
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

02 OCTOBER 2013

Present-

MEMBERS:

Councillors G Chapman, Conway, Fantham, Mrs Green (Vice-Chairman), Lawson (Chairman), Link, G Sutton

OFFICERS:

R Hill	Licensing Team Leader
B Lisgarten	Legal Governance Team Leader
C Thorley	Member Support Officer

Other Persons Present:

JS (Applicant, Item 6)
Mr Fender (Applicant's Representative)
A Scarf (Manager of premises (Item 6))
S McCurdy
Councillor Hilary Killen (Watling Ward Borough Council)

1. INTRODUCTIONS

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 30 July 2013 were confirmed by the members present and then signed by the Chairman.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were given by Councillor's Green and Fantham.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman said these would be dealt with once the item was being discussed.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman said this would be dealt with once the item was being discussed.

6. APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF SEX ESTABLISHMENT LICENCE

The Chairman introduced the item and stated that the Sub-Committee were to consider the Application for Grant of a Sex Establishment Licence for Junction 9 situated at London Road, Flamstead, Herts AL3 8EX.

R Hill then provided the following background to the application; R Hill explained that the premises were licensed as a sexual entertainment venue until May 2013. A renewal application was made prior to the expiry of the licence, which was rejected when a defect with the public notification of that application came to light. As such, the continuation rights bestowed by that application ceased to have effect in July.

R Hill stated that this application was now for a new licence. All notification requirements had been satisfied in respect to the current application.

R Hill said that no objections had been received from the police in respect of this application.

However R Hill stated that objections to the application have been received from local residents, businesses and the parish council, and could be found at Annex E of the report.

R Hill said that in response to references within the objections about the continuing usage of the premises, licensing officers had made a number of unannounced visits to the premises. On Friday 30 August 2013, nude dancing was observed taking place, and officers spoke to the manager of the property at the time to affirm the lack of licence. As the legislation permitted one sexual entertainment event per month without a licence, no further action was deemed possible. On a further visit one week later, performers were clothed.

R Hill mentioned that officers had also spoken to the premises management in June of this year, during the first application, in respect of the signage displayed outside the premises which depicted silhouettes of female dancers in various poses. A standard condition attached to SEV licences prohibited the display of signage unless required by law or approved by the Council. Several of the objections found in the appendices of the report referred to this signage.

The Chairman thanked R Hill for his introduction and asked the other individuals present at the meeting to introduce themselves. The applicant's representative introduced himself as Mr Fender, the applicant's agent. J Shayler, the applicant and owner of Junction 9, and A Scarf, an employee from Junction 9 were also introduced.

In addition Councillor H Killen was also in attendance representing her ward and also objecting constituents from Flamstead who were unable to attend the meeting. S McCurdy, a local business owner (Majestic Trees) was also present.

In regards to declarations of interest the Chairman stated that the premises was not in his ward and that he had not previously visited it and asked the members present on the Sub-Committee if this was also the case for them. They reiterated the premises were not in their ward and they had not previously visited it.

The Chairman then allowed the applicants representative to make a short statement in relation to the application. Mr Fender began by giving a brief summary of the location of the premises and its operating hours. Mr Fender highlighted that there

was a section of land between the premises and the nearest residential buildings of approximately 2 acres. Mr Fender stated that he could see no legal ground for refusal of the application on discretionary grounds as there was no suggestions that the applicant or the applicants manager were in anyway inappropriate individuals to run such an establishment. Mr Fender surmised that he could only foresee the application being refused if the Sub-committee decided that the premises was inappropriate given its locality or its potential to be unfitting to the character of the local area.

Mr Fender stated that whilst his client had been the licence holder for the concerned premises there had been no history of anti-social behaviour, no crime and that the premises had not been a point of concern for the authorities. Mr Fender highlighted that this point was verified by the fact that the police had no comments in relation to this application. Mr Fender also pointed out that until this recent licence application the premises had not received any concerns from the local residents. Mr Fender said that another licence application for Junction 9 had been made in 2012 and again no concerns from the local residents had been received.

Mr Fender acknowledged that the objections raised in the letters of objections followed similar themes but he wanted to highlight that out of the entire population of Flamstead only 9 had felt strongly enough about the presence of Junction 9 to write into the Council, Mr Fender stated that surely if the presence of Junction 9 was of that much concern to the local residents then more would have wished to register their objections.

Mr Fender also highlighted that although two local businesses had complained about the renewal of Junction 9's license with various concerns and implying that Junction 9 was having a negative impact on their businesses he was of the impression that these businesses, specifically Majestic Trees, appeared to be flourishing as the recent industry accolades on their website suggested. Mr Fender also commented that there was a set of industrial units adjacent to Junction 9 the owners of which had not complained, and surely they would have had the presence of Junction 9 been detrimental to businesses in the local area.

Mr Fender also said that in relation to Flamstead Parish Council's objections to the premises he had looked at the published minutes of the council and could find no reference to Junction 9 which suggested that the issues that Councillor Killen raised in her letter may have been exaggerated.

Mr Fender summarised by saying that whilst he acknowledged there were a few individuals who were opposed to the premises he urged the Sub-Committee to focus on the facts, which showed that since the applicant had been responsible for the premises all license conditions had been complied with. In addition there had been no change to the locality in terms of character or layout and if granted Junction 9 would continue to operate as a legitimate business.

The Chairman thanked Mr Fender for his thorough presentation. The Chairman drew Mr Fender's attention to condition number 21 of the report which concerned the display and advertisement of the entertainment available outside of the premises. The Chairman asked if the current signage at Junction 9 really was compliant with this. The Chairman stated that he thought the signage was tawdry and that it was designed to capture the attention of passers-by. Mr Fender said that this signage had been seen by the Council's visiting officers but that if it was deemed to be inappropriate his client would endeavour to comply with any requests made in relation to this signage.

The Chairman then invited Councillor Killen to speak. Councillor Killen began by saying that she had been a resident of Flamstead for 29 years living to the north of the Junction 9. Councillor Killen explained that as a result she was very familiar with the premises and had seen numerous changes take place over the years. Councillor Killen said she had seen it transition from a hauliers inn to a family pub with a children's play area, and then to the establishment it is today.

Councillor Killen stated that in addition she was a ward Councillor and was representing residents who did want to attend the Sub-Committee to express their views but who are unable to do so due to work commitments.

Councillor Killen stressed that none of the objections of these individuals were based on general moral grounds and that all the objections related specifically to Junction 9.

Councillor Killen explained that the first issue was based on location. Councillor Killen said that some residents felt it was inappropriate in regards to the rural and residential character of the neighbourhood. The second issue related to recent changes to the physical appearance of the premises and the manner in which the establishment appeared to be managed which raised concerns over the ability or willingness of the applicant to comply with legal requirements and therefore his suitability to be granted a renewal.

Councillor Killen stated that the location and nature of the premises did not fit with the Councils Core Strategy as Flamstead had been recognised by the Core Strategy as one of the small villages within Dacorum which had; "been selected as places where limited development is possible without serious environmental detriment. This development is restricted to minor housing proposals and facilities to meet local needs (i.e. for those people needing to live and/or work in the Green Belt) so that the character of the villages and Green Belt location is protected."

Councillor Killen drew attention to this because she felt it was relevant to the context of this specific locality and so too to the decision to be made on whether the establishment was appropriately located. Councillor Killen said that Dacorum recognised the need to preserve and protect the rural characteristics of certain areas of which Flamstead was one.

Councillor Killen questioned if, based on this, was the Committee satisfied that this particular locality was appropriate for this sexual establishment?

Councillor Killen drew attention to other small businesses in the Flamstead area and said that they contributed to and enhanced the vibrancy and cohesiveness of the community. Councillor Killen stated that to varying degrees they all integrated and supported village events. Councillor Killen said that all of these businesses had either, improved the area, or would continue to do so. In contrast Junction 9 had chosen not to integrate into village life and had physically barricaded itself off with wooden paling and fencing and the erection of hoardings and signage which did not fit into the local rural scene.

Councillor Killen also mentioned that local house prices were affected by the location of Junction 9. Councillor Killen referenced a situation where estate agents had to advise a reduction of approximately £200,000 to the sale price of a house in the vicinity in order to secure the sale.

Councillor Killen stated that some may be of the opinion that the premises was located out of the way but due to the signage the premises was prominent and so was having adverse affects on the local area. Councillor Killen pointed out that the only other licensed establishment in Dacorum, a sex shop in Apsley, had no signage or external sign of its activities in total contrast to Junction 9.

Councillor Killen summarised by saying that due to the points she had just mentioned she requested that the Sub-Committee exercised their discretion and refused the application from Junction 9.

Following Councillor Killen's statement the Chairman asked if anyone had any questions. Mr Fender requested the opportunity to respond to the comments made by Councillor Killen. Mr Fender stated that allegations into the mismanagement of the premises were unfounded, the Chairman agreed that without police reports or some evidence of the unsuitability of the owner/manager of Junction 9 its was inappropriate to allege they were unsuitable to run the venue.

The Chairman then invited local business owner S McCurdy to speak on the application. S McCurdy said that residents of Flamstead were not aware of the 2012 application for a sexual entertainment license application and that is why they had not registered their objections. S McCurdy said that he did not feel that objectors of the Junction 9 license application were a small minority but instead that there were a large number of residents who were afraid to register their objection given the type of clientele that Junction 9 attracted some of whom were thought to be unsavoury characters.

S McCurdy said that whilst he appreciated Mr Fenders comments in regards to the success of his business he did still receive many negative comments from customers who were shocked to see a sexual entertainment venue in such close proximity to his business. S McCurdy said also that to the best of his knowledge the owners of the industrial units located next to Junction 9 were in fact struggling to sell off units and whilst this may be down to economic reasons it was possible that again the close proximity of Junction 9 could be a factor in this.

S McCurdy said that there had also been a blatant shift in the marketing associated with Junction 9 over the last 4 years and that the signage and the graphic online advertising made it very obvious as to what activities were being carried out at the venue.

The Chairman again asked if Mr Fender wished to respond to these comments. Mr Fender again reiterated that there were no reports of anti-social behaviour or crime and so he didn't think S McCurdy's comments in regards to the nature of the clientele at Junction 9 were relevant. Mr Fender also pointed out in relation to Councillor Killen's earlier comments regarding house prices he had looked on the property website 'Zoopla' that morning and it stated that house prices had risen significantly in Flamstead over the past few years so clearly the presence of Junction 9 was not affecting property prices in the area. Mr Fender also pointed out that the condition and external appearance of the building was compliant with the conditions of the license and that due to the boarding on the outside it was impossible to see any of what went on in doors. The Chairman gave Councillor Killen an opportunity to respond to Mr Fender's comments but she had nothing to add.

The Officers, the applicant and his representatives and the members of the public withdrew whilst the Sub-Committee considered the matter.

Resolved:

The Licensing and Health & Safety Enforcement Sub-Committee, by a unanimous decision, concluded that the application for Grant of a Sex Establishment Licence be granted provided that the applicant adhere to all standard conditions. The Chairman wished to draw attention to the signage of Junction 9 and that he strongly advised the applicant to liaise with R Hill to ensure that the signage was of an acceptable standard.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.