

From: (Redacted) <(Redacted)@btinternet.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 2, 2023 8:28 PM
To: Licensing <licensing@westberks.gov.uk>
Subject: Awberry Farm, Beenham License application 22873

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Dear Sir / Madam

Please note I have attached the West Berkshire map of rights of way which clearly shows the public footpath which crosses in front of Awberry Farm Barn in Beenham, within 50m at the closest point, and also shows how close neighbouring properties are to the venue. If you haven't already visited the site may I urge you to do so, to see at first hand the proximity of dozens of houses and how narrow the roads are.

Referring to the new premises license application for Awberry Farm, Beenham, I would urge refusal for the following reasons.

The prevention of crime and disorder; the prevention of public nuisance ;

Granting an alcohol license valid for 11 hours to this site is very likely to lead to crime and disorder as well as noise disturbance. There are many houses within less than 200m of the proposed licensed site and dozens more homes back on to the site around its perimeter, as do the Primary School and the Pre-School. The small number of staff proposed for the venue would be unlikely to be able to "police" drunken revellers wandering around the site and causing noise disturbance to neighbours. If people attending events 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.

Mr Hopes has stressed the "wedding venue" aspect of the application when discussing it in the past, but he has been very vague about the nature of the "multi events" which are also proposed to be held at the site. A potential number of 120 attendees drinking for 11 hours could cause unimaginable levels of noise and general disruptive behaviour. It would be totally unacceptable because this is normally a very tranquil village, situated within the North Wessex Downs AONB.

At the EAPC meeting when provisional approval was granted for a change of use, Mr Hopes said that everyone attending an event would be inside the barn with the doors closed from 10pm onwards, but even if this were the case it would not prevent people wandering around the farm from midday until 10pm. It should be noted that there are no toilets inside the barn and no-one can smoke inside it so people would inevitably have to leave the building at times even if the doors are supposed to be closed. Thus they could be wandering around outside after 10pm, after 10 hours of drinking, with all the attendant noise disturbing local residents, and of course every time the doors are opened to let people in or out noise will escape from the barn.

The barn lies lower than the homes which surround the site and sound travels upwards so this would accentuate the effect of the noise and therefore the disturbance to local residents.

Public nuisance and public safety

The site is situated in the heart of a small, rural, tranquil village with narrow roads, many of which have no footway. Many stretches of the road through the village are only wide enough for one motor vehicle at a time. There is rarely any through traffic travelling through the village and so at weekends people, 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 villagers, including children, 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. If drivers have consumed any alcohol, even within legal limits, there could be major problems on the narrow road, with poor visibility and parked vehicles.

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).**"

Public safety and the protection of children from harm

As previously mentioned, a well-used public footpath crosses directly in front of the proposed venue, parallel to its driveway. At its closest it is less than 50m from the barn. This footpath is a popular walking route for the 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.

The public footpath leaves the farm land right next to the entrance 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. The owner states that the gates to the venue would be kept closed when an event was in progress. However there is nothing to stop people attending an event at Awberry Farm from wandering away from the Barn, taking the public footpath and walking across to the rec. The risk also 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, and I certainly would not feel it safe to let children and young people go to the recreation ground on their own.

The footpath is also a popular route for many unaccompanied groups of teenagers from local schools doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award camping weekends. It is not unusual to encounter half a dozen such groups, of 5 or 6 youngsters, 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. On the grounds of safeguarding, particularly of children and young people, and protecting them from harm I do not see how a license can be granted.

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

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Name (Redacted)

(Redacted), Beenham, RG7 (Redacted)