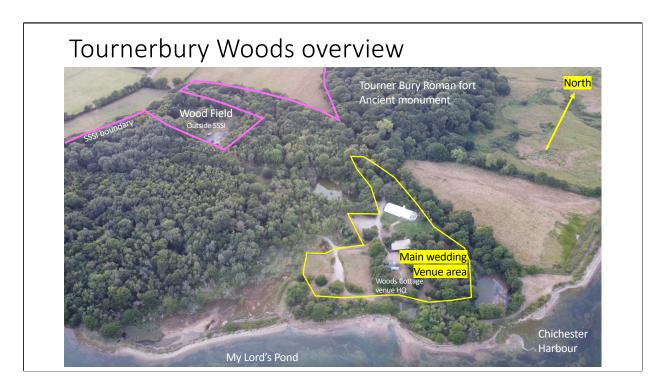
# Saving Tournerbury Woods

Hugh Stallard, Trustee 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024

A warm welcome to all of you and thank you for coming this afternoon.

My name is Hugh Stallard, and I am one of the founding members of Saving Tournerbury Woods.



The purpose of this afternoon is for us to give you some background as not all of you may be familiar with what Saving Tournerbury Woods is all about and the current position.

I would however stress that this is not about politics although sadly politics seems to enmesh itself in too many aspects of our lives.

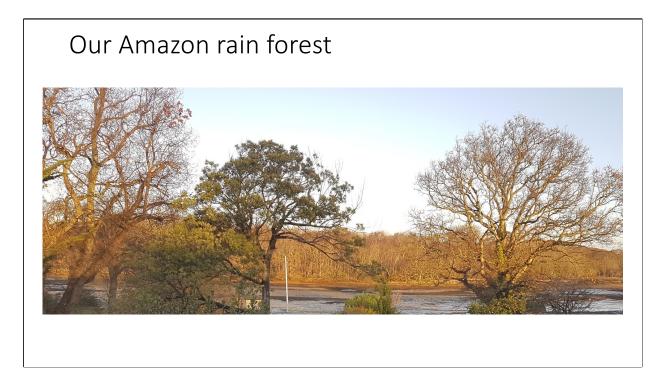
This is about our environment and the protection of that environment for our grandchildren and theirs as well. It is also about applying the rules equally to all.



By way of background both Chichester Harbour and Langstone Harbour are very important for their biodiversity as they are not only Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), but parts of Chichester Harbour and its immediate surrounds are also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds and designated as a Ramsar site for bird protection of worldwide importance.

There are good reasons therefore why Chichester Harbour are protected to this degree.

As you can see on the map Tournerbury Woods directly abuts Chichester Harbour and is not only within the AONB but almost all of it is an SSSI and covered by SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations.



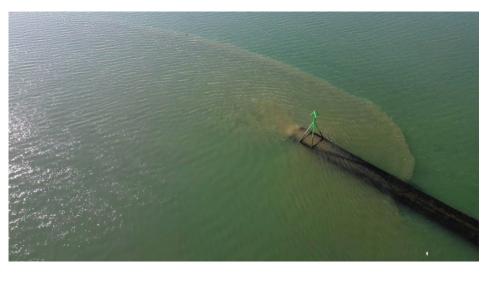
One might well ask why Chichester Harbour and its immediate environment is so special. It is in real terms our equivalent patch of the Amazon rain forest and a unique and important environment and ecosystem. We are lucky to have it on our doorstep, but we all have a duty to look after it.

It contains broadleaved oak woodland, grassland, salt marshes, inter-tidal mud flats and sea grass and is one of the UK's leading locations for overwintering birds.

Chichester Harbour is not just home to a variety of migratory birds, and other flora and fauna but is also used extensively for a whole variety of leisure pursuits, including sailing, paddleboarding, kayaking, canoeing, swimming and fishing.

It is no surprise that Chichester Harbour and its immediate environs are protected to this degree.

# Threats to our environment

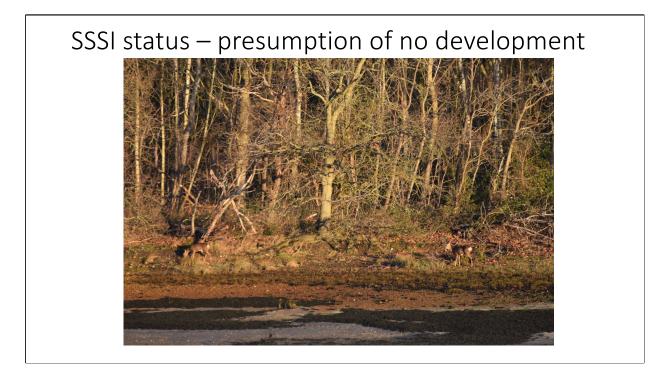


Chichester Harbour faces many real threats to its future which not only come from things like climate change but from activities caused by people, which we can all have an influence on.

Amongst those which affect the sensitive ecosystems, and that humans control, are pollution from sewage, and increasing nutrient pollution caused by intensive agriculture. However, the general loss of important habitats to our flora and fauna by inappropriate development are big contributors.

We can all see why Chichester Harbour is protected by specific designations such as SSSI and AONB status but also by planning legislation. Where society lays down rules through planning laws and designations the rules must be fairly and equally applied to all. A variety of authorities are responsible for enforcing environmental breaches and these include Natural England, Local Authority enforcement teams and the Environment Agency.

However, the sad fact is that increasingly these organisations seem to have inadequate resources to enforce any form of statutory compliance and or are unwilling to do so. This we have seen quite clearly with the Environment Agency's lack of action on persistent pollution of our rivers, harbours and waterways by utility companies like Southern Water.



If we now turn specifically to Tournerbury Woods, it is not only within the AONB but most of it is an SSSI and covered by SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations. It is about 90 acres and privately owned. Tournerbury is recognised as strategically important as it is one of only two ancient woodlands on the shores of the Harbour dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is populated by a variety of wildlife including deer, bats and a rich variety of birdlife. Since 1997 there has been a legal agreement on the management of Tournerbury Woods with Natural England made under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

The general presumption in an SSSI is that no development should take place unless there are very specific reasons to do so. In the 1997 agreement Natural England's objectives for Tournerbury were to 'sustain the various habitats and their communities of plants and animals that make Chichester Harbour of special interest and of international importance'. Tournerbury's objectives were to 'conserve the woodland and manage the land in sympathy with the wildlife interest'.

There are two major issues which concern Saving Tournerbury Woods and those relate to the loss of trees and development activity which has taken place without planning consent over the last 20 years.

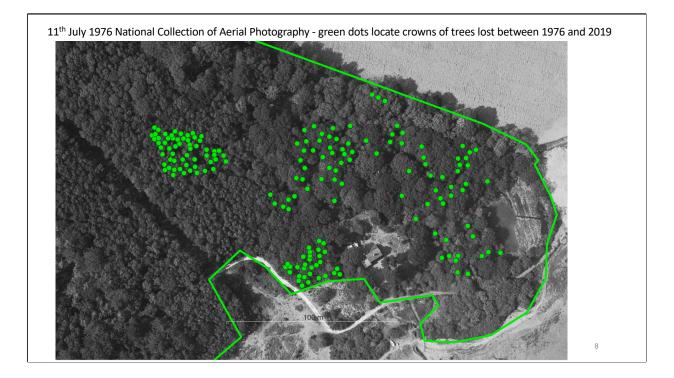


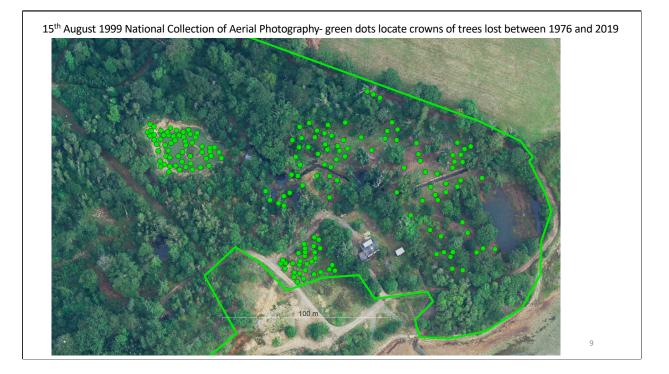
If we deal with the trees first, all trees in Tournerbury Woods are covered by a Havant Tree Preservation Order – TPO448. It is a criminal offence to remove or damage trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order without formal consent. Consents have been given over the last twenty years for the removal of just two trees close to Woods Cottage (the small cottage pre-dating the designation of the SSSI).

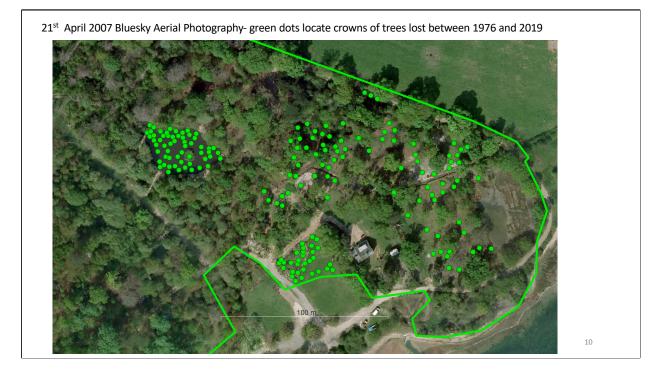
The following slides show you a series of aerial photographs taken over the last 20 years or so which illustrate the change to the tree in Tournerbury Woods. Each green dot shows the approximate location of a tree that is no longer present.

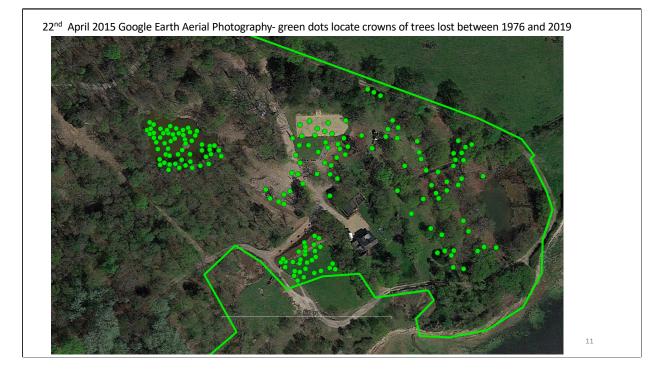
Please bear in mind that under the formal agreement with Natural England, any trees which either fall down or die are required to be left in place for ecological purposes.

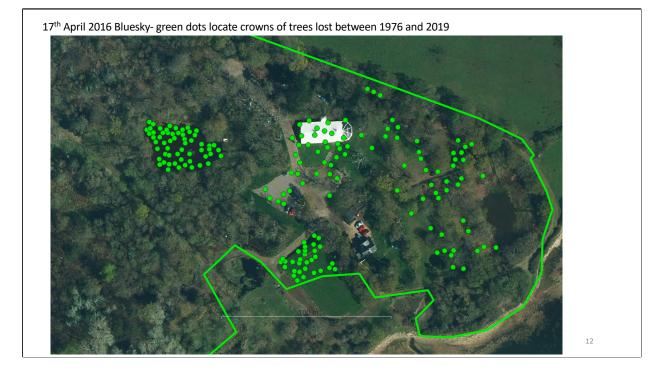
We will now ask you just to consider what the aerial photographs show. We would like to be explicit that, whilst we have evidence that the trees have been lost, we do not know exactly what happened to them. However, the scale of loss is clear, as are the areas affected. You can form your own view.

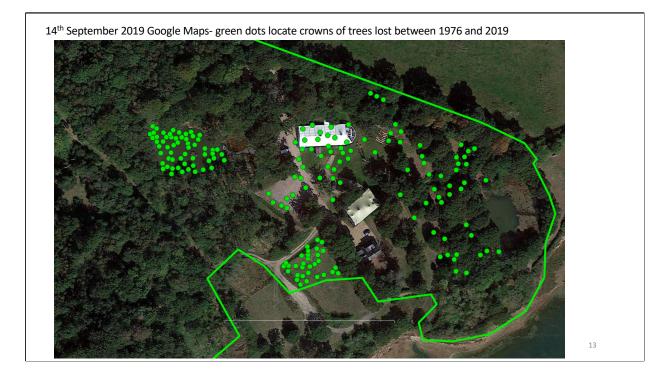












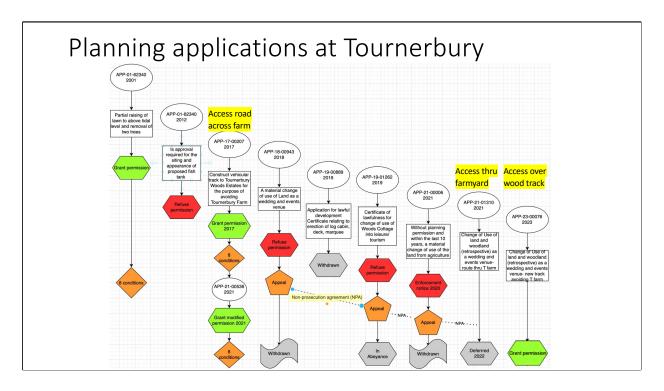
## Natural England Enforcement visit July 2013



Havant Borough Council are the statutory body who are required to enforce Tree Preservation Orders. No other body has this responsibility although Natural England supervises the legal management agreements covering trees.

The Planning Enforcement Officer at Havant Borough Council has told us last year that they are not willing to pursue a possible breach of the Tree Preservation Order. We provided evidence to them such as the aerial photos that are in the public domain. Another example of this publicly available information is the photos taken by Natural England on an enforcement visit to Tournerbury in July 2013. You can form your own view based on what they show.

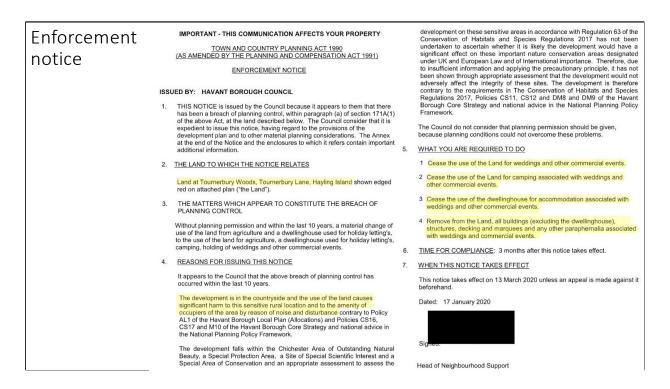
We would also ask you to consider Havant Borough Council's refusal to investigate the position further.



The second major issue is in relation to unauthorised development activity. Over 10 years ago, a permanent wedding and events venue was created without planning consent first being obtained within Tournerbury Woods. That is a clear breach of the rules as no 'permitted development' is allowed in an SSSI without Natural England's consent for this activity.

Various planning applications have been made over time seeking retrospective consent for the marquee and other structures, and all of them, until recently, have been refused. The diagram shows the series of applications made to gain planning consent- each application is one of the vertical lines with the stages of consideration colour coded red for refused, orange for appeals, grey for withdrawn and green for granted.

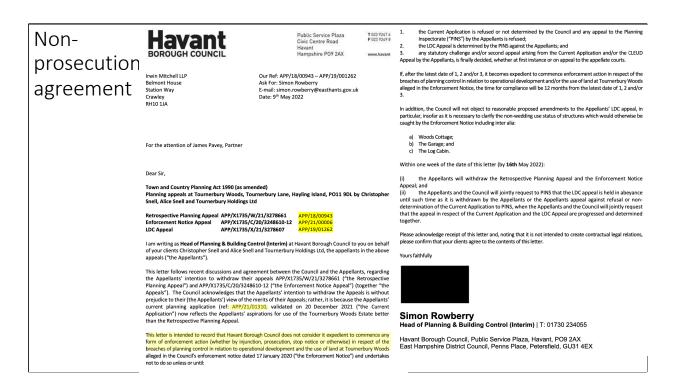
Chichester Harbour Conservancy as a consultee have on each planning application made strong objections to the proposals as being contrary to the best interests of the AONB management plan.



In January 2020, Havant Borough Council served an Enforcement notice on the owners of Tournerbury Woods. An Enforcement Notice can only be issued where there is a clear breach of the rules and is only issued as a last resort. The Enforcement notice came into effect on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and required them to cease all events taking place on site and to remove all the unauthorised development. That of course has not happened.

Whilst building without planning consent is not normally a criminal offence, failure to comply with an Enforcement notice is a criminal offence. We would ask you to reflect on whether this is appropriate behaviour from a Local Authority given the designation of Tournerbury Woods.

To me that is like saying 'you broke the rules so undo what you have done, but in your case you do not have to follow the rules and you can keep making applications until one day we give you consent and pardon everything you have already done against the rules which everyone else has to follow, and by the way you can keep the money you made whilst breaking the rules'. It also begs the question of why Havant's Enforcement team did nothing after serving the Enforcement notice...



We only found out last year through a Freedom of Information Request that Havant Borough Council had entered into a private, non-prosecution agreement with the owners of Tournerbury Woods over 2 years after they served an Enforcement notice on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

That agreement permitted Tournerbury to pursue a further planning application for retrospective consent (APP/21/01310) and to continue to use the site... despite the Enforcement notice!

APP/21/01310 was deferred in December 2022 and has not been decided by the Council, and so this non-prosecution agreement remains in force. APP/21/01310 is identical to the granted application APP/23/00076 apart from the access route, and so we are not clear why the old application APP/21/01310 that goes through Tournerbury Farm is undecided by the Council... unless its sole purpose is to maintain the non-prosecution agreement in force.

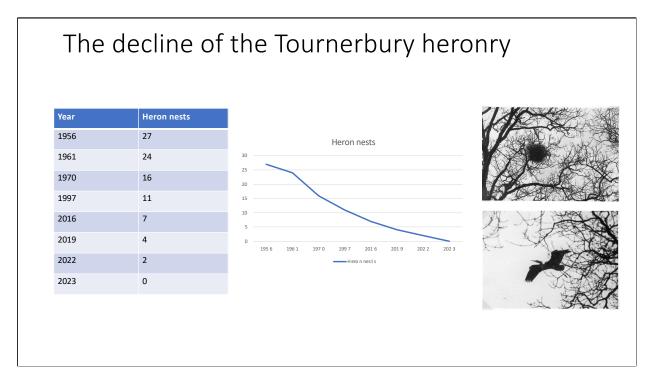
We would ask you to reflect on whether this is appropriate behaviour from a Local Authority given the designations covering Tournerbury Woods.



In September 2023, Havant Borough Council's Planning Committee agreed to grant retrospective consent to a further retrospective planning application (APP/23/00076). Havant Borough Council's Planning Committee considered it to be a sustainable development provided that a new access road was created to the venue that did not pass through the farmyard at Tournerbury Farm as in the previous application APP/21/01310.

It is clearly somewhat difficult to operate a working farm with all the health and safety issues if there is significant traffic going through the farmyard. However, the legal agreement with Natural England forbids the upgrading of tracks in Tournerbury Woods and you will see a photograph now showing the track in question in spring 2023 and where a new bridge will be required over a small stream.

I ask you to reflect on how this new access road could be used in practical terms by all the required traffic in its current state. I cannot imagine, but perhaps you can, how cars and coaches could pass on that track without significant construction work. The planning consent granted in September 2023 was however strictly on the basis that no further events were to take place until such time as the new access track (and bridge) was available.



It is notable that there used to be a sizable heronry in Tournerbury Woods, one of the reasons why the site is so important in conservation terms. The number of nesting herons gradually reduced from about 30 pairs 70 years ago to the point when no herons nested in 2023, largely we believe because of the disturbance from traffic entering the site and the events. Herons need an undisturbed place to nest.

Several local residents have reported startled deer and other wildlife racing around the foreshore pursued by a loose dog during recent shooting events at Tournerbury Woods.



After the planning application APP/23/00076 was granted permission last September, Saving Tournerbury Woods sought legal advice on whether the decision by the Planning Committee had been properly taken. On the basis of the legal advice received, taken with the help of the Environmental Law Foundation, Saving Tournerbury Woods has applied for a judicial review of Havant Borough Council's decision to grant planning consent for the previously unauthorised activities.

We await a Court date. We would like to ask for your support in opposing the development plans of Tournerbury Woods given its designation within the AONB and as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and continue putting the pressure on Havant Borough Council to carry out a full investigation of the tree loss under Tree Preservation Order 448.

We believe that, had the Planning Committee been properly briefed on all matters concerning Tournerbury Woods, they would not have granted consent.



You may be interested to know that the Council has been consulting on further potential sites for development around the Borough, and Tournerbury Woods has been added to the list created in 2022.

Saving Tournerbury Woods is about preserving the special characteristics of Chichester Harbour and Tournerbury Woods for our grandchildren and theirs as well.

# Saving Tournerbury Woods Professor Jonathan Raper, Trustee 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Good afternoon, my name is Professor Jonathan Raper. I am a founding member of Saving Tournerbury Woods and a specialist in English coastal landscapes and their evolution under climate change.



Along with my colleagues in Saving Tournerbury Woods, I have become extremely concerned by the way that the development in Tournerbury woods appears to be in conflict with a wide range of laws and plans for the area.

I would like to take you through some of these concerns in detail.

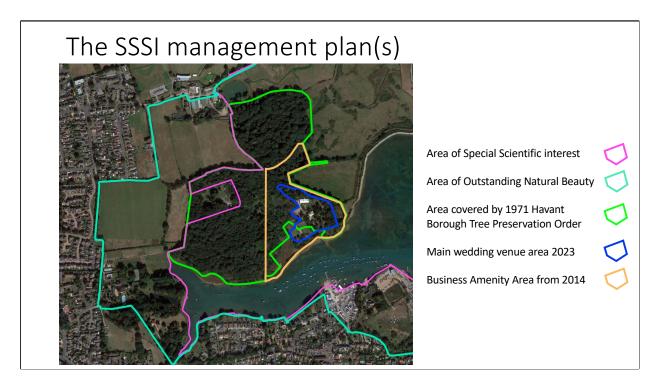
To start with I'd like to show you exactly how unusual it is in England for an event venue to actually stand on SSSI designated land. One planning application submission by Tournerbury provided a list of 16 allegedly comparable venues and I show you a selection of these here. In all 16 cases apart from Tournerbury, the venue buildings are either outside the SSSI, or the SSSI has been wrapped around them because the venue buildings were there before they were designated by law. The Tournerbury venue is actually on land that was 150-year-old forest when designated in 1970 and which has been subsequently been developed into an open parkland.



The foundation of all decisions made about development and conservation should be the protections set out in the law. I will show you on these slides how Tournerbury and the surrounding area are covered by these legal designations.

Firstly, you can see here the pink line showing you the area that is inside the Chichester harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest managed by Natural England under a legal agreement. Secondly, you can see the pale green line, showing the outline of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is supervised by the Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

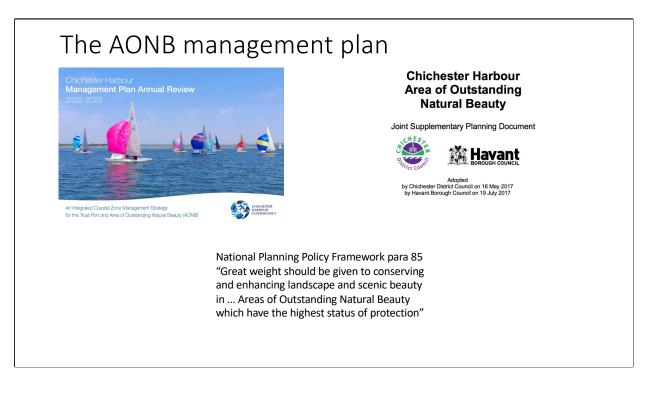
Thirdly, you can see the bright green line, going around Tournerbury woods and including the ancient monument fort area at the top, which shows the area covered by Havant Tree Preservation Order 448. Fourthly, you can see the area marked by the blue line that outlines the area of the wedding venue, some of which extends under the trees into a total of 3000 m<sup>2</sup> of gravel car parking for up to 150 cars.



Finally, you can see this area marked by the orange line. In October 2013, 16 years after the legal management agreement was agreed by Tournerbury with Natural England, Tournerbury produced their own version of the management agreement that contained a complete exclusion to all the rules applying to the SSSI inside the area marked by the orange line. This one feature was the only difference between the two versions and it was produced 3 months after the Natural England enforcement visit of July 2013.

Unfortunately, Natural England agreed to treat this version as valid in May 2014 despite its lack of authenticating correspondence. However, we believe they followed the wrong procedure to accept it, and that this decision is incompatible with the protections of the SSSI. Natural England have also classified Tournerbury Woods as in Favourable condition, despite the loss of a significant amount of the forest at designation in 1970, and despite their own senior staff questioning this decision in documents produced to us under Freedom of Information disclosures.

We have therefore appealed this decision to the Office of Environmental Protection who regulate Natural England. If this body finds in our favour, then this so-called Business Amenity Area would no longer exist, and this would restore the rules of the SSSI, excluding its use as a venue and requiring restoration of the original landscape.

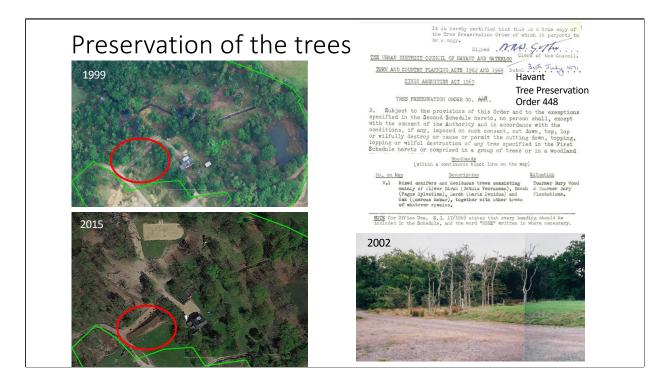


Tournerbury Woods is also covered by the management plan for the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The two local authorities of Chichester and Havant are required by law to "have regard" to the management plan for the harbour, and they have agreed the Joint Supplementary Planning Document that sets out the way they will judge development proposals put to them.

Our Judicial Review legal challenge says that Havant:

- 1. Fails to even mention the Joint Supplementary Planning Document, which sets out what the Councils have agreed with the Conservancy about planning decisions in the Harbour
- 2. Failed to take account of the policies in the Management Plan as the proposed development is incompatible with them

If the judge accepts our submission, which was made on the advice of an expert lawyer in this field, they will quash the decision to grant planning permission, and the council will be required to make the decision again after taking account of the points we have made. We would expect a judgement within the next month, when we also hope to have a response from the Office for Environmental Protection. We aim to ensure that the council will have to take account of all of the issues that we believe that they previously ignored if the decision returns to them to be re-taken by the Planning Committee.



We showed you earlier how trees have progressively disappeared from Tournerbury Woods, since the site was designated as an SSSI in 1970.

I can show you two small case studies of trees that disappeared. In the location inside the red oval in the 1999 air photo, there were some trees growing in 1999, but after the landscaping of a large amount of adjacent builders' rubble authorised by a planning consent in 2001, you can see in the 2002 ground photograph that this group of trees appears to have died. Following this area through time we can see that the dead trees and the healthy ones behind them are no longer there in 2015 when the lawn has been extended and an earthwork has been constructed at this location.

You can also see in the 2015 photograph the footprint of the marquee that we clearly see on the site today and by comparison with the 1999 photograph you can see that it too has replaced a number of trees. You can form your own view on what you see in these photographs.

We have asked Havant planning Enforcement team to investigate our evidence of the disappearance of trees. However, they have refused on the basis that Natural England have not reported any concerns to them! Natural England told us that this is not their

responsibility. As we do not think this is satisfactory, we are in the process of taking this further to the Local Government Ombudsman.

# <image><figure><image>

When you undertake the diversion or infilling of a water course, or a pool, you are legally required to obtain Ordinary Watercourse Consent from Hampshire County Council Flood and Water Management team.

Comparing waterbodies and watercourses clearly shown on 1999 air photograph with what can be seen in the 2019 image shows:

- watercourses 80m long have been infilled
- pools totaling 380 sq. m have been infilled

The infilling work was undertaken between 2013 and spring 2015 based on air photo evidence.

The Flood and Water Management team have confirmed to us that they have not given any Ordinary Watercourse Consents for Tournerbury Woods and we are asking them to investigate further.

### Summing Up

What happens next?

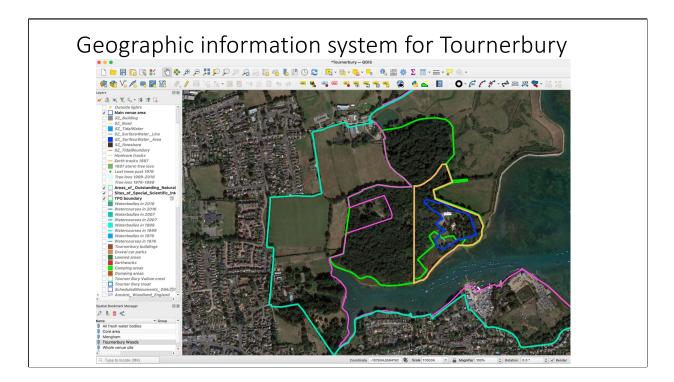
- We will pursue complaints and appeals to ensure planning and environmental law is applied correctly and fairly
- We will seek the greatest degree of restitution of the historic biodiversity in the woods
- We will monitor the use of the site for compliance with formal agreements
- We will campaign for public access to the woods and the hill fort
- We will support neighbours to the woods in pursuit of these aims

How you can help us...

- We will ask you to write to your local councillors about the issues at Tournerbury Woods
- We will ask you to object to any further planning applications
- We will ask you to be our eyes and ears to record significant events visible from around the woods
- We will ask for contributions to our funds or pointers to those who can help

Thank you for coming today

You can contact us on info@savingtournerburywoods.org.uk



A view of our geographic information system containing publicly available information about Tournerbury and the surrounding area displayed over Google aerial imagery.