
WITNESS STATEMENT OF DOMINIC HEYWOOD

1. My name is Dominic Heywood and I am the co-founder of Flat Cap Hotels. I make this statement in support of the application made by the The Bridge Cheshire Limited for a new premises licence for The Bridge Hotel, Prestbury; and in response to the representations received against this.

Background

2. I would firstly wish to give the Committee some brief background on Flat Cap Hotels.
3. Flat Cap Hotels is a family owned and operated restaurant, bar, bedroom and event brand firmly rooted in the heart of Cheshire. We are a passionately independent group of hotels with a highly individual view of the hospitality world. We offer boutique bedrooms, flamboyant furnishings and beautifully restyled interiors. We have taken distressed buildings with great historical and local importance through full refurbishments, re-imaging the spaces before welcoming the public into the stunning venues.
4. Since our inception, the aim and ethos of Flat Cap Hotels has been to bring something very different to the table, combining a flair for the extraordinary with a fondness for fine food, imaginatively presented.
5. As a group, we continuously invest in the local areas in which we are occupied. We always use local suppliers, such as the local butcher, farmers and dairies, and we have even established our very own product line with The Prestbury Candle Company.
6. We work, live and operate in Cheshire and take advantage of the abundance of wonderful local businesses to ensure that the surrounding economy is always firmly

supported by the Flat Cap Group. We are not a national company; we champion local employment and local business.

7. Our all day dining concept; and our cosy staycations; as well as our ability to allow people to meet, entertain and hold any event, from weddings, christenings and funerals to baby showers mean that we can and do accommodate people of all ages and needs. We continue to embrace the community of Cheshire by frequently implementing offers and encouraging people not only to visit our venues such as The Bridge, but also the local areas, like Prestbury High Street.

The Bridge

8. In terms of the Bridge itself, I would say that since acquiring the site in 2018 we have done huge amounts to improve and modernise the site. The Bridge has been a pub since the 1600s, and has been recorded as a coaching inn for much of its existence. From 1955 – 2016 it was owned and operated by a local family who established it as a restaurant, bar and hotel in the sort of form it trades today.
9. It has long been used as a wedding and events venue, and has long had the benefit of the wonderful outdoor space nearby the River Bollin.
10. Unfortunately, though, despite its long history, the venue then saw a significant downturn in trade. It was generating very little income, was unable to maintain its status as a focal point of the village and contribute to the local economy and champion other local businesses. Ultimately, and very sadly the business went into administration. We bought The Bridge from the administrators, saving it from becoming yet another lost local pub, an empty, boarded up building which in my view would have been a stain on the High Street.
11. Indeed, when we acquired the premises the Grade II listed building was in a state of disrepair. The Flat Cap Group committed a sizeable investment into the building and undertook a sympathetic restoration to safeguard its listed status and its future in the village. We fully refurbished all 27 bedrooms as well as the restaurant and event spaces. In doing this we have taken all the charm and history of the building, updating it whilst preserving its stunning listed features.

12. The extensive renovations and refurbishments that have been undertaken have insured that the restaurant is a point of interest and has placed this historic landmark firmly back on the Cheshire map. We are really proud of this achievement. I attach a document with images showing the premises both before and after our renovations.
13. The event spaces can cater for all sorts of events, from family celebrations to corporate events for people from all ages. We also provide space for local art classes and yoga classes and are often hosts to local businesses such as Dress Cheshire and The Prestbury Candle Company. It is intrinsic to our core values that we provide a beautiful and attractive space for the local community, as well as attracting visitors to the area to boost the local economy, which is the backbone to any community.

Community

14. Indeed, being part of the community is really important to us. I am therefore of course upset to hear that we have caused distress to some in the local community. This really would never be our intention – we want to be a valued and positive part of the area. I hope that during the course of the hearing we can explain our proposals and the reasons behind our application fully in order to provide comfort to those who have made objections.
15. However, I am also truly heartened by the positive comments we have received. I am pleased that we are described as a ‘positive addition to the village economy and community’, amongst many other things. This is exactly what we strive to be.
16. Under the management of Dominic Gotellier, who is a local resident of Prestbury himself, having lived there for 30 years, I believe that the premises has gone from strength to strength. He has brought a wealth of experience in the service industry to ensure that The Bridge is a prosperous and welcoming location and a true community asset. We are proud of our investment in the local community, our employment of local people and making the premises a true destination in the local area.
17. Since taking over the premises, we have regularly attended Parish Council meetings, previously in person and more recently online. We have contributed to the village financially in many ways, from Christmas fairs and Christmas lights; the upcoming installation of poppies in the village; and the development of the car park on Bridge

Green. This is a testament to our devotion to the village and our desire to have a positive relationship with local residents.

18. Another proud period for me has been our response to the Covid-19 crisis. This year has been immensely difficult for all in the hospitality industry, but also for our community as a whole. I believe that we contributed to making things just a little bit better in our local area. We provided care packages and a full takeaway service to the local community and delivered this within the village of Prestbury and beyond. This had great success and has allowed us to forge new relationships with members of the community. It also allowed us to continue using our local produce suppliers during worrying times for them.
19. We also opened our hotel rooms to NHS staff throughout lockdown to aid in the fight against Covid-19. We offered accommodation and a full menu, and in doing so we met the strict safety guidelines set by the health service to minimise the spread of the virus. These policies remain in place today and allow us to provide a safe space for customers and staff alike.

External Area

20. In terms of business, as I have said, Covid-19 has had a catastrophic effect on all hospitality businesses, and as such we have had to adapt our business to give ourselves the best chance of a future in Prestbury. We have invested in thermal imaging fever detection devices and a track and trace information gathering system. We also have a wireless access door that can be opened from customers' phones without the use of keys.
21. In line with recommendations, regulations and guidelines around outdoor spaces, we are providing a safe and secure social gathering space outdoors on our riverside terrace. This means that households that have been in lockdown for many months can socialise with their loved ones in a safe and secure way. We have been really keen to create a versatile and accessible outdoor space to safely cater for all.
22. We have offered music in the external area because we consider that it offers something different and some valuable additional ambience. We have had excellent feedback from customers who have enjoyed a meal or a few drinks in the external

area accompanied by some quality music from local bands and artists. Indeed, many of the supportive representations talk about what a welcome addition the music has been. Indeed, people have been unable to enjoy things like drinks and live music for some months, and we really do feel that we are offering something that most in the local area consider to be welcome and the sort of thing that has been missed for many months of this year.

23. However, we absolutely would not wish to carry this out in a way that causes concern or disturbance to other local residents. We absolutely apologise if this has been the case previously. I hope that the Committee can understand that we have been trying to diversify our business in response to a really difficult year and have been trying new things.
24. We are not, in this application, seeking to do anything in terms of music that is different to what we are currently permitted to do, as will be detailed during the course of the hearing. However, what we will do is offer clear and enforceable conditions and restrictions on our entertainment going forward to ensure that we operate it without causing a nuisance.
25. I have absolutely no doubt that our team will achieve this. It is absolutely in our interests to do so. We want to continue to provide the food, drinks, entertainment, atmosphere and venue that our customers, both local and further afield know and love, whilst ensuring that we operate in harmony with our neighbours and the community as a whole.