

For attention: Tracy Brunings

Langeberg Municipality

Your e-mail to BolandPlan dated 5 August 2022 refers.

OWNER'S REPLY TO COMMENTS FROM M AND M MITCHELL REGARDING IMPACTS OF MONTEVUE NATURE FARM:

It is noted that M and M Mitchell letter refers to their comment for workable solutions to their raised points of concern and not as a formal objection against the land use planning application.

INTRODUCTION:

We understand that the Michell partners have lodged comments on our application for consent use on our property for renting out our 3 existing units on the farm for short term self catering purposes.

We see their complaints, which are mostly personal and irrelevant to the case , as nothing more than an outright attack and personal vendetta against our family. Its our opinion that this stems from their jealousy, gross ignorance regarding us, and how we run businesses, especially remote businesses in general. Its also clearly based on her misplaced sympathy and retribution for a disgruntled ex farm worker that told her lies about us.

Instead of relying on up to date facts and personal experience of what we do on the farm and the case at hand, most comments are based on "hear say" and lies and ignorance They base their opinions on irrelevant outdated photos gathered from our social media, rather than their personal experience of us, our farm, our guests, or facts that are specific to the issue at hand, which is the application for consent use for our 3 self catering units, which we want rent out on occations to guests.

In this document, we will reply to each of their comments, even those that are completely irrelevant to the application, which should lawfully be ignored in all honesty, so that all the facts can be given from both sides. We will explain and substantiate why very few of their comments are serious points of concern, and why our farm and accommodation will only benefit the area, the economy, the community, the local people, farmers and workers, and the natural environment for now and the future.

REGARDING: Michell's Comments on method of operations and activity to date:

(I will number all comments, whereas each number coincides with the next bullet point in this section of their document)

1. As Michell also agrees, **low impact sustainable eco tourism** is basically the only appropriate use for unproductive land like on our property. Their comments on how we operate the farm, our employees, and opinions about other guest farms show their complete ignorance of our current operations and the "self catering farm units" rental sector.

We do indeed currently have a permanently appointed manager, Mr. Vioks, who is very capable and talented and permanently on site to supervise. We have appointed Mr. Vioks and all our employees through SEESA and have drawn up contracts, available on request. We have been training Mr. Vioks for about a year now on all types of work and management relating to general farm work, maintenance, accommodation, hospitality, and admin.

We also have an additional permanent employee on site that helps with the accommodation and farm work and who is a qualified driver.

All our employees have full uncapped internet, smart phones, lap top computers, as well as a house phone and radios, at their property on our farm, that they use to constantly be in contact with the owners and the guests on the property. They have experience with these. M. Fredericks has previously worked for Sanbona for a long time and brings a lot of guest farm and hospitality experience to Montevue.

So unlike the Michells' outdated information, we are indeed staffed properly and have well qualified people on site permanently to manage, supervise and reduce potential risks. Through the wonder of technology, internet, phones and live security cameras we can monitor and manage everything successfully remotely even when not at the farm and with the help of our supervising manager and employees we can safely and efficiently run our operations.

In addition to this we are friends with our close neighbors who we, and our staff, are in regular contact with (just 1 minute walk from our workers accommodation), if any additional help is needed for whatever reason. We also use highly qualified local builders, plumbers, solar experts, water experts, gas experts, farmers, and people from Cape Nature to help when and were needed. We also provide help where needed to our neighbours.

Looking at our average **5 star ratings** of the units we rented out, and amazing feedback we have received so far from guests, its crystal clear that the farm and self catering accommodation units are indeed operated and managed successfully and that we are all well qualified to do so. Unfortunately it seems that The Michells have no experience in running a remote businesses or hospitality businesses

like these, and therefore are ignorant of how successfully people can and have been doing it in South Africa and worldwide these days.

I also see that **Sanbona and Simonskloof** are named as local examples and seen as in the same niche market as us. They are bigger catered resort style nature reserves with lots of infrastructure, people, lots of roads and lots of guests and is totally different to what we are doing at Montevue.

At Montevue we currently have the main house and 2 very small units that we rent out. It is rented out on a self catering basis, which means guests cater for themselves and do not need a big amount of employees or the owners on site, like Sanbona.

2. **The Michells' concerns about the owners not present on the farm** and therefor it poses security risks, come from a basis of ignorance unfortunately. Since we have taken ownership of the farm, we have done a tremendous amount to improve security and reduce risks of our farm and surrounding farms -

Previously, before we took ownership, there was only the one farm worker and his girlfriend living on the farm. They had almost no electricity, no internet, no phone signal, no phones, no radios, no alarm systems, no transport, no firefighting tools or fire extinguishers, or conservation experience or help from the owners.

The farm was plagued by theft and vandalism. All the houses on the farm was greatly damaged, windows, doors etc, stolen, solar was stolen, borehole pumps were stolen and fences were broken down. (We can provide proof on request) When we saw the farm for the first time, very little was there and working. The farm as it was, without us, was a big security and fire risk for the property and the neighboring properties, as the workers had no means to seek help or help or monitor anything and the worker was an alcoholic with no supervision from an employer, who would cause problems and start fires where and whenever he wanted.

After we took ownership we now have implimented the following for security:

- We have full paid membership with **Boland Security Solutions**, the local security and armed response company. They are only a short phone call or message away and patrols our farm on occasions.
- We have **live feed and other security cameras** on various places on our property. These cameras can be monitored remotely by the owners and also be the employees on site.
- We have **motion sensor alarm systems** on all our solar panels, borehole pumps and inside our houses. Since we installed this, we have not had any thefts or attempted thefts on our property.

- We have **panic buttons** for all guests with armed response that can be there within 10 minutes.
- All our units and our employees have powerful hand held **radios** that they can use to communicate with other houses or the workers, in case of emergencies. Guests can call our workers immediately, who in turn can phone the police, Boland Security or the owners.
- We have fixed up most of our **fences**, and closed big holes so that its more difficult for people to enter the property. We have strong locks on all gates.
- We have **fire and security warning signs** at all houses, as well as SMOKE ALARMS and fire extinguishers.
- These days, we have a **capable 4x4 farm bakkie** permanently on the property for our Farm Worker (who has a valid driver license) to use for driving through the property at least once a day to supervise the guests and nature. We also have a 4x4 quad bike on site to help. The bakkie can be equiped with our trailer and **full water tank, with generators, and has fire extinguishers and medic kits**, so we can fight fires, whenever one breaks out on our property our neighboring properties.
- Finally, we also have membership to the "**Ouberg Farm Security**" **whatsapp group** with all our neighbours, and in constant contact with everyone in our area, to quickly get and give alerts of security risks. Together we work as a community to make it safer for everyone. With the things we implimented, I believe the area is much safer than it was before us and crime has drastically reduced in the last year in our area.

So you can see that its clear we have MUCH more security than Michell was aware and better security than many of the farmers in our area. With the combination of permanent qualified onsite managing supervisors, motion alarms connected to Boland Security in Montagu, panic buttons, live feed security cameras, full internet with smartphones and whatsapp, computers, radios, transport vehicles on the farm, fire fighting equipment, and all the other risk mediation measures that not only helps us, but also our neighbours, our farm is not a security risk or nuisance to neighbours.

3. **As mentioned before, we do indeed have a qualified resident manager, Mr. Vioks**, with skills and authority on site to act on behalf of the owner. In contrast with The Michells' opinion, our other employee, who is in charge of cleaning the house and looking after guests is indeed "hospitality staff", having worked and having been trained in hospitality by Sanbona, a 5-star business. Unfortunately the Michells has either outdated informatioon on this or going according to information from our ex farm worker, who was himself not trained or capable.
4. **We respect The Michells' uneducated opinions on our "remote" method of operating**, but want to assure you that, as a long time business man, who have multiple local and international businesses that is solely been run remotely, this is indeed possible and we are evidence to that.

All the current activities on our property is sustainable, and cause almost no measurable damage to the ecology or neighbours and definately not climate change.

In fact, the impact that we have had and will have in the future, was/is almost exclusively beneficial to all of the above as well as many other things

- **Dams** – We have not excavated ANY new dams on the property. All dams were there long before we arrived. We have made the one dam (that Michells' sent photos of) a bit deeper and repaired it so that its safer. Now that its safer and stronger it would more easily be able to take water from big storms and floods, which years ago broke many dam walls and caused a lot of permanent erosion and damage to the ecology and veld in our area.

Without us repairing the dam, it would pose a much bigger risk for ecological impact. We do only occasionally top up the dam with clean borehole water, so that there is regular flowing water in the dam. This water goes back into the ground water systems and is not lost.

Now that the dam has water, local wildlife, like Kudus, duiker, klipspringer, tortoises, jackals, water birds, cats and other species have a place to drink water. Previously there was no water for many kms, with many animals suffering because of this. The water is there for the benefit of the animals and the ecology. The water is without polution and is sparkly clear, unlike Michells assumptions. It has a earth bottom so do not need cleaning. It can be drained within a short time if needed.

- **Fish** – There is indeed a few small fish in the dam. These are not the invasive species of Tilapia that Michell assumes. The species is the Blue Kurper, an endemic species to the area, which is in almost all rivers and most dams in the area. The fish is a food source for local water birds and their population are kept in check by these birds and by us. Since these fish were introduced we have an increase in healthy endemic water bird life, that previously had no way to drink water, or feed, in our area.
- **Translocation of Antelope-** Michells', who have no experience in game farming is unfortunately ignorant with many of their comments here. Gemsbok is not exclusively a desert animal. They have been in many areas of the Karoo too in the past. They thrive in dry harsh environments such as the desert and Karoo.

We have not translocated the Gemsbok from the Northern Cape, we have bought and transported them, legally and with the correct transport permits, with Cape Nature (contact Martin from Cape Nature). They were bought from a local farm, just 30 minutes away from our farm (proof can be shown) and they are used to the type of vegetation and veld.

Regardless of that, these animals can NOT compete for territory of ANY local kudu/duiker/klipspringer etc. species, as they are safely confined in a seperate camp, with compliant game fencing that are being checked and maintained regularly. No kudus, duiker, klipspringer etc. are in this camp. These gemsbok do not cause any damage to the veld. They are browsers, meaning they eat the leavess of bushes, and do not dig in the ground. Not more than any other endemic species. We feed our Gemsbok high quality Lusern every day and also game pellets as supplement. We give them more than enough food so that they do not need to feed or damage the veld. The animals that we keep also have no relevance to the case or our accommodation, so should be ignored.

- **Carrying Capacity** – As far as we know, no surveys have been done on our property for generations and The Michells has also never been on our property, with our permission, so their comments on carrying capacity is baseless. Personally, I have studied karoo environmental management, done personal surveys on property, and my opinion is that the carrying capacity is much higher than Michell's claim.

That said, as we mentioned, we do not need to utilize ANY carrying capacity, as our game is confined in an enclosure and is well within compliance for keeping game and the type and size of fencing we have for the particular game we possess. We only have only 3 Gemsbok animals so its difficult to understand how the Michells could think that they could have a measurable impact on an entire bigger area. Certificates of enclosures and compliance can be shown on request or you can get it from Cape Nature who supported our relocation of these animals. These animals are being well looked after, and is a benefit to the tourism industry, and local economy of Montagu.

- **4x4 use** – The Michells mistake "Encouraged 4x4 activity" with driving a 4x4 capable vehicle on a normal farm road for exploring and sight seeing. We do not encourage any form of 4x4 or farm road misuse or "4x4 activities". We do mention that we have roads on the farm that are mostly fit for 4x4 and therefor encourage people to bring their 4x4 vehicles if they want to drive on the roads, instead of using other normal vehicles. Our guests are not hardcore 4x4 enthusiasts. They are wealthy, professional people who respect the environment. They stay on all the roads with their 4x4 vehicles.
- **The consent use for off-road trail** being part of the application would be for exclusive for in house guests and can be limited by Council as such. Initially we thought of opening the trail for day visitors but we have decided against this.

Visitors are not allowed to go off the existing roads, they have absolutely NO impact on nature. There are almost never more than 2 or 3 vehicles on the property at any given time and the amount that the people drive around on the farm is very little, as they mostly like to relax at their houses. Thus these existing farm roads are indeed acceptable sustainable for eco tourism.

- **Indiscriminate fires and camping** - These are not indiscriminate. There is a good reason for each thing we did on the farm. We do not allow any fires or camping indiscriminately on the farm. There is only one allowed camping place, situated in a big existing clearing. Nothing was cleared from our side for this spot.

For almost each house, we have an inside, safe and enclosed braai place, that we use when its windy. The only outside braais are either in a deep fire pit with wooden or rock fencing around it in a clearing, or a built closed braai, so that there is no way that fire can escape or cause a veld fire.

We have many fire safety warnings at all accomodations, as well as fire extinguishers and smoke alarms (photos available on request), and explicitly tell each guest to be mindful for fire safety when visiting. All houses, except the new small cabin behind the mountain, were existing structures, so we did not clear any vegetation for it. The new unit was also built in an existing clearing, with an existing road close to it, from long ago, to it, so no measurable impact was made to the environment for any of our dwellings.

- **Biggest part of all the roads on the farm were there before long ago.** Sections of the old track was overgrown and in some cases we had to open up to get access to the old back road. They have not been in use for many years and at sections overgrown for many years and thus Michell may not have been aware of them. Maybe we were ignorant and could have made a mistake in not applying for opening the road over the mountain. It was not our not an indiscriminate decision and we had good reason.

With the track in its previous state it was not possible to reach the other side of the mountain or through our property, which is not only a big risk when a fire breaks out on neighboring properties, it also makes it impossible to access almost 1000 ha of our property on the back of the mountain.

In case of a security risk or in case of a veld fire, we are now able to access the area on the back of the mountain to fight the fires and/or help neighbours and their workers escape.

So the now accessible mountain road doubles as a fire path and to get much needed access to a part of the area, where no other neighbours could access in recent years. We also had botanists visiting our property and accessing these previously impossible places to study the environment and plants. We work closely with them and Cape Nature, to help conserve the environment for the future.

- **Light and noise pollution** – This is irrelevant to our case, but I can assure you that there is absolutely no light pollution or noise pollution coming from us that can have any measurable negative impact on neighboring lands or flora or fauna. (not more than any other houses in the area.)

We only have the main house and 2 units that guests currently rent and only on occasions, so I doubt that lights from these (which are all LOW watts solar powered lights) can have any negative impact on the environment.

We do not allow any loud noise or music at the units. All our guests are higher class responsible professional people there to enjoy nature and are seldom there to make noise. Therefore, I doubt that there can be any regular noise pollution or disturbance to animals. The only noise that Michell and our neighbours complain from was the noise that our previous farm Worker, Francois, caused when he played loud music at his worker house. Not sure if that is what they hear. If we do get any complaints regarding noise, we will be happy to immediately take action, but have not had any complaints in 4 years.

- **Day visitors** - Michell mentions day visitors, but we have only had one paying day visitor in the 4 years on our property and they were Botanists to study the veld. We do not allow people to just come and visit to disturb areas and only one day visitor per day was allowed. (Note that we do not allow any day visitors anymore.) The only reason that Michell thinks there is constant noise and light pollution is not due to hearing or seeing it themselves, but rather studying our social media posts of us enjoying ourselves on our own property for the occasional birthday party for us and our friends, which very seldomly happens and have no measurable impact on the environment or nature.

5. **Guests not being signed in** – We do "sign in" our guests online, as is the case for ALL self catering rental units in south africa and with Airbnb facilities. I can understand that older types of catered accommodation like hotels or big resorts, like Sanbona signs people in personally on paper, as they offered catered services, but that is not how short term self-catering rentals work these days. All is being done online. All our guests are vetted, have to pay big breakable/damage deposits, for if they damage the veld or cause disturbance, so we never had any issues before with guests.

As mentioned, we do have full time staff on the property and they have a bakkie that they use to patrol the property and the units, and make sure that all guests are behaving themselves and following our rules and regulations. All guests have to agree to our fire and security and environmental rules and regulations before they are allowed on the property. This is being done online.

6. **Lack of cellphone** – Unfortunately this is untrue and based on very outdated information, or lies. We have full uncapped internet at the workers houses for a few years now.

The current workers have reliable smartphones, and they have their own laptops as well and they are familiar and used to communicate effectively via whatsapp, e-mail and phone. We are in constant communication. We also have a house phone and have radios that they can use in emergencies.

All the "emergencies" that the Michells claim that they had to go out for was never for us, or one of our guests visiting the farm. These has always just been things that happened to the previous disgruntled farm worker or his wife, mostly while heavily drunk, or drugged, and has nothing to do with how we operate the farm or the safety measures in place.

The situations that Michell is referring to about Magalena who died, is very unfortunate for us and also gave us big distress – this was said that it was a heart attack and was out of our hands. (although we suspected it might have be caused by violance from her husband, as he abused her a lot during their time together and we have personally seen her with black eyes etc, after they have been drunk and fighting.) In any case, this was out of our control. We did help her and her family a lot after this and were very sympathetic. We took care of her children, gave them money, food and helped them as best we could.

To make it clear - They did have a phone at their home, which we bought him with our money, with the phone number of emergency services, as well as being only 200m from Mr Pieter, our neighbor across the road. Instead, Francois in his drunken state chose to run to the Michells which is further away.

Distress caused to Michells because of death of Magdalena and "eviction" of Francois and "family"
– As I will explain and substantiate below, many of these accusations are untrue and based on lies of The Michells and our disgruntled ex farm worker and is the main reason why we have to go through this ugly business of complaints and defence of complaints. Its unfortunate that the Michells did not engage with us properly to try and understand things from our perspective but rather choose to spend many days and hours of their time to do a personal attack against us, our farm, our business to damage us, our children's future and our livelihoods.

Here is our story: When buying the farm, we were given a choice by the previous owner to keep employing Francois on the farm or to let him go. Some of our neighbours and people from the area who know Francois, told us to rather let him go before we buy the farm, as he would not be a good worker for us and has drinking problems. Instead of listening to their advice, we had sympathy with Francois and decided to give him a chance and employ him as a farm worker. Its the first time he actually had an employer that could guide him, help him and look out for him as the previous owners were never present or involved. We were good employers to him and cared for him. We felt very sorry for him, his wife (girlfriend actually, as they were not legally married) and Magdalena's children who mostly stayed with their grandparents in town, and NOT at the farm.

We even gave Magdalena a job as a cleaning lady for our houses. We trained her and helped her to do a great job and they were very happy. Unfortunately, as it turned out, Francois could not be trusted and was drunk or drugged a lot of times, causing lots of problems and safety issues for us, our guests

and to Magdalena who he physically assaulted. We have records of this, as we had to call out the police on occasions.

He played music loud at nights, had parties with friends and caused problems with the neighbours across the road and their workers. These are all personal problems of him and we tried to help and advise him as best we could, but he started being drunk at work and caused problems with guests. He cursed and shouted at the guests and even at us, the owners. He had no regard for our instructions or rules, especially when intoxicated.

On occasions he stole our quad bike without permission and drove to town drunk. He was in a big accident one night when he did this. We had to replace the quad bike at over R70,000. This is the direct amount of damage he caused us at this one time only. When he was in the accident, we were very worried about him. We worked tirelessly to find out in which hospital he was to visit him and supported him all the way. (Afterwards, he damaged the new quad bike to due to using it illegally without our permission when drunk at night.)

We tried to make his living conditions better by getting showers and working toilets and power, but he broke the batteries, torn out the cabling in the roof, made a hole in his house's roof and made fires in his house, causing a lot of damage and neglect whenever we bought him something. Example: We bought him R1000 work shoes, but he "lost" it in within a couple of months. We were always good for him, giving him extra money, bringing him extra food, buying him and his girlfriend clothes, phones, and even buying their children clothes, food, stationary etc. We sometimes even looked after their children while they worked. We looked out for him and tried to help as best we could, but he refused to be "bossed around" by these new owners.

We went the legal prescribed route and had given him many verbal warnings, written warnings and even final written warnings, which he all signed. (Proof signed by Francois available upon request). Only after all this, and him still refusing to listen to instructions and still being drunk at work and damaging our property, we decided to intervene by getting the help of the labour company, SEESA. Together with Betsie from SEESA we held a hearing with Francois and he agreed verbally and in writing to all the accusations against him, and agreed that he was in breach of his working contract and his accommodation contract. Therefor it was SEESA's decision that he can not be rehabilitated and that all trust has been gone between employer and employee and that its impossible for him to stay on as an employee at our farm and was dangerous for him to stay on at the accommodation on our property.

Unfortunately, according to his legally binding Accommodation Agreement, he is only permitted to stay on our property as long as he is an employee. So once he quit his job, he was not allowed to live there any longer.

It was not only dangerous to our other employees and to our guests, but also not good for him to be alone on the farm after his wife's death. To be clear he did not start acting worse when his wife died,

he was always drunk and violent and disorderly when drunk. He was fine after her death, and we felt very sorry for him and helped where we could. We even allowed his brother to stay with him during his time of need and gave him a job. We also tried to give some of his family a job, but they did not want to stay there with Francois alone.

So during the hearing, SEESA offered him a settlement contract where he had the choice to accept almost a half year's salary in exchange for quitting his job and finding alternative accommodation. He understood the settlement as we explained it well in his home language and he accepted it. We gave him 30 days to vacate as the law provides.

After he accepted the money, they drank up all the money and had almost nothing left, so decided he refused to leave the farm without us building him a new "wendy" house. He complained at the Michells about this and made many accusations against us such as that we fired him without reason and kicked him off the property, which is untrue.

We followed the correct procedures per law in partnership with labour company SEESA and have all the contracts, warning letters and settlement letters as proof for you. Instead of following our legal right to get the authorities to evict him, we decided to give in to his demands and built him a house at our expense at their family's property, so that he can have his own house and be with his family and have time to look for a new job. He left the property on his own free will accepting the settlement.

We even helped him with reference letters for potential employers, and advice to get unemployment benefits and then we even got him a good job. (which he never pitched for, because he was drunk when he had to go for the interview). We gave him additional money afterwards, helped paid for Magdelenas' funeral and paid for her children and even tried to employ Magdelenas one daughter, but she quit after not wanting to stay with Francois. We want to make it clear that we did a lot for her children, and assisted them a lot more than Michells did or thought we did. We did everything we could to help Francois, even after he warned us that he would destroy our property and assault other employees.

We were good to his wife and their family. We gave them money, improved their housing, we employed their family and saw them as our own family at one time. But Francois wants more money from us and spread lies and untruths to Michells in such a way that they chose to rather believe a drunk farm worker than believing us who has only been good to our farm workers, to the community and the economy. We wonder - Where were the sympathetic Michells in the evenings when Francois was drunk and beat his wife, when he cursed our our guests, when he damaged our property, when he sat on the farm causing trouble every night with his loud parties?

We feel that the Michells are jealous of what we have built on the farm in 3 years, only see us as invaders from the city who have little regard for Montagu and the environment, and thus they would not rest before they see our future destroyed.

Its ironic how the Michell's entire case is built upon their sympathy for our ex farm worker and the community, when we have actually just done good for farm workers and the community in general. Francois had the chance to be a good employee, and stay employed and living at our property, but chose not to be one. He chose to ignore our instructions, came drunk to work and behaved in a way that it was impossible to continue employing him.

So, instead, we hired and gave accommodation to employees that wanted to work, that wanted to follow instructions and that wanted to be sober at the job. We have upskilled them, uplifted them and empowered them, and they are not only now looking after themselves, but also their families with the salaries that we pay them. So we feel very sad that the Michells are not understanding or appreciative of this. Its unfortunate that we could not retain the one worker, Francois, but that was due to his choices and not ours. His "replacements" are good workers who want to work and better themselves and their families and without us, them and their families would not be where they are now.

If we had to stop stop our tourism operations as the Michells want, then those employees and their extended families that they care for will be without money and hope.

7. **Dangers of rural area that owner does not appreciate** – These dangers are mostly baseless and again assumptions based on ignorance. I have grown up in a rural town, and on farms my entire life and know a lot about these dangers. I have a university degree with Biology and ecology as main subjects and know about snakes. In the 4 years that we are on the farm, we have never personally had a live poisonous snake encounter, and only 4 other encounters with snakes that our employees or guests know of. Our dwellings are neat and blends in with nature, not like more messy grounds that the Michells have at their houses which attract snakes.

We have snake warnings everywhere and make sure guests do not take risks during snake season. In case of snakes seen at our property, we always get a qualified local snake handler, Gerrie, from "Snake Lives Matter" in Montagu to quickly come out, catch and relocate the snakes within 10 minutes.

We have called out an ambulance for an unrelated matter in the past and they have been able to reach our accommodation perfectly fine without 4x4 quickly and efficiently. Our property is not very remote, its only 15 minutes from town and emergency services can quickly access our property. Michells do no have to worry about us causing them distress by calling them. We have never had to call them, our other systems and security in place makes our property safe for us, our guests and our neighbors.

8. **4x4 that poses risks** - Guests can explore the farm from the existing farm roads with their 4x4 vehicles. We maintain all roads to keep them safe. They are not allowed to leave the roads, so there no risk and no damage to the property or environment. Driving on the farm causes no extra chance for fire or inconvenience to neighbours. The roads are safe. Unlike Michells' claims - we do have a 4x4 recovery vehicle on site, and have phones, internet, and radios to

contact emergency services, who are less than 15 minutes away at any given time. We have helped guests with flat tires before and it was no problem.

9. **The Michells observing the construction of new 4x4 routes** – As mentioned, most of the routes were existing tracks, some sections we simply cleaned up to get access and making it safer to use. We were assisted by one of the most prominent and best earth moving companies in the area (can give name on request) and was done safely.

We already mentioned that the track we opened up over the mountain was done to double as a fire path (as there were none), for fire safety and we needed to get driveable access to the back part of the farm for various reasons including security. The road was approved by certified earth movers and their engineers and is not very steep. One can drive up the road easily with a 2x4 vehicle. Many years ago, there were a jeep track from both our neighbours on the back of the farm, and it's simply these tracks that we made usable again. Some parts of the track were visible on Google Maps when we bought the farm. We invite the Michells to come hike with us, so we can show them what remained of the tracks and gates to the other surrounding farms. The previous resident, Mr Biden and previous owner Mr Richard will also be able to tell you that they have not accessed the entire farm when they stayed there, so they might not have known about all the previous tracks and roads that were there.

In any case, we apologize if we were not allowed to open up these tracks. The Earth movers didn't indicate that we need any permission for that. It was ignorance on our part, and we apologize for that. I also want to mention that roads and vehicles can't create any negative visual impact, from their property, as it's only a very small part of the road that is visible from the Ouberg road (or the Michells), and very few vehicles use the road. It's 3km away from the Ouberg Road, and Michells, so it's unlikely that the sound of a car would bother anybody. Especially since the Michells live so close to the bigger Ouberg road with more traffic and dust. Certain neighbours' neglected houses and properties next to the road are more of an eyesore than our track kilometers away from anyone.

10. **Aware of legislation** – As the Michells suggest, we were not aware of any applications for permissions that we had to do. Our other self-catering accommodation facility that we rent out is actually only 1 single beach house that we rent out on a short term on Airbnb from time to time. We were never in the tourism industry as they claim. We know many people renting out their houses on Airbnb and even on farms and have never in our life heard of anyone that had to apply for special permissions. We assumed it's our property that we use for ourselves and if we wanted to make some extra money renting it out to friends, family and other people on occasions it would not be a problem.

Now we know about this and we do everything we can, to rectify any possible mistakes. Since becoming aware of our compliance issues, we have been working tirelessly and spending vast amounts of money that we put into the local economy, to improve and become compliant. Michells can rest assured that they and other neighbours are protected from any impact of tourism activity. It's only a few units that we have and plan to rent out and it's on a self-catering basis. We market our farm as exclusive and never allow too many people there. There can be no impact to our neighbours, like Michell who are more than 3km away.

11. **Loud Parties** – Although totally irrelevant to this case, I thought I would comment the absurdity of this comment by the Michells - The one specific (and only) party that the Michells mention is a special 40th birthday party, where we hosted for about 30 of our friends. (Most of them leaving the property by nightfall) Yes, music were played and yes, we were awake until 5am, but we did not bother anyone and definately not the animals. And this was a once off thing in 4 years of us staying there. I doubt the Michells could hear or see the party, 4km away, as they only know about this when snooping around on our facebook pages and youtube account, where we post about our experiences on our own farm.

The Michells saying we encourage this type of activity is an absolute lie, as you will see on our websites that we always tell guests not to make any music or be loud. We do not overload our dwellings ever. In fact, we state on our website that no more than 15 guests are allowed on the property at any one time. Many of the guests of this specific party stayed at other accommodation in town, eating out there and paying accommodation putting much needed money into the local Montagu economy. We also want to make it clear that we do not allow parties at our farm from guests. We do not host or allow any big paid events. The only times when there are many people or parties is for our own personal use, which happen very few times and is of no concern to the Michells what we do in our personal time. If they or any other neighbors have any complaints, we will gladly listen and make less noise. We have never had any complaints before, even from neighbors living closer than The Michells.

12. **Current Fire risks** – Most of these claims are either based on outdated info, ignorance or outright untrue. See below comments on their bullet points:

- **Lusern store made of reeds** – this is not a lusern store, this is a natural hide providing shade for our game. We keep our lusern in our barn, which is close to the workers house.

- **Cabin with thatch roof** and wooden construction – Thatch roof has been redone and given a fireproof treatment. No fires can get close or ignite the roof. We are doing everything we can to make it safe.

- **Jetmaster inside the dwellings** – Our Jetmasters are contained built in metal braais, that are freestanding, away from any wood. Its made specifically for this for fire safety. No fire or hot sides of the unit can touch any wood parts of the house.

- **Metal chimney** – this does indeed clear the apex and was done by certified installers. The chimney as appropriate liners that meet regulations and have built in spark arrestors to prevent floating coals or sparks from setting fires to thatch or flammable services. Its 100% safe.

- **Fire pits** – there is only one fire pit outside a wooden cabin and we instruct guests to not use that when its windy, and make sure they kill the fire when done. There is no bushes or grasses close to the firepit and a wooden wall has been built around it to further make it safer. We take fire safety seriously.

- **Open fires in non designated** wild camping sites – this is untrue. There is only one camping site with a stone firepit braai in the middle of a very big existing clearing, that is protected from wind. No guests are allowed to make fires outside of the designated areas.

- **Wood burning hot tubs** – these are completely safe and the fire box has a metal cover. They are desigend so that no sparks coals or burning wood can get out of the deeply sunk fire container. The hot tubs also double as splash pools and fire safety pools, with extra water available at our houses for any fire emergencies on our property, or for neighboring properties. The hot tubs / fire pools are are actually a benefit to fire safety.

- **No fire extinguishing measures available** – This is also untrue. We have many fire extinguishing measures in place. There are fire safety instructions and warnings at all our houses and are also one of the terms and conditions that all guests need to accept before they can enter the property. There are big fire extinguishers at all our houses on all floors. There are water tanks and hoses at all houses. There are Smoke/fire detectors and alarms at all houses. We do have a firebreak, which is the track that was opened up for vehicle access over the mountain. This works efficiently as a fire path. Additionally we have a 4x4 vehicle on the farm, with a firefighting trailer, with water tank and hoses on. We are also in the process of our application to the "Winelands Fire Protection Association" and getting fully compliant with them and sending our managers and other workers on fire fighting trainings. The above in combination with the close contact we have with emergency services and our close neighbours, make our property more fire safe than most properties in the area. We also have proper third party insurance for our property.

- **No limits** – These allegations are untrue. We give strict instructions to guests where they are allowed to be and not. They are not allowed to have any vehicles, bikes or bicycles outside of the existing roads on the farm. Although they are allowed to walk freely in the farm, the impact is minimal as we rarely have more than 10 people on the farm at any given point and the property is big, with not many people hiking outside of the existing jeep track paths. We do not allow day visitors any more and we do not allow wild camping in non designated areas.

The 4x4 trails we "advertised" are the existing jeep tracks on the farm and not there for 4x4 recreational misuse, but only for driving to sight see and appreciate the natural environment and nature, from the safety of their own vehicles, without having to damage the plants otherwise.

Unlike the Michells allegations, there are indeed designated firemaking facilities at our one dam, which have a safe firepit, close to the water, away from anything that can burn. That said, we do not allow day visitors anymore, so its irrelevant. There is also a designated braai area for campers as explained. No undesignated fires allowed.

There is no risky behaviour. The guests agree to our fire safety measures and our permanent onsite staff members and manager patrol the grounds regularly daily, to make sure that there is no risky behaviour going on. Our clients are upmarket clients (honeymoon couples and professional families) who come to enjoy a nature farm and are used to fire safety and looking after the environment.

Activities by guests pose no more risk to neighbouring farms than any other farmers and their workers in the area. The Michells keep mentioning about the 4x4 vehicles that they want to include, but I want to remind you that this can be restricted to in house guest only, no offroad driving for the general public would be allowed. No people are driving over or damaging any of the veld or biodiversity. We are very strict with that. I thank the Michells for telling us to get advice and input from tourism and conservation bodies. We are open to any collaborations with other ecotourism providers and we will take this advice to heart and do our best to improve where we can and do even more. Nature conservation is one of our big reasons for buying this farm and wanting to share it with other people.

13. **Game species that are not endemic** – The relocation of our Gemsbok, which are very well adapted to the Karoo regions, was done in partnership and approval with Cape Nature. Their enclosure is fully compliant and its impossible that they can escape. As an extra security measure there is also boundary fencing around our property. The gemsbok will not escape as

we are feeding them and they will stay where there is regular food and water for them. In case they do escape no damage can be done to neighbors or their properties. These animals do not eat fruit and can be captured (darted) if needed. These type of antelope do not jump fences, like Kudu. We keep strong supervision on these animals to make sure they are safe and secure.

14. **Our septic facilities** – post no risk to neighbouring properties. There are no running rivers for many kms from our septic tanks and no immediately close water ways that could be compromised in any way. We are busy with ways to change our septic tanks to closed systems that get pumped regularly to make it even safer.

Unlike the Michells claiming we cannot pump our systems, we have indeed had professional companies come out to our farm to pump our septic tanks successfully

Our camping spot use a environmentally safe composting type toilet. It pose no risk to any river systems. Its all secured and no baboons or other animals have been able to enter these toilets to throw poop around. Baboons have enough of their own poop to throw around. There is no unsecured human poop, as its always cleaned up.

15. **No access for Munisipal honey sucker** – Its untrue and based on a post from 2 years ago. The municipality do indeed have access and can pump our workers houses septic tanks. We use a private company to pump the rest of our houses septic tanks when needed. No refuse get into any water ways or rivers from our septic tanks. Its mostly fresh water that overflow from the septic tanks that do get into the ground. It does not stink and is clean and also do not have any chemicals inside. This water gets filtered through 4km of soil before it reaches the Michells property and I can assure them that it poses absolute no risk. Dogs, livestock and wild animals' refuse just as much "risk" to ground water contamination. We will continue to work deligently with authorities to make our sanitary system even more efficient.

16. **Our dwelling units for our workers has proper septic facilities** that get pumped can get pumped by the municipality when needed. The workers' accommodation has no relevance to the renting out of our guest units in any case, as this workers house has been here long before we started renting out houses. No refuse water goes into the river. (what river?) The road damage that is spoken of is not due to water/refuse from our workers houses, its because the road is in a dip, and water from rains/flood damaged it and have worn it out. This is irrelevant to our property. We have personally helped the municipality to improve this part of the road, by letting them store their vehicles and equipment safely on our property.

17. **Heritage building** – this is not a certified heritage building. Its an old workers house on our property, where farm workers lived. Its in very bad condition now, after our ex farm worker lived there, and is beyond reasonable repair, and can now not be used. We appreciate the history behind this little building, and look after it. We have not broken it down, or damaged it in any way, and we make sure that our guests do not touch or damage it too. We and our guests appreciate

this building and look after it well and it has much more of a use now with tourism on our property than before. We would be open to its restoration.

18. Notes on history of property – We appreciate the history behind the farm, the old workers house and the previous workers and their family. I have explained our situation in previous sections. We want to make it believe that the Michells are only using this to further their own personal agenda. Although the small house might have been occupied by the farm workers for a long time, they were in service of the land owner and have never owned the land. The workers's staying on the farm were strictly conditional on them being employed by the farmer.

This was especially the case when we bought the farm and for the previous owners. (Housing Contracts available on request) Only Francois and his girlfriend Magdalena was living on the farm. Magdalena (francois girlfriend, who did not live on the farm her entire life), had children who lived permanently with their family in town, at the time we bought the farm. They only visited the farm on occasions and did not live there.

Francois and Magdalena were far from self sufficient. Francois was paid a monthly salary and bought most of his provisions from town. We also provided him with much of what he needed. Gardening, chickens, and a couple of sheep, which he neglected until their death, were graciously allowed for by us when we allowed him to stay on in service of the farm. We even bought feed for his animals. Francois would not be able to live on a farm and be self sufficient. He needs a full time job.

We understand that they have a family graveyard at the farm (illegal graveyard). We have made it clear to Francois that any of their family can be buried there and he or his family can visit the gravesites at any time they want. We were very accommodating and respectful regarding this and will continue to be.

"EVICTION" – Michell makes it out that we unjustly evicted Francois and that it was sudden. It was neither. He was given many written warnings and final written warnings through the course of the 3 years he worked for us. (Proof available on request) We gave him more chances than any sane employer would have, but he chose to not accept our authority as an employer, regardless of how good we were for him, and was drunk at work numerous times, abused and damaged our property, assaulted and threatened fellow farm workers and cursed at guests and the owners, without provocation.

Unfortunately it came to a stage where it was impossible to keep him on in our service, as the agents from SEESA agreed. It was a security and safety risk for our other workers, for our guests and for us and our property and we could not operate a farm or business with him working there. Unfortunately there is only one usable workers accommodation on the property and Francois had to make way for the new workers, who were also previously jobless and who we have now empowered and uplifted, just like we tried for Francois.

We unfortunately do need accommodation for our manager and other worker and there is no place for Francois to stay. Because of his grievances against us and his threatening of our other workers, we could not let him stay on the property, even on a separate part of it. We were very gracious when making Francois's settlement offer. He accepted the settlement for a big financial payment to him, and we paid for a built house for him at a place of his choosing, which he chose at his family's property in town.

We even seeked work for him and wrote reference letters for him, and found work for him, which he neglected and lost. All his own decisions caused his problems. We tried to do what we could, and really tried to help him, but it was out of our hands. Jooste has no case against us. We did everything legally and according to the book, as representatives of SEESA can attest. (Proof available on request) Him living on our property was provisional in him following all our rules and regulations (which he broke numerous times) and him being employed by us.

When giving him written warnings we warned and explained to him many times that when he causes himself to lose his job, he would not be legally allowed to live on the property any longer. He understood this as he agreed verbally and writtenly. But he still chose to misbehave and lost his job and rental unit because of it.

I can assure you that he was happy when he chose the settlement, but now that he came in drunken fights with his neighbors at his new home and have wasted all the money we gave him, he is looking for new solutions (more money or accommodation) and thus its understandable that he complained at the Michells and spread lies about us.

19 . We thank the Michells for their advice regarding the Jooste family (only Francois in this family), who wants to come live on our farm again. Unfortunately this would not be possible, even if we wanted it to. There is no workable solutions. We (and the municipality and authorities) would not be able to accept francois fixing up the old stone house himself. He has no proper building skills or tools or the funds for this. Even professional builders and engineers told us that we could not save the house, so I am 100% sure that its not safe having a general farm worker try and restore it or live in it.

There is also no santiation, water, solar or anything else connected to this house. We respect principles of spatial justice, but we have given Francois spacial justice for three years and in these three years, he assaulted fellow farm workers, threatened farm workers, tourism guests on the property and the owner. He damaged property, stole from us and have caused big distress to us, other workers and guests. It unfortunately not possible or safe for us to give him a chance again.

We implore the Michells who are very sympathetic to his case, to rather employ him themselves and give him housing on their property. In the past, we did offer to pay to build a house for him on their property, but they were not willing to provide water or electricty or sanitation for him. Unfortunately we could not offer that and unfortunately cannot offer any of this anymore, as we already made the financial expense when settling with francois and building him his wooden house in town.

We still love Francois and his family, and still greet him friendly when we see him. We do still care for him, but unfortunately he can never live or work on our property again.

CONCLUSION:

Even though the Michells claim that we have never introduced ourselves, we have actually. We even brought Melody flowers and thanked them for their help with Francois and Magedelena. I would also think that long term concerned community members such as them would actually introduce themselves to new owners like us, instead of waiting for the new owners to do it from their side.

Instead of welcoming us, and all the massive benefits we have brought to the community, we are treated by them like as selfish inkommers who have little care for farm workers, the community and neighbors. This is just not the case and the Michells might have forgotten that they themselves are inkommers and not from this area.

The Michells continue to mention how we "aggressively market" our units, which is ironic as we have not spent a single cent on advertising on social media. We have built social pages for our farm that we use to post about all the amazing things of the farm, the community, the environment, the fauna and the flora and with that we have brought a lot of interest and education to people from elsewhere. The Michells unfortunately mistake "aggressive" marketing with personal passion for the farm, and building a brand for a business.

We love to share what do, and how we experience nature. Our online efforts have brought a lot more positive attention to this little understood and largely unknown area, and the conservation thereof.

How we run our business and farm must seem strange to more traditional people, who are not used to it, but this way is possible and it can be much more effective than the traditional ways. Everything that we have done or changed on the property has been done for good selfless reasons. We make no profits for our business (Tax returns available on request), as all our revenue is put back into farm and the community.

We invest our income in hiring and training previously disadvantaged workers, renovating and upgrading the houses, fixing and improving the workers houses, repairing irrigation, improving dams, mending fences, maintaining roads, increasing safety, security and more.

We are constantly aware of any impact we might have on the environment, educate ourselves, and do what we can do to reduce any risks. We are willing to work with the Michells and other authorized authorities to improve and fix where we are not fully compliant and will do what we need to do to make sure that we are only a benefit to our neighbors, community, Montagu and its sustainable tourism, economy and ecology. We welcome any further suggestions from you or the Michells on how we can do this, as we will be happy to implement any measures and do whatever we can that is feasible, but implore you to kindly consider our application in a favorable light.

We apologize for this lengthy writing, but kindly ask you to consider our feedback on their comments and understand things from our perspective and that we are here to do good and do everything legally and compliant. We know we have made some mistakes in the past and we have rectified most of it and working on the rest.

Its unfortunate that all the information that the Michells gave are based on their vague perception of how we operate and operated in the past, rather than currently. Their opinions are based on seeing social media posts from us, rather than personally experiencing things on our property.

Its unfortunate that their ignorance on many of these topics and our business caused them to rather complain to authorities instead of engaging us and hearing our side of the story. They base their opinions on out of context photos and videos that they found on our social media pages, and lies and untruths of a disgrungled farm worker who can only benefit from them helping him get his job or house back. This is out of our hands, as we did what we could.

We want to assure you and the Michells, that we are here to stay, for us and our children's futures, to conserve the land and bring new sustainable tourism and economy to Montagu area.

We have already brought lots of attention to the environment, we have personally driven millions of Rands into the local economy; and caused a lot more secondary from our guets. We have employed farm workers and their families, given them a better life, and given a future for new generations of previously disadvangated people who want to work. We are here to help the community. We are willing to work with everyone on this to achieve our goals and make sure that all our neighbours, including the Michells are happy and feel safe with us there.

Regards,

Albertus Engelbrecht

(Director of Montevue)