

Statement in Support of Newmarket Horsemen's Group by Christian Wall

Introduction

At the ISH on Thursday 8/12/22 I was unable to provide a response to some matters of relevance raised due to time constraints so I thank the lead inspector Mr Kean for offering the opportunity to make a written submission.

Much was spoken about the Limekilns Gallops and the effect that the expense of photovoltaic cells would have upon them so I will try not to go over ground already trodden.

Support for NHG and SNTS evidence

I support of the evidence of the Newmarket Horseman's Group and SNTS. I write as a racehorse trainer of 36 years standing and as Chairman of the Heath Committee, a body of trainers and representatives of Jockey Club Estates tasked with the maintenance and integrity of the training grounds. As such I represent all the town's trainers from large to small.

Newmarket – its pre-eminence and vulnerability

In the UK, we have very few industries that can be said to be the best in the world. Racehorse training is one. Each one is the subject of huge competition from outside as many countries would like to take their place at the top. Newmarket's pre-eminence as a racehorse training and breeding centre is not disputed but it was asserted by the Sunnica team that the HRI had suffered ups and downs before but had always recovered. I would add that we live in very different times where the current threats to our prosperity are very different to before. In the last three years horse racing in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar has expanded tremendously and will continue to do so. The exceptional prizemoney in Australia racing there is undergoing growth beyond all imagination a few years ago. France and Ireland are also becoming much more of a threat in the last three years than before. As was said by others too, Newmarket HRI is vulnerable and more vulnerable now than previously.

Owners and Investors – The Limekilns

So why would a racehorse owner want to have a horse trained in Newmarket?

And how as a trainer do I try to convince a potential client to do so?

A new owner may be impressed by the history and the prestige of Newmarket but we still need something to ignite the passion and make them commit to the town and invest in racehorse training here. It is after all a discretionary spend by an investor, as has been said, not the more usual form of investment such as in a company, shares, an ISA, a pension or in a property. As part of that process trainers will take a potential client to the Limekilns as it is the HRI's greatest asset, its jewel in the crown, as was said. Standing atop of the Limekilns gallops by the Bury Road the whole amphitheatre is laid out before you. The great horses and famous people that have trodden the same ground can be recited but as much as anything the superb rural vista looking across the shallow valley towards Chippenham Park, the hills and beyond to the Fens is a backdrop little changed for literally centuries. That backdrop is a part of the Limekiln's character and aura - it is not just a part of its landscape; it is a vital part of its history and atmosphere.

If that view to the north from the top of the Limekilns is harmed (and I and many say ruined) by the spectacle of acre upon acre of photovoltaic cells, then I know that the passion investors have shown to me and other trainers will not be ignited. I know this from what has been said and discussed with me by many investors over many years when they visit the Limekilns, the way they light up when I explain the history of the Limekilns going back to the 1700s, when the great undefeated thoroughbred racehorse Eclipse trained there, combined with the views from there to the gallops opposite, the driveway and walls of Chippenham Park opposite and the views across open countryside and over the hills and Fens beyond to Ely. They often mention this part of their tour in later discussions of their visit. The potential client will, put at its lowest, be much less likely to invest here if Sunnica goes ahead. That unique magic tingling moment they experience will be lost. That will be clearly harmful. That harm to Newmarket's prized showcase is in turn harm to its HRI.

The super-rich investor can afford to be involved in horse racing, or other sports or investments, whatever and wherever it takes their fancy. They are 'footloose' and are often international, investing £millions into this country. They want everything to be the best it can be and that includes the studs, training yards and the ambience of the surroundings. All their research of gallops and training centres will have turned up photographs of open spaces and rural, bucolic settings. What Newmarket has in this one place is three centuries of racehorse training history, its connected historical landscape, the spectacle of the horses on the gallops, the amphitheatre from the Bury Road and the views across to Ely Cathedral – all in one place. It is indeed unique. History sells horses. These investors are not expecting to see a backdrop that is semi-industrial. The small owner, even a potential minor shareholder and the lifeblood of the smaller yards, is equally likely to be put off. They too would have the notion of the romance of the place in their mind. To them participating in racehorse ownership is a lifestyle choice where they can spend time on the gallops in a rural setting so that they can relax and escape the stress of city living and their work.

If the development goes ahead then a major selling point, the showcase of Newmarket that I and other trainers rely on, would not just be harmed, it would be lost. I, and speaking to many trainers, others would lose the showcase and be forced to show a potential client the Limekilns from the side of the Norwich Road looking south, turning our backs on the PV cells so that the development can't be seen as, not only as you have your back to it but because you are below it on the lower side. However, that is the worst place from which to view the Limekilns as you do not have the full view from the top, indeed you cannot see much of it at all. In addition from there one faces into the sun in the summer, and the historical view with Ely Cathedral in the distance over the hills and fens will be lost. The paintings of winning horses and riders in the Jockey Club Rooms and Museum going back centuries are from the top looking north – why? Because that view and its historical context combined with the training of racehorses here makes the scene iconic. Watching horses gallop past is just part of the scene, and a part that of itself can be seen at any racehorse training area, certainly not unique to Newmarket. One of Newmarket's principal USPs will be severely harmed by Sunnica.

A14 and Railway

The A14 and railway have been mentioned as 'detractors'. The A14 road is not openly visible, even from the top of the Limekilns, as it sits in a cutting for much of its length and is screened

so only the tops of lorries are visible, and the railway line is not intrusive as trains are infrequent and are low down, also partly in cutting. The Sunnica development, by contrast, will be unrelieved and visible right across the landscape from left to right and, I understand, will remain so without screening throughout its 40 years which is indeed semi-permanent – more than a generation, if not a lifetime of many.

Limekilns – a “Place of Work”

I also wish to add that the Limekilns, the views from it, its history and as a place in itself, are highly valued by the people who work there, those employed in the HRI – the trainers, stable staff and riders. It was implied by a spokesman for Sunnica at the hearing I attended last Thursday (ISH2) that the Limekilns was less valuable, for some reason, because it was ‘a place of work’.

Just because riders, trainers and support staff use the Limekilns as part of their work it does not mean that they would not be as conscious of or value their surroundings as much as others. The impact of the Sunnica proposals opposite would substantially diminish its value for them. I can say without any hesitation that all of us who work there are conscious of the surroundings and value the Limekilns hugely because of not in spite of its surroundings – it is a place of huge value to all of us in the HRI for its history, its environment and views, not just for the horses we ride and train who gallop on it. Just look at the number and strength of objections from those who work in the HRI. We choose to work at Newmarket and not elsewhere because of its HRI, its history and environment.

Nobody values the Limekilns higher than those who work there, including its surroundings. We, the trainers, riders and support staff in the HRI who visit it often from April to October when it is open and at other times of the year to walk there will be as adversely affected as anyone by the harm to the views from it caused by the Sunnica proposals, as well as separately by the threat to the viability of the HRI.

Villages to the NE of Newmarket

The villages to the north-east of Newmarket house many of our important workers, especially vets, farriers and senior managers because, not only is it a pleasant area in which to live with close knit communities in villages and schools, but it offers better value for money than the villages to the south and west many of which are unaffordable to some. Many also choose to live there because of the rural setting where they can take long peaceful walks to relax and where it is a pleasant place to bring up their children.

This area is a part of the equestrian and farming character of Newmarket with studs and farming in this area, and horses can be seen using the bridleways. With the proposed Sunnica development spreading out in a horseshoe around them like a flood, many will feel isolated and cut off from their surrounding communities – the severance one from the other will here be significant as a consequence of the Sunnica proposals and socially it will inevitably mean less interaction between them.

Hatchfield Farm Development

The Sunnica proposals cannot be likened to the Hatchfield Farm development as that was a housing development with objections based mainly on the impact of traffic, which was

actually found by the appeal inspector and Secretary of State to be beneficial in the morning peak and a de minimis impact 'at best' elsewhere. He found that the HRI could overcome that impact, which on his inspector's findings is not in the least surprising.

In addition, the Hatfield Farm proposal, which included market and affordable housing, a new horse crossing and major improvements to the A14/A142 junction, was seen by some to be beneficial overall to Newmarket. There was not unanimity in the community. The findings of the inspector and Secretary of State on the resilience of the HRI must be seen in this context. By contrast, the objections to the Sunnica scheme have in my experience unanimous support in the whole of the Newmarket HRI and wider community. There is precious little local benefit to Newmarket as a result of the Sunnica scheme and substantial harm over a wide area, in particular to the communities living to its north-east, as the SNTS evidence shows.

Threat to HRI viability

There was debate whether the impact of the Sunnica proposals on the Limekilns was a threat to Newmarket HRI's viability in the long term. It is clearly such a threat.

To remain pre-eminent, from which so much benefit comes in terms of attracting the best in the world (including horses, trainers, professionals and support staff), the HRI needs to preserve Newmarket's USP and better it wherever possible, especially its number one USP, the Limekilns.

I know from speaking to other trainers, other persons in the HRI and their families that their environment is of substantial importance to them and their families, that they will not hold Newmarket so dear if Sunnica is allowed, and some have said that they will seriously consider moving away especially if offers are made from equestrian establishments and investors elsewhere, which is likely given the increased competition from elsewhere in the world. This has not been the case until recently and never before have so many people talked about moving away from Newmarket, possibly due to a number of factors, but Sunnica is clearly the main one mentioned. I do not see this as merely talk but a serious matter which we in the HRI are finding is increasingly apparent.

I noted that it was said on behalf of Sunnica that there was no evidence that a trainer has said that they would leave Newmarket in the event of the scheme going ahead. No trainer would say openly that they would move out of the town if the Sunnica or any other proposals were to be granted, as this would immediately undermine confidence in key staff, owners and others and potentially cause serious harm to their business if not collapse. The truth is that a number of trainers have said to me that as a result of the Sunnica proposals Sunnica would cause real harm to the Limekilns and to the area north-east of Newmarket. At first the loss of owners, key workers and others in the HRI will be a trickle but it will soon become a flood as confidence, social enjoyment and the communities will suffer. The overall effect on the HRI would be hugely harmful in the long term and likely to undermine its pre-eminence beyond redress.

As has been shown by the evidence of the Newmarket Horsemen's Group and SNTS, the Sunnica development would cause harm to the function of the Limekilns as a showcase of the

HRI and, in addition, would be a very real threat to the HRI's viability as a whole in the long term.

I support the evidence on this matter given by John Gosden, Richard Popham and others in objection to Sunnica.

Conclusion

For these and all the reasons given by them and SNTS, the Secretary of State is urged to dismiss the Sunnica proposals and not confirm the Order.