

# STANKERR PUBS LIMITED

## **Submission by James Noble Director of Stankerr Pubs Ltd to Licensing Committee for Crown and Sceptre pub hearing.**

Stankerr Pubs Ltd is a small family owned property investment company (Co Reg 06994901) that owns a 6 pubs in England but has wider operational hotel and pub interests as part of Tabacon Group of companies, see: [www.tabacon.co.uk](http://www.tabacon.co.uk).

The Crown and Sceptre was purchased in 2014 as a vacant pub and after an initial capital investment programme the pub has been let to several tenants over the years with limited success. The pub became vacant in July 2020 with Stankerr Ltd owed over £20,000 in rent arrears. It then took over a year to find another new tenant to take a Lease of the pub despite Stankerr Pubs investing a further £10,000 on refurbishment and the pub being offered at a heavily discounted annual rent.

The current tenant Gavin Martin took a 10 year Lease of the property from 12 November 2021. He has close personal connections to the previous DPS but we understand he is not implicated in any way relating to the recent incident.

It is my belief that if the Crown and Sceptre has its license suspended further then it will not open again and it will lose the current Christmas trade which is paramount to its continued viability. If the license is revoked please be aware there are no alternative planning uses available as it has been allocated as an Asset of Community Value by Herefordshire Council.

Notwithstanding the above Stankerr Pubs Ltd take their Licensed Premises obligations extremely seriously and they hold the Premises License rather than their tenants in order that prompt and immediate action can be taken if ever their Premises License is put in jeopardy such as in this case.

I have spoken at length to the previous DPS who says he worked closely with West Mercia police up until June 2023 when the licensing officer left. The previous DPS claims there was never any drug issues on the premises and the police discovery was a relating to a third party. He has made his case to police regarding the circumstances of the incident which I am not best placed to comment upon and he has told me that he has admitted using cannabis for personal use in his flat.

He states that The Crown and Sceptre representatives were the head of HAND and that they worked closely with the other pubs in the area regarding safeguarding and reducing anti-social behaviour in Ross and set up the WhatsApp Group called Pub Watch.

There are two regular licensed SIA Trained door staff working at the Crown and Sceptre, one using a bodycam and I am told they work closely with the Police when requested. I understand none of the fully operational CCTV footage at the public house has been requested or taken by police. A recent TENS application and a proposal for an extension of licensing hours coupled with additional conditions were accepted by Herefordshire licensing subject to advertising. This incident has therefore come out of the blue from what appeared to be a relatively smooth operating and successful trading pub.

It is evident however from what the Stankerr Pubs Ltd has seen in the video that has been circulated and my conversations with the police that quantities of class A drugs were found in the pub and we find this totally unacceptable and we hold the previous DPS together with our Leaseholder accountable. We further understand that one of the employees was suspected of using Class A drugs and lived in one of the upstairs flats above the public house.

Stankerr Pubs Ltd wishes to work closely with the police and Licensing Authority and has taken immediate and resolute steps to rectify the situation since the license was temporarily suspended in order to make certain the Licensing objectives can now be achieved if the suspension is lifted after the Committee hearing:

Steps are as follows:

- 1) Stankerr Pubs Ltd has discussed and taken legal advice from Weightmans their Licensing solicitors regarding proposed actions.
- 2) We have served the tenant Gavin Martin with notice that he has breached his Lease obligations as attached.
- 3) We have ensured that the barring of the previous DPS from the premises and agreed with the tenant that he will also be barred from the flat until any charges which may/or may not be brought against him are proven.
- 4) We have ensured that the employee of the tenant who is alleged to have used Class A drugs is removed from both the pub and flats and is barred from ever returning.

- 5) We have agreed the attached statement from the tenant agreeing to all the steps that we are putting in place to rectify the situation or face immediate legal action.  
(We understand this has been signed but await the hard copy)
- 6) We have agreed with the Licensing Authority to tighten the existing alcohol license conditions that they have recommended with particular emphasis on the zero tolerance to drugs use which will be extensively advertised.
- 7) We will be insisting that all permanent bar staff at the pub hold a Personal License which will be paid for by Stankerr Pubs Ltd.
- 8) We have appointed an exceptional DPS called Julie Hawkins who will be employed directly by Stankerr Pubs Ltd immediately that the temporary License suspension is lifted.

Miss Hawkins will have accommodation on site and total control over the operation of the pub, the suitability of employees, staff and doormen to work at the pub and the pub modus operandi in line with Stankerr Pubs Ltd and Licensing Authority objectives. A statement from our DPS is as follows:

#### *DPS Suitability Statement – Julie Hawkins*

*'I have worked in the pub trade since I was 16 years old, as I moved to Tenerife and the legal age to serve alcohol was 16. I was exposed to the effects of alcohol and drugs in a Spanish nightclub environment which gave me firm foundations for what followed. I was then, by 17, managing a small British bar, which, was ran the way a public house should be, with the purpose of enabling the public to have a fun time, in a safe and clean environment, with community spirit being the focus more than alcohol consumption. In 2000 when I returned to the UK I began working for Places Trading Ltd. A small pub company and supplier in Gloucester. I oversaw the day to day management of six pubs and a nightclub, ensuring that the licensing, training, health and safety and staff management was compliant and well managed. I then moved out of the office back into pub management as I missed the active community aspect.*

*I completed several qualifications including the relevant drugs awareness, food hygiene, cask management and on-licence certification. I was used to dealing with both employees and members of the public who needed to be removed from our public houses. I then managed the Kingsholm Inn as DPS for a couple of years and ran a tight ship in terms of managing a safe environment and protecting our customers from excess alcohol consumption, ensuring staff understood their responsibilities and how*

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*their decisions impacted others. During these several years I was also the secretary for the LVA (Licenced Victuallers Association) which was our local pub watch scheme and we worked with the Police to ensure individuals who posed a risk to public safety or to themselves were prevented from entering any premises and given a fresh chance every 12 months to enjoy these public houses with different behaviour. After these bans most were reformed and knew what was expected of them in terms of acceptable behaviour.*

*I left the pub trade and went to work in the office for Gloucestershire Constabulary for 12 months which gave me further insight into the life changing impact of alcohol and drugs. I was at the same time manager of the Club at Newnham on Severn, a conservative club ran by a committee and much to the annoyance of a couple of village locals would stop them when intoxication was setting in. I was never afraid to encourage a good atmosphere so that drinking could be enjoyed to a healthy level. I then just maintained some part-time match day work as I was more settled in my day jobs.*

*In 2012 when I became a Mum I embarked on a law degree and after graduating in 2016 I worked in freelance civil litigation for a couple of years which helped me develop my legal brain and understanding of the law, and our roles and responsibilities, with my young daughter pub life was not viable but pubs are such an important part of the community, and they should be a safe space for people to combat loneliness, enjoy the company of others, feel safe, have a drink and be merry if they wish, but in the knowledge that the publican has taken all measures to protect their health and safety. I am still passionate about this, just as I am proud of this small town that I have called home for a decade. Ross-on-Wye is a beautiful place to live, eat, shop and I would like to think that we could enhance the town with a lovely community pub that promotes a positive and safe atmosphere with zero tolerance of drugs, intoxication, or any individual behaviour / poor management that poses a risk to ourselves and each other. It will be made clear that whatever has happened at the Crown and Sceptre is a thing of the past and will not be happening under the watchful eye of the new DPS.'*

**Julie Hawkins LLB (Hons)**

Director of KIH Products Ltd  
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We hope that the Licensing Committee accept that Stankerr Pubs Ltd is most acutely aware of its responsibilities and the very grave repercussions of losing its alcohol license.

Furthermore that it has taken rapid and effective and fully implementable steps to ensure the licensing principles are upheld going forward with a vigorous focus on zero tolerance of drugs.

The Directors of Stankerr Pubs Ltd sincerely hope that the Licensing Committee will therefore agree to the lifting of the suspension with immediate effect. The Licensing Authority can be assured that Stankerr Pubs Ltd will be paying very close attention to the operation of this public house and the protection of its Premises License.