

FOR THE ATTENTION OF STEVE WEAVER, PLANNING DEPARTMENT, HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATION APP/19/01262

TOURNERBURY WOODS ESTATE

Submitted 15 April 2021

It is clearly impossible to make meaningful comments on most of the latest additions to the documentation for APP/19/01262 as so much has been redacted. It would also have been useful to have seen the email from Steve Weaver to Irwin Mitchell of 10 March 2021 to which their substantive reply of 24 March 2021 relates; this missing document is rather like having half a jigsaw puzzle.

Despite that, I wish to say that I strongly concur with what appears to be the advice of the Legal Team at Havant Borough Council to differentiate between the various leisure uses that have taken place at Tournerbury Woods Estate over the years. Irwin Mitchell's argument that these cannot be classified into different categories by virtue of whether they are primarily indoor or outdoor pursuits is an irrelevant red herring in this context. It is grindingly obvious that the rationale for lumping all the different types of uses into one long, ongoing continuum of leisure/tourism activity is to give the impression that the post-2012 commercial wedding venue business, the most contentious and problematical change of use within Tournerbury Woods, has been in existence for longer than is actually the case. The period 2012 to 2019, when the CLEUD application was submitted, does not qualify as the necessary 10 years for the CLEUD to be approved, and any attempt to convince HBC that it is all one and the same thing is misleading. Prior to 2012, the assorted activities such as shoots, the hire of Woods Cottage as a holiday let and random corporate events neither required any sort of planning permission as they fell under permitted development, according to numerous HBC statements on the matter, nor a CLEUD, nor did any of these activities give rise to the grotesque levels of disruption caused by unimaginable levels of new traffic, all of it, as before, channelled through a patently inadequate, single lane track through the centre of Tournerbury Farm.

I sent in a long and detailed objection dated 13 February 2020, still available on the planning portal for APP/19/01262, which clearly sets out the different historical periods in which different areas of the Woods were utilised by the applicant, together with a coloured plan showing what was done where, and when. This is still as relevant today and is attached once again to support this letter (Plan XX3).

By his own admission in paragraph 21 of the Christopher Snell Witness Statement, it was not **until 2011** that Mr. Snell and his wife decided to "**focus business on the Estate towards wedding events** to pick up weekend business and complement the existing successful corporate hospitality business centred on Woods Cottage." Unlike all previous commercial activity/use within the Woods, there were three major physical and logistical obstacles that had to be overcome before this decision could be turned into a reality:

1. Sufficient car parking for large numbers of wedding guests
2. Year round, all weather access for guests and service vehicles
3. Mud control

It is crucial to stress how significant these issues were, and how the necessity for them was the sole reason for the extreme and irreversible transformation of a large area of untouched woodland north and west of Woods Cottage – the area coloured blue on Plan XX3. In Tournerbury Woods' previous incarnation, nothing as radical as this had ever been needed or contemplated. Shooting events involved small numbers of all terrain 4 wheel vehicles, with mostly local guests participating in rural clothing and muddy wellington boots throughout all areas of the Woods, as can be seen in numerous photos on the portal. Short term rentals of a country cottage in the middle of woodland implies, by its very nature, informal wear and a great deal of mud as part of the package. Small numbers of vehicles, perhaps as few as one per booking, with limited movements in and out of the woodland, were all that were required to effect these rentals. Occasional corporate events, when required, made use of temporary hired in marquees erected on the West Lawn under the 28 day rule – no other space was available before 2012 with an equivalent flat, firm and open location.

Large scale, commercial weddings, particularly in rural locations, require radically different environmental conditions. Huge numbers of vehicles and guests need to arrive, park easily, and leave all on the day of the wedding, regardless of whether other members of the wedding party have booked to stay on at Woods Cottage either side of the main day. The recent trend of having back to back weddings over two or three days of a weekend have only increased the intensity of traffic moving back and forth, at almost non stop levels 24/7 through Tournerbury Farm. These involve an intensive turnaround of activity and traffic taking place between midnight and 8 am when the subsequent wedding party is able to start their new preparations all over again. Secondly, big and fancy weddings require a massive amount of service provision – flowers, food, drink, marquee decoration, special entertainments, live music bands, temporary seating such as straw bales, outdoor lighting, plus inevitably teams of caterers, waiters, barmen and serving staff, cleaners, taxis, car parking attendants, and security – all of these have to be able to reliably get into and out of the Woods to deliver what is required, then to take it and all the rubbish and bottles and litter away again, at all times, and in all weathers. Thirdly, weddings almost invariably involve guests turning up in their finest outfits, an opportunity to make an impression together with exotic hats, clean stiletto shoes, smart polished brogues and long dresses for the bride and bridesmaids. None of these individuals would welcome their various outfits becoming plastered in mud from the first moment of stepping out of a car – even if they get wet in pouring rain, they do not expect to have their outfits ruined before the wedding even starts.

To this end, the applicant began an extensive programme of major landscaping modifications to be able to accomodate this entirely novel business activity. The southern half of the area chosen (shaded grey on Plan EB 0878 as submitted by the Applicant for APP/199/01262) was low lying terrain on heavy clay soil with ditches and ponds, and susceptible to regular and widespread flooding. Indeed, in numerous adjacent areas where no landscaping has taken place, many of the tracks and spaces remain as deep puddles soggly inaccessible for months at a time, and not only during winter months. The northernmost half lay slightly higher, demarcated by the clay digging bluff created during the brick making operations of the 1930's. The entirety of the area coloured blue on Plan XX3, previously consisting of continuous woodland and scrub was systematically cleared of vegetation apart from a few residual trees in the northern parking area, and thousands of tonnes of hard core, gravel and top soil were imported into the Woods through Tournerbury Farm using large-scale, heavyweight transport, in, then out again to collect yet more material. By the end of 2012 or thereabouts the first stage of the conversion was almost complete and the site totally unrecognisable from what had been before. The southern sections had been significantly raised above previous ground levels with ditches and ponds filled in to ensure that the wedding venue area would remain dry and sound in all weathers. Massive open area car parks with wide access roads

and thick gravel surfaces came into being. The area designated for the brand new 33 metre wedding marquee, commissioned and first erected in July 2013, was also raised and made flat with a deep gravel bed, first in 2013 and again in 2015, and an enormous lawn with wide access pathways was constructed between the largest car park, Woods Cottage and the marquee. In the subsequent years up to 2017/18, further large scale imports of landscaping materials into Tournurbury Woods continued on a regular basis, and two enormous earth banks (coloured brown on Plan XX3) also appeared - these could not have been made without significant quantities of material moved into or around the site. The final result, together with the Log Cabin and later additions to extend the size of the already substantial Love Deck in 2017, succeeded in turning the alleged "curtilage" area into a clean, modern and attractive wedding venue site with open pathways between well-spaced facilities.

It will always remain a mystery to understand how the Snell family, according to Paragraph 8.3 of the Applicant's Witness Statement, were able to readily use all of this extensively redeveloped area – the area shaded grey on Plan EB 8078 - as their "garden" and an "area to play in" as far back as the Applicant's teenage years, which ended in 1990. Those of us who visited the Woods on a weekly if not daily basis back then "remember it very differently", as the Royal Family would say. A boggy, neglected and impenetrable tangle of vegetation forever encroaching into the original curtilage area (outlined in black on Plan XX3) might be a better description. Razor sharp brambles featured heavily. I am attaching an old aerial photograph taken in the winter of 1996 showing the continuous tree cover north of Woods Cottage, together with evidence of the early piles of building and garden waste tipped illegally in the Woods between 1994 and 1999 when no other commercial or leisure activity was taking place; the Applicant was living in London at the time. This waste became the base material for West Lawn after tipping operations were banned by DEFRA in 1999. The original saltmarsh that had thrived here for centuries was covered and raised at least 1.5 metres above ground level before being finished with top soil and grass. It was subsequently used for parties and temporary marquees until the new landscaping works began in 2011/12. Although 1996 was long ago, nearly all this part of the woodlands remained in this untouched state, until 2011 or so, other than West Lawn, created between 2001 and 2003.

As to the extensive explanation in the Irwin Mitchell letter of 24 March 2021 of how the new event counting system works, it is impossible to comment as all useful information has been redacted from public view, other than that it seems unnecessarily complicated. Despite this, I refer back to Appendix 1 (Attachment XX5) in my submission of 13 April 2020 which shows, in Column C, from data compiled by the Applicant's inclusive submission of invoices in APP/19/01262, that there were zero invoices for weddings in 2009, 2010 or 2011 - for the simple reason that the wedding venue business was not up and running in those or any previous years – back then the facilities essential for holding the kind of wedding events that can now be held were wholly inadequate.

In paragraph 20 of the Irwin Mitchell letter, reference is made to the "motivation" of authors who have submitted objection statements in the past, implying that much of what has been said is lacking in weight, value, or truthfulness. Exactly the same doubts can be applied to any submission by anyone at all, including applicants and advisers, regardless of whether the claims are made in a statement of truth or in some other format. Numerous errors and inaccuracies were discovered by several writers in the APP/19/01262 Witness Statement, and reported in our various submissions in February 2020, but whether these inaccuracies were deliberate or accidental should be a matter of purely private speculation. Virtually nothing that is written, or stated, or sworn to, can be guaranteed to be wholly truthful in every respect. There must be millions of facts that can never be proved unequivocally due to the absence of corroborating photographs, paper, telephone or electronic records or other watertight evidence, but it does not follow from that that memories and

recollections of them are inherently dishonest, valueless or driven by some malicious personal agenda.

For the avoidance of doubt, I should like to clarify once again that my motivation to send in so many submissions to the growing collection of undecided planning applications dealing with Tournerbury Wood's future and access to it is simply a function of the mass of new documentation that is regularly added as times goes by, with new, often highly questionable arguments that require a serious and considered response. Since the very first planning application in 2018 for retrospective permission, I have continued to feel very strongly indeed about the unfair and unacceptable burden that has been unilaterally imposed on Tournerbury Farm since 2012/13 by virtue of the type, volume and intensity of new wedding business traffic created by Tournerbury Woods' dominant tenement status on the one hand, and the Farm's servient tenement status on the other, under the terms of a Right of Way agreement dating back to 1987 when Tournerbury Woods and Tournerbury Farm were split into two separate properties and access between the two was simply for the purpose of low key agricultural and forestry activities. By 2012 the Applicant himself was aware of the potential for a future conflict of interest over the original route, and so applied for planning permission for the construction of an alternative access track through a field owned by Tournerbury Farm and bypassing all farm buildings, stables, yards and duckponds – this application was approved in June 2012. It is now April 2021 and there is still no end in sight, despite the new track being all but complete at zero expense or inconvenience to the Applicant. Despite yet another (hopefully short term) hold-up over the exact routing of the last 40 metres of the new track, caused by poor mapping and survey in the previous 2017 version of the planning application, the Applicant continues to generate dozens of excuses to justify his perplexing refusal to relinquish the original route in favour of the new one, despite all of the huge economic advantages it would bring to both of the two businesses involved, Tournerbury Woods Estate and Tournerbury Farm. Another major advantage of the new track is that it is much wider, safer, and has numerous passing places should two large vehicles travelling in opposite directions need to get past each other. Massive transport of this kind, whether coaches or heavy duty lorries, appears to be a standard feature of Tournerbury Woods life now and in the future, including modelling of critical turning spaces in the design and layout of the new track.

I also wish to confirm, once again, that I have no objection to the wedding business operating in Tournerbury Wood per se, subject to some level of reasonable control on the number of weddings held each year so as to limit noise and environmental pollution, and subject of course to the exclusive use of the alternative track for all Tournerbury Woods activity. My greatest wish is that the Farm owners should finally be granted their long overdue freedom from the appalling ordeal they have been pointlessly and relentlessly subjected to for the last 8 years, with just a brief interlude in 2020 due to covid restrictions on weddings and other large gatherings. Whilst it was claimed in both planning applications for an alternative access track in 2012 and 2017 that the traffic levels would be only marginally heavier than they had been before, the Applicant was nevertheless quite happy to boast there had been 10,253 visitors to Tournerbury Woods between August 2017 and 2018, well over 25 times the average number of annual visitors in the decade before the landscaping conversion began. I also have grave reservations over planning permission being granted via a CLEUD rather than the normal procedure, as it opens the gate to a host of new possibilities not yet formally on the cards, and without any sort of planning controls whatsoever. For example, the conversion of further parts of Tournerbury Woods into a major camping venue along the lines of Center Parcs or similar, substantial new permanent buildings to house washing and toilet facilities for campers, reception and admin facilities for staff and further space for weather-proof storage, flooding sections of the woods to create ponds and boating lakes with chalets and

yurts dotted around the margins, boat marinas and moorings in artificially created marinas, etc. etc. etc. If any plans along these lines are being considered, I believe it is entirely reasonable that there should be a mandatory and full public debate, in advance of, and not retrospectively, of any such changes. Tournembury Woods is, after all, designated as an SSSI and an AONB. Public organisations such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Chichester Harbour Conservancy would need to be involved.