

Cheltenham Borough Council

Licensing Sub Committee – 2nd July 2020

Licensing Act 2003: Determination of Application for a Premises Licence

For The St James' Club, Gibson House. Cheltenham. GL50 3QG

Case Officer: Jason Kirkwood - Senior Licensing Officer

Introduction

1. The Licensing Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) introduced a unified system of regulation through four types of authorisation to permit licensable activity:-
 - The premises licence,
 - The club premises certificates for qualifying clubs,
 - Temporary Event Notices and
 - The personal licence.
2. Licensable activity is defined under the 2003 Act as the following:-
 - The sale by retail or the supply of alcohol,
 - Regulated entertainment (recorded and live music, performance of a play, exhibition of a film, etc)
 - Late night refreshment (food or drink supplied above ambient temperature between the hours of 23:00 and 05:00).
3. Since the implementation of the 2003 Act, Central Government has issued Statutory Guidance (the Guidance) to provide more comprehensive and detailed advice on this legislation. It was last updated on 6 April 2018. The licensing authority must have regard to the Guidance when determining this application.
4. The Guidance is binding on Cheltenham Borough Council acting in its capacity as a licensing authority under the 2003 Act. However, the licensing authority may depart from it, if it has good reason to do so. Departure from this Guidance could give rise to an appeal or judicial review, and so clear reasons must be referenced in such instances.
5. The 2003 Act requires that a council must formulate and publish a statement of its licensing policy. This will explain the manner in which the licensing authority will carry out its responsibilities under the 2003 Act. The licensing authority may depart from the Statement of Licensing Policy (the Policy), but must give good reason(s) where it chooses to do so.
6. The Guidance and Policy are both referenced: through elements of this report, through a summary of the most relevant extracts from each attached as appendices and by way of weblinks to both documents.

Background

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7. The Borough Council, as the licensing authority, is responsible for authorising all venues/ events in the borough where licensable activities take place.
8. The legislation provides a clear focus on the promotion of four statutory objectives which must be considered when licensing functions are undertaken.
9. The system is built upon four licensing objectives:-
 - The prevention of crime and disorder;
 - Public safety;
 - The prevention of public nuisance; and,
 - The protection of children from harm.
10. The licensing authority must promote these objectives in carrying out its functions.
11. Each objective is of equal importance. There are no other statutory licensing aims or objectives, although other aims and objectives may be pursued through local policy.
12. Where an application is made to the licensing authority, the default position is that the application will be granted, as applied for, unless relevant representations (objections) are received. If relevant representations are received, a hearing must be held to consider the application, in light of the objections and/ or any support for it.
13. An objection against an application must refer to the promotion of one or more of the licensing objectives to be considered as a relevant representation, and must be made by a Responsible Authority or an 'Other Person'.
14. Responsible Authorities: - The 2003 Act identifies 10 responsible authorities that act as statutory consultees for applications for premises licences. All of these consultees are served with a copy of the application and have the opportunity to object or make comment:-
 - The relevant Licensing Authority,
 - The Chief Officer of Police
 - The local Fire and Rescue Authority
 - The relevant health and safety enforcing authority
 - The local authority with responsibility for environmental health
 - The local Planning Authority
 - The relevant body with responsibility for the protection of children
 - The relevant Public Health Authority
 - Trading Standards
 - Home Office Immigration Enforcement (on behalf of the Secretary of State).
15. Other Persons - The 2003 Act allows any individual, body or business to make representations to the licensing authority regarding an application for a premises licence, where their comments relate to the promotion of the licensing objectives.
16. Mediation - In some cases, mediation by the licensing authority has the potential to find a satisfactory conclusion for all parties, and a hearing may be dispensed with, if all parties agree. Due to the volume of representations, it has not seemed realistic for mediation to produce such an outcome in this case.

Policy Considerations

17. Core Hours for Licensable Activities - As set down in the Policy the council will avoid arbitrary restrictions on licensing hours that undermine the principles of flexibility and consideration of each application is on its own merit.

18. However, the council believes that licensable activities carried on within the core hours set out below will generally not have a harmful impact on the licensing objectives, address the concerns raised by local residents and businesses and are usually less likely to attract representations.

19. Furthermore, earlier closing will result in less alcohol consumption and drunkenness and would also be consistent with the ability to get crowds dispersed from the town centre.

Table 1: Core Hours for Licensable Activities

Type of premises	Commencement hour no earlier than	Terminal hour no later than
Off licence	09:00	23:00
Restaurant	10:00	01:00
Theatres, cinemas and other performance venues	10:00	00:00
Pubs/ bars/ nightclubs	Town centre 10:00	03:00
	Local neighbourhood areas 10:00	00:00
Takeaways	N/a	N/a

20. As set down in Appendix D of the Policy, the location for the St James' Club is defined as a 'town centre' location.

21. Where relevant representations have been made, the sub - committee will take the following matters into consideration when making a decision, as per the Policy. These are not a definitive list and other matters may be considered:-

a) Operating schedules - demonstration of compliance with management standards to support each of the licensing objectives.

b) Proximity to residential accommodation - the likelihood of the operation to have an adverse impact on the peace and quiet of local residents.

c) Potential noise and nuisance from people leaving and entering the premises.

d) Ability to demonstrate that systems in place to ensure timely dispersal of customers away from residential areas.

- e) Use of external areas for carrying out the licensable activities and potential noise impact on local residents.
- f) Proposed hours of the licensing activities and general opening times for the public – The use of winding down periods to enable more efficient dispersal.
- g) Type of use – alcohol led premises such as pubs, bars and nightclubs, off licenses and hot food take away premises are more likely to be associated with crime and disorder and public nuisance than other premises such as seated restaurants, theatres, cinemas and other cultural activities.
- h) Availability of public transport to assist in the timely dispersal of customers from the vicinity and to ensure safe travel home.
- i) The potential for contamination of the street environment through increased litter and other pollution of the streets by customers

The Determination of an Application

- 22. Where relevant representations have been received and mediation is unsuccessful or not viable, then the licensing authority’s discretion will be engaged. It will convene a hearing by a sub – committee of the Licensing Committee to consider the application and representations.
- 23. Responsible authorities and/or other persons in relation to an application may attend the hearing, with adequate notice, to amplify and clarify their relevant comments. They may not add to their original representation once the objection period has closed.
- 24. The applicant may also attend the hearing to assist the authority in considering the application.
- 25. The hearing should focus on the steps considered appropriate to promote the particular licensing objective or objectives that have given rise the representations and not stray into undisputed areas.
- 26. The sub – committee should determine the application with a view to promoting the licensing objectives in the overall interests of the local community. The licensing authority must give appropriate weight to:-
 - The Statutory Guidance - the current version is available to view [here](#) (the most relevant extracts to this case are attached at **Appendix 5** of this report).
 - The Cheltenham Borough Council Statement of Licensing Policy – the current version is available to view [here](#) (the most relevant extracts are attached at **Appendix 6** of this report).
 - The representations (including supporting information) presented by all the parties. (Attached at **Appendix 3 a – j**).
 - The steps that are appropriate to promote the licensing objectives.

The Application

Case number: 20/00454/PRMA

Applicant: St James Club Limited

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Licence type – premises licence

Address: Basement, Gibson House, St. James Square, Cheltenham. GL50 3QG

27. Other information: the premises will be known as ‘the St James’ Club’. Many objectors have referred to the name as ‘Chemistry’, as a venue operating in the past from this location was known under that name.
28. A sub - committee is required to discharge its duty and determine this application with a view to promoting the licensing objectives. This is because relevant representations have been made against the application.
29. The application is attached at **Appendix 1** and details the hours sought for licensable activity to take place. It includes the steps the applicant would take to promote the licensing objectives at Section M if the application is granted.
30. The application was received on 19th February 2020 and was deemed as duly made at that point. The close of the objection period was 19th March 2020. The application was sent electronically to all responsible authorities and public notice of the application was given by way of site notice and a notice in a local newspaper. An objector reported the site notice missing at one point, however an officer checked the site notice and it was still in place.
31. The application was accompanied by a plan of the premises, which is attached at **Appendix 2**. The location of the proposed venue is shown by way of area maps highlighting Gibson House at **Appendix 4 a - d**.

Relevant Representations

32. During the objection period there were no relevant representations received from any responsible authority.
33. However, there were a relatively significant number of relevant representations from other persons. The breakdown of the relevant representations is as follows:-

Total letters/ email/ forms received – 194 (1 objection was withdrawn leaving this final total)

168 from individuals

21 from couples/ families/ persons living together representing 2 persons objecting

3 from local businesses/ organisations

1 from a Ward Councillor

1 from a 5 person household

Total named objectors – 219

67 of the above objectors describe themselves as parishioners of the church

10 of the above objectors describe a direct link with the school/ nursery.

34. *It should be noted that where objections only referred to the licensing objectives by name, further information was requested as far as possible.*

35. All relevant representations are attached at **Appendix 3 a – j**. They have been batched alphabetically as far as possible, each batch is manually page numbered and they are

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redacted to remove names, signatures and personal contact information (telephone numbers and email addresses). **Appendix 3 j** contains 2 representations out of that order, due to an administrative error.

Hearing

36. It is clear that Government has a clear priority for the justice system, council meetings generally and regulatory functions to continue to be maintained, as far as practicable, notwithstanding the challenges faced by society through the measures introduced to tackle COVID – 19.
37. In usual circumstances, the hearing would have taken place prior to 18th April 2020. However, the sub – committee determined that the period within which the hearing should usually be held, as laid down in Statutory Instrument 2005 no. 44, should be extended for up to 3 months. This was because of the acute difficulties of holding it at the time due to the national emergency in relation to COVID – 19, in particular with no physical meeting possible. The high number of objectors, the apparent age dynamic of many of them and the likely difficulties in providing access to and managing a meeting through online means alone led to this decision.
38. However, the council will make its best endeavours to ensure that the hearing is held on 2nd July 2020, as it would be inappropriate to delay the matter further. It is hoped that certain government measures may have been relaxed slightly by that time, and with proper coordination and management, the hearing can be held by way of a combination of a physical meeting (with social distancing measures) and online facilities to view and take part in the meeting.
39. The council is currently preparing to deliver certain council meetings ‘virtually’, whereby the public/ councillors can view and/ or take part in meetings through online conference facilities. It is hoped to use those same facilities and a physical meeting through limited means to ensure access to the hearing, the right for all parties to be heard and provide transparency about the decision making process. Further information will be made available about how the hearing will be managed nearer to the time, as it will be dependent on a number of factors and ultimately the health and safety of all persons involved in this process.
40. In any event, the council appreciates that not all parties will want to attend the meeting in person, but it understands that they will want their views to be considered. Further, the council understands that many objectors may face difficulties in accessing a meeting online, and so may be hindered in engaging fully with the process.
41. Therefore, it seems prudent to ensure that objectors can voice their concerns through their local ward councillors and/ or a representative of their choosing. This approach has been taken by many councils where there are a number of objections to an application under ‘normal business’ circumstances.
42. *It is worth bearing in mind that normal practice at hearings would involve parties not repeating the points that have already been made to the sub – committee on the day. Furthermore, the sub – committee will consider all written representations in any event, and the hearing itself is the opportunity for parties to only ‘amplify and clarify’ the points they have already made in writing.*

43. On that basis, the case officer will make best endeavours to facilitate effective means for objectors to be heard in a coordinated and effective fashion. The ward councillors, a representative from the church and a representative from the local community will be contacted to discuss this approach, but this will not override the right for any party to act independently if they wish. All parties will be updated in due course as the council aims to secure good access to this meeting for all.

Case Officer Comments

44. It became apparent very early in the consultation period that the application gave rise to concern amongst many local residents and other members of the public with connections to the area, in particular through a local church. In many instances concerns were raised with reference to the operation of the nightclubs Gas and Chemistry that previously occupied Gibson House.

45. An application for a premises licence at Gibson House was refused in 2010, but a premises licence had previously been in force for a number of years. The premises has not been licensed as a venue since at least 2010.

46. Members are asked to consider the following points, which seem pertinent to the case:-

1. Objectors raised significant concerns regarding the impact on the local community of a licensed venue at this location in the past.
2. In light of those allegations, the sub - committee may consider to what extent concerns raised about previous use of the premises may have been due to poor management of the venue and/ or generally lower standards in the management of the night time economy at that time. If so, how far could those concerns be addressed by better management practice in future?
3. Alternatively, they may consider the extent to which it is reasonable to believe that alleged past problems may reoccur through use of the venue due to a potential conflict of the intended activities and the nature of the area concerned. The specific details of this application and management controls proposed for the venue are crucial considerations in this respect.
4. Many objectors have grave concerns about the proximity of a licensed venue to a church, but it must be acknowledged by all parties that moral issues cannot be considered in their own right. However, concerns raised in that regard that do relate to the promotion of the licensing objectives and this application certainly can be considered.
5. It is understood the management team for the proposed venue will be different than has previously operated the venue.
6. The sub-committee may wish to satisfy itself whether the prospective licence holder has policies and procedures in place to address the concerns raised by the objectors.
7. It should be noted that an existing licensed premises is generally open until a later terminal hour on a daily basis in close proximity to this proposed venue – namely ‘The Bottle of Sauce’. That premises is permitted to sell alcohol from 10:00 – 00:00 hours on Sunday – Thursday and 10:00 – 01:00 hours on Friday and Saturday, and seems to coexist well with the local community and does not apparently give rise to a disproportionate number of complaints.
8. The operation of licensed venues in the night time economy seems generally more developed and improved since the previous venue closed. For example, the setting up

of Night Safe (launched in 2007) and the work done by stakeholders to achieve and maintain the Purple Flag status for the town (first awarded 2016) suggests a more effective partnership based approach to tackling alcohol related problems now exists.

47. Furthermore, all parties must recognize the following important considerations:-

- The decision making exercise is considered as an 'administrative' process in legal terms. However, there is potential for legal challenge against a decision, and where a party appeals, the decision making process is scrutinized. The licensing authority is bound by legislation and case law in how it carries out this function, and so must act accordingly.
- Members can only consider evidence/ reasoning presented, which is clearly related to the promotion of the licensing objectives and this specific proposal.
- The fact that no responsible authority objected to the proposal must be considered by the sub – committee. Where those bodies have concerns about an application, they can object and recommend conditions. They are considered as technical experts in their fields and have not objected, which confirms they are satisfied with the applicant's proposals.

48. Finally, the case *R (Hope and Glory Public House Limited) v City of Westminster Magistrates' Court* [2011] EWCA Civ 31 is considered an important licensing case that was considered by the Court of Appeal in 2011. An extract from the conclusion provides some assistance for the sub – committee:-

41. As Mr Matthias rightly submitted, the licensing function of a licensing authority is an administrative function. By contrast, the function of the district judge is a judicial function. The licensing authority has a duty, in accordance with the rule of law, to behave fairly in the decision-making procedure, but the decision itself is not a judicial or quasi-judicial act. It is the exercise of a power delegated by the people as a whole to decide what the public interest requires. (See the judgment of Lord Hoffmann in Alconbury at para 74.)

42. Licensing decisions often involve weighing a variety of competing considerations: the demand for licensed establishments, the economic benefit to the proprietor and to the locality by drawing in visitors and stimulating the demand, the effect on law and order, the impact on the lives of those who live and work in the vicinity, and so on. Sometimes a licensing decision may involve narrower questions, such as whether noise, noxious smells or litter coming from premises amount to a public nuisance. Although such questions are in a sense questions of fact, they are not questions of the "heads or tails" variety. They involve an evaluation of what is to be regarded as reasonably acceptable in the particular location. In any case, deciding what (if any) conditions should be attached to a licence as necessary and proportionate to the promotion of the statutory licensing objectives is essentially a matter of judgment rather than a matter of pure fact.

43. The statutory duty of the licensing authority to give reasons for its decision serves a number of purposes. It informs the public, who can make their views known to their elected representatives if they do not like the licensing sub-committee's approach. It enables a party aggrieved by the decision to know why it has lost and to consider the prospects of a successful appeal. If an appeal is brought, it enables the magistrates' court to know the reasons which led to the decision. The fuller and clearer the reasons, the more force they are likely to carry.

49. The last paragraph highlights in particular the statutory duty of the sub – committee to give clear written reasons for its decision. This allows all parties to an application to understand the eventual outcome in a meaningful way.

DECISION MAKING

50. The sub – committee will consider thoroughly and diligently the representations and their relevance to the determination of this application. Members must limit their considerations of the objections to where they are specifically relevant to the application before them.

51. The licensing authority must determine the application and decide whether to:-

- **Grant the application with mandatory conditions and those offered in the application only, or**
- **Grant the application with mandatory conditions, those conditions offered in the application (amended or otherwise) and attach specific conditions to promote the licensing objectives - where it considers it appropriate. (This may include restricting the hours applied for in the application), or**
- **Refuse the application, as it considers it appropriate to promote the licensing objectives.**

52. Each application must be considered on its own merits and in accordance with the 2003 Act, the Guidance and the licensing authority’s Statement of Licensing Policy.

53. If conditions are attached to the grant of a licence they must be tailored to the individual type, location and characteristics of the premises/ events concerned. This is essential to avoid the imposition of disproportionate and overly burdensome conditions on premises where there is no need for such conditions.

54. If any party to a hearing is aggrieved by the decision of the licensing authority (this means the applicant or any person/ organisation/ business that made a relevant representation), they may appeal to the Magistrates’ Court. They must do so within 21 days of being notified of the decision in writing.

Licence conditions – general principles

55. Conditions on a premises licence are important in setting the parameters within which premises can lawfully operate. The use of wording such as ‘must’, ‘shall’ and to a lesser extent ‘will’ is encouraged.

56. Licence conditions:-

- Must be appropriate for the promotion of the licensing objectives;
- Must be precise and enforceable;
- Must be unambiguous and clear in what they intend to achieve;
- Should not duplicate other statutory requirements or other duties or responsibilities placed on the employer by other legislation;
- Must be tailored to the individual type, location and characteristics of the premises and events concerned;
- Should not be standardised and may be unlawful when it cannot be demonstrated that they are appropriate for the promotion of the licensing objectives in an individual case;

- Should not replicate offences set out in the 2003 Act or other legislation;
- Should be proportionate, justifiable and be capable of being met, (for example, whilst beer glasses may be available in toughened glass, wine glasses may not);
- Cannot seek to manage the behaviour of customers once they are beyond the direct management of the licence holder and their staff, but may impact on the behaviour of customers in the immediate vicinity of the premises or as they enter or leave; and
- Should be written in a prescriptive format.

Background Papers

Various appendices

Report Author

Contact officer: Mr Jason Kirkwood

E-mail: licensing@cheltenham.gov.uk

Tel no: 01242 262626

Legal contact officer: Vikki Fennell

Email: Vikki.Fennell@teWKesbury.gov.uk

Tel no. 01684 272015