

Before Hearing Commissioners
at Christchurch

under: the Resource Management Act 1991

in the matter of: application RMA/2021/3921 for consents to demolish
the heritage-listed Grand National Stand at Riccarton
Racecourse

and: **Canterbury Jockey Club**
Applicant

Evidence of Tim Mills (company)

Dated: 17 August 2022

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EVIDENCE OF TIM MILLS

INTRODUCTION

- 1 My full name is Timothy William Mills.
- 2 I am the Chief Executive of the Canterbury Jockey Club (*CJC*, the *Club*) and have held this position for 26 years.
- 3 I have worked in the racing industry my entire life starting with the New Zealand Racing Conference upon leaving school in December 1979. In 1987 I moved to Christchurch to take up the role of Racing Manager with the CJC before being appointed Chief Executive in 1996.
- 4 I am familiar with CJC's application to demolish the heritage-listed Grand National Stand (*GNS*) at Riccarton Park Racecourse (the *Application*). I am authorised to give evidence on behalf of CJC.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- 5 The Canterbury Jockey Club has been in existence for 167 years. As would be expected over such a long existence extraordinary advancements and evolutions have taken place across all aspects of the Club's operation.
- 6 The CJC built the GNS 100 years ago to meet the needs of the sport of thoroughbred racing and those people participating in it at that time. It was built to assist the Club's purpose of being.
- 7 Through this evolution and the Canterbury earthquakes the GNS is now counterproductive to the Club's purpose of being. The use of the GNS steadily declined as modern means of participating in racing (and sport in general) resulting in more and more off-course participation and a drift to big numbers of spectators attending on a small number of major days.
- 8 The cost of repair and bringing the GNS up to the required level of new building standards is of such a magnitude that it would financially cripple the CJC and undermine its purpose of being to the extent that the CJC would not be able to fulfil that purpose.
- 9 The reality is that the CJC has the opportunity with a potential redevelopment of the site of the GNS to set itself up to progress and benefit its stakeholders and the people of Christchurch and Canterbury for the next 167 years.

THE CANTERBURY JOCKEY CLUB (CJC) AND RICCARTON PARK RACECOURSE

- 10 The Riccarton Park Racecourse is a Racecourse Reserve the ownership of which is vested in the Trustees of the Christchurch Racecourse (the *Trustees*) by the Riccarton Racecourse Act 2016. This superseded the Christchurch Racecourse Reserve Act 1878. The land is held by the Board of the Trustees on trust for the purposes of racing.
- 11 The Trustees in turn lease the entirety of the land to the CJC to manage for the purpose of thoroughbred racing. The CJC is responsible for the construction and management of all facilities on the property that are needed to conduct racing. CJC therefore owns all of the buildings and racing infrastructure at Riccarton Park Racecourse.
- 12 The CJC is a not-for-profit incorporated society affiliated with New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing.
- 13 The Trustees and the CJC are entirely different entities, with their operation and finances completely separate from each other. I note that the Trustees were the body responsible for the recent sale of some of the Riccarton Racecourse land to Ngāi Tahu Property Limited (which is currently being developed as the Kevin Hickman Retirement Village by Ryman Healthcare), and the Trustees received the proceeds from this sale. CJC does not own any land at Riccarton Racecourse it can sell.
- 14 CJC has recently completed the construction of a new synthetic racetrack, the second of its kind in New Zealand, after receiving \$10.5 million from the Government's Provincial Growth fund for this purpose.
- 15 The wider Riccarton Park Racecourse provides not only racing amenities, but also supports the Riccarton Rotary Sunday Market and the historic Tea House (the *Tea House*) both of which are enjoyed by the public. The racecourse is also used by the public, outside of racing and training hours, by the general public, for walking, exercising, sports team training, dog walking and such like.
- 16 CJC hold 31 race days each racing year. Some of New Zealand's most important races and racemeetings are conducted at Riccarton Park including the New Zealand Cup Meeting in November, the Grand National Festival in August and the Autumn Racing Carnival.
- 17 The biggest event, being the New Zealand Cup Meeting every November, sees around 15,000 attendees on Cup Day. The remainder of the race days vary between 750 to 4,000 attendees per day.

- 18 In the course of its operation in excess of 650 people derive some form of income each year from the CJC.

HERITAGE AT RICCARTON PARK RACECOURSE

- 19 The CJC was established in 1854 and held its first meeting at the Riccarton Racecourse in March 1855. Riccarton Racecourse subsequently became the home of the New Zealand Cup in 1867. To have raced at the same venue every year since is a feat no racing club (Nor, possibly, any other land-based sporting club) can match.
- 20 Two heritage buildings exist at Riccarton Park Racecourse – the GNS and the Tea House. Both were designed by Alfred and Sidney Luttrell, local architects who specialised in racecourse building design and gained many of their commissions through Sidney’s involvement in numerous racing and jockey clubs.
- 21 The CJC pride themselves in their heritage and in being one of the oldest (if not the oldest) organisations in Christchurch. The CJC is committed to preserving heritage values at Riccarton Racecourse.
- 22 An example of this commitment by the CJC is its restoration of the Tea House. The Tea House was in a dis-used state in 2000, and the CJC along with local and Council support took up the challenge of restoring the building to its original glory. In 2004, the late Honourable Mick Connelly and Lesley Keast raised funds to assist in this restoration.
- 23 The restoration was undertaken by William Fulton, heritage architect also providing evidence at this hearing. The successful restoration of the Tea House was recognised by the NZ Institute of Architects and the Christchurch Civic Trust in 2009.
- 24 Today, the Tea House is used regularly as a function venue capable of hosting up to 150 people.
- 25 In 2005 then CJC celebrated 150 years of existence with part of the festivities being the publication of the history of the Club in a book titled ‘Thunder in the Wind’ written by New Zealand’s foremost Racing Journalist David McCarthy. The book records Christchurch City and Canterbury Province being linked for eternity with the earliest settlers and forebears having roles to play in the establishment and development of the CJC.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE RACING INDUSTRY IN NEW ZEALAND

- 26 The racing industry has developed and changed significantly since the construction of the GNS in the 1920’s. In those halcyon days

attendance at racemeetings was the only way to participate in the sport other than through the wireless and starting price bookmakers.

- 27 The evolution of the TAB in 1951, extended radio coverage, and trackside television broadcasting has increased the sport's off-course participation appeal. Inevitably, this has also reduced the sport's on-course attendance. People no longer need to travel to a racecourse to attend the races – they are now capable of participating in their own lounge, hospitality outlets or even on their cell phones.
- 28 Other than major Carnival race days when large crowds are attracted, attendance at the Racecourse is largely comprised of members, owners, sponsors and enthusiasts.
- 29 As a result of this transition, racing clubs around the country have changed their focus from maintaining massive infrastructure for large attendance to instead providing facilities for the core requirements of the club, with the ability to expand through temporary infrastructure for major race days when required.
- 30 This is a modern worldwide trend with the practice now being to design a racecourse to the capacity of its third or fourth biggest event of the year, with the ability to expand facilities through temporary facilities.
- 31 The New Zealand thoroughbred racing industry itself is reflecting this with a consolidation to fewer racecourses venues nationwide (examples of this include the closure in recent times of courses like Motukarara, Waimate, Winton, Dargaville, and Waipukurau). New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing Inc's investment policy is supporting the key racecourses across the country to accommodate the bulk of race meetings, and a retention of tourist type racecourses that attract big attendances at holiday time.
- 32 Built at a time when racing had a much greater following, membership and attendance, the GNS was constructed to meet the demands of that previous era of racing. Over the ensuing century racing has evolved whereby patrons now participate in the sport in a greater variety of means such as television, streaming, radio, cell phones, social outlets, and TABs. The demand for massive grandstands simply no longer exists – the modern race meeting no longer requires a building of that nature.
- 33 The GNS is no longer required by CJC for its highest attendance meetings (including for the New Zealand Cup Meeting and Cup Day). The newer Club Grandstand is more than capable of providing indoor facilities for those attending, with CJC able to bring on additional infrastructure as and when required.

THE GRAND NATIONAL STAND (GNS) AND THE EARTHQUAKES

- 34 The GNS has formed an integral part of the Riccarton Park Racecourse for a very long time. The CJC has an emotional attachment from a bygone era to this spectacular building. I will personally be very sad but realistic to see it go, should this consent be granted.
- 35 Prior to the Canterbury earthquakes, the GNS was used at only three or four racedays of the year and even then it was only ever used to approximately 80% of its capacity.
- 36 Following the Canterbury earthquake sequence, and more recently the Kaikoura earthquake, several buildings were physically damaged, including the GNS.
- 37 CJC held a material damage insurance policy covering all the buildings on the site. CJC made a claim on its insurers in respect of these buildings including the GNS and entered into a confidential settlement agreement with its insurers.
- 38 CJC is not in a position to be able to release details of that settlement agreement but it can confirm that the amount received from its insurers is well less than half the costs of repair or rebuild of all the damaged buildings on site. The settlement of the insurance was a cash sum for CJC to spend as it saw fit and did not require the repair or rebuild of any particular building.

THE COST OF REPAIR AND CJC FUNDS

- 39 The cost of repair of the GNS is significant and CJC simply do not have the means to fund the financial deficit.
- 40 CJC has either already spent, or is committed to spending, all of the insurance proceeds on projects that are required as a priority to enable the racecourse to keep functioning in a competitive environment. We would not responsibly allocate money to a building with little present day purpose and risk the future of the racecourse.
- 41 CJC's annual reports¹ clearly demonstrate that CJC does not have the ability to fund millions of dollars into the restoration of a building that will have no commercial, functional or racing use.
- 42 As noted above, the nature of the racing industry has changed significantly over the last hundred years, and there are far less

¹ <https://racing.riccartonpark.nz/sites/riccartonpark/files/2022-06/Annual%20Report-2021-%20CJC.pdf>

attendances at race meetings. As such, CJC have no need for a venue the scale of the GNS to accommodate spectators anymore.

- 43 CJC anticipate it would only really require the use of the GNS for one race meeting per year and even then it would be nowhere near fully utilised. GNS is capable of comfortably accommodating all race meetings through the use of existing infrastructure and temporary marquees.
- 44 To require the CJC to spend capital to fund the significant restoration of a structure that might only be used once a year is not commercially feasible, and could itself risk the entire future of the CJC and put the club into financial ruin.
- 45 For these same reasons, should this resource consent not be granted, CJC will not be restoring the GNS and nor can it be required to remain on-site, continue to be fenced off from the public, and would continue to deteriorate and be an eyesore to all those using and visiting the racecourse. This would be a sad outcome for the future of the racecourse.

THE VISION FOR THE SITE

- 46 While the current consent is for the demolition of the GNS, which allows for the site to be levelled and grassed, the CJC has a vision for the site of the GNS to ensure that it plays a vital and profitable role in the future of the Club and in the future of racing at Riccarton Park.
- 47 CJC is looking at a combination of grassed terrace embankments with a single story race day/function room and roof top viewing platform, to provide a facility to accommodate functions and race day attendance.
- 48 The terraces will be designed to accommodate temporary tenting to provide facilities for meetings on the scale of the New Zealand Cup Meeting. This will provide a much more family friendly space that is appropriate for the nature of thoroughbred racing today.
- 49 Rather than being a financial drag on the Club this redevelopment will be an income generating asset thus helping secure the future and financial viability of the Club so that it can continue to serve the sport for the next 100 years to come.
- 50 However, the Club cannot realistically start to seek funds for any prospective development of the site until there is certainty that the Grandstand will be demolished and that the land is available for a new building.

RESPONSE TO SUBMITTERS

- 51 A number of submissions expressed a sadness or regret that the GNS might be demolished. I wish to acknowledge that myself and the CJC feel the same way. However, the CJC will not ever be in a position to contemplate restoration of the building given the cost required, and the limited use a grandstand of that scale would have today.
- 52 The CJC has done everything in its power to date to protect the heritage values at Riccarton Park Racecourse. Unfortunately however, it is not (and will not be) in a position to restore this building to its former glory as it has done for the Tea House.
- 53 CJC will ensure that records are taken of the GNS prior to demolition, and that materials that could be reused elsewhere at the racecourse are retained and reused (for example in whatever structure might one day locate on the site of the GNS).
- 54 Ms Tutauha in her submission suggested that the GNS could be retrofitted and repurposed for the arts (for example for covered music and performances). As noted above, the Trustees were vested the land under the Riccarton Racecourse Act 2016 for the sole purpose of racing and are only allowed to lease the land to the CJC for that same purpose. Therefore any alternative use of the GNS must relate to racing.

CONCLUSION

- 55 It is with a heavy heart that the CJC have filed this Application to demolish the GNS. But unfortunately, the nature of the modern racing industry, coupled with the significant cost to restore the GNS to an appropriate standard, have left the CJC with no other choice.
- 56 The CJC pride itself on its heritage, and will continue to do so moving forward, including by ensuring that the legacy of the GNS lives on for years to come through the continued success of the CJC.

Dated: 17 August 2022

Tim Mills