# Couple forced to close wedding venue after council blocks medieval moat site plans



A Cambridgeshire couple have closed their outdoor wedding venue business after a local council raised concerns over the site’s medieval moat and other issues, leading to the cancellation of booked weddings and a significant financial impact on the local economy.

Katy and Joe Bird, who founded Hardwick Moat Weddings near Tilbrook, Cambridgeshire, launched their outdoor events business in 2021 after hosting their own wedding at the four-acre site. The venue, praised in numerous five-star reviews for its picturesque setting in meadows once grazed by cattle, specialised in intimate weddings with a maximum of 150 guests. Events took place under a marquee erected during the warmer months, complemented by glamping accommodation in a neighbouring field, with guests transported to and from a distant car park by an old Ferguson tractor and trailer.

The venue’s location is notable for a medieval moat, which the couple say remained undisturbed by their operations but has become the focus of contention with Huntingdonshire District Council. The council opposed their application for retrospective planning permission, citing concerns that the business threatened the moat, described as “potentially comparable to nationally significant scheduled monuments”. Scheduled monuments are protected historic sites listed on the National Heritage List for England, which includes significant archaeological sites such as Neolithic structures and Cold War-era military shelters.

Additional objections cited by the council included alleged heavy machinery use on the site, noise and light pollution, and local traffic issues. The couple vehemently denied these claims, stating in various reports submitted to the council that there had been no significant ground invasive works or use of heavy machinery within the moat area. Mrs Bird said the marquee was erected on previously ploughed fields and that the moat had been cleared of brambles and fallen trees by hand, without removing trees or employing heavy equipment. The bridge over the moat to the glamping area was transported and installed by a small team without machinery.

Despite commissioning wildlife, noise, light, and traffic studies to demonstrate minimal environmental impact and the benefits to farm diversification and the local economy, the council concluded the proposal would “dilute the rural character of the area” through the introduction of hard edges in the countryside and disrupt the visual gap between Tilbrook village and surrounding fields.

The couple expressed frustration at the planning process, saying the council repeatedly introduced new concerns, often at short notice. They ultimately dissolved Hardwick Moat Weddings and notified clients of cancellations, including three booked weddings in 2026 and turning away at least 20 other enquiries. Mrs Bird described the heartbreaking experience of informing brides and grooms, including one who had booked the venue two years previously and lost deposits with suppliers.

“The council made their minds up that they didn’t want to work with us, even though we jumped through every single hoop,” Mrs Bird told the Daily Mail. “We’ve probably had 20 weddings we had to say no to. One bride had chosen the venue two years ago. She’d already been to suppliers and had to cancel them and lose the deposits.”

The closure of the venue is estimated by the Birds to have cost the local economy around £100,000 annually, as they sourced suppliers from within a ten-mile radius. One local supplier, Dawson Nixon of Pitched Perfect Events, who provided bell tents for glamping, said he faced a shortfall of £15,000 to £20,000 a year as a result of the venue’s closure. He lamented the council’s decision as “an absolute travesty” and praised the couple’s commitment to working with local suppliers rather than seeking commissions.

Andrew Brodie, the 73-year-old farmer who owns the land used for the weddings, also expressed surprise at the council’s comparison of the moat to a listed monument, stating such moated farmsteads are typical and that his moat had been dredged in the past. He supported the concept of farm diversification, saying, “From my point of view, it’s an ideal diversification because it’s out of the way and didn’t disturb anyone. I’ve never had anyone complain to me.”

Although the couple had the option to appeal the council’s decision, they opted not to pursue further legal action after spending £15,000 on reports and facing ongoing disputes. Mrs Bird has now transitioned to running an independent funeral directing service in the nearby town of St Neots.

Huntingdonshire District Council was approached for comment but had not made a public statement at the time of publication.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.magzter.com/tr/stories/newspaper/Cambridge-News/BID-TO-USE-MEDIEVAL-SITE-AS-A-WEDDING-VENUE-REFUSED-AGAIN> - This article supports the claim about a medieval site in Cambridgeshire being refused use as a wedding venue due to council concerns over the site’s preservation and other issues.
2. <https://www.instagram.com/pitchedperfectevents/> - This Instagram page belongs to Pitched Perfect Events, which provided bell tents for glamping at Hardwick Moat Weddings, supporting the claim about local suppliers impacted by the venue’s closure.
3. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/> - This URL is related to the National Heritage List for England, which includes significant archaeological sites, supporting the claim about scheduled monuments.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-policies-for-the-uk-planning-system> - This webpage provides information on national planning policies in the UK, which could contextualize the council’s concerns about preserving rural character.
5. <https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/planning-enforcement/planning-applications-and-decisions/> - This page from Huntingdonshire District Council discusses planning applications and decisions, relevant to the council’s role in reviewing the wedding venue proposal.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-enforcement-england> - This webpage offers guidance on planning enforcement in England, which might shed light on the processes involved in handling disputes like those faced by Hardwick Moat Weddings.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14639421/Wedding-business-owner-destroy-couples-dreams-council-refused-planning-permission.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data