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## WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROB MILNER

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1. My name is Rob Milner and I am the Secretary of Wilmslow Rugby Club. I make this statement in support of the application made by the Club for a new premises licence for the clubhouse and grounds; and in response to the representations received against this.
2. I write simply to give some brief background on the Club itself, and a bit of an insight into the reasons for our application.
3. Wilmslow Rugby Club was founded in 1884 and therefore about to enter its 138<sup>th</sup> year in existence. Its formative years were spend occupying a site on Hough Lane in Wilmslow before land was purchased from a local farmer in 1934 at the existing site. The site is named The Memorial Ground in recognition of those Wilmslow players lost during the Great War of 1914-18.
4. We have therefore occupied the space on Kings Rd for almost 100 years, a rural space back then but over the years increasingly developed for housing, the most recent addition being our neighbours on Woodlands Rd.
5. The rugby club has always formed a central part of the community, both within Wilmslow and the wider area. We have provided a safe, nurturing environment over the years for tens of thousands of children to learn how to play rugby union and develop themselves in a team sport requiring a high level of skill together with a strong emphasis on teamwork, camaraderie and personal discipline. These skills ultimately have a strong influence on both their personal wellbeing and their ability to function successfully in the wider world.
6. We run one of the largest mini and junior rugby facilities in the North of England with typically between 300 and 400 members registered at any one time. The club has

produced a large number of players over the years who have gone on to achieve high honours within the game, at club, county and international level. Indeed, Hamish Watson, the current Scottish International, will be touring South Africa this summer with the British and Irish Lions. We are very proud to say that Hamish began his rugby journey at Wilmslow where he was an active member of the mini and junior section.

7. Wilmslow typically run 3 senior adult teams. Our 1<sup>st</sup> XV plays in level 6 of the RFU's national league structure, albeit we have been as high as level 5 in recent years. This makes Wilmslow one of the highest ranked amateur clubs in the country, the definition of this being our commitment to the non-payment of players. The club is registered as a Community Benefit Society, meaning we are a not for profit organisation.
8. For the avoidance of doubt this requires any profits generated in the running of the club to be invested in their entirety back into the club for the benefit of the club as a whole. The committee/officers of the club are all entirely voluntary. This is an important consideration when assessing the overall running of the club and in particular any commercial activities which sustain the club. The current committee work extremely hard to preserve the work of generations of committee members who have gone before. Our motivation is to preserve the legacy of the club both now and long into the future.
9. Our position within the fabric of our local community extends beyond rugby related activity. We are currently engaged with The National Trust in a joint venture to increase tree planting in the local area as part of a wider initiative to establish 20 million trees across England, Wales and Northern Ireland by 2030. In addition we have recently agreed to allow the club to be used by Cheshire East Council as a Covid-19 testing centre. We also have a very close relationship with Wilmslow High School who regularly use our clubhouse facilities for various activities.
10. We consider the club to be a well-run entity, however the fact is that it is still an ongoing challenge to sustain profitability long term. In addition to revenues generated by subscriptions from our membership we are extremely reliant on the proceeds of events held at the club. We have a function room and of course lots of outside space.

We have historically held events both inside and outside the clubhouse, some specifically rugby related but many providing a safe space for our club community to hold events such as weddings, funerals and birthday parties etc.

11. The granting of this license application is absolutely essential for us, not only to maintain our ability to hold such events, without which we would struggle to raise sufficient revenue to take the club forwards, but also for us to consider holding up to 3 events per year on a larger scale. The potential to hold these events would enable us for the first time to consider larger, more sophisticated gatherings if we are approached with a proposal that works for us whilst adhering to the criteria that would accompany any events of this size. This extra income is extremely important to us in the longer term, in the main to help pay for the maintenance and improvement of the fabric of the buildings and grounds - thus preserving the club for future generations to come.
12. I wish to emphasise strongly that this is not some attempt on our part to change the focus of our club from a rugby club to some kind of events venue. Our ongoing focus is to preserve the integrity of our rugby club – however in order to do this on a we would like the ability to consider a more diverse range of activities, knowing that this will be restricted to a maximum of 3 external music events per year with audiences over 500 in number.
13. I would further wish to emphasise that everything we doing going forward should this licence be granted must be done with our nearby neighbours in mind. We will ensure that any activities which take place are appropriate for the locality and are appropriately conditioned, managed and monitored.