



15 May 2024

**By email to [licensing@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)**

The Licensing Officer  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
Pathfinder House  
St Mary's Street  
Huntingdon  
Cambs  
PE29 3TN

Dear Sir

**THIS LETTER REPLACES MY OBJECTION LETTER DATED 11 MAY 2024.**

**Priory Park, St Neots – Application for a Premises Licence by Neotists CIC**

I am writing to object to the Application submitted by Ben Pitt on behalf of Neotists CIC for a Premises Licence for Priory Park, St Neots.

The Application must be refused:

**1. To Prevent Crime and Disorder**

The Applicant states they are not applying for an alcohol licence but the St Neots Festival Plan details the location of a number of Bars. This requires clarification. Does this Licence permit the sale of alcohol? If alcohol is to be permitted I am concerned about Event Goers drinking to excess and the resulting anti social behaviour. Evidence of alcohol induced anti social behaviour is frequently seen in St Neots – smashed shop fronts, piles of vomit, broken glass littering the town's streets on Saturday and Sunday mornings. This is not something which should be inflicted on local residents as a result of alcohol being served in the Park.

There is a drug problem in St Neots. Individuals dressed in dark clothing are frequently seen travelling at speed on electric scooters around the town and it is recognised they are dealing drugs. Staging large scale public events in Priory Park will attract drug dealers and users to the area.

## **2. To Prevent Public Nuisance**

Priory Park is located in a heavily populated residential area of St Neots. The residents of the Barringer Way development, Queensway, The Crescent, Almond Road, Rowley Way, Longsands Way and Woodlands will all be adversely impacted by events held pursuant to this Licence.

The Application is vague and widely drafted. If granted, it will run for an unspecified term.

No information is given to the scale or frequency of the events which the Applicant wishes to hold save that it is to cover one off events organised by the Applicant **including but not limited to St Neots Festival – an annual performing arts festival.**

If this Application is granted, local residents will suffer a significant reduction in their living amenity and environment on numerous occasions for lengthy periods of time. The Applicant is seeking permission to hold events on:

Saturdays from 11 to 21.30 - 10.5 hours in total;  
Sundays from 11 to 20.30 – 9.5 hours; and  
Bank Holiday from 11 to 21.30 – 10.5 hours in total

(For an event encompassing the Easter Weekend – residents could be impacted for a total of 41 hours).

Residents will be impacted in the following ways:

Loud and Sustained Noise – from amplified music & public address systems preventing their enjoyment of their indoor and outdoor space.

People's homes are a place of sanctuary from the increasingly hectic and stressful world we live in. Their homes are a place where they should be able to unwind and relax away from everyday pressures and stress. For many, their gardens are places where they can spend time in nature. Gardening as a hobby provides many people with an important mechanism for destressing and recharging their batteries. If this Application is granted, it will result in a significant reduction in residents' ability to enjoy their home/living amenity space on any number of occasions and for lengthy periods of time. For residents suffering with mental health and anxiety issues, the loss of their ability to enjoy their "place of sanctuary" may have a very significant impact on their wellbeing. Auditory sensitivity is frequently reported by autistic people.

The opportunity to walk or sit in Priory Park and enjoy the peace and quiet which Priory Park offers, provides residents with an important relaxation resource, again important for their mental health and general sense of well being. If this Application is granted, it will result in a significant reduction in residents' ability to enjoy this important resource on any number of occasions and for lengthy periods of time.

Event Goers have a choice to attend an event or not. When they have had enough, they can return to the sanctuary of their own homes. Local residents living adjacent to the Park do not have this option – their choice is to stay at home and endure the noise and disruption or to make arrangements to go away for the duration of the event (assuming they have the financial resources to do; holiday accommodation and travel prices increase significantly over Bank Holiday Weekends). To expect local residents to absent themselves on any number of occasions, is inequitable. Residents have a right to enjoy their homes and to be afforded the same opportunity for rest and relaxation as everybody else.

Last year's Festival ran from 12 noon until 9pm on the Saturday (9 hours) and from 12 noon to 7pm (6 hours) on the Sunday. Only 12 months later and permission is being sort for an additional hour on the Saturday and 2 hours on the Sunday for the 2024 event. The St Neots Festival is currently a 2 day event. The fact this Application is for a licence including Bank Holidays indicates an intent to extend the event to a 3 (potentially a 4 day event if staged over the Easter weekend) in the future. If granted now, local residents will have no opportunity to be consulted on what will be a major change to the existing arrangements and one which will have an even greater impact on (i) their ability to enjoy their home/living amenity space and (ii) their mental health and general sense of well being.

Noise and disturbance from Event Goers returning to parked vehicles - Event Goers parking in local residential streets cause noise, disturbance and disruption for local residents. People returning to cars create noise (loud voices, shouting, singing, slamming of car doors etc) potentially disturbing young children who are sleeping. They also drop litter. [While the Applicant states an intention to lay on a Shuttle Bus to convey Festival Goers from parking at the St Neots Rugby Club to the Event, this arrangement did nothing to stop the parking issues caused by last year's St Neots festival. People always try to park as close to their final destination as possible. Without parking restrictions being put in place and *enforced*, similar noise, disturbance and disruption will happen every time an event is held pursuant to this Licence]. Will the Applicant have the financial resources to lay on a Shuttle Bus for every event it stages? Will the Rugby Club be able to provide parking each time an event is held? Additionally, inconsiderate parking causes traffic congestion and creates a public safety issue for local residents because access for emergency vehicles is impeded.

### In Summary

For the reasons detailed above, the Neotist CIC Licence Application must be rejected. Any Licence granted must be **solely** for this year's St Neots Festival and restricted to the same hours as 2023. All future events must be licenced on an event by event basis and the right of local residents to be consulted about any future events which could significantly impact them, must be protected.

### Chair & Composition of Licensing Sub-Committee

If a hearing of the Licensing Sub-Committee is convened, this must be chaired by an individual with no links to Neotist CIC. Cllr Ben Pitt and Cllr Richard Slade (recently elected as St Neots Mayor) are both members of Neotist CIC indeed Richard Slade co-founded the Neotists with his wife, Clair Slade. Cllr Stephen Ferguson (former Mayor of St Neots) and former member of St Neots Town Council frequently appears on Social Media and in the local press photographed alongside one or both of Cllrs Pitt and Slade. On 18 September 2023, Cllr Ferguson's first podcast on his "The People's Republic of St Neots" Facebook page was with Clair Slade.

St Neots Town Council is providing £16,000 of funding for the 2024 Festival (it provided £15,500 of funding for the 2023 event).

Neotist CIC receives £10,000 per annum from St Neots Town Council to supply the entertainers for the St Neots Farmer's Markets and other similar events on St Neots Market Square (a contract which was not required to go to tender because of the value of the contract).

While I am advised by William Dell'Orefice that the Sub-Committee will exclude any councillors who represent "the area", I am unclear as to what is meant by "the area". Does it mean St Neots as a whole or only the Priory Park Ward? I acknowledge any Councillors appointed to the Sub-Committee are required to declare any potential conflict of interest but the Council's definition of Conflict of Interest seems to relate solely to conflicting financial interests. Given the connections/relationships between Cllrs Ferguson, Pitt & Slade, the St Neots Town Council and Neotist CIC, in the interests of fairness and complete transparency the Sub-Committee which decides on this Application must be comprised of & chaired by individuals with no direct link to St Neots and having no connection to the Neotists either as members of that organisation or because of relationships (family, friendship, business, or financial) with individuals who are members of that organisation.

I confirm I am available to attend the hearing of the Licensing & Protection Sub-Committee on Thursday 13 June 2024.

Yours faithfully

