

LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE

8 September 2021

Present: Councillor G Saffery (Chair)
Councillors A Grimston and B Stanton

Also present: Mr Greg Blesson, Applicant
Mrs Gloria Robinson, Interested Party

Officers: Senior Licensing Officer (AY)
Interim Head of Legal
Senior Democratic Services Officer (JK)
Democratic Services Officer (OE)

4 **Committee membership/ election of a Chair**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the sub-committee would comprise Councillors Grimston, G Saffery and Stanton.

The sub-committee was asked to elect a Chair for the hearing.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor G Saffery be elected Chair for this hearing.

5 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

6 **Application for a new Premises Licence - Mad Squirrel, 3 King Street, Watford**

The Chair welcomed all parties to the hearing, made introductions and explained the procedure to be followed.

The Senior Licensing Officer confirmed that all parties expected were present. There were two preliminary matters for members' attention:

- The representation which had been received from Mr Norbert Hunyadi, Appendix 3A, had been withdrawn and should be disregarded.
- Additional documentation from Mrs Robinson had been received and circulated to all parties. It was confirmed that these had been received.

Introduction to the application

The sub-committee received a report of the Head of Community Protection outlining an application for a new premises licence for 3 King Street, Watford.

The Senior Licensing Officer introduced the report. The premises was located just outside the town centre. Two representations had been received from residents living in the flats above the premises which related to the prevention of public nuisance, the prevention of crime and disorder and public safety.

There was one representation (appendix 3B) which had not been withdrawn, from Mr and Mrs Omar, who would not be attending. Their relevant comments needed to be considered in their absence. No representations had been received from responsible authorities but conditions had been agreed with the Police and Environmental Health. The hours had also been amended and the request to provide live and recorded music had been withdrawn since the original application was made. The objectors had been made aware of these changes. While no formal mediation meeting had taken place, officers had acted as intermediaries between parties.

There were no questions from the committee, the Interim Head of Legal Services, the applicant or the interested party.

Address by Interested Party

Mrs Gloria Robinson introduced her representation. She noted that it was a very busy part of Watford and the changes to the roads meant that King Street saw more traffic than it used to. Children and young people congregated at McDonalds which was in the immediate vicinity. Additionally, there were often a large number of delivery drivers in close proximity to the premises. There was often insufficient space for pedestrians due to the delivery drivers, queues for local restaurants and parking issues.

She outlined further factors which impacted the busyness of the local area including the taxi rank, the main entrance to the shopping centre, local bus stops and deliveries to other premises. The area was always busy. She underlined that she enjoyed having people around but the increased visitors to the area would affect many people. It would not be possible for the premises to manage the behaviour of customers once they had left the premises.

She had concerns about the premises having live music and the impact it would have on local residents, including young children, late into the evening. It would bring no benefit to the locality and she was concerned about the additional noise. It was not possible to adjust the volume of live music.

Turning to the access to the flats, Mrs Robinson noted that it was difficult for residents to access the main door due to the queues on the pavement outside. It was not obvious that there were residences above. She feared that the additional premises would have a significant effect on residents and it would not be conducive to a positive environment.

The Chair thanked the resident and asked the applicant whether he had any questions or responses to her points.

The applicant, Mr Greg Blesson, responded to a number of the interested party's points advising that he wished to address her concerns:

- The application had been amended and there would now be almost no live music.
- The venue would see fewer customers than the previous occupier of the premises due to its set up.
- Although alcohol would be sold the target market demographic would be those interested in more premium products.
- He had operated a venue in St Albans for 11 years where there were a large number of residents in the locality and they had had almost no responses about how that venue was operated.
- He agreed that it was not clear that the external door led to residences above the premises. He had a number of proposals to make and offered to discuss the matter further and work with the council and residents to alleviate this issue.
- He understood that this was a busy area but could not address this issue.

The Chair asked Mrs Robinson if she was aware how she could contact the Environmental Health and parking teams at the council as they might be able to address some of her concerns. Mrs Robinson responded that there was no available parking in the area for the delivery drivers.

Mrs Robinson added that the landlord for the building would need to agree any changes to the building's fixtures. She reiterated her concerns about people congregating in the area.

The Chair noted that much of these issues were outside the remit of the Licensing Sub-Committee which was focused on the merits of an application. He welcomed the applicant's offer to discuss the issue with the entrance.

There were no questions from the Interim Head of Legal Services.

The Senior Licensing Officer clarified the following points in response to the interested party's address:

- The hours for the sale of alcohol had been amended to 23:30 from midnight.
- The live music element had been withdrawn from the application. Some music could still be provided but without the need for a licence.
- Some issues outlined fell outside of the scope of Licensing, including parking of delivery drivers. The committee could not take into account concerns about other local premises.
- The points about space on the pavement could be dealt with under a separate arm of licensing. Hertfordshire Highways were given the opportunity to comment on pavement licences and whether adequate space was available.

Mrs Robinson noted that some premises were not using their full capacity and customers therefore queued outside. The Senior Licensing Officer noted that these may be temporary Covid measures and he could raise them with Environmental Health.

Address by the applicant

The applicant, Mr Greg Blesson, was invited to address the sub-committee.

Mr Blesson started by advising that he had family links to Watford and knew the town exceptionally well. He was keen to invest in Watford as there were a lot of chains locally but his was an independent business. He owned a state-of-the-art brewery producing premium craft beer. The clientele were older, rather than 18-20 year-olds. Retail sales were an important aspect of the business representing 20-25% of revenue sales. The retail aspect and the aim to develop the takeaway aspect of the business meant that the premises had an unusual planning classification. He wanted to re-emphasise that the business comprised local people running an independent business. The original application had been amended and comments had been taken on board.

Mr Blesson went on to address the issues raised by residents in their representations:

- The premises was geared for fewer people than the previous occupier and there would be fewer to disperse.
- Music would not be an issue, he would be taking on the existing music system to play background music.
- A specialist in fire safety had been employed and the premises would be complying with their recommendations.
- They were one of the 5% of breweries with 'Salsa' accreditation, this covered a range of areas from fire safety to hygiene and traceability.

He felt that all the issues raised had been addressed.

Mrs Robinson asked about the fire alarm which had been going off in the building and residents were no longer evacuating as it was a frequent issue. Mr Blesson explained that this was due to a recent leak and a specialist was being brought in as it had damaged the electrics.

Councillor Grimston noted the pre-existing issues in that part of town and the difference with larger companies and independent businesses and how the applicant had expressed an interest in working with local residents. She referred to the different clientele of this proposed premises. It was important to ensure residents were happy.

There were no questions from the Interim Head of Legal Services.

The Senior Licensing Officer asked about the takeaway aspect of the business and whether it would add to the problems of delivery bikes in the locality. The applicant responded that he did not consider it would be an issue, it was hoped that customers would come in themselves when they were in town. The premises would be quieter during the day and open for purchases.

Following a question from the Senior Licensing Officer, Mr Blesson confirmed that he understood that although live music was not part of the application, if there was irresponsible behaviour the right to play music could be withdrawn.

The Senior Licensing Officer confirmed that details of the amended application had been emailed to the interested parties on 18 August and full details were included in the committee report.

The Chair noted that he had understood that it was the applicant's intention to be a civic-minded neighbour open to ongoing communication with residents. Mr Blesson confirmed this was the case and offered to meet twice a year with residents.

Mrs Robinson asked about how late the sales of alcohol for takeaway would operate. Mr Blesson explained that technically it was possible up to closing time but in practice this was not how the venue would operate. It was very unlikely that customers would come in at 11pm to buy beer, and it was likely that the fridges would be locked earlier than that but customers could stop in on their way home. There were conditions proposed to be attached to the licence limiting the consumption of off-sales of alcohol to the pavement licensing area and in sealed containers only. Customers were responsible for their own actions away from the premises and the town centre also had a Public Spaces Protection Order to control antisocial behaviour. The applicant confirmed that he had spoken to the Police at length about this.

The sub-committee and the officers had no further questions for Mr Blesson.

Summary

The applicant had summarised his application above.

The sub-committee retired to consider its decision.

Decision

On the sub-committee's return, the Chair announced the decision.

The Chair added that as an advisory, members welcomed the commitment to ongoing discussion with residents and would encourage further dialogue.

RESOLVED –

To grant the application, amended as set out in the report, and to attach to the licence the conditions agreed with the Police and Environmental Health.

Reasons:

The committee carefully considered the Interested Parties' oral and written representations but concluded that these primarily related to other premises in the area, and to general issues outside the scope of the committee's remit such as traffic and parking concerns.

The committee accepted the applicant's evidence regarding the nature of its business, in particular that its business model involved the supply of high quality alcohol from its own brewery to an older demographic, with a significant percentage of turnover coming from the sale of alcohol for consumption off the premises. The committee also accepted the applicant's evidence that music played on the premises would be at a background level, with the playlist being selected by senior managers.

The committee was satisfied that granting the application, amended as set out in the report and attaching to the premises licence the Conditions agreed by the applicant with the Police and Environmental Health would not undermine any of the Licensing Objectives.

Chair

The Meeting started at 11.10 am
and finished at 1.00 pm