Deli had been opened in the barn adjoining the hotel building which unfortunately did not succeed financially so was eventually closed.

We were aware that finances were becoming a struggle for Eric. A friend and I met with him shortly before he locked up the property and left and he advised us of thoughts he had regarding how to bring in more income. One idea was to put in a pizza oven and operate a pizza take away and offer pizza in the restaurant. Within days, Eric had left.

There followed an uncertain period (The Queens has in fact gone down a very rocky road during our time in the village). At one point, a Juke Box appeared and a very different atmosphere and clientele followed. We went for a meal on one occasion and the couple in charge had a fight behind the bar, causing us to leave immediately. We did not return.

These proprietors did not remain long. The Queens had previously been put up for sale. Groups within the village had expressed interest in wanting to purchase it but did not. It was eventually purchased by Derek Warwick Developments. After initially leasing it out, it was closed and a planning application made to add additional rooms replacing those that had been sold, to remodel the barn as a residence etc. A group called Save The Queens objected to this application. It was not approved.

Thus began some 9 years plus of ongoing planning applications, rejections, appeals, Court actions, which for a long period left the Queens locked up, deteriorating and in gridlock. It became an eyesore within the village. Someone commented to us that it "looked like the Third World out there".

The owners then decided to proceed with permitted development. The building was completely refurbished, including structural repairs and renovation – eg, re-wiring, full insulation, heating, plumbing, repairs, redecoration. I observed that a new wooden post had been erected by the bar and was told that a bag of sand or cement had gone through the floor above showing that the floor was not properly supported, was unsafe and needed a structural element in place, which was then provided.

The village generally approved of the refurbishment as not only did the Queens property look the best it had looked in our years in Selborne but would now last many more years. A neighbour (and friend) living opposite the property had been very upset by the eyesore he had to look at through his windows and was very pleased with the improvement. He is now a regular visitor to the Tap Room.

The village is now in a National Park. This has resulted in an increase of visitors. Selborne is both a gateway village to the park as well as a destination village within it. In keeping with all other National Parks, it needs visitor accommodation and facilities such as restaurants, coffee shops, pubs (as well as increased parking). The museum was by then renting out a holiday let flat and was operating a restaurant, coffee shop and shop. This, and the Selborne Arms had become the social hubs of the village. The Queens proposed to offer both accommodation and a tap room and was prepared to enter into an agreement with the museum to provide space for the museum to expand its activities which would in turn provide facilities for the occupants of the Queens' holiday lets, locals and visitors.

The upper floors were converted to holiday let flatlets. I have seen these and note that they are well decorated and well equipped. There is adequate parking, a laundry area and a garden area.

Part of the ground floor became a Tap Room which we understand is operated in agreement with the Gilbert White Museum and its micro-brewery. This allows the village to have its own Gilbert White micro-brewery, something which should be a matter of pride for both the village and the National Park. This serves the Gilbert White range of beers, other drink and food. It is well used and popular. It attracts regular local customers (we know many of them) as well as visitors. We understood that its opening hours were partly decided in agreement with the Selborne Arms and other businesses in the village so as not to unduly compete with each other. It may well expand its opening hours, especially in view of the situation with the Selborne Arms property having been up for sale for a few years now and its leasehold now up for sale by the current leaseholders.

The Queens is sited opposite the Gilbert White Museum and its grounds. We understand that there is an agreement in place whereby the Museum can use the ground floor to a) provide space for the micro-brewery to expand its direct sales and business, and b) for a Field Study Centre for A level students and adults. The current Field Study Centre is for school children and occupies a barn building on the museum's grounds. It was not felt safe to have the children's provision moved across the very busy road so the adult provision is proposed to be accommodated within The Queens.

The provision of environmental, ecological and biodiversity based educational programmes would appear to be very much in the ethos of the National Park as well as the Gilbert White museum. These issues are also very much of global concern today.

It is our opinion that the situation regarding the ongoing planning disputes has gone on long enough. It has also served to divide the village and to lead to much acrimony within what used to be a famously friendly, sociable and caring village. We are now known as the village of lawsuits, court actions and quarrelsomeness.

Noone wants to see The Queens back in gridlock, or worse, locked up again. Noone wants to see the museum closed. And no one wishes to see Selborne continue to be subjected to further ongoing legal and planning disputes, the unpleasantness these cause and the damage to the reputation of the village.

So, we would raise three points:

1. We appreciate that this is an emotive issue and that people experience nostalgia and a longing for the past but we are now in the present and need to think about the future. The clue is in the term – Planning. One does not plan for the past, but for the future. The issue therefore is not whether how **past** needs should be served, but how the **future** needs of the village and the National Park can best be served. We believe that this is what Planning decisions should be focussed on.
2. The community is aware of what the owners' application states as to what they propose to do with The Queens. What we are not aware of and what people are constantly asking, is what does Save The Queens intend to do with the property? This needs to be clearly communicated to the community.

Save The Queens claims to be a community group. In the interests of full transparency, they need to advise the community of their membership (we have been told by a villager of her surprise in continuing to receive emails as she didn't consider herself any longer a member after 8 plus years), who comprises the committee leading their group, the sources of funding for the legal processes and other actions requiring funding, and who the potential investors are who have indicated their intention of funding any plan for the

property. The community needs to know what their vision is and whether this vision is appropriate, achievable and sustainable.

3. We believe that in order to proceed in a democratic manner and to obtain the actual views of the full community, a survey should be undertaken by an independent party to see what the community wants in this matter, as opposed to what the small group that claims to represent them wants. This would have the added advantage of not expending huge amounts of taxpayer's funds on what is a relatively small issue that is being dragged on and on through legal avenues.

It is time the matter was resolved, in keeping with what the **community** wants.

Thank you.

