
WITNESS STATEMENT OF MATTHEW STEVENS

1. My name is Matthew Stevens and I am the Chairman of Langley Cricket Club. I make this statement in support of the application made by the Club for a new premises licence for the clubhouse and grounds; and in response to the representations received against this.

Background

2. I would firstly wish to give the Committee some brief background of the club's history, and then explain its current place within the Langley community.
3. Langley CC was founded in 1864, and the club played on a field set aside for that use by the owner of Langley Print Works, situated within the boundary of the factory grounds. The club become well known within the local area, and many of the factory employees and the villagers became members of the club. The club played their matches on this site for around 100 years.
4. In 1964 the factory closed and the club lost the use of its ground. As such, for the next nine years, they were forced to play away matches only, but managed to retain their players whilst doing so. Subsequently, in 1973, thanks to the hard work of the Committee at the time, and with the help of the people of the village and surrounding areas, the club moved to their present ground on Cock Hall Lane.
5. At the beginning, facilities were very sparse and with the absence of the support from the factory, all the funds required came from players and other friends of the club within the area. At this time, we changed in the village hall and travelled to the ground and had our teas in the local pub. All the cricket that was played at this time was on a friendly basis.

6. This changed in 1975 when Langley became founder members of the Cheshire Cricket Competition, playing against teams from Macclesfield, Congleton, Northwich and Hazel Grove. The club remains an integral part of the Cheshire pyramid system to this day.
7. In 2010 Langley applied to become a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC). This was duly granted by HMRC and the club's constitution was updated accordingly.
8. By 2011 the club had reached a pivotal moment. Both adult teams were getting older and the need for investment back into the club was apparent. We received a grant to renovate the shower and toilet areas in line with new league guidelines and this was complete by the time the 2011 season started.
9. In 2012 Sport England were running a major grant funding initiative called Protecting Playing Fields, where funding could be directed into improving playing surfaces across many sports. The club applied and received a grant of £65,000 towards essential outfield drainage and playing surface improvements. The club also applied to and received £15,000 grant funding from the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme towards the outfield drainage. By 2013 the works were complete. These made an immeasurable difference to the ground. We installed a pedestrian entrance gate during this period which enabled the local community to come in and use our facilities all year round. This was very well received and to this day the community are able to use our facilities for general recreation throughout the year.
10. In 2014 discussions were taking place with the Parish Plan Steering Committee regarding a gap they had identified in the local area that the cricket club could potentially help with. Sally Hammill wrote:

“The Parish Plan for the Parish of Sutton, Macclesfield, was published in October 2012. One of the major concerns of residents who completed the questionnaire (58% of residents returned completed questionnaires), was the lack of facilities & activities for children of the parish, especially in the 12-18 age group.

The Steering Group is working hard to find a way to improve play facilities for younger children as well as working with local groups to provide opportunities for older groups. With this aim we intend to work closely with the Langley Cricket Club in their aim to provide coaching & sporting facilities available to all local children.

We are very happy to support the Cricket Club in their plans for future development and improvements as it will provide much needed opportunities for many of our children who need organised, structured play provision in a safe environment, close to their homes.”

11. To fill this gap in local provision the club re-started a junior section in 2014. We applied for and successfully received £7,000 funding from Sport England towards junior equipment and invested in 2 volunteers to become qualified coaches to run the sessions. We also received grants from 3 different funders towards the installation of £7,800 artificial match pitch for training purposes. Our junior sessions started with 6 juniors and 2 volunteer coaches. Throughout the year and into the close season the club engaged with local schools and the numbers of children began to steadily increase. Indoor sessions over the winter and into 2016 also led to more volunteers wanting to become coaches.
12. Over the next 2 years the junior section grew to unprecedented levels. We created junior teams at under 9, 11, 13 and 15 levels and increased our number of volunteer coaches from 2 to 8. The numbers of juniors participating in training and games grew year on year and the cricket club was becoming a real central hub for the community. However, one thing letting the club down was the lack of a modern clubhouse to go with the wonderful setting.
13. In 2015 the club applied for and were awarded £8,500 towards new ground equipment so we could maintain the new outfield and playing surface using modern equipment. This made a terrific difference to the playing surface and our annual league pitch and outfield marks began to improve.
14. In 2016 a project to extend and modernise the clubhouse was started. One of the key aims of the project was to open our facilities up to use by the local community. We

had sent a survey out to the local community and 98% thought it was a good idea with 92% saying they would use the facility in the future. This was by far the biggest project the club had engaged in since the move to our Cock Hall Lane ground. We applied to and were successful with 5 funders and started the work in late 2016. The club also raised £20,000 towards the cost through organised events and fund raisers. The work was complete by the start of the 2017 season and it created:

- A new bar area with the ability to serve cask and barrelled beer
- A new kitchen facility
- A new junior equipment store
- A modernised club-house room
- Refurbished toilets with baby changing facilities
- An extended outdoor patio area

15. There is no doubt the extension and modernisation of our clubhouse led to a surge in people attending the club and participation levels across the juniors and adult teams. The Friday night junior training sessions were a focal point in the week for many local people, with new friendships made that are still going strong today.

16. In 2017 Langley Cricket Club were awarded ClubMark status for the very first time. Andrew Jackson, Macclesfield Cricket Development and Coaching Officer, commented:

“The Cheshire County Manager reviewing the club’s documentation, policies and procedures had only minor changes to make which highlights the level of detail that the club has ensuring everything is run with due diligence – a brilliant remark considering how quickly you have got the junior section going.”

17. In 2018 one of the volunteer coaches approached the club with the idea of creating a women’s team – a first in our 154 year history. This was universally greeted with excitement as women’s cricket is one of the fastest growing sports in the UK, and especially in the Cheshire region. Indoor training sessions were booked and the

response was fantastic. By 2019 the women's membership base had grown to 20 training and playing in softball tournaments on a regular basis.

18. In 2018 the club held its first firework display and this was very well attended by people in the community.
19. In 2019 the Cheshire Girls Under 13s team played a county game against Derbyshire Under 13s Girls at the club, and this was the first time the club had been asked to host a county organised event.
20. In late 2019 the club decide to start a girls' team with the ambition that the girls would start to integrate into the women's set-up and provide a constant stream of future cricketers. In 2020 the girls' and women's teams have entered into leagues and we played our first competitive games – again another first in our long history. We also started a 3rd team to give our juniors the chance to play senior cricket. With the help of the Cheshire Cricket Board we arranged fixtures and provided 18 of our juniors with regular senior cricket.
21. Our team of volunteers devote hours and hours of their free time to ensuring the club is run effectively and efficiently, providing opportunities and life long memories for children and young people and keeping the club's 156 history legacy going for many years to come. The club is looking to put itself in the best position to secure its future, whilst fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of people local and the surrounding areas.
22. To summarise, over the last few years, the club has achieved the following:
 - Over £200,000 in grant funding from 12 different funding bodies for key club projects over a period of 8 years.
 - ClubMark accredited.
 - 2 qualified volunteer Child Welfare Officers.
 - 12 volunteer ECB qualified coaches with a junior committee managing the section.

- Mixed junior teams at All Stars, under 9, 11, 13 and 15 age groups with over 100 children participating on a weekly basis throughout the cricket season.
- 3 senior adult teams.
- Women's team playing league cricket.
- Girls Under 13 team playing league cricket.
- More junior parents requesting to become volunteer coaches ready for the 2021 season.
- The prospect of our newly formed 3rd team playing league cricket in 2021.
- An opportunity for local children and young people to regularly participate in recreational and sporting activities whilst enhancing their social skills and making lifelong friends.
- The ability for friends and families of all ages to come together and socialise in a safe environment.
- An accessible large open space area available for use by everyone in the local community all year round.
- A fully modernised clubhouse with bar and catering facilities.
- A strong dedicated volunteer committee pulling in the same direction to provide Langley and the local areas with a unique and deserving facility that is available to everyone.

Licence Application

23. I strongly believe that we are successful in achieving all of the above, whilst also being respectful of our neighbours and the local community at large. I am supported in that view by a large number of local residents and supporters from further afield. I attach support from local residents at Exhibit MS1 and support from further afield at Exhibit MS2.

24. However, I am of course aware that there are some local residents who disagree, and who have made complaints about the operation of the club both in the past and in relation to this application. These residents initially complained to us about noise emanating from some outdoor events we held, under temporary events notices.

25. We as a club consider ourselves to be a community asset, and as such, as soon as we received these complaints, we made a point of reaching out to the residents to discuss. We do not want to operate in such a way as to cause any issues to the local community.
26. I held a meeting with those who had complained in August 2019, and as part of our action points following this, assured them that we would contact Cheshire East Council to seek advice on managing noise levels at events. I should highlight that we are a cricket club, not an events venue, and this will continue to be the case. However, we hold events as ancillary to the cricket activity, and as a result of these complaints we have sought to educate ourselves further on managing these, both through liaison with the Council and through seeking legal advice. I believe that we have acted responsibly and appropriately in this regard.
27. On taking advice from the authority, one matter which arose was that some changes would be necessary in relation to our existing CPC – to reflect changes to layout that had been made in respect of the Club House since our CPC was originally granted.
28. As such, and as advised, we lodged a number of minor variations seeking to address this. These were refused by reason of representations submitted against them by the residents who had previously complained. It was at this point that we decided that it would be sensible for us to seek legal advice. When we did so, we discussed the options open to us, which included varying our CPC or applying for a new premises licence.
29. The reasons for our decision to apply for a premises licence were set out to the community at large, and to the residents who had previously complained, well in advance of us submitting our application, together with an invitation to speak to us with any concerns/queries.
30. The wording at Exhibit MS3 was posted on the village social media page, and the letter at Exhibit MS4 was sent to the group of residents who had previously complained. I would draw the Committee's attention to these, as they explain our motivations for this application.

31. We received a huge number of positive and supportive comments on our social media post. We received one direct contact from a member of the community, the landlady of a local pub, who was supportive but concerned to know whether this application would affect her rural rates relief. We undertook, through our solicitors, to make enquiries of a ratings expert to ensure that this would not be the case and provide her with that confirmation. Her relief is not affected because our licensable activities are purely ancillary to the use of the grounds for cricket activities.
32. We also sent details of our proposed application to Sutton Parish Council, and awaited lodging the application until after they had had the opportunity to consider this at their meeting on 23rd July 2020. They subsequently resolved that they were satisfied with the application subject to the limit of 8 external evening events that we had proposed.
33. As such, there was a significant period of time between us notifying the community of our proposals (in mid-June) and us lodging the application in early August 2020. We did not receive any direct responses or queries from the residents in that time.

Representations

34. During the consultation period, we received some correspondence from the Environmental Health Team at Cheshire East Council. We were happy to agree some amends/additions to our operating schedule to ensure that they were confident that our proposals were acceptable. For clarity, I attach at Exhibit MS5 a revised operating schedule which shows the agreed position we have reached.
35. Importantly, the amendments include:
- Reduction of the number of events which will take place externally beyond 7pm to 6 per year (from 8 as proposed in our application); and
 - Restriction of external licensable activities to 23:30 on any day.
36. We wrote (through our solicitors) to each of the residents who had made representations to explain these amendments and to invite them again to speak with us in advance of the hearing. I attach the correspondence we have had in relation to this

at Exhibit MS6. With the exception of Mr Gilbert, who was kind enough to join a 'Zoom' call to speak to us, we either have not received a response or have received a response indicating that there was no desire to discuss matters further with us.

Licensing Objectives

37. As such, whilst these matters will be addressed in detail at Committee, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight that I believe we have policies, procedures and safeguards in place that will ensure that, should our licence be granted, the licensing objectives will be upheld.
38. There has never been any crime or disorder associated with the club or with any events, and there is no reason to believe that this will occur in the future. The sorts of events we are talking about are community focussed, and our clubhouse is simply used for members and families/friends for drinks around cricket activities. Our operation simply does not have the propensity to undermine this objective.
39. As a sports club we naturally have to be very conscious of public safety in terms of the way we operate, and this also extends to protecting children from harm. I am happy to discuss and explain the incident referred to in some of the representations when an air ambulance was called for a child during the course of the Committee hearing. However, in general what I would say is that we have an exemplary record in this regard as confirmed by the Cheshire Cricket Board Clubs & Participation Manager – correspondence from whom is at Exhibit MS7.
40. In terms of public nuisance, we are acutely aware of allegations that our operations have caused a nuisance, and are committed to ensuring that this is not the case. This is demonstrated by our commitment to seeking advice on this matter. We have invested in sound level monitors for external events, and have offered conditions that require these to be used when regulated entertainment is taking place externally. We have committed to licensable activities not taking place externally after 23:30.
41. Finally, and importantly, as noted above, we have committed to having no more than 6 events per year which carry on outside beyond 19:00. This means that the outside

area will only be used for licensable activities between 19:00 and 23:30 6 times a year – an average of once every 2 months.

42. We believe that this presents a sensible and reasonable compromise – it allows us to carry out the sorts of events we need to generate revenue whilst committing us to a very restrictive permitted usage of the outside space in the evenings.
43. We do need to be able to generate revenue from the bar sales within the clubhouse, and from a small number of events per year to allow us to cover the day to day running costs of the club. These are significant, but they allow us to provide the excellent community facilities detailed above. All funds raised by events and through sales in the club house go back into the club for continual improvements in provision, equipment and facilities.
44. As such, we need this licence to be able to continue and secure the long term future of the club. We are not asking for any more than what is necessary in order to do that – indeed, we have actively sought to restrict our licence as much as possible (e.g. by agreeing to this limit of 6) so as to be as neighbourly as we can be.
45. I hope that the Committee consider what we are proposing to be a reasonable and proportionate balance between these competing interests, and I am happy to assist with any further queries they may have during the course of the proceedings.