

Cheltenham Borough Council Licensing Committee

Report Background Paper - Red Apple Associates Ltd

Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

This e-mail to Cheltenham Borough Council is to oppose the above application – I note that the last date for receipt of comments is 31st May.

GRASAC have been working with staff from Cheltenham Borough Council as well as the Police as evidence was gathered prior to the recent race week that individuals (mostly, but not entirely, women) have been approached requesting sexual favours or at times grabbed or groped, in particular during the period of race meetings. Please see copies of the posters produced in conjunction with all organisations attached for your information.

Sadly, in addition, there was a serious sexual assault reported by Gloucester Constabulary during the recent race week in March (including seeking information from helpful bystanders who supported the victim) that was widely reported by the Police.

We would hope that the request by the sexual entertainment venue is declined and as Cheltenham Borough Council staff members, with support from Councillors, continues to work with organisations that advises any individuals who have suffered sexual assault, the request from the venue would be wholly in opposition to the hard work and effort of all involved to make Cheltenham a safer place to reside and visit.

Please contact me if you require any further information and I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this communication.

A resident

I am writing to object to the proposed additional dates applied for sexual entertainment at the Two Pigs.

External Advertising/ Objects on the pavement

Throughout Race Week and during other race events when the Two Pigs is hosting the Eroticats lap dancing under its SEV licence, it regularly has external advertising objects on the pavement during its opening hours. One outside Spec Savers on the High Street, near the corner of Church Street, partially blocking the pavement. One at the High Street entrance to the alleyway down the side of Cobblers Corner leading to the Two Pigs. This object more or less blocks this access to the alley, especially when there is also one of the promotions staff standing next to the barrier with fliers. These objects consist of fabric banners in pink and black promoting 'Club Eroticat' stretched between two metal posts.

Contrary to the licence term “ No flyers or similar promotional material for the premises shall be distributed within the Town”, flyers promoting Club Eroticat are distributed throughout the town centre by teams of promoters wearing pink hi-vis jackets branded Club Eroticat. The flyers have the same pink and black branding as the on-street banners on the High Street outside the Two Pigs. They don't contain the locations, instead they promote the Eroticats courtesy van which drops punters off at the Two Pigs as well as whichever other premises are hosting Eroticats that evening. The flyers also promote the Eroticats website, the front page of which offers XXX live cam chat and XXX chatlines. The flyers can still be found on the pavements round the town centre the following day despite the best efforts of the Ubico street cleaning team.

Involuntary involvement in the sex industry

Working in the sex industry may be an active choice for the performers and management, but it is not so for everybody involved, including some of the staff at the Two Pigs who are used to working in a pub and music venue the rest of the year. When Eroticats takes over the pub for days at a time, the Two Pigs' usual staff are either co-opted into working in the lap dancing club, collecting glasses etc, or are laid off for days at a time.

The promoters hired via Griffins promotions are mostly 18-21year olds shipped into Cheltenham for the evening. Their usual jobs are promoting night clubs around the southwest of England and Wales, and they aren't told before they arrive that they will be promoting a sexual entertainment venue.

24 Hours exemption

If the Two Pigs is not granted a licence, it can still host lap dancing once a month under a 24 hour exemption. It is argued regularly that the licence gives more control than the exemption. Previous advocates for Red Apple/ Eroticats have argued that it enables them to concentrate lap dancing in one venue. Neither of those are the case. Eroticats does not restrict itself to the Two Pigs for race events. They regularly host lap dancing in other venues around the town centre during race events. Having a licence has not prevented the Two Pigs from having external advertising on the pavements and benefiting from promotion staff and flyers throughout the town centre. Operating under the exemption would limit the operation of Eroticats at the Two Pigs to one night per month.

The 24exemption makes a mockery of local decision making on licensing applications and policies. The process is not transparent or publicly accountable. Members of the public wanting to avoid lap dancing activity or to find out the extent of it during race events are not able to do so. The extent to which the 24 exemption is used during race events is peculiar to Cheltenham. It doesn't appear to happen elsewhere in the country during major sporting events. For most of the country this 'loophole' which was apparently designed not to penalise pubs or clubs from hosting the occasional stripper has little effect. But in Cheltenham, it has become the basis of an industry. It is up to the UK parliament to review this legislation, but it would be appreciated if Cheltenham's local politicians could press for this review.

The effects of sexual entertainment

One of the advantages of being in my forties is that I can go out for a drink with my friends in town without having to deal with anyone getting 'handsy'. That is not the case during race week and other racing events. The level of sexual harassment increases during race events, leading to many women choosing to avoid the town centre or certain venues. The many women who work in the licensed trade can't avoid it. Sexual harassment is rarely reported, Although the GRASAC campaign during raceweek is to be commended, I still didn't report the man who latched onto my group of friends, following us and putting his arms around our waists despite not being invited and us repeatedly peeling his hands off us or moving away; or the men who shouted after me as I made my way home at the end of the evening. I am aware how overstretched the police are during these events, and it is hard to change the habits of a lifetime to formally report these incidents.

I have previously 'made the mistake' of booking tickets for a show at the Everyman during a race meeting. The show was great, but walking back home through the town centre (by the most direct route) with my twelve year old was not, running the gamut of promoters large groups of drunken men, and this would make me less likely to book a similar event during a race meeting in future.

The links between sporting entertainment, sexism, and the sex industry are not inevitable, and it is time that it was challenged, to make the atmosphere in the town centre more welcoming for everyone, not just for men wanting to turn the clock back. Notably during race events, the gender balance in the town centre changes to a very male dominated space.