

We will supply the panel with a copy of this statement once it has been delivered. We request that, if deemed appropriate, the arising questions are answered after our statement has been made. We have also taken into account the Applicant's revisions to the site plan as notified on 27 January 2017.

HS:

It may appear laudable that the Applicant has initiated mediation with two sets of objectors and submitted a revised plan for this Hearing. However, rather than mediation, this has felt like an exercise in damage limitation. We would like to point out that without our intervention, no mediation or revised plan would be on the table for your consideration today. The Speddys and Heywoods, who have now withdrawn their objections, were, at the time the original application was submitted, completely unaware that it had been lodged. These nearby residents had not seen the Notices nor read the local paper that had carried the advertisement. No-one had told them – not the Applicant and not the Licensing Authority – even Churchill & Sarsden PC whose Parish contains the festival site had not been informed (*see Appendix 2*). Fortunately we had a phone number for the Speddys and alerted them. They were then able to notify their neighbours and Churchill & Sarsden PC. Had we not taken this action the original plan may have been approved and those living in close proximity to the site would have faced the prospect of finding themselves surrounded on three sides by campsites, floodlit car-parks, a toilet block or a performance stage in perpetuity or until such time as the Licence was revoked.

This is just one example of a series of major obstacles through which we, as interested parties, have had to navigate our way to this Hearing today. It has been a very rough ride indeed. Along the way we have been beset by misleading information, contradictory information and complete absence of information, both from the Applicant and the Licensing Authority. We hope that, as a result of this Hearing, lessons will be learned and that residents living in close proximity to the site of such major events will, in future, be properly informed about Applications and Variations in a timely fashion, with both applications and their respective plans available to view on the WODC website. We also request that members of the public be treated with courtesy and respect by frontline Council staff in response to enquiries.

Good communication, or rather lack of it, is therefore the main theme of this statement. We would like to thank the panel for placing a condition on the 2015 Variation of Licence, which emphasised that:

“good communication with local residents was paramount and the Council would anticipate such in future.”

Since that condition was imposed, communication between the Applicant and some interested local residents has certainly improved with regular meetings held. However, invitations to participate are, we believe, restricted to email circulation of previous interested parties. We are not aware of any wider advertising of these meetings: indeed, one of the objectors was not even aware that these meetings existed.

The Applicant failed to adequately communicate their plans for this Variation. At the residents' meeting on 23 November 2016 it was announced that the Variation comprised two components: an increase in capacity and an increase in live music (see Appendix D of the Hearing documents). A site plan for the 2017 festival site was circulated without any reference to additional land (*see Appendix 1*).

Mr Smith, in his introductory comments, says:

“We are confident that our current site and event plan are workable with this increased capacity, however we may look to using some neighbouring land as contingency”

This is then contradicted by later statements:

“LW (Lynsey Wollaston): Site Layout and Capacity – The site layout we have been using for the last couple of years has worked well and in 2016 we achieved a great flow of visitors and content around the site with adequate space and comfort levels. We intend to maintain this whilst accommodating the additional volume of visitors.”

“LW explained that there is sufficient contingency land within the boundary of the site and we will be making use of this land for the first time.”

Having been led to believe that an increase in numbers could be accommodated within the existing site, residents were naturally shocked when, less than one month later, a site plan for the Application for Variation was submitted that included large areas of land that had never previously been mentioned or discussed and with no indication of how that additional land would be used. We ask the panel to consider three questions here:

Q: Is submitting an Application for Variation which includes a new site plan approximately 75% larger than the Applicant led residents to expect, consistent with good communication?

Q: Why did the original Application form contain no reference to the attached site plan?

Q: Why was the site plan not labelled or annotated to indicate the proposed uses of the additional areas?

When asked why Churchill & Sarsden Parish had not been informed of this application, the Applicant expressed surprise that the Local Authority had not done so, as on page 8 of the WODC document “How to apply for or vary a Premises Licence” it clearly states that the Local Authority will consult with Parish Councils.

Q: The applicant has subsequently stated that the requirement for additional land was suggested by the Licensing Authority – is this so?

Q: If that is the case, did the Case Officer visit the site before making that suggestion?

Case Officer Michelle Bignell has been extremely helpful and informative but we are still left in some doubt as to who is responsible for notifying the interested parties of this Application: the Licensing Act 2003 [17 (5) a and 13 (3)] indicates that it is the responsibility of the Applicant, whereas the WODC Guidance states that the Licensing Authority will undertake the notification [WODC How to apply for or vary a premises Licence... Page 8 – *What happens to your Application*]. The Applicant seems to believe it is the responsibility of the Local Authority. The Agenda for this Hearing [item 3.4] states that “Consultation has taken place with the relevant Town and or Parish Council(s) but this seems to contradict the Case Officer’s claim that they do not have to inform or consult with Parish Councils.

In view of the fact that neither the relevant Parish Council (Churchill & Sarsden) (*See Appendix 2*) nor three residents that were surrounded by the land subject to the Application were informed, we ask:

Q: Is there a requirement to notify such interested parties or to consult with them regarding this Application for Variation, and if so who is responsible for this notification?

We also note that the Notices posted at the access/egress points of the premises were only to the current licensed site area, not to the additional areas subject to this Application for Variation (*see Appendices 3, 4, 5,*)

Q: We ask that the panel consider if this Application has been advertised in accordance with the requirements of the Licensing Act 2003 [17 (5) a, c]?

The copies of the Application that were distributed (by e-mail with two attachments: the Application Form and site plan) stated that: “The application can be viewed through the online Public Access Portal.” This implies that further details could be viewed by any interested party – but key elements of the Application including the site plan, were not available to view on-line. Furthermore, one objector was unable to enter comments online two days before the deadline, seeing only a message stating ‘Sorry we are not currently accepting comments from the public on this Variation’.

The advertising, notification and communication systems for Applications appears to be wholly inadequate for major events of this scale. What little information that is currently available online is incomplete and inaccurate (*see Appendix 6*). Relying upon a single local newspaper advertisement and some A4 signs to notify nearby residents in such a rural area seems archaic in an age where a substantial proportion of the population use the internet as their primary source of information. There is no reasonable excuse for not contacting all residents within a radius of the premises either by e-mail or by post (for those

who don't use email) since alert systems are already in use by WODC for planning applications and the notification of bin collection dates. We ask:

Q: Why were the details of this Application not available to view on-line via the WODC website?

In conclusion:

Q: We request that the panel consider the implications and consequences of the way this Application has been conducted regarding decision making as set out in Article 13 of the Council's Constitution, specifically:

- *Where a decision is likely to have wide-ranging or significant impact on the community, additional time and emphasis should be given to consultation and members of the public actively encouraged to contribute their views;*

It cannot be right that local residents find out, purely by chance, about a major change to a Licence which could have a significant effect on their amenity. We would like the council to take steps to ensure that such a situation does not arise again.

CS:

A tension is now emerging between Taste Festival's commercial imperative to expand this event and their ability to maintain goodwill with residents who are affected by its further expansion. Plans for expansion in terms of numbers and land required, are now pushing at the boundaries of the festival site as it stands and this inevitably has an impact on those living in the local area.

Our main concern, then, is about the sustainability of the festival on its current site if numbers were to increase beyond 20,000.

We would like to draw the Panel's attention to pages 2 and 3 of our letter of objection where we list comments made by people who attended last year's festival. Although these are not official complaints, they do, we believe, cast some doubt on the extent to which even current licencing objectives are being met in order to keep 20,000 people safe on site.

The comments include references to disorderly behaviour in the campsites; inadequate security that allowed a 10-year-old child to enter the site unaccompanied; a group of children from the campsite allowed access without an adult; inadequate sanitation; noxious smells from toilets that could be smelled from Kingham Station forecourt; a lack of adequate water supply leading to a child collapsing from dehydration; another mother with a 5-year-old daughter stating that she didn't feel safe on site; the mother whose child collapsed complains about a two-hour queue in blistering sunshine to get into the festival site.

I myself had the experience of queuing to leave the site for over an hour on Sunday evening. Drivers were tired, frustrated and aggressive. Tensions were rising and there were no stewards in the parking area or any indication of routes to exit the site. It was a very uncomfortable situation and neither I, nor my fellow passengers, felt safe. The severe thunderstorm that interrupted the festival on the Saturday afternoon, with torrential rain, led to people having to leave the site to attend to their children because there was inadequate shelter on site to protect them. We see no mention in the application of plans to provide extra shelter for families and would hope that this, at least, would be incorporated into any licence variation.

These incidents occurred with the festival at a capacity of 20,000. We are pleased to note that the Applicant is now prepared to commit to providing extra resources in line with industry guidance and best practice so that they can properly manage the site and meet their licencing objectives. If these measures were being put in place to ensure the safety of the existing capacity of 20,000 people, we would be reassured. Instead, these extra resources will be required to keep 25,000 people safe. This leads us to ask whether this ever-expanding event is sustainable on its current site. One resident, living close to the site, states that the increased noise and light pollution from the festival is currently "just about manageable". If it is necessary to extend further into adjacent land to ensure public safety on site and to accommodate increased numbers of patrons, extra staff and traders this is likely to cause further public nuisance for residents living in the local area.

This event, which started as a small-scale local food festival in 2011 attracting 7,000 patrons per day over two days, has grown hugely in scale since Taste Festivals took up the licence. In 2013 attendance was, at maximum, 12,000. If this current variation is granted the capacity will be 25,000 – more than doubling potential attendance in four years. If the event were to continue to grow at this rate, by 2021 it would require a capacity of 50,000. The expected closure of the Cornbury Festival may well be seen as an opportunity to attract larger audiences. Local villages and transport infrastructure already struggle to cope with a capacity of 20,000. The unclassified road through Lyneham, which is the designated route to the festival, experienced an increase in traffic of 465% during the 2015 festival. This road has not been resurfaced for over 10 years and, due to cuts in funding, the County Council cannot adequately repair it.

The Applicant has repeatedly maintained that this is a ‘Boutique Festival’ and that the site can only sustain a certain capacity. What is not clear to us as residents is what constitutes a ‘Boutique Festival’ and at what point it would be considered to have reached its maximum capacity. **Q: Can we ask the panel to request clarification?** as this is of concern to local residents who have had to adjust to the steady growth of this event in terms of numbers, hours of operation, live music and now expansion of the festival site.

In the past we were told that the Applicant had no immediate plans to increase the festival beyond 20,000. At their meeting with residents on 23 November the Applicant stated that “We feel that 25,000 is the right number for the festival at this time and have no immediate plans to increase over and above this number”. However, as the Applicant also pointed out at that meeting: “IMG is a commercial company therefore the reason we create the Festival is to make money”. In stark contrast, the primary aim of the Local Authority is to “protect and enhance the quality of life of the citizens and communities of West Oxfordshire”.

We therefore appeal to the Licensing Panel to ensure that this event grows no further in scale either in capacity or site area. While we accept that The Big Festival brings pleasure and some economic benefit to the local community, these benefits come at a cost to others and it is these costs that we ask the panel to bear in mind when considering this Application.

Thank you for hearing our further comments in support of our written objection.

Appendices

- [1] Site plan as circulated at Residents’ Meeting on 23 November 2016
- [2] E-mail from Churchill & Sarsden Parish Council
- [3] Site plan showing location of advertising notices and access and egress points to the current area and that subject to the Application for Variation
- [4] Photographs x 4 of the access/egress points to/from the site subject to this Application for Variation
- [5] Photographs x 2 of proposed access/egress points of revised site plan
- [6] Screenshot from WODC Licensing website