

Wychwood response for Licensing Application January 2026

The current proposals

The current application seeks the following changes to the Premises License for Wychwood Festival, an annual music festival held at Cheltenham Racecourse Helifield:

1. Increase in maximum capacity to 14,999.
2. Extension of licensed area to include a new additional camping field.
3. Thursday evening licensed entertainment using the “2nd stage” in a marquee / big top, with a finish time of 2300 .
4. Changes to noise limits, to raise target limit to 60dBA (5mins) and absolute limit to 65dBA(5mins).

The principal interest of the Environmental Protection Team is potential impact of noise from the site to cause public nuisance to residents of homes around the site. Changes 1 & 2 above are unlikely to have any impact on noise levels experienced around the site by residents of noise sensitive properties.

The applicants for this License have been in discussions with this department and have already agreed measures to control potential effects on the neighbourhood. This includes a programme of noise monitoring around the site very similar to the programme that was operated at last year’s event and successfully delivered an event that complied with noise limits.

In respect of change 3, the Thursday evening entertainment will be limited to attendees staying at the site in recreational vehicles, and will only utilise the 2nd stage, which has a considerably more limited capacity than the entire arena. The applicant has agreed to an off site noise limit of 55dBA(15mins) target level and 60dBA(15mins) absolute limit, and a finish time of 2300.

The proposals to overall noise limits under Change 4 have also been discussed with the applicant and considered in the context of the available national guidance. The main guidance document available is “Code of Practice on Environmental Noise Control at Concerts”, published by the Noise Council in 1995, known as “The Pop Code”. This guidance is considerably out of date and long overdue updating to reflect how such events operate in 2026. An update has been described as imminent for at least the last 7 years, but still hasn’t been published. It should be noted that this document is *guidance*, and there are no set limits in force nationally for similar events. Noise limits should be set which are bespoke to the event in question and give full consideration to other factors, which may include: Proximity of unusually noise sensitive premises, background noise levels, previous levels of compliance, and to a degree the nature of the entertainment being provided. Overall noise limits in a premises licence should be set to meet the licensing objective of the prevention of public nuisance and may need to vary on a case-by-case basis for different events and operators, even at the same location.

Previous history of this event

Wychwood has operated at Cheltenham Racecourse for about 20 years, and over this time has used a variety of locations around the extensive site. The event moved to the helifield in 2023(?) and the event operated without complaint that year. In 2024 complaints were received from 15 members of the public regarding off-site noise levels, however on balance it should be noted that 2 reports were also received in support of the event, and indicated that they had been requested to make a complaint by someone else. These complaints resulted in a member of the public requesting a formal review of the site licence, which took place before the 2025 event. This review did not result in significant changes to noise limits, other than incorporating a

new limit on low-frequency noise. However the hearing did result in considerably improved monitoring of the event by consultants acting for the festival operators. The event was also monitored by officers from CBC Environmental Protection Team. During the event, one isolated property was located where it was not possible to limit noise levels to a compliant level and a private arrangement was reached between that resident and the event operators. Peak noise levels monitored by CBC were found on Sunday evening when performances on 2 stages overlapped for about 10-15 minutes which was quickly dealt with in an appropriate way. Other noise sources were also dealt with in a pro-active way before approaching noise limits.

Relevant Guidance:

The guidance on setting off-site noise levels contained within the Pop Code is as follows:

Concert days per calendar year	Venue Category	Guideline
1 to 3	Urban Stadia or Arenas	The MNL should not exceed 75dB(A) over a 15 minute period
1 to 3	Other urban and rural venues	The MNL should not exceed 65dB(A) over a 15 minute period
4 to 12	All venues	The MNL should not exceed the background noise level ¹ by more than 15db(A) over a 15 minute period

For clarity, the above table includes the following notes:

1. The value used should be the arithmetic average of the hourly LA90 measured over the last 4 hours of the proposed music event or over the entire period of the proposed music event if scheduled to last for less than 4 hours.
2. There are many other issues that affect the acceptability of proposed concerts. This code is designed to address the environmental noise issue alone.
3. In locations where individuals may be affected by more than one venue, the impact of all events should be considered.
4. For those venues where more than 3 events per year are expected, the frequency and scheduling of the events will affect the level of disturbance. In particular, additional disturbance can arise if events occur on more than three consecutive days without a reduction in permitted MNL.
5. For indoor venues used for up to about 30 events per calendar year an MNL not exceeding the background noise by more than 5dB(A) over a fifteen minute period is recommended for events finishing no later than 2300.

In discussions, the applicant has further explained the reasoning behind their application for the raised off site noise limit. In particular they have suggested that the existing limits of 55dB(A) target and 60dB(A) absolute are out of line with the above guidance. This appears to be correct if we treat the event as a 3-day event, however if we include the Thursday evening, the event will now cover 4 days, although the Thursday evening will run at a lower off-site limit, so it would seem reasonable to discount this 4th night of operation.

We also need to consider the impact of other events at the same location. At time of writing, we understand there will be 2 nights of activity involving amplified music at this site in July, and one

in August, but details of noise management for these events have not been determined at this stage. We expect the other events will be subject to license applications at a later date and it may be appropriate for these new events to be issued licenses with reduced noise limits, but it does not seem appropriate to further restrict noise levels for Wychwood due to other events planning to use the same site.

We recognise that this opinion may deviate from the exact word of the guidance, but note that the current license, agreed last year by committee added in conditions on low-frequency noise which were not included in the 1995 document.

Other relevant concerns:

The noise limit is unlikely to be approached for most of the time the event is operating. Our experience of monitoring this event is that during the day noise levels are significantly below any limits, as the festival has a more family-friendly, low-key approach to the activity on the main stage. In practice, the operators are unlikely to run the event near maximum levels later in the day when headline acts play to bigger audiences. This is common practice for a festival of this style and demonstrates a shortcoming of the 1995 guidance which doesn't account for the nature of the event.

In drafting conditions to prevent the event causing public nuisance, we have to consider the effect of the event on an appropriate geographical area, but the legislation does not permit us to take action to limit noise levels to those requested by unduly sensitive individuals in the vicinity of the site. In essence we are required to consider the effect of the event on an "average" individual.

The impact of weather conditions, specifically wind speed and direction is considerable on this event. In 2025 the wind direction was a settled south-westerly breeze, meaning that noise was largely carried towards Southam where houses start at about 500m away from the main stage. After the event there remained a concern that in the relatively unlikely event of a wind coming from the North, homes are less than 400m away. Therefore in order to satisfy the existing 55dB(A) target / 60dB(A) absolute noise limits it may become necessary to reduce in arena sound levels to an unacceptable level. This would be very disruptive to the delivery of the event and the increase in noise limit should make this scenario unlikely to cause such an issue.

Recommendation:

After considering the noise management proposals put forward by the applicant, such guidance as is available, and the successful delivery of last year's event this department agrees with the applicant that an off-site noise limit of 60dB(A) target, and 65dB(A) absolute should be applied. Further conditions relating to noise management should be applied, as follows:

OFF SITE SOUND

1. The Licensee shall provide a Noise Management Plan to the Council's Public Protection Division at least 6 weeks prior to the event. The Noise Management Plan shall identify how noise arising from the holding of the event will be effectively controlled to comply with conditions 4, 5, 6 and 7, as below. Inter alia, the plan shall include:

- A monitoring regime for numerical levels, subjective levels and low frequency noise targets.
- Response process for any deviations from the Target Level.

- identify suitable monitoring locations, as agreed with the local authority.
- This shall also include details of the noise consultant, including their name, address and telephone number.

2. The noise control consultant/s shall liaise between all relevant parties on all matters relating to noise control prior to and during the event. The noise control consultant/s must be present on site, or monitoring the event off site, throughout the duration of the regulated entertainment, including sound checks, with authority to monitor and control noise levels on site. The Licensing authority shall have access to the results of the noise monitoring at any time.

3. Sufficient noise propagation tests shall be undertaken prior to the performances in order to set appropriate control limits at the sound mixer position. The sound system shall be configured and operated in a similar manner as intended for the event. The sound source used for the test shall be similar in character to the music likely to be produced during the event.

4. For the Thursday, the control limits set at the mixer position shall be adequate to ensure that a Target Music Noise Level (MNL) of 55dB LAeq (15mins) measured at one metre from the facade of noise sensitive premises shall be achieved between the hours of 0900 hrs to 2300 hrs. Where the Target Level of 55dB LAeq (15mins) is exceeded then suitable and appropriate action shall be taken to meet this Target Level. An Absolute Music Noise Level (MNL) of 60dB LAeq (15mins) measured at one metre from the facade of noise sensitive premises shall not be exceeded between the hours of 0900 hrs to 2300 hrs. For the Thursday, regulated entertainment shall only be licensable until 2300 hrs.

5. For the Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the control limits set at the mixer position shall be adequate to ensure that a Target Music Noise Level (MNL) of 60dB LAeq (15mins) measured at one metre from the facade of noise sensitive premises shall be achieved between the hours of 0900 hrs to 2300 hrs. Where the Target Level of 60dB LAeq (15mins) is exceeded then suitable and appropriate action shall be taken to meet this Target Level. An Absolute Music Noise Level (MNL) of 65dB LAeq (15mins) measured at one metre from the facade of noise sensitive premises shall not be exceeded between the hours of 0900 hrs to 2300 hrs. The noise levels shall be monitored at noise sensitive locations agreed with the Council. (Note: MNL and noise sensitive properties are as defined in Code of Practice on Environmental Noise Control at Concerts - Noise Council 1995).

6. The control limits set at the mixer position shall be adequate to ensure that an Absolute Music Noise Level (MNL) of 45dB LAeq (15mins) measured at one metre from the facade of noise sensitive premises shall be achieved between the hours of 2300 hrs to 0300 hrs.

7. The level of amplified music sound energy emitted from the site shall not exceed a target of 85dB LCEq (15 minutes) with an upper limit of 90dB LCEq (15 minutes) at any time when measured at locations specified in an approved Noise Management Plan.

8. The Licensee shall ensure that the promoter, sound system supplier and all individual sound engineers are informed of the sound control limits and that any instructions from the appointed noise control consultant/s regarding noise levels shall be implemented.

9. At least 6 weeks prior to the event, the licensee must submit a communications plan for informing nearby residents of the event to the Council's Public Protection Division. This must include a contact telephone number for complaints which is staffed at all times while the event is taking place.

10. The Licensee shall keep a documented record of complaints received and resultant actions. The appointed noise control consultant be notified of any complaints immediately.

11. The Licensee shall provide a report to the Council's Public Protection Division in order to demonstrate compliance with these conditions within 28 days of the Event.

12. Any reasonable request by an authorised officer of the Council to reduce noise levels as a result of non-compliance with licence conditions shall be complied with immediately.