

Old Camdenians Sports Club Representation regarding licensing variation proposal

We have held a lease on Camden playing fields continuously for nearly 75 years and over that period of time many things have changed, residents have come and gone, use has fluctuated and we have of course maintained and improved our facilities as best we could afford. The club has been run by the same group of individuals since my first involvement 15 years ago and it has been our aim to provide the best possible facilities we can to our members and to the local community over that period. While the main focus of the club has and will always be Sport, the Social and Bar side is a vital source of income which keeps the club running.

Many of the representations made relate to late night music, noise and general disturbance.

I feel it is most relevant to highlight the fact we are just 1 of 3 clubs in Burtonhole Lane with the other 2 being closer to Eleanor Crescent where the majority of the representations come from. We have only held 19 functions in the past 12 months, with only half of these being evening functions. Knowing this we simply cannot be held responsible for all disturbance in the area simply because we have sought a variation to our license. The perfect example of this is that we had a noise complaint last summer filed against our club for an evening when we were completely shut. I know this because I was out on the roller on our cricket square alone at 7pm listening to the music coming from up the road.

Mill Hill Village Sports Club last summer attempted to stage a large outdoor music festival. The organisers of this event originally approached us to hold this event which we turned away without hesitation. Mill Hill Country Club, which is the closest of all 3 clubs to the main residents in this area is a fully fledged function venue and don't carry out any sporting activity at all anymore. They have more frequent events than we do and I would assume much later as well based on us enquiring to them for a comparison in pricing they offered us the venue until 2am a few years ago with no restrictions on bringing our own alcohol. To the best of my knowledge, they get round the licensing laws by not providing their own bar and effectively hire out the space for people to bring and do what they want.

Our approach to these types of events is much different.

- We only hire our facility to people who are first members of the club.
- We don't allow any alcohol to be brought onto the premises which keeps us in control of how much is consumed and when.
- We close our bar at 11pm as per our licensing restrictions and request all guests leave by midnight on the evening of an event.
- We have a policy in place that we don't hold evening parties for anyone under the age of 21 unless it is a family party such as a Bar Mitzvah. We expect a ratio of 1 adult to 3 children at any event held as well.
- We are very clear with all hirers what we expect and highlight that we are in a residential area with them and they are expected to leave respectfully after any event as well.
- We encourage members and guests to make alternative travel arrangements and not to bring vehicles where possible or to leave them over night.
- All guests are invited to remain in the club while they arrange taxis etc following an event to reduce the noise out on the street.

The club currently operates cricket and football activities all year round, but our bar opening times are limited and actually greatly reduced from what is currently permitted anyway. Any idea that we are constantly pushing the boundaries of what is permitted, opening 7 days a week or even exceeding them is simply not true. I am happy to provide evidence from our till system if the council so wish but over the last 2 months the bar has only been open 12 days.

The typical opening times for our bar during sports activities are;

- 12-8pm Saturdays and Sundays in the summer (22 weeks April – September)
- 5pm-9pm on weekdays in the summer (only when cricket is taking place. Approx. 45 evenings this coming season many of these at kids matches)
- 2-6pm Saturdays in the winter for afternoon football matches.
- 12-4pm Sundays in winter after morning football matches.

The above hours will remain in place regardless of the outcome of this application as we have no intentions of being open 7 days a week until late at night as it simply wouldn't benefit us to do so. The Bar is only used on occasions when we are open for other activities. These typical hours do change occasionally as required depending on the activity but always within our licensing hours.

This license variation is simply intended to give us flexibility in what we can offer for when we hire the club for a function or event. We are looking to expand our weekend times slightly to allow us, at our discretion to offer an extension to our opening times for certain events such as weddings or a significant birthday. We do get requests from these types of events to extend opening times currently which we have to turn down which costs us vital income to support the club.

This variation if granted will not be used regularly all year round as I have demonstrated above, it will only be applicable to the odd event day. The nature of these events however doesn't always fit to a timetable so the approach taken is done so as to not overly restrict the club.

Finally on the hours, I would note that we have overall offered to reduce the total hours per week by conceding time during the week. We would be willing to discuss further restrictions within reason but it is difficult to put our activities into specific time brackets all year round as the nature of our use is so sporadic and seasonal.

It is also important to note that not all residents are opposed to the club, our social secretary [REDACTED] lives on Burtonhole Lane 3 doors up from the club and both her direct neighbours are members of the club. We have good relationships with the farm opposite and have other local residents who use the ground in the summer for walking dogs, exercise etc and love the facilities who have also become members.

I do not wish to address each individual representation specifically as I feel most of them have a shared view on general noise disturbance which I have addressed above.

I will address 2 specific points though;

Firstly, we are aware of a letter which was delivered by one of the residents opposed to our variation to all the local residents requesting that they all make a representation against this variation. The contents of this letter were greatly exaggerated in an attempt to rile people up against this proposal. We have in response to this actually written to all the residents ourselves explaining who we are and what we are trying to do in an attempt to engage with the local residents more. We have also extended an open invite to every local resident by way of a free social membership to the club to be involved and support the club, which we do hope some will use so they can see how much the positives of the club outweigh the odd evening function.

Secondly, I wish to address the representation by George Maille directly, since moving into his property he has been a constant opposition to the club and despite numerous attempts over the years to work with him and appease him he continues to complain quite literally about everything we do. It is verging on the point of harassment to be honest at this stage. He has in the past entered the ground and threatened bar staff and coaches as well as been incredibly rude towards myself and other committee members.

To address his points specifically;

- The majority of his representation are matters un related to the licensing variation. He has simply used this as another platform to try and make his point. Each matter with regard to trees, planning consent, development of the ground etc has been addressed in full by the club with Barnet council and no further actions have been taken by the council on any of these occasions. There have been instances in the past of the permissions being retrospective but this is simply due to the inexperience of our volunteers in these areas.
- We have held the current Club Premises license since 2005 so his claim that we were granted extended hours in 2010/2011 is not true.
- The club has escalated activities in the last few years, this is simply the club using the facilities to their potential though, we have more sport than ever before and, yes, we do hold more functions than 10 years ago. This however is out of necessity to generate enough revenue to cover the ever-increasing bills. The club shouldn't be penalised for using the ground more. We pay rent 12 months a year, 7 days a week to Barnet Council which means we should be allowed to use it 12 months a year 7 days a week.
- He also suggests that there was little football played at the ground when he first moved to the area. Football has been played by Old Camdenians at the ground since the 1950s and the football club is over 100 years old. The football section was until recent years the biggest part of the sports club so this statement is completely un true as well.
- The club as previously explained only held 19 functions in the last 12 months this doesn't exactly mirror his comments about us becoming a 7 days a week events business.
- We have never held a function until 3am, our volunteers and bar staff have no intention of working these sorts of hours on top of our existing jobs.
- We have had various visits from the noise complaints team as would be the nature of running this type of activity anyway. On every occasion in my personal experience the officer who has attended site has been more than happy with the noise levels observed and no further action has ever been taken. The last occasion I remember was after one of the recent Euro matches, when the officer arrived at around 10pm we had already closed the bar, the majority of members had already left and I was cleaning the floor.
- We have had a couple of unfortunate incidents recently which we have had to call the police for, as is responsible of any venue if there is an issue.
 - We had one hirer before Christmas who was a member of one of our football clubs. He booked it for a family birthday party, unfortunately it turned out he booked it on behalf of a friend of his. The group that turned up were travellers and he didn't attend himself. There wasn't any trouble beyond them refusing to leave when we shut the bar at 11pm as they hadn't been told this. They did get quite aggressive towards our staff members and so the police were called and they slowly dispersed them without any further incident.
 - The second occasion more recently in January was a 15th Birthday Party for a family that had hired the venue previously for a christening. The family are well known to the club and were perfect on the first occasion. Unfortunately, their daughter put

the event on social media and the 50 guests which it was hired for turned into well over 100. With the age group involved we kept the bar closed for the evening and even hired security for the door to check for alcohol etc being brought onto the premises at the request of the family. There was a small group of lads that turned up completely drunk with the sole intention to cause trouble, they trashed our toilets and were the main cause of the issues that night. As soon as the event got out of hand, we shut it down immediately at around 9pm and asked everyone to leave this did unfortunately cause 100+ kids to spill out into our car park and try to make alternative arrangements to travel home which led to more noise on the street than normal. The lads continued to cause trouble in the neighbouring farm yard which is when we called the police on that occasion.

- The suggestion that the clubs licensing hours are too generous already is absurd, we have operated these hours since our club started using the premises in the 1950's, they were confirmed in 2005 after the licensing act came into place and even before he was a resident in this area. We have already demonstrated how we actually open far less than these anyway. If the council were to restrict our use further, would they also be willing to reduce our rent accordingly?
- He repeatedly references open doors outside activities etc, all our doors are fitted with self-closers, music is inside only and we make every effort to contain functions to the indoor space. The only increase in noise outside comes from the smoking ban which forces people outside venues, which must be a country wide problem.
- The bar door which he refers to opening directly facing his property actually used to be our main entrance. In this instance when we fitted the new entrance from the car park and moved the bar to that end of the room this has actually reduced the noise going directly towards his property.
- Outdoor seating and benches have been purchased and put out on the grass these are used by spectators of the sports, I'm not sure why we should be confined to our building. He mentions in his representation that he can't sit out on his patio in the evenings because of us, so what is the difference the other way round?
- The signs that George so 'generously' made for us are actually displayed next to every exit of the premises as a reminder to our members to respect the local neighbours.
- Finally, and perhaps somewhat strangely, I would like to include some of his other complaints that he has omitted from his extensive list. He has previously complained about us running kids summer camps for football on the ground, our bins being outside our gate, wording on our signs and various other insignificant things like this. The nature of these petty, and in the instance of football taking place at a football club, ridiculous complaints should be considered when assessing the weight of his opposition. He clearly has a personal issue with the club which is unfortunate, but completely unavoidable on our part at this stage.

While I can appreciate that living next to a sports and social club is not ideal on the few occasions, we do hold events, I would stress that we were part of this local community when they purchased their properties and in many instances the sports fields and surrounding countryside may have been one of the things that attracted them to the area. We do make every consideration when it comes to the neighbours and any disturbance as we do value our location as well. We have by inviting all the residents to join the club and use it, made the best efforts we can to involve the local residents in the club and will continue to fight to keep our club's long history in this area going.