

Brewery put spoke in scheme

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WAVERLEY Borough Council's aspiration to build houses on the Farnham Memorial Sports Ground in West Street has been dealt a blow this week by an unlikely source - global brewing giant Heineken.

Councillors recently signed off £50,000 for a feasibility study into relocating the Memorial Ground's current tenants Farnham Town Football Club to the former Weydon Lane landfill site, known locally as Brambleton Park, and in turn redeveloping the Memorial Ground for housing.

However, when challenged on the council's plans this week, Heineken - the successor to Farnham United Breweries which gifted the sports ground to the people of Farnham in 1947 - confirmed the restrictive covenants placed on the ground have not been relinquished, adding defiantly that Farnham Town FC "will continue to use the sports ground".

Heineken has praised Waverley's planned extensions to the Memorial Hall, also covered by the 1947 Deed of Gift, to incorporate the Brightwells Gostrey Centre; commenting that these will "benefit the wider community and therefore remain in keeping with the intention of the original gift".

However, its steadfast acknowledgment of the deed and its requirement for the Memorial Ground to be used for 'recreational and sporting use' - and not housing - represent a major impediment to Waverley's ambitions.

Heineken UK Ltd assistant company secretary Lucy Storey, responding to an email by Rowledge architect Mark Westcott calling for the brewery to stand by the original Deed of Gift, said: "Let me first assure you that we have not relinquished the restrictive covenants of the 1947 Deed

of Gift.

"Waverley Borough Council wrote to us last year with details of the [Memorial Hall] proposal and advised they had taken care to ensure there was no infringement of the covenants.

"Having carried out our own due diligence we would agree that the proposal of an extension to the hall, for the purposes described, follows the spirit of the deed.

"We believe that there is no commercial or housing proposed, but that the extension is to cover a day centre for elderly residents of the community, including health, welfare and social activities.

"We believe this to be in keeping with the intention of the deed which specifically states that the land and hall be used for 'any activity of an educational, cultural, social, recreative or charitable nature'.

"Finally, we are assured that the football club will continue to use the sports ground and will be given access to new, higher standard, changing rooms with which they have expressed support. The sports ground will not be affected by the proposal."

The Memorial Hall and adjacent sports ground was gifted to Farnham Urban District Council in October 1947 in memory of the five employees of Farnham United Breweries who lost their lives during the First World War.

When Farnham Urban District Council was disbanded in 1974 the 1947 Deed of Gift was conveyed to Waverley District (later Borough) Council, and likewise following Farnham United Brewery's demise, the beneficial ownership of the Memorial Hall and Sports Ground passed first to Courage, then Scottish and Newcastle, and finally Heineken.

But despite the many changes of beneficiaries and benefactors, the 1947 deed remains unchanged and stipulates that the hall 'shall primarily be used for the purposes of organised indoor games dancing and physical training' and the

sports ground for 'organised outdoor games sports and physical training', as well as for 'any activity of an educational cultural social recreative or charitable nature'.

It explicitly forbids the council from letting the hall or sports ground 'to any one person corporation club organisation or association exclusively for any longer period than one day at a time' - a clause the council has already seemingly breached by awarding an eight-year lease to current tenants Farnham Town FC.

And crucially given Waverley housing aspirations, the deed also states: "The council shall not build or allow to be built upon any part of the said premises any building or erection other than in connection with [its intended uses]."

Waverley is yet to publish the findings of its feasibility study but speaking to *The Herald* earlier this year, Pat Frost, the then-Mayor of Farnham and a member of the special interest group set up by the council to explore ways to bring the former landfill site in Weydon Lane back into public use, described the Memorial Ground as "an ideal site for housing" and stated the covenants on both the Memorial Ground and Weydon Lane are not "unsurmountable".

Responding to Heineken's comments this week, a spokesman for Waverley added: "The council is currently progressing the Memorial Hall refurbishment and is satisfied that all legal requirements have been met.

"As part of the Memorial Hall refurbishment the council is working with Farnham Town FC to provide brand new on-site changing rooms located at the football ground. They are due to be installed before the next football season begins."

The Memorial Hall has already closed for redevelopment and Waverley is expected to sign a contract with a chosen contractor to complete the building works imminently, with the Brightwells Gostrey Centre in line to relocate to the hall once completed.