

FORMER STANMORE AND EDGWARE GOLF CENTRE, BROCKLEY HILL, STANMORE

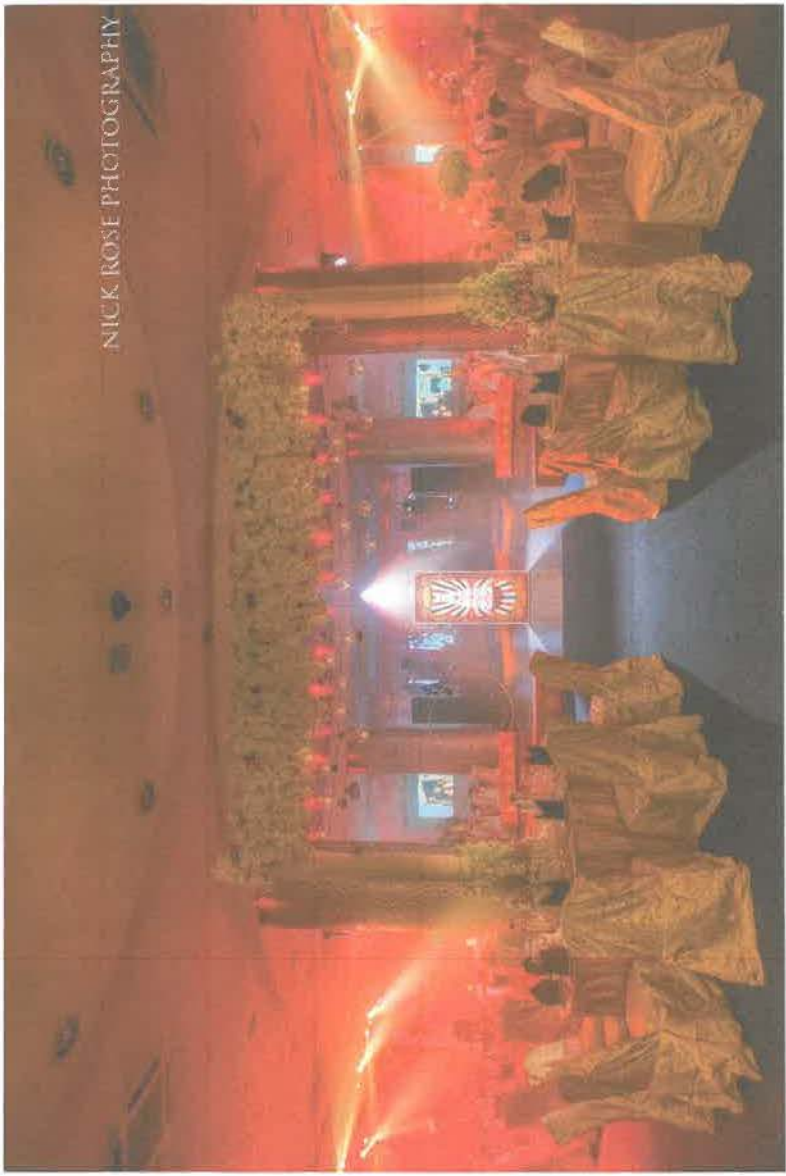
PINS REF: APP/M5450/W/22/3299650

STATEMENT BY RAVI RUPARELIA

1. My name is Ravi Ruparelia and I provide this statement on behalf of the appellant in this appeal, Sairam (Holdings) Ltd.
2. My family are specialists within the leisure, hotels, restaurants and the banqueting sector. I have grown up within hospitality and my earliest jobs were working in restaurants as a waiter in Harrow. In the 20 years that my family has been active in the leisure and hospitality industry in and around Harrow, we have acquired a deep understanding of the diverse population of Harrow and the requirements, in particular, of its South Asian communities when hosting significant social events such as weddings.
3. Our previous banqueting facility at the Premier Banqueting site in Harrow was born out of necessity. My family has operated restaurants in Harrow since 2002. We were soon receiving requests to provide on-site catering in school halls and leisure centres for large-scale ethnic weddings and associated events, mainly for the Hindu and Muslim communities of the area. These venues were not designed for such events but it was common for members of these communities to have to resort to such venues for their special day, often in old and tired buildings, in the absence of a more appropriate facility. Only a very small minority from these communities could afford the high cost of hiring a large central London hotel or a countryside estate for the large numbers that typically attend South Asian weddings. There was therefore a clear need to provide an affordable banqueting facility in Harrow that met the particular social and religious requirements of the various local South Asian communities.
4. Those of Hindu and Muslim faith typically have large gatherings for their special events. A wedding is not one afternoon of vows, but a time for families to get together over a longer period. A wedding is a celebration of the union of two families and all family members, and a high number of friends of both families, are invited. These weddings last for days, sometimes weeks, and are planned in intricate detail years in advance.
5. We understood this and so we created our bespoke event space at our former location at the Premier Banqueting site in Harrow. From the outset, we marketed the business as a "one-stop shop" not only for South Asian weddings, but also for weddings for other local ethnic minority communities for whom large events are typical (for example, the local Afghan, Arabic and Somali communities). No longer did a bride and groom and their families need to look for a venue and then re-design the interior from scratch to enable a South Asian wedding to be hosted. No longer did they need to search for caterers and their décor. We also enabled families to avoid the expense of employing event management companies to investigate the feasibility of hosting a

South Asian wedding at locations that had no experience of hosting such events. At last, Harrow had a venue which enabled its Indian, Pakistani, Afghanistan, Arabic and African communities to host weddings and other events in a bespoke building that was fitting for the important life events that were being celebrated. As we encompassed all aspects of the service in-house, it became affordable for families to celebrate those life events with us without having to compromise on respecting their cultural heritage. It is no exaggeration to say that we thought of ourselves as performing an essential social and cultural service for one of the largest South Asian populations in the United Kingdom. We were able to provide dignity to families who wanted to respect their traditional customs.

6. Please see overleaf some examples of how our venue catered for the various types of events that we hosted, with the specialist staging and décor required.







7. Over its period of operation, Premier Banqueting held thousands of events, with variations in the set-up and timeline of events that was mainly dependent on the faith of those celebrating. The one common factor was that the venue was always ready in terms of décor, catering and management so that all those attending would have a seamless experience.
8. For example, those of Hindu faith would have the religious ceremonies in the morning and certain patterns and traditions needed to be followed so that the respective families of the bride and groom were initially kept apart. On the other hand, Arabic communities require segregation between men and woman and we preserved that by separating the venue and having female-only staff on those event days. Our teams understood that particular periods were holy for particular faiths, for example Ramadan for Muslims. The weeks following Ramadan are an especially important period for holding weddings. Knowing these communities and their cultures as well as we do, we would plan for such high concentrations of events months in advance so that there would be sufficient specialist food, and sufficient numbers of appropriate staff, when the busy periods came. We also planned our business appropriately around blackout periods when weddings are not allowed for those of Hindu faith. This awareness of various cultural nuances and sensitivities can only be acquired through years of experience and knowing these communities as well as we do. It is not just a matter of opening up a venue, but of understanding specific cultural needs and preparing in advance accordingly.
9. I should add that the Peel House Car Park near to our Premier Banqueting venue gave us experience of managing car parking for large events. Our use of the car park provided a source of income for the Council as we block-booked spaces for events in

advance. However, not all events required the car park to be used given the numbers travelling to and from the venue by coach. Coaches would drop off guests directly outside the venue and then go back to their off-site coach park. As we would know generally years in advance the number of people attending an event, we would know the number of coaches required and the number of car parking spaces needed per event.

10. Unfortunately, in 2015, we received a major blow when the Council presented plans for the regeneration of Wealdstone which included demolishing the Peel House Car Park on which our venue relied, and reformatting the street which would make it impossible for guests to access our venue.
11. We urgently requested meetings with the Council and had various meetings with Mr Paul Nichols (Divisional Director of Regeneration and Planning), Cllr David Perry (Leader of Harrow Council), Cllr Keith Ferry (Regeneration), Mr Michael Lockwood (Chief Executive) and others.
12. In various emails, correspondence and public forums, all these individuals spoke of the importance of supporting our business as an important element of Harrow's social and cultural infrastructure. In March 2016, the Harrow Times reported Cllr Ferry (Regeneration) as having said that *"the council had been helping the owners find new premises in the borough and was almost fully covering the cost of its move"* (see Appendix 1).
13. This search involved looking at 7 sites within Harrow and 12 in the wider boroughs. The Council was supportive of keeping our business in the borough as they understood the employment and cultural importance of our venue. Harrow Councillor Susan Hall at the time stated *"You'll be removing one of the best businesses in Harrow, which Premier Banqueting is. Let's think this through before we go ahead with this ridiculous plan."* (see Appendix 1).
14. The dialogue has remained open since then, with emails and face-to-face meetings between ourselves and the Council. In this spirit, prior to purchasing the site that is the subject of the current appeal at the end of October 2019 with the intention of relocating our banqueting business there, we approached the Vice Chief Executive of Harrow Council, Mr Paul Walker, who arranged an urgent pre-application meeting for us with the Council's Head of Development Management, Ms Beverley Kuchar, at the beginning of October 2019.
15. We knew the officers at Harrow Council understood the importance of our business for local South Asian communities, as many of them had been involved with assisting relocation since 2015. We had several pre-application discussions with officers about the design and massing of the scheme, and we acted on the advice they gave us. Throughout the pre-application discussions, officers remained supportive of the need to relocate the Premier Banqueting venue within the Borough. Positive progress was made at each stage of the pre-application process to refine and amended the design and scale of the scheme to accord with Green Belt parameters. It was therefore

disappointing that these constructive pre-application discussions ended with the Council's members deciding to refuse planning permission. This contributed to the current unacceptable position of there no longer being a single venue in the Borough that provides all the facilities required by members of Harrow's sizeable South Asian and other communities when hosting large social events.

16. In the Hindu and Muslim faiths, places of worship do not provide for weddings and associated social events. Religious leaders therefore performed these ceremonies in our venue. With the closure of all other venues in Harrow that previously offered a viable alternative to our offer, I consider it essential that this appeal succeeds to restore dignity to members of South Asian communities who live in Harrow and who are currently unable to host culturally appropriate weddings within their own administrative borough. I note the argument that adequate, alternative venues do, in fact, exist, but none of these bills itself as catering for weddings. In contrast, our family business provides an essential and affordable service for these communities enabling them to have a culturally appropriate wedding near their home in the presence of their families and loved ones.

17. I have attached to my statement various letters of support from religious and community leaders.

Appendix 2 – Letter from His Holiness Shri Rajrajeshwar Guruji

Appendix 3 – Letter from Councillor Chohan

Appendix 4 – Letter from Dinesh Shonchhatra, President LCNL

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts set out in this statement are true.

Signed



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13/09/2022

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Campaigners fear plans to move the Civic Centre will 'force communities out of Wealdstone'

3rd March 2016



The Civic Centre

By **Beth Cherryman**

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Campaigners fear council plans to move the Civic Centre will "force communities out of Wealdstone".

A petition was presented at full council on Thursday, February 25, saying under the plans businesses and large local employers in Wealdstone such as Premier Banqueting London could face closure, with its building demolished to make way for the new Civic Centre.

It said many businesses in the area would be undermined by closing the Peel House car park and that putting such assets at risk would be a major loss to Wealdstone's economy.

Leader of the Conservative Group in Harrow, Cllr Susan Hall, said: "This is a very important business, this will be harmful to a lot of people who work for that business. This is their business, their livelihood put on the line here."

She said Premier Banqueting, in Canning Road, employs about 120 people, most of whom are Harrow residents.

But she said many other businesses in the town will be damaged if Peel House car park is closed.

Cllr Hall continued: "It will damage the entire Wealdstone business community. It's absolutely ridiculous. You say you are making a difference for local businesses, well you are - you're going to finish them all off.

"You'll be removing one of the best businesses in Harrow, which

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Premier Banqueting is. Let's think this through before we go ahead with this ridiculous plan."

In response, Cllr Keith Ferry, responsible for business, planning and regeneration at Harrow Council, said there would be a new car park, more houses, more offices and a new voluntary organisations hub. In addition, he said the existing Civic Centre site will become new homes for more than 480 families.

But Mr Ruparelia, who runs Premier Banqueting with his father, said: "In a time of austerity, it is important to provide support to good businesses.

"Premier Banqueting London, which is a business within you ward, is a good example of this as it currently generates £106,792 per annum for the car park, £50,286 per annum in business rates and in 2015 £417,723 in expenditure to local suppliers.

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"We understand the need for re-generation, however ours is not the only business which survives on the use of the Peel House car park.

"Our petition, which has generated over 3,000 signatures, is from members of our local community and businesses which need these types of amenity space.

"If the council offices are to only move to the Peel House site; how will the council fulfill its pledge to provide enough car parking spaces for the businesses and residents of Wealdstone?"

Leader of the council Cllr David Perry said Peel House car park was underused throughout most of the working week and businesses would be able to use a new car park that would be part of the new Civic Centre development.

Rosalyn Neale asked: "If Premier Banqueting is forced to close or to leave Harrow, what will the council do to support the

employees who would almost certainly lose their jobs?"

But Cllr Ferry responded that Premier Banqueting was not being forced out. He said the council had been helping the owners find new premises in the borough and was almost fully covering the cost of its move.

He added: "Replacing the Civic Centre will open up the site to development and commercial opportunities, it will raise several million per year and create employment opportunities in Wealdstone."

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Dear Sirs

International Siddhashram Shakti Centre UK is a registered Charity organisation with the principal activity of propagating Hindu philosophy, through celebrating religious and cultural events for the community and for mankind, at their premises in 22 Palmerston Road, Harrow-weald, Middlesex HA3 7RR. We closely work with *New Scotland Yard Met –Police as Hindu faith leadership and carry out volunteered chaplain work, Home Office departure services and London Fire Brigade*. We touch the lives of thousands of people in the London Borough of Harrow, which has the largest Indian community in the United Kingdom.

It is these fundamental roles and playing a community part for thousands of individuals in Harrow, I have an intricate understanding of the multicultural communities which are based here. My role is to support religious faith and community infrastructure and the use of Premier Banqueting facility in Harrow was essential to this need. Having a thorough understanding of the south Asian community I attended many events in this venue in my spiritual capacity. The loss of this venue has created a vacuum in the community which we are desperate to fill.

The scale of the Asian community in Harrow is vast and continues to grow, with families moving far and wide to be closer to their loved ones. Harrow has diversified to meet the needs for these communities, with large parts of Harrow dedicated to the culture that these communities brings; be it retailers, restaurants, events and places of worship which everyone has benefited from.

The hole that Premier Banqueting has left after being in operation for so many years has been catastrophic as thousands of individuals no longer have a place for gathering for their uniquely placed events. These events require a thorough understanding of religious practices and due to certain factors over the past few years such as the loss of Premier Banqueting and VIP Lounge there are no venues in Harrow to assist with these communities.

We have worked closely with Premier Banqueting since 2015 as part of their relocation plans and we were delighted that finally they had a potential site to serve the community for gatherings. We are fundamentally in support for the proposed banqueting facility at Brockley Hill, Harrow.

We are very happy with the plans that we have seen and the applicant has our full support. We can't wait to have a venue our community in Harrow to hold their holy events.

Please feel free to contact me direct on +44 (0) 7812180303 if you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

His Holiness Shri Rajrajeshwar Gurujii
Founder and Spiritual Leader



DUNN Ben - MERCURE Banbury Whately Hall GM

From: Sandip Ruparelia <sandip@angelcareplc.co.uk>
Sent: 07 September 2022 16:36
To: RAVI Ruparelia
Subject: Fwd: Letter of Support for Premier Banqueting

Fyi

Sandip Ruparelia
Managing Director
Angel Care / MNS Care PLC
www.carehomesgroup.com

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Chohan, Councillor Bhagwanji" <Cllr.Bhagwanji.Chohan@brent.gov.uk>
Date: 7 September 2022 at 16:35:29 BST
To: sandip@angelcareplc.co.uk
Subject: Fwd: Letter of Support for Premier Banqueting

Kind Regards,
Cllr Bhagwanji Chohan
Alperton Ward, Labour.
Ex-Mayor of Brent 2017/18
Mob-
Mail-

From: Chohan, Councillor Bhagwanji <Cllr.Bhagwanji.Chohan@brent.gov.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, September 7, 2022 4:27:35 PM
To: Sandip@anglecareplc.co.uk <Sandip@anglecareplc.co.uk>
Subject: Letter of Support for Premier Banqueting

Dear Sirs

Letter of Support for Premier Banqueting

My name is Bhagwanji Chohan and I am councillor for, Brent, Alperton . A large proportion of the community I represent are from the Hindu and Muslim communities. I wish to express my concern at the loss of Premier Banqueting which provided an important service to this community.

I understand that Premier Banqueting has closed and has been unable to find an alternative venue from which to operate in Harrow despite support from the Council over recent years to do so. I also understand that there is the potential for the business to build new premises within the Borough but that this is not guaranteed.

Premier Banqueting has provided an essential service to the community of Harrow and its closure is a great loss to those I represent. It was used by generations of the same families for important cultural and religious events including weddings.

There is a lack of appropriate alternative provision in Harrow. It is unclear where this important community within Harrow will now be able to celebrate life events at the size and budget they require while still meeting their cultural and religious needs.

I am therefore concerned about the loss of this important venue within the Borough and would support a positive decision to allow Premier Banqueting to build new premises within Harrow.

Yours faithfully

Kind Regards,

Cllr Bhagwanji Chohan

Alperton Ward, Labour.

Ex-Mayor of Brent 2017/18

Mob-

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PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY

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ED6 3LF

Mob: 07803 589 429
Email: ronakpaw@btinternet.com

Dt: 12/09/2022

Dear Sirs

Letter of Support for Premier Banqueting

I am the President of the Lohana Community North London and past president of the Lions Club of Kingsbury which represents local community of thousands of members in Harrow and surrounding area from the Hindu faith. Our aim is to (bring together) the fellow community members in North London in celebrating the religious Hindu festivals, enhance the cultural, educational and sporting skills and create an environment where individuals can realise their potential. We have lots of members and are extremely active in social, charitable and religious activities.

I have been a firm supporter of Premier Banqueting and my dealing with them goes more than 10 years and understand the value the premises has provided to the local South Asian community with the number of weddings and charitable events it holds.

Premier Banqueting was a purpose built venue and today we don't have this for the communities. We were very saddened with the loss of this community asset and know the level of knowledge the staff have with all the different cultures.

I am therefore concerned about the loss of this important venue within the Borough and would support a positive decision to allow Premier Banqueting to build new premises within Harrow.

Please feel free to contact me on 07956810647 / 0208 424 8686 if you require any further information.

Yours faithfully

Dinesh Shonchhatra
President – LCNL.

