

---

**PROOF OF EVIDENCE**  
**OF**  
**WILLIAM GITTUS**

---

Introduction

1. My name is **William Angus Gittus** and I am the Group Property Director of The Jockey Club.

In this appeal I represent the Appellant, Jockey Club Racecourses Limited (JCR). I confirm that except where stated the facts and matters contained within this statement are within my knowledge and that its contents are true. I give this evidence in support of the Appellant.

2. My relevant qualifications and experience are that I hold a BSc (Hons) in Agricultural Business Management from the University of London and a Diploma in Surveying from the College of Estate Management, Reading.
3. Following a career as an army officer, I qualified as a chartered surveyor in 2000 and was appointed a partner in Bidwells Property Consultants in 2005. I was appointed Managing Director of Jockey Club Estates Ltd in 2006 and in 2013 Group Property Director of The Jockey Club. I am responsible for overseeing The Jockey Club's property portfolio, including its three training centres and 15 racecourses. I am familiar with the appeal site and its surroundings having visited on numerous occasions.

The Jockey Club

4. JCR is wholly owned by The Jockey Club which was founded in 1750. JCR operates 15 of the 59 British racecourses under Royal Charter (Ireland including Northern Ireland is separate). All profits made by JCR are re-invested into supporting the sport of horseracing in Great Britain.
5. British Racing is a major industry employing 17,400 FTE core, 85,000 direct, indirect and associated employees contributing £1.1bn to the UK economy – **Appendix 1**.
6. Attendance at British racecourses in 2019 was over 3.5m persons in total, making racing the second most popular spectator sport after football – **Appendix 2**.

7. “The Jockey Club’s Vision is for British Racing to be the best in the world for many years to come and for the sport to be accessible for millions of people in the UK to enjoy. Our mission is to act for the long-term good of British Racing in everything we do.”
8. The Jockey Club’s Vision for Sandown - **CD6.47**Appx05.

#### Sandown Park Racecourse

9. Sandown Park is private land with racing held there since 1875. It is a nationally important racecourse in Esher, Surrey. The grandstand, Eclipse building and ancillary buildings are adjacent to other open air recreational and sporting areas including the dry ski slope, Skywalk Adventure park, golf course, clubhouse, driving range and go-kart track.
10. Sandown is a turf “dual code” racecourse staging both flat and jump racing, with 24 annual racedays. It is the only one of its kind in the outskirts of London, with a loyal core of racegoers. The racetrack is of high quality but occasionally suffers from waterlogging. The world-famous Eclipse Group 1 race in July attracts UK and international runners. The racecourse buildings appear superficially acceptable due to continued ‘patch and mend’ maintenance and recent refurbishment of two hospitality rooms. However, the racecourse is in urgent need of extensive refurbishment, and feedback from its customers is that venue experience and facilities are poor versus competitive racecourses. It has low retention of customers generally, particularly ‘day-outers’ and ‘first-timers’ – **Appendix 3**.
11. Sandown is a major contributor to the local Elmbridge economy with some 157,000 spectator attendees, with a direct economic impact of over £6.4m and GVA impact of some £3m (2018 figures) - **Appendix 4**. In terms of permanent employment, it provides 110 FTE positions and supports 480 suppliers, 277 of which are in Elmbridge Borough and neighbouring postcodes (the latter equivalent to a £4.04m Elmbridge spend) – **CD6.47**Appx03. It also generates significant additional temporary employment at racedays and events, equivalent to approximately 17,000 shifts, 73 FTE annually. A 150-bed hotel would create additional permanent and part time new jobs.
12. Sandown Park is much more than a racecourse. It is a major asset to the local community for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, a valuable provider of event space throughout the year used for conferences, meetings, exhibitions and weddings as well as outdoor entertainment and activities including trade shows, open air music concerts and festivals, vintage car rallies and markets. There are no other similar locations in the Esher and Elmbridge area with the range found at Sandown, a rail station nearby and extensive on-site car parking.

#### The Planning Application

13. The purpose and objective of the planning application is to carry out the transformation, upgrading and enhancement of Sandown Park Racecourse for which there is a pressing need and to make it viable, resilient to economic and other changes for the foreseeable future. It is to bring it up to a standard expected by the racing public as well as others who use its facilities, to safeguard employment, and ensure that the substantial economic and tourism benefits it brings locally to the Elmbridge area and to racing in the UK more generally are secured.

Importantly, it is not to carry out residential development except to achieve and facilitate these goals.

14. The initiative for this was from the Council who encouraged JCR to bring forward a long-term masterplan proposal to enhance and sustain the racecourse for the foreseeable future. In the absence of the current requirements, residential development of land on the periphery of the wider racecourse land would not be contemplated.
15. It is essential that to be viable, both for horseracing as well as for any ancillary activities using their land and buildings, premium racecourses must maintain a very high standard of facilities which seeks to maximise income from racegoers and their discretionary spend as well as from those booking facilities at the racecourse for exhibitions, weddings, trade fairs and other events. Those seeking to visit sporting and other such venues are increasingly more discriminating in terms of the quality demanded. The returns from operating racecourses are diminishing when the same time the expenditure on the upkeep is increasing - **Appendix 5**.
16. The racecourse facilities at Sandown require significant and urgent restoration and enhancement. If high quality facilities are not provided at Sandown, users and visitors will go elsewhere. There is substantial choice available both locally and elsewhere for discretionary spend on sport, leisure and recreation – See examples at **Appendix 6**. Sandown will lose income, with owners and trainers choosing to race the better horses at other racecourses, the quality of racing at Sandown will suffer, media, broadcasting and HBLB income will diminish, and Sandown will suffer further; once decline sets in it can accelerate rapidly with ever greater costs and resources required for it to be arrested and reversed. The same is true of its use for events.
17. Sandown can currently be described as ‘just about managing’, even with significant sums continually being spent on it, as in 2019 when £900,000 was spent on refurbishment of two hospitality rooms in the grandstand. It is at a tipping point. It does not run at a profit and requires to be subsidised by income generated by other JCR racecourses. Limited refurbishment with continued maintenance is a short-term expedient and is no longer-term answer. Based on its experience of running racecourses over many years and advice from its own staff and consultants, the Board of The Jockey Club determined to carry out transformational development of Sandown to ensure its economic and sporting sustainability.
18. The proposals which are the subject of the planning application are the minimum required to arrest the decline of Sandown. They have been carefully structured as a package and every element is necessary to achieve this objective – Schedule **CD6.47Appx06**.
19. Once they have been carried out, further substantial work is required over a number of years, including to the roof and terraces of the grandstand, to the Eclipse building, and elsewhere on the Racecourse. All the net receipts obtained after the proposed development is carried out will be spent on a future programme of continued improvements and maintenance at the Racecourse, to continue to retain its position as a major regional sporting and recreational venue.
20. Response to objections is at **CD6.47Appx04,05**.

The proposed transformational works

Sites A-F

21. Site A contains the racecourse operational area, including the stables, ancillary uses such as veterinary facilities, the horse box/lorry park and weekday car park, and the 21 room Sandown Lodge. Stables are also located on Site 1 with access from More Lane. Stables, veterinary facilities and testing labs are an essential requirement for any racecourse, are here in a very poor state of repair and in urgent need of replacement in order to comply with health and safety as well as equine welfare standards. Sandown Lodge, the racecourse's racing staff accommodation, is relatively low-quality accommodation requiring people to share rooms and facilities. Both would be replaced with well designed, modern accommodation for the essential requirement and benefit of horse and staff welfare, with modern testing and veterinary facilities required to meet modern racing standards.
22. Site B contains the proposed hotel and is required to support Sandown's conference and events business as well as visitors to race meetings and business users and visitors to the area. This proposal has been supported by Local Plan policy CS9 for many years. There is a shortage and are none of quality within at least 2 miles. A good quality modern hotel offering a full range of facilities located on or adjacent to a racecourse is now required for any high-quality racecourse by racegoers as well as those visiting the racecourse to attend events and visiting the area for business. The absence of one at Sandown is a clear detriment and makes it far less attractive as a venue compared to other similar locations. The previous hotel granted planning permission failed to be developed for reasons in **CD6.47**Appx5. There is a clear demand for a high-quality hotel of the type proposed in this location, overlooking the racecourse and visible to passing trade on Portsmouth Road. See **CD6.47**Appx3,9 and **Appendix 6**.
23. Site C, the Family and Community Zone is proposed as a major benefit for racegoers with a young family. It has been a strong ambition of JCR to provide more family facilities at their racecourses as it has seen a need for this. Consumer research for the 2019 Race Free campaign supported this conclusion – see **Appendix 7**. There is nowhere for young children to remain in a child-friendly alcohol and betting free environment on a raceday at Sandown and the location in the centre of the course is ideal for parents to accompany their children in the soft play area or outside on the grassed areas or cycle track, visit the café and also watch the racing. The Zone will be available throughout the year for the benefit of local residents which through the Community Use Agreement will be permitted to use it free of charge, a major benefit to the local community. The go-kart track will close and noise from it which has been the subject of complaints in the past from residents in the vicinity will therefore cease. This has been welcomed by officers of the Council.
24. Site D is currently used as a car park, but its poor surface becomes muddy in winter and is avoided by racegoers as well as on occasions becoming waterlogged and unusable. This can result in displacement of car parking into the local area. It is proposed to lay "grass Crete" on the surface which will not change its use or be visible.

25. Sites E1 and E2 are on the racetrack itself which is in urgent need of improvement. Sandown was forced to abandon 3 fixtures in early 2020 due to waterlogging. The proposed track widening projects will increase the area of racing surface on the bends, enabling better ground to be provided on heavily trafficked areas, which has material equine welfare benefits, as well as protecting existing important racing fixtures in the calendar. This in turn leads to higher quality racing.
26. Site F, the frontage car parks leading to the coach and lorry parks are also in need of enhancement. They are poorly laid out, inefficient and visually of relatively poor quality with much of the surface being roughly made up ground with poor drainage of hard surfaces. Due to their poor layout, traffic on racedays backs up onto Portsmouth Road causing traffic congestion within the Esher area more generally. Many local residents and councilors have commented upon this. The proposals will materially improve the situation by replacing the poorly laid out car parks, horse box and coach parks and accesses with properly designed and landscaped car parking areas with improved accesses which will improve the internal traffic flow leading to substantially improved off-site traffic flow.

#### Buildings

27. Buildings surveys reveal a requirement for extensive works both internally and externally, agreed with the Council to cost c£36m. See **CD6.47** Appx06,07,08, **CD6.63** and **JCR Statement of Case Appx02**.
28. Buildings required to be demolished and rebuilt are included in the planning application. The proposed works to the grandstand do not require planning permission. It is deteriorating in its quality and requires significant works to bring it up to modern standards and meet customer expectations.
29. The £900,000 obtained from internal JCR resources spent on the interior hospitality areas of the grandstand in 2019 was an essential 'stop-gap' measure to refurbish a small part of the building. An extensive restoration is required of not only the grandstand but also of the Eclipse building and other areas when funds become available.
30. The children's nursery at the Toll House on Site 5 is proposed to be replaced by a new nursery building and the Toll House, a locally listed building, will be renovated and used as part of the residential development. It is proposed to continue offering the nursery for the benefit of the local community.

#### Enhancements to other areas outside the planning application area

31. The larch lap paling fencing along the central part of More Lane is to be replaced to open up views across the Racecourse and horseracing not currently obtainable at ground level, to the significant benefit of users of More Lane, in particular pedestrians, residents and pupils and visitors to Esher High School.

32. In addition, environmental, biodiversity and ecological enhancement is proposed. This includes enhancements to the Racecourse Gates, planting 2.5ha of wildflower meadow, erecting bat boxes, planting and maintaining c225 trees and carrying out survey, monitoring and maintenance work on Littleworth Common, an SNCI – Ecology Statement, **CD6.47 Pt1Appx10,11**
33. Accessibility enhancements on surrounding highways are proposed – Transportation Proof, **CD6.47 Pt1Appx12**.

Construction

34. The construction of the new stables, staff accommodation, upgrading of car parks, entrance and frontage, as well as the track works and works to upgrade the grandstand needs to be coordinated – **CD6.47Appx08**.
35. Given the year round nature of Sandown’s activities, it would not be practicable or economic to carry out the works in many different phases over time, for example if and when funds might in theory become available as has been suggested, as the disruption, reputational harm and revenue cost would all be excessive. All the necessary finance is required to be available before works commence.

The proposed new housing on Sites 1-5

36. The Design and Access Statement describes the development. The purpose of seeking planning permission for 318 dwellings on JCR land is to generate sufficient funds to carry out the transformational enhancement works to Sandown.
37. The net proceeds of sale would be the minimum required to carry out the proposed works of enhancement and, as advised and agreed with planning officers and independent viability consultants appointed by the Council, to deliver 20% or c64 affordable housing units. Without sale of the land for housing with planning permission as proposed, the transformation of Sandown will not take place.

Potential funding sources

38. It is recognised by the Council officers that the proposed transformational development comes at a considerable financial cost and this is not possible unless there are sufficient funds provided to pay for the proposed works through a planning permission. Extensive discussions were held with officers concerning how the proposal could be funded. They were satisfied that the only practicable way was through the grant of planning permission for residential development on JCR land at Sandown and for the net proceeds of sale to be used, tied by legal obligation, with the maximum affordable housing for the transformation to be viable. This was determined and agreed by consultants to be 20% affordable housing. An upwards only review

of the percentage was also agreed. However, members of the Planning Committee disagreed. The members consider<sup>1</sup> that the Appellant should find alternative sources of funding.

39. It is not within my expertise as a witness to discuss planning policy but although the Council dispute the principal of funding the works as proposed, at no time have the Council members or officers disputed the need to carry out transformational development to save Sandown racecourse from inevitable decline.
40. The Jockey Club continually seeks to appraise itself of all potential sources of funding. The only ones available to it are loans or from internally generated resources. See Potential Funding Sources Table **Appendix 8**. No others have been suggested by the Council at any time, including in their Statement of Case<sup>2</sup>.
41. There is no funding available for major capital projects from internal resources. In 2018 (the latest published accounts) The Jockey Club made a net profit of only £4.5m on a turnover of £214.6 million, or 2.1%, or about half the minimum interest rates available before loan capital repayments. The 2019 accounts are about to be published and show a similar position. Before 2018, its net profit per year was around £10 million. See Jockey Club Annual Review 2019 at **Appendix 9** and RCA Finance Presentation at **Appendix 5**. All of this net profit is required for minor capital projects, revenue subsidy and other forms of financial support at its 15 racecourses, including those in peripheral rural areas which depend on them economically. If planning permission is not granted, Sandown's financial position will deteriorate further, and markedly over time.
42. The taking on of additional debt for major capital projects such as this has been determined by The Jockey Club including its Board to be unaffordable and the priority for the foreseeable future is to maintain standards but reduce debt significantly. It paid down £8.9m of retail bond debt in June 2019 but its debt currently stands at £110m.
43. A number of its racecourses deliver minimal profits and it is essential that available resources are utilised to keep them in operation. In addition, many racecourses are tired and in urgent need of refurbishment, most being minor or medium cost projects costing between £1m and £5m. This includes Huntingdon, Haydock, Warwick and Wincanton. It is required to support British Racing through increased prize money investment to try to retain owners and prevent owners going abroad to train and race their horses.
44. Sandown has run at marginal profitability over a number of years requiring support from other operations. The COVID19 crisis has caused a significantly greater loss of (to date) £90 million in revenue to JCR which will take years to recover from. All racing since June 2020 and for the foreseeable future must run behind closed doors. There is no spare money available for major capital projects such as that proposed at Sandown and there will not be any for at least the next 10 years and probably more.

---

<sup>1</sup> Council SoC paras 6.39 – 6.42

<sup>2</sup> Council SoC para 6.41.2 does not mention any other than use of revenue receipts from Sandown in future

Conclusions

45. The proposed development is the minimum required to bring about transformational enhancement of Sandown, with substantial further works of improvement and refurbishment to the grandstand, Eclipse building and other parts of the racecourse being required to continue to be carried out over future years, funded by revenue receipts.
  46. All sources of funding have been explored. The proposals are urgently required to halt and reverse the decline of Sandown and the only practicable way that this can be done is through the mechanism proposed in this planning application.
  47. The Jockey Club has a strategy to ensure that it maintains high standards at all its racecourses wherever possible, to ensure economic sustainability, minimise maintenance expenditure and maximise income from its current assets as well as contribute to the communities in which we operate. That it is what this development proposal is seeking to do.
  48. As has been made clear on numerous occasions in discussions with Council officers, if planning permission is not forthcoming, the proposed transformational works will not take place in accordance with this long-term masterplan for Sandown, encouraged in discussions by them.
  49. By contrast, if planning permission is granted, Sandown will be returned to be a high-quality racecourse and events venue with a secure future, for the benefit of the British racegoing public and wider business and leisure users, the local economy and many others in Elmbridge and the wider area.
-