

Lesley McEwen Representation

Dear Sir / Madam

With regard to the new premises license application for Awberry Farm in Beenham, where I have lived for many years, I would like to comment as follows.

Firstly, please see the attached image from the West Berkshire map of rights of way which, unlike some other maps, clearly shows the public footpath which crosses in front of the venue, and also shows how close neighbouring properties are to the venue. If you haven't already visited the site I would urge you to do so, to see at first hand the proximity of neighbouring properties and how narrow the roads are.

Granting an alcohol license valid for 11 hours to this site would be highly likely to lead to crime and disorder in some circumstances. The site is within less than 200m of several private residences and dozens more homes back on to the site around its perimeter, as do the Primary School and the Pre-School. It is very unlikely that the small number of staff proposed for the venue would be able to "police" drunken revellers wandering around the site and causing noise disturbance to neighbouring property owners. If attendees at the venue start drinking at midday, by early evening there could be extremely anti-social behaviour which could also lead to damage to neighbouring properties.

The site is, as I say, very close to many neighbouring properties. Although he has stressed the "wedding venue" aspect of his application, the applicant has been very vague about the nature of the "multi events" he also proposes to hold at the site. One can only imagine the effect which over a hundred attendees drinking for 11 hours might have from the point of view of noise and general disruptive behaviour in what is normally a very tranquil village within an AONB. The applicant also assured the EAPC that everyone attending an event would be inside the closed barn from 10pm onwards. This does not stop people wandering around the farm from midday until 10pm and as there are no toilets inside the barn and no-one can smoke inside it people are inevitably going to be leaving the building and wandering around outside after 10pm, with all the attendant noise disturbing local residents.

The site is situated in the heart of a small, rural, tranquil village with narrow roads, many of which have no footway. We rarely have traffic driving through the village en route to somewhere else so at weekends, villagers, both adults and children, feel safe to walk, cycle and ride horses along these narrow roads. The influx of over a hundred attendees at the proposed events constitutes a danger to those using the roads as the guests will be unfamiliar with the road layout and its restrictions.

There are no streetlights through the village or near the entrance to the farm and the gateway has a restricted view on to the narrow lane. At weekends most neighbouring properties adjacent to this gateway have their cars parked on the lane which makes it even more of a potential hazard for

anyone unfamiliar with the narrow roadway and if drivers have consumed any alcohol, even within legal limits, the narrow road, with poor visibility and parked vehicles could cause major issues.

The traffic assessment by the Highways Development Control Team Leader on the application for change of use concluded "that the proposal is contrary to Policy CS 13 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy [2006 to 2026] and the Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire 2011-2026. These documents aim to promote sustainable development, reducing the need to travel and contributing to reducing climate change. It is also an inappropriate proposal at a time when there is Climate Change Emergency. This was declared by the UK Government in May 2019 and by West Berkshire 3 Council in July 2019. Therefore any proposal that will increase traffic and the emission of greenhouse gases in the location that is unsustainable should not be supported. **I therefore consider that the proposal should be refused on sustainability grounds and potentially on the grounds of intensifying the use of an access with poor sight lines and lack of car parking.**"

The applicant has proposed a car park, very close to neighbouring properties, which will need to be well-lit. The potential for noise as revellers leave the venue around midnight is huge and would constitute a major disturbance to residents, especially during summer months when people sleep, or try to, with windows open. Up to 120 attendees plus staff cannot all leave the site at once so the noise would go on well past midnight.

At the moment we enjoy dark skies as there is no light pollution but a well-lit car park and cars leaving the venue would destroy that privilege for local people.

It is essential that the rural position of the venue within the countryside is accepted due to the provisions of Policy OV56 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan. The notes accompanying the above state:- **"Noise can be a major nuisance.... the background levels of noise in residential areas in the countryside are often low. The introduction of noisy activities into such areas can therefore be especially disruptive.** The Council will pay particular attention to any likely increase in ambient noise levels when considering planning applications". The Policy states:- "Special consideration is required when noisy development is proposed..... which would harm the quiet enjoyment of areas of outstanding natural beauty". Paragraph 2.7. of the Policy states that the development decisions affecting AONBs should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape which is linked to a sense of place and a quality environment. Solitude and tranquility in rural areas can be especially important to the enjoyment of the special landscaped qualities of the area and the introduction of noisy activities in quiet areas of the countryside can be intrusive and damaging to their special sense of place.

The Principal Landscape and Planning Officer of North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty objected to the application for a change of use at the farm: "The AONB objects to the proposed change of use of the farm complex buildings to an events venue ... Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of an AONB is to do with the relationship

between people and place. It encompasses everything - 'natural' and human - that makes an area distinctive. It includes geology and landform, climate and soils, flora and fauna. It includes the rich history of human settlement, land use over the centuries, archaeology and buildings, cultural associations, and the people who live in it, past and present. A field may just appear like any other field to some but within the AONB it is what is under, within and above the field that make it of value, it is the changes that have taken place over centuries that have created the distinct identity that is the North Wessex Downs. A special quality of the AONB is dark skies, this has not been addressed in the application nor has the impact on local biodiversity, in particular protected species, at no point are they mentioned in the design and access statement. **The AONB is particularly sensitive to developments that are visually prominent, of an urban, suburban, or industrial nature or are noisy, these all have the ability to tilt the current harmonious balance between the built and natural environment which would have a negative effect on tranquility and dark skies, both of which are special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB**" The report concludes: "**Overall the AONB considers the intensification of use that would arise from an events venue would fail to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and therefore fails to comply with the NWD Management Plan, para 8, 174 and 176 of the NPPF, Core Strategy policy ADPP1, ADPP5, CS10, CS14 and saved policy ENV19 e), f) and g).**"

As previously mentioned, a well-used public footpath crosses directly in front of the proposed venue, within 100m or so, parallel to its driveway. It is a popular walking route for residents of Beenham and neighbouring parishes. Alcohol-fuelled revellers could cause intimidation at the very least, and possibly endanger the safety of innocent walkers, including children.

On the grounds of safeguarding, particularly of children and young people, I do not see how a license can be granted. The owner states that the gates to the venue would be kept closed when an event was in progress. However, the public footpath leaves his land right next to the gates and immediately opposite is the recreation ground where children play and young people congregate. At the moment it feels safe enough for youngsters from the village to go there with friends without their parents. However I certainly would not feel it safe to let them go alone knowing that people attending an event at Awberry Farm could easily wander away from the Barn and walk across to the rec. The same thing applies to people using the public footpath across the farm. When people drink at social events things do sometimes get out of hand and bad behaviour results. Would a person walking alone feel safe if that was the case? I would not.

During summer months, this footpath is a popular route for many unaccompanied groups of 5 or 6 teenagers from local schools doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award camping weekends. It is not unusual to encounter half a dozen such groups at various intervals on any Saturday. I would consider it reckless in the extreme to grant a license which might risk drunken revellers threatening the safety and well-being of these youngsters.

I hope you take into account these objections, on the grounds of prevention of crime and disorder, maintaining public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm, and refuse the license application.

Yours faithfully

Lesley McEwen

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