

LICENSING PANEL (LICENSING ACT 2003 FUNCTIONS) ADDENDUM 1

10.00AM, MONDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2023

VIRTUAL

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ADDENDUM 1

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Ritan

Ritan Enterprises Limited
Oxford, England
UK: [REDACTED]

Antidote Bar

GF and LGF 5-6 Western Road, Hove

PROPOSAL TO ADDRESS DRUG-PROBLEM AT THE BAR

1. Introduction

This proposal looks at the issues that have arisen at Antidote Bar and outlines how they will be addressed.

It is important to stress that Ritan Enterprises takes these issues raised extremely seriously. After being made aware of them, it closed the bar with immediate effect.

The plan is to reopen the bar with new management, who will bring a new working culture, new vision and new character to it. It will also get a new name. The bar will be gentrified.

2. Background

The commercial property at 5-6 Western Road, along with the residential flats above it are owned by Ritan Enterprises Ltd. The residential and commercial property lettings are managed by Belvoir Brighton and Hove, located at 119-120 Western Road, Hove.

The commercial property tenant is Antidote Bar Ltd. Until recently Antidote Bar has been the Premises Licence holder, granted by Brighton and Hove Council. The licence was not held by Ritan Enterprises because its owner had previously been based overseas, making it less practical.

In 2022, a series of on-site checks by the police and found evidence of serious levels illegal drug use at Antidote Bar. Having informed the then Premises Licence holder and the Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS) about their concerns during the year, the police saw no improvement.

Ritan Enterprises' owner was first informed about the matter and that the police were seeking to revoke the bar's licence on 4 January 2023.

Use and possession of drugs is illegal and, along with other antisocial behaviour, is prohibited under the terms of the lease. The bar has a duty of care to the public, its staff and patrons and, as such, the situation that arose was completely unacceptable. It would have been addressed far sooner had it been known about by the owner.

Immediate action was taken. The Antidote Bar was closed on 9th January. It will remain closed until it's possible to operate it in a legal, safe and secure way.

This proposal outlines the actions being taken to address the issues raised by the police to ensure that the bar at 5-6 Western Road provides a safe environment for staff to work and people to relax and socialise, and more broadly contributes to the local community.

3. Police Report

The police report offers a lot of detail and is very evidence based, which is very helpful. Thank you.

The report highlights a series of problems that were not rectified.

Because Ritan Enterprises was not the Premises Licence Holder at the time, it was out of the loop and therefore unaware of the situation and unable to do anything about it.

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As mentioned above, the possession or use of illegal substances and other antisocial behaviour in either the commercial or residential property at 5-6 Western Road is prohibited. Ritan Enterprises has previously evicted tenants for such behaviour; its owner takes this type of issue very seriously.

4. Proposal

This proposal can be split into three core areas – licence management, bar operations and landlord oversight – where there will be fundamental changes, all of which dovetail to ensure action and accountability; all of which will address the problems that the police have identified.

Beyond that, the objective is to change the character of the bar – essentially to gentrify it.

4.1. Licence Management

- Ritan Enterprises will take over the Premises Licence to facilitate bar management oversight and ensure the changes are made. (**Application submitted 13 January.**)
- There will be a change of DPS. Discussions are currently underway with a very experienced bar operator, one with a reputation for high quality bars without the type of problems Antidote Bar has experienced.
- At the time of writing this, final discussions are still taking place with the potential new management and DPS. Hopefully, this will be finalised in the next 2-3 days so that it's possible to share more information during the hearing (if not before).
- All going well with these discussions, the new DPS/management will bring a vision, plus deep experience and good practice for bar management.
- Until a new DPS is in place, *the bar will remain closed.*

4.2. Bar Operations

- Arrangements for the transition period
 - Temporarily close the GF and LGF bar.
 - Change the name of the bar when it reopens under new management.
 - Keep the LGF bar closed until all parties (including police) agree that criteria have been met for it to reopen for suitable use.
 - Review threshold for age checks on entry, drawing on guidance from the police (for example, raising the threshold to 21 years of age).
 - Make sure policies and processes are in place that ensure women's safety, including
 - Warning posters (and other collaterals) and guidance about drinks spiking
 - Training staff to recognise signs of spiked drinks
 - Provision and usage of codewords for women to use if they feel threatened
 - Help with calling taxis
- Drugs strategy
 - Establish a written record of policy, objectives and responsibilities for use by management, staff and visitors, including contractors and agency personnel.
 - Base strategy on a needs assessment developed in consultation with the police and the licensing authority (and possibly health & safety specialists and drug support groups).
 - Pro-active liaison and cooperation with the police and council licensing body to ensure and reassure that bar is operating correctly. This would include having a system in place for regular updates and information sharing on actions taken, such as for:
 - Incident recording
 - Searches, seizing, storing and destroying/disposing of drugs
 - Refusing entry and evictions

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* property investment * real estate operation * commercial and residential lettings *

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- Provide guidance/training to staff on what they are expected to do if they suspect that drugs are being misused or if drug related crimes are being committed.
- Display ‘zero tolerance’ signs at the entrance and inside the premises.
- Staff to keep the premises tidy, clean tables and empty ashtrays frequently, and mingle with customers to help detect drugs misuse.
- Active involvement in [National Pubwatch](#).
- Fixtures and fittings
 - Refit the toilets to eliminate surfaces that can be used for drug taking.
 - Ensure existing CCTV system is functioning correctly, adding more cameras if needed (with possible link to the police station), and have staff trained to monitor it.
 - Ensure noise monitors are functioning correctly.
- Staffing and training
 - Provide training to all staff about illicit drugs, licensing laws including age requirements, managing public order situations etc. The training programme is yet to be finalised, but it will likely involve the council/police and/or a third-party provider.
 - Host such training sessions for staff from other bars in the area
 - Employ security/door staff, along with staff to monitor the toilets, at the weekends.
 - Introduce staff contracts with T&Cs that include notice that misuse of drugs inside or in the vicinity of the bar will result in instant dismissal and possible prosecution.

4.3. Landlord oversight

- Landlord commitments
 - Premises Licence holder will do the training and exam for a DPS licence to better familiarise with the needs of that particular role.
 - Ritan Enterprises will independently fund unannounced third-party testing for drugs in the bar at least three times a year, which will be shared with the DPS.
 - Ritan Enterprises will assist in creating the policy for staff and other personnel.
 - Ritan Enterprises will require monthly reports per the drug strategy (above).
- Other
 - If merited and helpful, Ritan Enterprises can provide pro bono support for a local campaign to reduce this problem in the community or at least keep it out of the bars.

5. Timeline

- A timeline is available and can be shared separately.

6. Licence revocation

Licence revocation would mean the loss of an independent bar in Hove and have knock-on effects on other businesses in the area. It would also likely mean another ugly, depressing boarded-up property on Western Road. None of this would serve the community well. It would be net negative for the council and Western Road.

Research by a leading insurer recently showed that in Brighton some 63% of small businesses face closure in 2023¹ amid the economic downturn. Hopefully that’s wrong. But, clearly, it makes sense to avoid adding to this statistic when a clear solution exists.

¹ <https://www.businessleader.co.uk/57-of-uks-small-businesses-at-risk-of-closure-in-2023/>

