

Annex 6

Village meeting.

Rownhams House

I have understood that there is a letter floating about the village in respect of our recent licensing application. It may have been helpful if the writer had contacted me first as I believe I may have been able to put many minds at rest. I am easily contactable.

A "Premises Licence" is required these days to do almost anything by way of public entertainment; serving alcohol, putting on a play (and I plead guilty mlords), a dance display or even showing a health and safety film to paying delegates. We could not put on another "Private Lives" in the garden without risking both a fine or imprisonment! The 2003 Licensing Act is a very broad brush indeed.

I am willing to admit that Rownhams House is currently hanging on by its fingernails. Office use, which has served us well for 25 years or more, is no longer fully viable. So what do we do? Do we let the roof fall in and allow the house and grounds to become a home for vandals? Do we follow recent advice given by two sets of different planning consultants and sell the whole lot for "residential development" which would effectively destroy the magic and split up the estate into tiny pieces which would then be impossible to 'supervise'? Or other suggestions have been a school or Private health care facility. That one sound safe doesn't it? Except the growth area at the moment is the treatment of substance addiction. I actually know a wonderful man who runs one of these clinics so I'd be actually quite relaxed about it – but I'm also sensitive enough to know that many people would feel very uneasy. So I am asking residents to think - really think seriously before they place their trust some fast talking property developer rather than me. I've loved Rownhams House for more than 50 years and I don't want it to come to harm on my watch.

Ok so you owe the bank a lot of money, you are losing tenants fast, you love the place, it is precious, you want the neighbourhood to remain 'classy', you don't want jobs or hassle, you make all sorts of enquiries with property professionals (some of whom have vested interests) and you think long and very hard indeed.

Or do you think of a Plan B which would allow the estate to remain both intact, well managed, supervised, properly administered by a reasonable bloke who loves the place so much that he spent 8 years researching the history? The question is would a Plan B enable the 'magic' to survive without alienating our neighbours. The answer is "yes"... provided the owners take very reasonable precautions. And we most certainly will.

Before putting in for this Premises License I took great care to speak to all the interested authorities to seek their advice. If we are to preserve Rownhams House it is very clearly not in our interest to upset either our neighbours or the powers that be. I suspect that in this instance the principal concern of neighbours would not be 'fire regulations' or 'food hygiene' issues but rather 'noise.'

On that basis I troubled to seek detailed advice from both Hampshire Police and the Test Valley Noise Pollution team – neither of whom wish to be called out in the early hours to deal with drunken partygoers or idiot disc jockeys. In completing our Application we have followed their advice to the letter. There will not be a rock group in the garden. Most amplified music will be in designated indoor rooms with thick walls, mobile air conditioning units so they don't open the doors in the summer – if we get one - and acoustic curtains if necessary.

As a former rock musician I am aware of 'sound leakage' and I tested one of the rooms a few weeks ago at a volume that would not be acceptable to anyone in the room selected. These Jimi Hendrix moments almost gave me tinnitus. It was barely audible outside and was somewhat swamped by traffic noise. Significantly no one complained. We will not be hosting 18th or 21th Birthday parties for obvious reasons. We shall however welcome corporate hire, and they have been coming here for many years without incident, product launches, private dining and civilised wedding receptions. In respect of the latter we shall make it crystal clear that 'booze ups' are not acceptable, our first choice caterers have a very strict policy on alcohol (as shall we), we shall be not be serving alcohol after 11PM, neighbours will be given a dedicated 'hot-line' telephone number to ring should they be disturbed which will enable us to both take swift action and 'plug the gap'. The "late night refreshment" mentioned in the licensing notice merely allows us to serve tea or coffee after 11pm ... indoors only.

I gather wedding receptions at the Village Hall have occasionally had problems. I do not know if they charge a ruinous amount of money for wedding receptions, (we will) and this will deter most of the usual suspects, or indeed if they 'vet' applicants. but we shall be unwilling to host anything which looks remotely like a yobfest. We are hoping to concentrate on small select gatherings of about 50 guests who are happier with cool summer jazz ... not Motorhead.

Likewise with any corporate bookings – we're not up for paintballing, wargames, clay pigeon shooting or go kart racing. Croquet and boules is our market.

Finally it has been suggested to me that one of the reasons for objecting is the possible effect upon local property values. I have to say that it is my intention to 'lift' the neighbourhood so that prospective purchasers can be truthfully advised that just over the garden wall is the most beautiful and civilised venue and they could consider themselves fortunate to have it on their doorstep.

If anyone would like further clarification on these issues please just ask. I'm happy to show them around them if it provides reassurance. If they can pose a problem we haven't addressed we shall be very grateful to you for the opportunity of sorting it out.

Thank you for listening.

RB