

A Tale of Two Pubs

How the Conservatives treat their constituents in Greatham

This is the true story of how the late Councillor David Onslow helped Greene King, his daughter, his friend John Foote-Forster and various others to make a pile of money from housing developments at the two pubs in Greatham without regard to the safety of the cars and pedestrians passing by.

And of how the four houses were built at the Greatham Inn in 2006, causing highway risks to the cars and pedestrians passing by, and the land behind sold with a 40 year “overage” in favour of Greene King. While all this was going on from 2005-07 a Strategy Director for Greene King was Mr Damian Hinds, the Conservative candidate for East Hampshire in the General Election on Thursday.

Please read on and let us know what you think – and let the Leader of the East Hampshire Conservatives know what you think as well.

Until early 2001, Greatham was served by two pubs. The Silver Birch Inn had a public bar, restaurant and accommodation for guests. The Queen Inn was a public house owned by Greene King. It had a spacious car park, and had about 4 acres of land around it. The Queen’s, as it was known to the regulars, closed in early 2001.

Since then the two pubs in Greatham have been subject to mysterious dealings and a series of planning applications were received by East Hampshire District Council. In 2001, two planning applications were submitted to develop each pub independently.

The first planning application (F.24695/002) was submitted by Greene King on 17 April 2001 to demolish the Queens public house and build 7 houses on the site. This planning application was refused by EHDC on 29 June 2001.

However, before then, a second planning application (F.30622/002) was submitted on 4 May 2001 to demolish the Silver Birch Inn and erect 15 houses on that site. Following the refusal of planning permission to demolish the Queens public house, the developers withdrew this planning application on 10 July 2001.

Greene King then decided to get together with the applicants at the Silver Birch to do a combined scheme. On 27 February 2002, a third planning application (F.30622/003) was submitted, again to demolish the Silver Birch Inn but this time to build 16 houses on that site. At the same time, a linked planning application (F.24695/003) was submitted to build two detached dwellings on the site of the car park of the Queens public house. As an incentive, the developers proposed to provide £175,000 for the refurbishment of the Queens public house so that the village would retain at least one pub.

The EHDC planning department recommended approval of the planning applications, but due to the number of representations from the public, the planning application was referred to the South Planning Committee on 15 July 2002. Despite the planning department’s recommendation for approval the councillors voted unanimously *against* the planning applications. One of the District Councillors voting against the developments was the local Councillor Judy Onslow, the wife of David Onslow. David Onslow had been the District Councillor for Greatham until 1999, when he was

replaced by his wife, and went off to Dublin for tax reasons. *See the exposure entitled **David Onslow and his business interests** on this website.*

But then a strange thing happened. In December 2002, the Queen's was sold to a company called Comparo Limited and, at the same time, Comparo Limited acquired the option to purchase the Silver Birch Inn and shortly after purchased Witham House (the house next door to the Silver Birch Inn). When Comparo Limited acquired the Queen's Greene King took a Deed of Charge over the two pieces of land situated to the West, North and East of the pub. That Charge is still outstanding today.

Comparo Limited has a sole director and shareholder called Susan Jill Parkinson (known as 'Jill'). From information given by David Onslow it is clear that Jill Parkinson is his daughter. Or that both of them thought she was. Jill Parkinson had been living since the mid 1990s, and is still living, with her partner, Martin John Leay. That was very useful because Martin Leay is a leading environmental expert, and a key question was whether the developments proposed were consistent with Greatham's proposed inclusion in the South Downs National Park. Mr Leay was at that time chairman of a company called CPM Environmental Planning and Design Limited (CPM)

In January 2003, Comparo submitted an appeal against the previous planning refusals for 16 houses at the Silver Birch Inn and 2 detached houses the Queens. The date for the appeal was fixed as 24 June 2003.

However, on 13 March 2003, Comparo submitted two new planning applications. F.30622/004 requested permission to build just 14 houses on the site of the Silver Birch Inn, whilst F.24695/004 requested permission to build a terrace of 4 houses on the site of the Queens public house car park. Again, £175,000 was proposed to refurbish the Queens public house. On this occasion, the Council refused the two new planning applications but agreed that that the appeals against the refusals could be heard at the same time as the appeals against the previous applications.

The main reason given by the Council's Head of Planning for recommending refusal was that the proposed developments would be inconsistent with what was usually permitted in a National Park. However rather strangely in the same month he sent a note to Comparo's planning agent saying that it did not necessarily matter whether Greatham was inside or outside the South Downs National Park – planning permission could still be given anyway!

However Comparo were likely to be the first company to know what was likely to happen. A Public Inquiry was ordered into the South Downs National Park, and the Countryside Agency appointed Martin Leay's company, CPM, as expert advisor and witness for the Countryside Agency during the Inquiry. So Martin Leay was leader of the team which prepared all documents for the Countryside Agency, and gave expert evidence at the Inquiry, which lasted from November 2003 until May 2005. Shortly after the Inquiry ended Mr Leay left CPM and began operating an environmental business from a business unit immediately adjoining the unit occupied by Comparo.

In May 2003 David and Judy Onslow were both re-elected as Conservative District Councillors. Judy Onslow remained the District Councillor for Greatham; David Onslow was one of the two District Councillors for neighbouring Liss, the other being Mr & Mrs Onslow's friend Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Cartwright, the Conservative Leader of the Council. David Onslow was immediately appointed as Cabinet Portfolio Holder for both Finance and Environment, for which of course he could seek advice from Martin Leay, if he had time left over from his duties for the Countryside Agency. David Onslow kept these positions until May 2005 when Judy Onslow succeeded her husband as Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment.

In June 2003, the four planning applications were subject to a public inquiry at which the EHDC planning officers failed to defend the Councillors' decision to reject the planning application. At the inquiry, Greene King withdrew their appeal against the decision to refuse planning permission for the two detached houses on the Queens public house car park, and the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal for the building of the four terraced houses. At the Silver Birch Inn, the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal against the building of the 14 houses. The result was that Greene King and David Onslow's daughter could get more money from the enlarged development at the Queens.

The Planning Inspector based her decision largely on the findings in a Viability Study which said that the Silver Birch Inn was not viable and recommended refurbishment of the Queens to keep one pub open in the village. This Viability Study was produced by the Estates Manager of Greene King. The independence of this Viability Study was also not challenged by EHDC planning officers. The Inspector agreed with the letter from Mr Ian Ellis, the Council's Head of Planning, which said that the permission could be given for the building of the houses even though Greatham was expected to be in the National Park. The Inspector was bound to be influenced by the opinion of such an experienced Planning Officer as Mr Ellis, who was highly regarded by all the local developers.

The Planning Inspector also ruled that, instead of paying £175,000 to refurbish the Queens, the public house could be sold at a discount of £175,000, which could then be used by the purchaser to refurbish the pub. This was documented in what is known as a Section 106 agreement. However the wrong people signed the Section 106 agreement and one of the signatures was suspected of being a forgery, yet the EHDC officers refused to take action. Instead they agreed with Comparo that they could re-execute the agreement with the right signatures!

The Queens public house was sold to Foxy Pub Co Limited, a company formed by Neil Savage, a friend of David Onslow's son, Richard Onslow. Richard Onslow had been meeting regularly with Neil Savage at his previous pub, the Black Rabbit in Kent, according to the publican. However Richard Onslow may not have known about this transaction. It is understood that the deal between Greene King, Comparo and Neil Savage's company was brokered by John Foote-Forster. Comparo retained the part of the car park on which the 4 houses were to be built, and the 4 acres of land to the rear of the site. Through the Deed of Charge Greene King retained a financial interest in all the land throughout the transactions.

Neil Savage proceeded to use a company called INTX Limited to undertake the refurbishment of the Queens public house, and used estimates and invoices from INTX Limited to justify the expenditure to the satisfaction of EHDC planning officers. However, had the planning officers looked into the ownership of INTX, they would have discovered that it was wholly-owned by Neil Savage. As was Foxy Pub Co Limited.

The Queens public house was re-opened in May 2004 as The Greatham Inn, with a much smaller car park leaving space for the building of the 4 houses. However, when Comparo came to sell the building site, they realised that there was not sufficient room for the 4 houses between the Greatham Inn car park and the bank. Comparo needed to cut away some of the bank and had to submit a new planning application (F.24695/005) to cut into the bank behind the car park to enlarge the building site. The bank contained a number of protected species of wildlife, in particular, slow worms.

Despite the suggestion by Greatham Parish Council and individual objectors that only 2 or 3 houses should be built on the existing site, the EHDC planning officers and Planning Committee, approved the cutting into the bank. Councillor Mrs Cartwright was particularly keen to support this, saying it was the only way to make sure the Greatham Inn would remain viable. We are not sure why she

said this, but perhaps she was influenced by her friends David and Judy Onslow. Judy Onslow suggested in the meeting that Comparo might build less houses, as suggested by the local residents, so why didn't Mrs Cartwright agree? We may never know.

One of the planning conditions was that a landscaping scheme must be submitted and approved in writing before any work commenced. However, on 18 August 2006, a JCB digger in the car park started digging into the embankment around the car park. Trees and bushes had been cleared back a further 5m from the boundary of the land, cut down with no thought for the wildlife inhabiting the area. When angry residents telephoned the EHDC planning offices, they found that, conveniently, the case officer was on a day's leave but she confirmed, the following week, that she had given permission the day before over the telephone.

Comparo sold the building site to a property development company and then sold the remaining land behind the pub at auction. It is understood that the land was sold with an overage whereby if the purchaser or a successor should secure planning permission for development of any of this land during the subsequent 40 years, Greene King will be entitled to 50% of the increase in value. Presumably that is why Greene King still have a charge on the land, and also on Comparo.

Sadly the good people of Greatham have been left with a bit of a problem. Instead of two detached houses beside the Greatham Inn car park (as originally proposed by Greene King) the residents have been left with a terrace of four houses with almost no accessible off-street parking. The enlarged site meant that Comparo could still make as much money as possible from the sale of the building site, but unfortunately the development has left serious parking and road-safety issues for the local residents. The entirely predictable result of the limited off-street parking has resulted in the new residents of these terraced houses parking their vehicles on the roadside, at a point opposite a bus stop, used mainly by school children, on the brow of a hill. It will only be a matter of time before there is a serious accident (*see below*).



But the Highways Department at East Hampshire District Council made no objections to the proposals put forward by Comparo. So it must be all right then. Just like it doesn't really matter that the village has lost its only visitor accommodation at the Silver Birch Inn when it might expect some more visitors to the National Park. Perhaps the visitors can rent some of the 14 town houses at Silver Birch Mews, because no-one seems to want to buy them.

We might ask Greene King for their opinion on why it was a good idea to destroy the only visitor accommodation in Greatham, and even more why it was a good idea to create the dangerous traffic conditions near the Greatham Inn. Perhaps they don't care now because an agreement was signed on 5th December 2005 whereby the Greatham Inn was sold to Enterprise Inns PLC. So it's their problem now.

But we would like to ask the Conservative parliamentary candidate, Mr Damian Hinds, if he had any views on the subject back in 2005 and 2006 when the houses were being built at both sites. Mr Hinds was a Strategy Director of Greene King from 2005 until 2007, and was a registered company director of one of its holding companies when the sale of the Greatham Inn to Enterprise Inns was signed. And throughout the entire period from 2002 until now Greene King maintained a financial interest in the land adjoining the problem. Could not Mr Hinds have had a word with Greatham's two local District Councillors, prominent members of the Conservative party and good friends of Michael Mates MP, to see if they could get together with his fellow directors at Greene King, and help the people of Greatham?

Perhaps Mr Hinds didn't know much about the area before 2007, when he moved to Alton. But he was a director of Open World Limited from 18 June 2001 until 12 May 2003, and one of that company's main directors and the company secretary has lived at nearby Liphook since early 2001. And since Greene King had plenty of other pubs locally, such as the Royal Anchor in Liphook, and the Deers Hut in Griggs Green we would have hoped for a bit more help and interest.

In the end Comparo, Greene King and their business partners have made a lot of money from selling the building sites at the old Queen's car park, and at the Silver Birch Inn, probably more than £2 million. And they might hope for some more if the land behind the old Queen's is ever developed. Greatham residents are left with no visitor accommodation, only one pub, a small pub car park and a serious traffic problem.

On Thursday please vote for a local candidate who puts having fun and quality of life first.

Or is it all just a game, where nothing matters any more except making money?