

## Annex 4

Dear Mrs XXXXX,

It is a matter of sadness that we find ourselves as adversaries in the matter of this Licensing Application. I am sure you will have learned that I did call around to see you on two occasions in the hope that we would be able to discuss the matter, but I was able to have a chat with your husband.

One of the matters of concern disclosed by Mr Lyel related to the position that you might find yourself in should you decide to sell your property and thus find your pen poised over one of those new house 'information pack' forms. I have looked on the net at these and I cannot find anything obviously to indicate that you have to disclose what your neighbours are up to. However I do know that the long standing 'Enquiries before Contract' form does place an obligation on sellers to disclose details of any complaint that they have made against a neighbour. How one differentiates between a 'complaint' and a 'request' presumably remains a moot point!

May I also address the issue which has clearly upset you in that Michael White of the Licensing Department apparently said that we were 'well along the path' or words to that effect. We have complied (above and beyond) the requirements of the Licensing Act with regard to 'publication' and this has been acknowledged by the Licensing Department. I have submitted articles to the Village Magazine and I believe that everyone who is entitled to know has been alerted to this Application. There has been nothing furtive about it at all. Do please remember that we have very many next door neighbours and it is beyond our reasonable capability to contact everyone individually. We have a staff of one and I remain as usual up to my neck in Rownhams House paperwork. In the 1930s the house had staff of 26... for a family of 7!

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At the moment we have long standing planning consent for mixed commercial/residential use. This also in fact includes consent for 'light industrial' use. I am wondering how, for example, I would react to this as a prospective buyer of your house. I think most people would be relieved to learn that next door was a civilised 'country house hotel' and not a 'light industrial unit'. We are not a 'hotel' of course - but almost all of these 'country house hotels' offer facilities for wedding receptions and 'room hire'.

The difference between 'them' and 'us' is that, for everyone's sake, we intend to be particularly choosy and our marketing will be aimed at the more civilised sector. I think the current phrase is 'high end'. Our 'hire' agreements will also emphasise this aspect. Also of course we shall be aiming at the 'corporate' market which I assume is uncontroversial. (?). Please also bear in mind that there is a growing trend for smaller lower cost weddings that might purely involve a morning ceremony with photographs and perhaps a light buffet lunch. Mid-week daytime weddings are also becoming more usual. Our provisional 'price list' will certainly encourage these.

With regard to the public meeting I much sympathized with your remark that you were uncomfortable about public speaking. We certainly have this in common. I know too well that in the minutes before and after (and probably during!) the mind goes slightly blank – mine does. For that reason I am attaching a copy of my statement which was prepared before the meeting which I hope that, in a quiet moment, may address at least some of your original fears. I also have a copy of your circular note so I am fairly certain that we both understand our differing viewpoints.

I hope that the attached will go at least some way to demonstrating that we are not intending to host ‘yobfests’. I attach also a (necessarily light hearted) article that has been submitted to the Village News (which may not yet be in print) but which I hope will further demonstrate that we are not intending to do anything that is likely to prejudice either our neighbours or our reputation as being civilized. You may not be aware that we have always included (most unusually in a commercial lease) a ‘get out’ clause. This serves to prevent offices being sublet to ‘unsatisfactory’ companies; but it is a something of a financial liability to ourselves. I hope however this disclosure will reassure you about the lengths we are prepared to go to keep the house as agreeable as possible.

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As you will have gleaned during the meeting, specifically from Mr Anderdon a member of the Test Valley Licensing Committee, it was emphasized that our license can be taken away just as easily as from a motorist who flouts the regulations. If you were at the helm of Rownhams House you would do whatever you could to avoid this eventuality. We have closely followed the advice of official bodies in respect of ‘closing times’ and I have to say that, staying at Rownhams House far more often than you believe, I regret that some of our neighbours are not themselves subject to the restrictions of the Licensing Act with regard to late night noise. Every householder in Merry England remains entirely at the mercy of fate as to who may move next door.

You should also be aware that over the past 30 years I have fended off many very suitors wishing to acquire Rownhams House. Indeed I have had another ‘overture’ within the last month. For one reason or another they have been sent on their way. However the quite incredible amount of hassle involved in running the house has become a real burden: life is too short. The long dreamt of ‘2 up & 2 down’ cottage by the sea is now looking very alluring indeed – especially as we have already lost very many tenants due to the recession and the costs of running the house remain frankly almost beyond belief. Significantly I have now insufficient funding to subsidise the house for more than a few more months. In other words you are not that far away from having a new neighbour and I’d bet the last pound in my pocket that they will not possess even a fraction of my long standing altruism.

So this is now my last attempt to ‘repel the commercially minded boarders’ who will doubtless possess both the avarice and the corporate muscle to do as they please. In the meantime I will comfort myself in the knowledge that at least I went down fighting. I am wondering whether this what you, your family and all our neighbours who regularly express their appreciation for Rownhams House really want?

I am aware that you may perhaps regard this last remark as 'scare tactics'. It isn't. I can send you in scans of recent maintenance invoices and copies of bank statements. It is very well known that country houses generally are floundering – there is even a TV series on Channel 4 devoted to this phenomenon.

I have fought planning (building) applications myself (i.e. the Horns Drive woodlands which I saved and then protected on behalf of the village) and I know only too well the difficulty in fighting the larger commercial operators who arrive in Italian sports cars accompanied by silver tongued barristers who can talk the perplexingly complex planning lingo. I don't quite know how they manage to roll over and tickle local planning authorities but they seem to be a great deal more successful in getting their way than mortals like us. And by definition these boys are 'easy in and easy out' and whilst they may make noises towards 'respecting the locality' it is clear that they are not much bothered at all. I've met more than a few of these gentlemen.

I remain more than willing to meet with you, to show you around the areas concerned, and to see if we can isolate any particular issue that may still cause you concern. I hope that by addressing these specific issues, we can deal with any of your residual anxieties.

So may we please meet to enable us to isolate specific issues? Both of us probably deserve a good night's sleep and with all of this hanging over us it would be good to attempt to put each other at ease. I am not certain that either of us would be pleased at the probable outcome if it became impossible to save the house due to our failure to obtain a realistic Premises Licence.

Having written all this it actually occurs to me that we are both (paradoxically) on exactly the same side! Or if we are not, we want exactly the same sort of result. You will think I'm quite crackers (you have to be to run Rownhams House) but if you were my sister living over the other side of the garden wall I would honestly say that your best interests would be served by *supporting* this application.

I look forward to hearing from you but would ask that you please put aside your understandable anger (and fears) for a few moments and to read carefully and consider what I have said.

And of course it's better the devil you know ...

Yours sincerely,

Roger Barber