

Background and defence for The Hop & Rye Micro Pub

The Hop & Rye is situated in the sleepy village of Wainscott, a rural part of Strood. In our village we have a Chinese takeaway, a fish and chip takeaway, a barbers, a co-op and The Stag Public House, which is used by the younger clientele as it has a t.v and music. It takes place of the old Wainscott Working Men's Club, which closed many years ago. The micro pub means we do not have any music playing, no t.v playing and we try to attract an older clientele by selling real ales and traditional beers. We have a bus stop outside the premises so; obviously people can travel to our pub by bus. We opened the Hop and Rye on the 1st December 2019 with which we had our local ward councilor, Elizabeth Turpin open the premises along with her family. Since we have opened, Elizabeth Turpin has asked if she could hold local parish meetings within our establishment.

We have Covid regulations in place, which have been inspected by Mr Ian Gilmore, Trading Standards Officer. We have signage on the walls and floors, a track and trace computer system in place and QR codes posted all around the pub. We have 2 wall mounted hand sanitizing stations in place (1 in each bar). We have screens in each bar to prevent anyone having face-to-face contact. We have signs outside of the bar. We have a supply of facemasks behind the bar should any of the customers not have one. I have sent Mr Gilmore an email and have spoken with him verbally in which he said he is quite happy to join in with the meeting on the 22nd December or in writing with a request from yourselves to give his account of his attendance to our bar in relation to Covid regulations. His email address is ian.gilmore@medway.gov.uk or his mobile is [REDACTED].

We have many letters of support from our customers and local residents. I would like to state we have been open for 1 year now and the police have never been called to our premises. We have had no complaints from trading standards or any local residents.

I have lived in Wainscott village for 23 years and we live approximately 500 yards from the Hop and Rye. This was a new venture for me and a large learning curve. I do feel with the Covid rules and regulations, they are quite confusing for a lot of people. Some people wear masks in shops and some people don't. I noticed a car cleaning place on Frindsbry Hill, Strood, which had approximately 10 staff in and out of people's cars with no masks on. Is that acceptable by the law? Who knows? How many car cleaning venues in Medway, I wouldn't know how to guess. I'm not condoning what happened in my bar but it's certainly not on the same scale as what I mentioned.

There has obviously been a breach of the law, which I gave my defence across during the first hearing. I know two wrongs do not make a right and I do feel that I should give you this further information.

The following day, Saturday the 28th November, The Stag Public House received a visit from 2 uniformed police officers approximately between 16.00-17.00 hours to disperse an illegal gathering of 9 people and some were ordered to leave the premises. The police informed the landlord that should this happen again then he would be fined. This information came direct from the landlord, whom I know very well. I have requested this information by email of this incident from freedomofinformation@kent.police.uk. which I'm awaiting. The point I'm making is I feel we are being treated unfairly but, not forgetting the seriousness of it.

With regards to PC Chris Hill's comment suggesting our pub is "a ticking time bomb". I don't know how he has made this assumption. Clearly from our support letters that is not the case. We have a variety of customers who enjoy conversations with new and old friends; many elderly customers enjoy playing dominoes, rumikub and a selection of different card games. We also have morris dancers holding their monthly gathering in our back bar before the lockdown. Also, PC Hunt's comment "It was probable that the actions at these premises had contributed to the area moving from tier one at the beginning of the second national lockdown to tier 3 at the end of the lockdown". It is quite clear from what the Health Minister has said. The main problem arising in the Medway and the spread of Coronavirus is from the schools, surely not our establishment.

I would like to add that Mr Wilson and his friends on the evening in question are all of a senior citizen age. One of them in particular is 69. And this "lock in" was not a free for all, the doors were locked so no-one else could come in. I know this does not justify the incident but, the point I'm making, it was not an illegal teenage rave and they should have known better.

Also, the bigger picture is there are so many business' closing and people losing their jobs due to Covid-19. Surely if there is room to rectify this issue without closing our premises it would be greatly appreciated. As, you will see from our support letters enclosed and the importance of a micro pub in a small village is clear. Before a decision is made if need be, you are welcome to come and see our establishment for yourselves.

Mr Mark Greenfield