

Mr Huw Bowen
 Chief Executive
 Chesterfield Borough Council
 Town Hall
 Chesterfield
 S40 1LP

Bryn Wheeldon
 West Bars News

CC R Osborne (Chesterfield Police)

7 August, 2017

Dear Mr Bowen

I am writing this letter on behalf of 27 local businesses (a total of 59 owners, managers and staff) and 68 members of the public. These businesses, their staff and a small sample of their customers were canvassed over a few hours on Monday 31 July, 2017. As you will see from the attached schedules, the signatories have given their unreserved support to the following letter:

Complaint regarding antisocial behaviour on West Bars and New Square Chesterfield

We wish to raise serious concerns that we have about the detrimental impact that antisocial behaviour is having on businesses located in and around West Bars and New Square in Chesterfield Town Centre.

In recent months there has been an increasing trend for large groups of people intent on causing antisocial behaviour to gather on a daily basis in and around the seating areas under the trees on West Bars adjacent to Dent's Chemist and The Pine Shop off New Square.

The type of behaviour being witnessed by the public and nearby businesses includes:

- Large groups of up to 30 people openly drinking alcohol;
- The same groups using and 'dealing' what are presumed to be illegal substances;
- These groups using foul and abusive language to each other within earshot of the passing public including families with young children;
- These groups 'fighting amongst themselves' causing distress to the passing public;
- These groups effectively causing a barrier across West Bars by spilling out on to and 'blocking' public footpaths;
- These groups intimidating the public by their collective numbers and aggressive demeanour;
- Individuals from these groups 'chasing' members of the public begging for money.

Customers from our businesses are constantly stating their disgust and that they feel intimidated and frightened by the antisocial behaviour of these people, to the extent that some are now completely avoiding the New Square/West Bars area of town.

As a direct effect of these people being allowed to congregate and have the freedom to carry out their publicly abhorrent activities this part of town is now being badged as a 'No Go' area by many members of the public.

We would appreciate answers to the following questions:

- To what extent does Chesterfield Borough Council consider West Bars and New Square to be part of the Town Centre?
- Why were there no activities or stalls in New Square on the July 25th the day of the Medieval Market as in previous years?
- Why is Chesterfield Borough Council content to stand by, do nothing and seemingly endorse the deterioration of the West Bars gateway into town resulting in this becoming an intimidating area for the public to visit?
- What specific action is Chesterfield Borough Council taking to prevent large 'antisocial' groups congregating in the West Bars area?

- What specific action is Chesterfield Borough Council taking to disperse large 'antisocial groups when they do congregate in the West Bars area?
- What specific action is Chesterfield Borough Council taking to address illegal drinking and use of illegal substances by 'antisocial groups congregating in the West Bars area?

We appreciate that there are many underlying issues and factors that have resulted in the current situation. We also understand that ongoing comments relating to addressing 'root causes' by many of those in public offices are well intentioned but have no direct impact on quickly resolving the situation. We are also aware of efforts being made by responsible public authorities to provide a co-ordinated and cohesive approach to the problems. (NB Please include this representation in your current public consultation on Public Spaces Protection Orders)

However, we feel that the time for continually talking around issues has passed and that there needs to be direct, positive and swift action to sort out these problems; if Chesterfield Borough Council is willing to show its support for our local businesses which are the lifeblood of our town.

We are also concerned that if and when any action takes place it does not merely displace these groups of people to other parts of the town. In particular to the bus station, the area around Shentall Gardens and the derelict ex Magistrate's Court building. Such a result would not solve the problem. Any Public Spaces Protection Orders which are determined must include whole length of West Bars, New Square and Low Pavement as a minimum.

We feel currently that the West Bars/New Square 'end' of the town including the safety of business people and the general public is being effectively abandoned by all the authorities at the expense of kudos generating projects elsewhere. For example: the Vicar Lane redevelopment; the Northern Gateway redevelopment and also including one off events such as the Cycle Race in June that had a significant detrimental effect on many of our businesses.

The overriding feeling is that apart from sporadic and reactive attendance by the Police that 'Mob rule' is being allowed to go unchecked in this area and that no one cares about the impacts on our businesses and customers. We consider that public and business safety should be your number one priority.

We look forward to your observations on our concerns

Yours sincerely

Bryn Wheeldon

Owner, West Bars News

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