

Bridgetown Monroe
6 Bucklersbury
Hitchin
SG5 1BB

Reference- Premises Review LC/14160

This is a written statement from the owner of Bridgetown Monroe, Christopher Dodd. (Woody)

Without prejudice

To whom it may concern.

OPENING SUMMARY

This case is not simply about a noise complaint. It is about the future of my business, my family, my staff and a venue that I have spent years building into a successful and respected part of Hitchin.

*I opened Bridgetown Monroe on 28th October 2023 after three years of planning. For the first 22 months of trading, we had **ZERO complaints**. Since a resident moved into a flat above the bar, I have faced a noise complaint that now has the potential to remove the 2am closing time that my business has operated under since November 2023.*

I have not ignored the complaint. Quite the opposite. I have worked extensively with the Council and Environmental Health and have made significant changes to the way my business operates. I have removed speakers, installed a decibel restrictor, monitored sound levels, removed the Friday DJ night, increased staff training and introduced further measures to manage customers leaving the venue. I have repeatedly tried to find solutions and accommodate the concerns raised.

I accept that residents have a right to enjoy their homes without unreasonable disturbance. At the same time, I ask that the wider circumstances are properly considered. The complaint relates to a very limited period of trading, while the financial consequences of losing the final 90 minutes of my weekend trading would be devastating. Those hours represent nearly half of my takings in the figures provided. The bar currently breaks even, and I have no financial backing or reserves to absorb that loss.

This is my entire livelihood. I am a one-man band, a father of three young children, and Bridgetown Monroe supports my family and provides employment for others. Closing earlier would not simply reduce my profits — it could force the business to close altogether.

*I am therefore asking for what I believe is a reasonable and proportionate outcome: **allow Bridgetown Monroe to remain open until 2am at weekends, with the restrictions and noise-management measures already in place continuing. The only change I would like to have the DJ remain on Saturdays until 2am close, with the removal of the bass.***

I have listened. I have adapted. I have spent significant amounts of money trying to resolve this. I am still willing to work with the Council and my neighbours.

*All I am asking is that the decision considers not just the complaint, but the **36 months of responsible trading, the measures I have already taken, the wider circumstances and the devastating consequences that reducing my hours would have on my business, my family, my staff and the wider Hitchin community.***

HOW WE GOT HERE / OUR LICENSING HOURS

I opened the bar at 6 Bucklersbury, 28th October 2023. The bar had been three years in planning and was delayed due to Covid. The owner of the bar is Christopher Dodd and is the sole director, founder and beneficiary of the business.

I have put everything I own financially, physically and mentally into making the bar a success and I have carefully managed all the 4 conditions of the licence to make sure they are each adhered to.

We are considered one of the safest venues in Hitchin, if not further afield, and we make a very conscious effort to make everyone feel very welcome, safe and, the end goal, to give them a great night out, responsibly.

When we opened, our hours were 12.30am close on the weekend, but quickly, after a month, I applied to extend my hours to close at 2am. This was granted immediately via Alan Stone, and at the time I was aware that was it. Everything was confirmed and arranged. I received my licensing in the post and it has been proudly displayed on my bar ever since.

I was then informed (Feb 26) that Environmental Health didn't inform Planning of the change and this had to be retrospectively adjusted. This is something I have been trying to achieve ever since I was informed. I was advised that Licensing forgot to inform Planning. Unfortunately, because this has gone alongside this noise complaint, Alan won't sign off retrospectively the previously agreed licence extension.

I am a very conscious business owner who is extremely respectful of customers and adjoining neighbours. I have become very close friends with surrounding businesses and I am very well known around town. This is because I am genuine, honest, respectful and hardworking.

As you enter the venue, we have signs on the front windows asking customers to be respectful of my neighbours when leaving the venue. I have door staff who respectfully manage noise outside the venue. They also restrict people taking drinks outside the front to prevent lingering and noise complaints.

OUR DJ

Our DJ is purposely the same DJ for the last three years. That is deliberate because he knows the staff, customers, and the rules of our venue. Unlike other venues in town, we keep it the same so these rules can be adhered to. The DJ has become part of the furniture and any negativity on the bar hurts him too. He has a lot of invested time in the bar and would do anything to keep it going as it is.

The noise we have determined in LOW FREQUENCY which is caused by bass. Vocals and treble don't go through walls and structures as much. Alan has confirmed that it is low frequency coming into Bruce's flat. We have removed the dedicated bass speaker and from 11pm we remove the bass from all tracks. This will stop any low frequency travelling up, and stop all noise issues. We have been doing this since the start of August.

BRUCE – THE COMPLAINANT

Bruce, who is the person complaining, moved into his flat 9/10 months ago. That's 22 months after I opened. That is 22 months of consistent trading with ZERO complaints. That is over 6000 hours of being open without any complaints. Bruce then moves in, and complains immediately. Bruce (complainant) did originally come direct to me with noise concerns and I addressed him professionally and worked with him on all points to rectify.

Then he went to the Council directly when he wasn't happy with the result of my actions. I did ask Bruce if he was aware of the type of venue I was, and he self-admitted he didn't do his research fully, if not at all. He admitted he attended my bar at 6pm on a Saturday evening when it is very quiet. He never once looked at the social media and in turn made his judgement based on the 6pm Saturday viewing. He didn't even speak to me in the bar upon viewing. All it would have taken was a simple social media scan, 2-minute conversation or a later visit. To be honest, the estate agents holds a responsibility here.

Since Bruce has gone to the Council to complain, it has been nothing short of a vendetta against the business. He has been consistent in his approach to destroying my reputation, and my mental health.

I have been speaking to the business next to the bar, Found Love, and I have discovered Bruce complains about their music and even complaining about their hoovering. He has been found knocking on their glass window at 7.30am to complain about this hoovering. Please bear in mind the business next to me is a up market hair salon. This is a testament to Bruce and his partner complaining about everything and not appreciating the noise a town brings. Below is a statement from Matt the owner of Found Love to explain the situation.

“He has even complained about a member of our team, Wayne vacuuming the salon floor, this is routine cleaning that any business needs to do, carried out briefly and a reasonable time of day. Apart from Bruce, we have received a noise complaint of any neighbour, resident or business in three years of trading, in my view the noise he has objected to, is minimal and no more than you would expect from a business operating normally. As Bridgetown Monroe's closest neighbour and business, I have not found noise from the bar to be a problem during our opening hours. I believe the facts in this statement are true”

Name- Matthew Sockalingum

Position- Owner Found Love

Date- 6/10/26

THE EFFECT ON ME AND MY BUSINESS

Please note, I am a one-man band. This bar is everything to me and it supports my entire life financially. I am a father of three young children and without this bar, and it running successfully, I lose everything. That is fact in this case.

I don't dispute he hears noise in his flat, but it isn't in any way disruptive and what needs to be considered is he lives in a town centre and he purposely chose to move in above a busy bar. He chose that. I didn't ask him to move in there, he chose down to his own free will to be there. Please note, he hasn't purchased the flat, he rents it. He has the freedom to move away at any point beyond his contract.

TOM – ANOTHER RESIDENT ABOVE THE BAR

I know of Tom who lives in the same block of flats above my bar and owns his property. He purchased his house and moved in before I opened the bar. He has never ever complained about any noise. He is also physically in closer proximity to the bar than Bruce is. Not one single complaint from Tom. I always engage with him when I see him, I make sure of this as a responsible licence holder so that if he did have any concerns, he can address them with me and I would be sure to fix the matter.

BRUCE AND HIS PARTNER

Bruce and his partner have been nothing but horrendous towards me. They only complain because they have a vendetta against me and the bar. They have been caught being extremely rude and vulgar to my customers, they have been secretly filming customers entering my bar and, even worse, decided to stand on their doorstep on the street and discourage people from entering my bar. This has been a running thing with them and it only just proves his issue with the venue, not the noise. They have set up a what's app group between all the residents, encouraging them to complain. This is becoming harassment and a huge detriment to the bar.

Since the licence review has been actioned, there has been another neighbour complaining via the relevant channels and I question, why did they never complain before the review. This is a clear sign that they are being coerced by Bruce most likely. If there was any sound issues then we would of been informed immediately.

I have been made aware of a situation with some verbal language directed at a tenant from a unknown customer. I have reinstated and trained my door staff to be aware of situations like this, to manage them best they can and to be focused on any customers that don't align with our four licences objectives. We wasn't aware of any situation but we will now be a lot more vigilant and welcoming of this information. We have incident log manuals to track and record any issues.

At the end of the day everyone deserves to live a comfortable life and feel safe. I have tried hard to resolve any issues put in front of me and I just expect the same in return. There needs to be a understanding of living in a town centre. It comes with pros and cons. A town centre will always been noisier than a village location. I choose to live in a village because a town centre is too noisy

for me, but in return I don't have facilities on my door step. I want for the complainant to be happy but there needs to be an understanding that living above a bar will come with some noise.

ALAN STONE

I find Alan Stone conflicting in his approach to this complaint. In person, he is nothing but nice and accommodating to the situation that I have been put in, but when he is with Bruce and via communications such as emails and phone calls, he is very one-sided on the side of Bruce. You can see he has been manipulated by Bruce and is a victim to someone consistently complaining and him buckling under the pressure of his noise complaints.

Please note, this is the only complaint Alan has received about the bar. The one previous to Bruce never went to fruition because they moved out and was never even processed into a system. In nearly 36 months of being open, ONE SINGLE person has complained and I find my business at risk.

I would understand a licence being put under review for drugs or violence, but for one person to complain feels really unjust, especially when I have worked hard and accommodated a lot of Bruce's and Alan's wishes to help mitigate any further noise issues.

I have also consistently been ignored on two points which I would of appreciated the answers on because it would of helped mitigate the issues further. I have repeatedly asked for the DB readings as evidence so I can see the exact readings to manage expectations. I have also repeatedly asked for the confirmation of which is the party wall with the complainants flat, and I have been ignored each time. I am a true independent business with no money in reserve to spend on a hit and miss approach to sound proofing. Once I have the party wall I can sound proof that wall and all sound issues will be solved.

EVERYTHING I HAVE DONE TO REDUCE NOISE

I have had several meetings with Alan and many calls and emails and, to Alan's testament, always been accommodating and welcoming. I have taken so many steps and measures to whatever noise in Bruce's flat is reduced. The steps I have taken are as followed, and this has been under Alan's provision.

- Removed the Monitor speaker
- Removed the Base speaker
- Removed the two speakers attached at the end of the bar. (Where Bruce lives)
- Attached a Decibel Restrictor to the speakers. 80DB max in the bar. This was instructed by Alan
- because it allowed the DB in Bruce's flat to be acceptable
- Consistent use of a DB reader to maintain any unruly peaks in the music
- We have asked customers who do shout to keep the noise down
- Staff have training every 6 weeks to manage noise

- We have a door man at the rear of the bar and myself at the door instructing customers to leave quietly and respectfully when closed.
- I have removed the DJ night on Friday. This leaves ONLY Saturday evening. (Please note we have a DJ on bank holiday Sundays when my licence allows late opening Only)
- I have sat down with Alan and his team to manage any situation
- I have involved external parties to help mitigate any concerns
- I have made a conscious effort to find the correct wall to sound proof (evidence can be supplied)
- I have offered to sound proof the wall in the complainants flat.
- I have shown evidence that noise does come from the pub opposite ours, (The George) as well.
- We have stopped our DJ from playing beyond 12.30am on a Saturday until this issue is resolved.
- We have put privacy lock on the iPad that plays the music through a small Sonos speaker setup.
- Only the manager and owner can alter the sound levels on the iPad. Making sure its within DB.
- We have removed all bass from all songs from 11pm. This stops the low frequency which is what the complaint is about.

THE BUILDING AND SOUNDPROOFING

When I took on the lease of the building, the landlord soundproofed the ceiling for me. This should have been signed off by Environmental Health, but I was advised they forgot to attend the property to sign the work off. This is something that is of fault of Alan and his team, yet again, might I add. The property to the left of the venue is currently derelict, which means there is no insulation or protection their side and rising above them. Noise pollution will leak into that venue and above. Also, the double-level flat directly above my bar is derelict and again has the same issue as next door. The flat above has been derelict for 8 years now and having chatted to the landlord, has no plans to do anything with the building. The ceiling to that flat is already sound proofed and nothing else needs to be added.

I am also concerned about the quality of any insulation in Bruce's flat. His landlord was the same landlord that did the building conversion into the units I hold one of. That said landlord was declared bankrupt due to shoddy building work and was discovered to be cutting corners greatly. One being insulation in the flats they built. The issue here very possibly could be the walls in his flat.

TWO HOURS A WEEK

Bruce is only complaining of noise between 1am and 2am. That is only 2 hours a week. The rest of the time he is fine with any noise he may hear. 2 hours a week. I have advised he could wear ear plugs, OR he can wear headphones with music etc for those said two hours, if what he claims is really affecting his life. Something he seems reluctant to do. Or for the sake of keeping a business open. I have done everything I have been asked for and more, and Bruce has done nothing. There needs to be a little compromise. He chose to live above a busy bar. The noise in his flat, from Alan's own words, isn't that bad, a few DB over the required limit without any limitations put into place his side. For the sake of two hours a week, he can manage the slight noise with examples above, but

his refusal to do anything will close a business, lose my family's income and cost countless jobs and a place for people to feel safe in.

Bruce only rents his flat, he has only lived there 9/10 months, he never did any research into the venue and he knew and chose to move above a bar. I find it really upsetting and unnerving that one person can destroy my entire life, something I have worked incredibly hard to create on a choice, when at the end of the day he messed up and chose to move above my business. I know we aren't a loud venue. We are a very respectful venue that is managed exceptionally well. I really am wanting to work with any complainant and come to a resolve that works for us all.

In total 2 hours a week is the entire complaint and this has been confirmed by Alan and Bruce themselves. I don't believe that is an unreasonable amount of time and it has always been part of the bars hours from November 2023. We are a late night venue. A very respected venue and we in turn respect every aspect of running such an important bar in Hitchin. We are also the ONLY VENUE in Hitchin that gives a place for a night out for over 30's that feels safe and welcoming for that demographic. Reducing the hours beyond 2am will jeopardise everything everyone loves and close permanently.

THE FINANCIAL AND MENTAL IMPACT

I have lost tens of thousands of pounds accommodating Bruce and Alan's complaints. I have lost customers, he has made my life a living hell, severely damaging my mental health further and now has the capacity to get me shut down when I have been nothing but respectful and accommodating. I have consistently asked for the recordings and data readings from Bruce's flat and I have been ignored every time from Alan. I have to believe the way Bruce takes recordings is factually correct, and whatever Alan and Bruce say, is true.

The hospitality industry has bottomed out and every day is a struggle to keep it open. I have created a fun, safe, happy place for people to have a great night out. There is not another venue in Hitchin that caters for over 30's with a later licence. This is incredibly important, the 2am needs to remain so my customers have somewhere to go. The entire industry has bottomed out and the bars earnings in the past couple of months have halved, this is partly down to making the changes to manage this complaint (something that can't be sustained) and also the drinking habits of people have changed. Utilities have doubled, the cost of wholesale drink has gone up 35% and business rates have gone up 120%. With all these added bills and less customers, and then the complaints on top, the bar is struggling. The only way this important business can survive is for the licence to remain as it currently is.

I employ a lot of staff, and they depend on me and the bar for their own survival.

THE NOISE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Alan has stated my Noise Management Plan has changed. I was unaware I had to inform Alan if I had to add more DJ nights etc, but please note this was done unintentionally and when I added more DJ nights, this was done over 20 months ago, and with zero complaints from anyone. I also emailed

my new Noise Management Plan to Jasmine in Licensing, and didn't get a reply. This was over a year ago. Me getting no reply to me means it's accepted.

No customers, no neighbours, no Council involvement, because IT NEVER EVER OFFENDED ANYONE. It's only since Bruce moved in. I added more DJ nights to the bar (only ever Friday and Saturday) because the demographic of Hitchin and the amount of customers coming into town and my bar drastically changed and did what any good or half decent business would do. I had to amend and adjust to the changing times, because if I didn't, the bar would have gone bankrupt many months ago. Whilst I did make this change, I was very respectful. I used the same DJ so he knew my business and restrictions, door staff always managed the door and customers and kept noise to a level I presumed was acceptable. Hence zero complaints.

BUCKLESBURY

Bucklersbury is a beautiful street in Hitchin. This road, before my time and long after I depart, is widely known as the road in Hitchin to go out and enjoy at night time. It is packed with restaurants, drinking venues and is an entry or exit onto the square.

The road is very narrow. (One way), the buildings on each side of the road are old, steeped in history. When I first opened the bar, I was restricted to double glazing the windows because of its heritage status. The floors are the original and can't be removed. My bar is directly opposite what I consider the loudest venue in town. It's all of 10ft across a road, The George. They have DJ's at least three times a week. Their customer base is 18-21 year old kids, which means they attract the Weatherspoons kick out. They allow 60-metre queues of very drunken, LOUD, young adults to wait outside their venue, directly opposite my bar and Bruce's flat. They shout, scream, fight and cause a nuisance. Us, on the other hand, don't allow queuing, are strictly over 21's and certainly don't attract the drunken Weatherspoon kick out. We do this because we are respectful of our neighbours, but because we also don't want a loud bullish crowd in my bar.

The George by a long way is the most violent bar in Hitchin. I have seen countless times how they actively don't care about fights and clearly don't report them when it happens as well. With Bucklersbury being such a narrow street, the noise from their venue lifts at a 45-degree angle and hits the flats above my venue. I have no issue with the noise they create, but I certainly won't be blamed for this. Please note, I am not slandering the George and have a great relationship with the bar management, staff and security. However, it would be amiss if I were to not mention the above points that would majorly affect noise pollution going towards the complainant.

For all of two hours a week between 1-2am, I find myself in this situation. I find it heartbreaking and really disrespectful for what I have achieved.

BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

In the first two years of being open, Bridgetown Monroe won Business of the Year. This is a huge achievement for any business, let alone a brand-new business in such a small town. This is credit to my entire team. This was publicly voted as well. Over half the customers that enter our bar are returning customers. We have loyal fans, respectful customers and I do hope after reading this, long

may it continue. We are a safe venue for all, and create a happy party night out. We have brought a lot of joy to many local people, and this isn't by accident. We all work hard in the bar. Upon request I can supply many references from many influential people in Hitchin.

PETITION AND SUPPORT

We are incredibly well loved and respected by all our customers and since everyone has found out about our licence being put under review for the said complaint, we have been inundated with love and support that proves how much Hitchin Town and its residents from near and far, need Monroes to remain open as it is.

I know that your council review has received 100s and 100s of SUPPORT for the bar, with each one independently expressing their reasons to keep the bar open until 2am. That is know is fact, and if anything, has shown the bar how loved we are, but also it should prove to yourselves, why we should remain as is. How important we are, how respected, how we follow each of the four objectives and damn good we are.

We have done our own independent survey with [change.org](#) and we have been blown away with the level it has received. Everyone has expressed their love, support and demand to keep the bar as it is.

As of 11th October, we have received 1283 support signatures.

It has been shared 1490 times with over 21 comments.

change.org



1,283

Verified signatures

Change.org helps verify signatures are from real people.

Copy link

WhatsApp

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Save BRIDGETOWN MONROE from closure

Petition progress

Petition starter added an update, 3 weeks ago

Shares

1,490

Comments

21

Amy W • 10 hours ago

Nicola B • 10 hours ago

Lisa Y • 21 hours ago

Victoria B • 22 hours ago

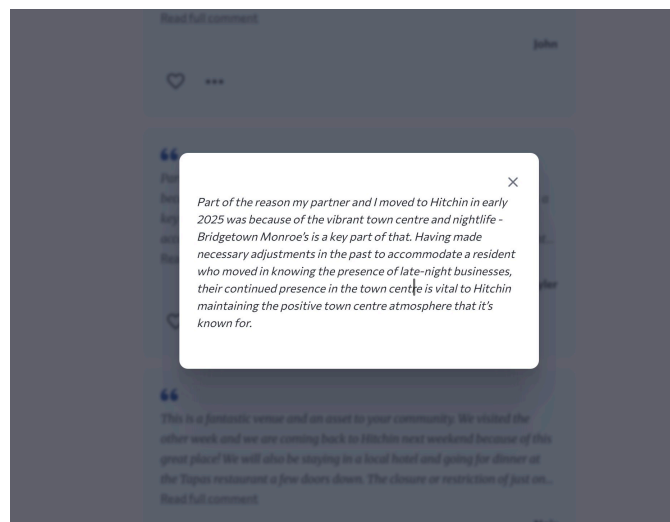
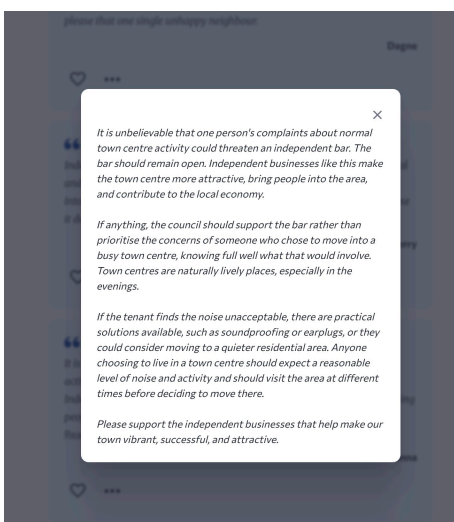
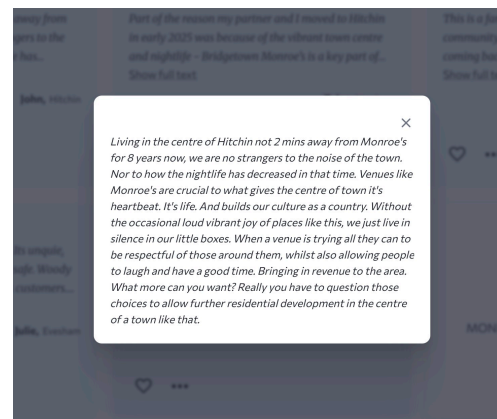
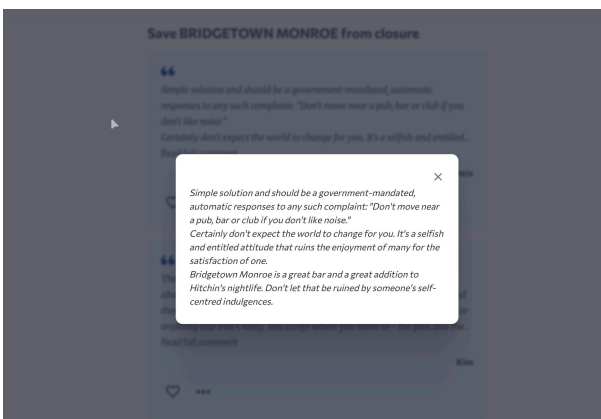
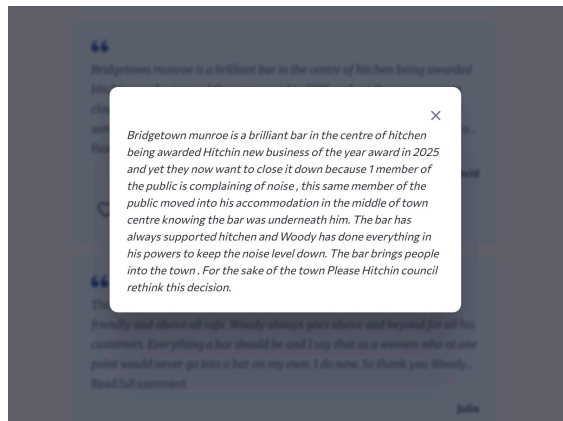
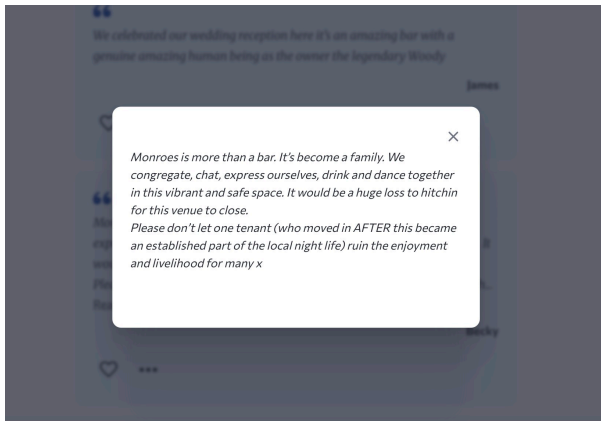
minesh P • 1 day ago

Sarah W • 1 day ago

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We knew we was loved by lots of people, but this NOW PROVES it. You can view the petition via this link- <https://www.change.org/p/save-bridgetown-monroe-from-closure/feed>

Many supporters have also added comments, and I have selected just a few of them to give you an idea of their feelings on the situation and the bar.



BBC RADIO 3 COUNTIES

The support has come from far and wide, and our plight has even been picked up by BBC 3 Counties radio. They researched the situation, canvassed in Hitchin town centre and interviewed many residents, ALL WITH POSITIVE POINTS FOR THE BAR, and interviewed myself to understand the situation. This was live on the radio and went out to Tens of thousands of listeners. I was interviewed by their leading drive time DJ Andy Collins on the 1st October. You can find the recording <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0031vzy>

I finally want to share a statement from Hitchin's town centre manager. Danny Pearson. He is a very influential person in Hitchin, very well respected and a fan of the bar but also has a very level head and a neutral position. His statement is below and like our bars customers and the residents of Hitchin, it is exceptionally positive and important to take on board.

"I am writing a reference for the team at Bridgetown MonroeBar. They have been a valued member of the Hitchin BID family for several years and it is extremely important that they are allowed to operate as a town centre bar here in Hitchin. For anyone complaining about noise I'm not sure what to say other than it is a town centre... it will be lively. How blessed we are that we have an active town centre rather than a boarded up, dead end, wasteland.

We know they are good neighbours to the people along Bucklersbury and communicate well with those around them. They also won a public vote last year and were crowned 'BEST OVERALL BUSINESS AWARD FOR HITCHIN'. We, Visit Hitchin, will always fight for our town centre businesses and we often remind people who live in the towncentre that they, the businesses, must be allowed to operate. These local business and people are what makes Hitchin great."

Danny Pearson – Hitchin Town Centre Manager.

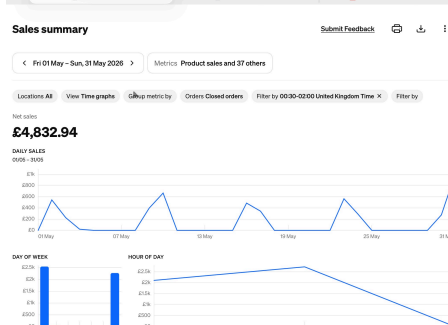
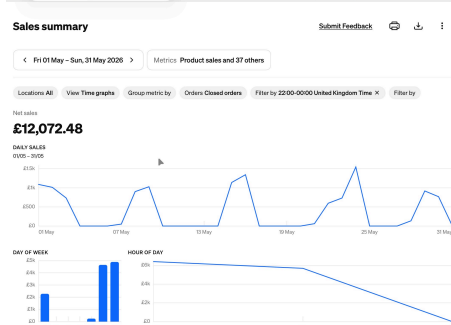
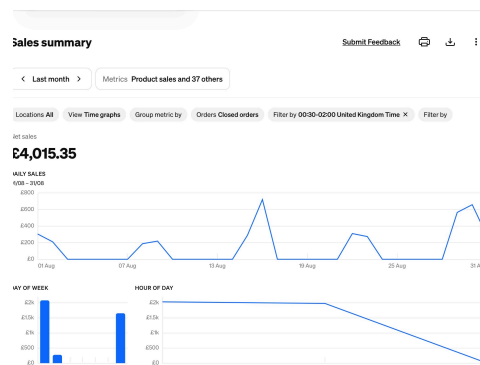
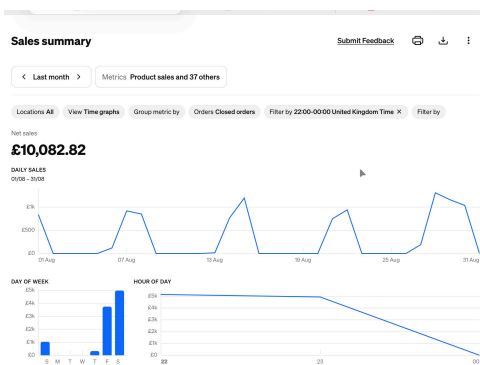
MY FINAL PLEA / THIS IS MY LIFE

I am pleading with you to see this from my side of the coin, and how this is something that has escalated for no reason. I have accommodated and helped at every single moment through this horrendous process with Bruce and Alan and I really hope you can see it in your heart to leave the licence as it is, and with the measures I have put in place, see how respectful and helpful I have. The 2am licence has to remain for many reasons, financially it is vital, a place for over 30's to end their night is vital. My staff need their hours for a liveable wage. The bar is my future, my families future and my partners. I have worked for 7 years to build this bar to the level it is. I have succumbed to the bar breaking even currently or a loss, but It can't change anymore or it won't survive.

At the end of the day, he moved in above a very busy, successful bar, which helps a lot of people in their lives. Even more so today, people need their sanctuary, which we are to many, and they need to enjoy themselves and to feel like they can be anyone without judgement. Here at Monroe's we are just that. I have put a lot of measures into place to make everyone happy. This is including Bruce and all neighbours. These measures were in place before Bruce turned up, and that is proven with zero complaints in 22 months. I have added additional measures to personally accommodate Bruce, and I am at a point with Alan's suggestions, that the business simply isn't viable and will haemorrhage money, and will have to close. This will destroy my life as well as my family's and staff. I employ a lot of people throughout the year and this is something that will drastically change with current staff and any further hires.

I am asking to remain open until 2am with the continuing restrictions in place. 2am on the weekend is not a lot to ask, especially when The George is 3am, SpeakEasy is 3am and I have been 2am since November 2023.

I ask you to look at these figures from two random months of the year. These are the till sales for the entire month through two blocks of times. 10pm-12am and 12.30am-2am. The reason I am showing you this, I am a one-man band. I have no backers, no loans, no anything. The bar as it stands breaks even. What comes in, goes straight back out running it. Any restriction on the bar closing time wise, will cripple the bar immediately and force it to close. I don't have any reserve funds to cover the gaps in loss of earnings.



As you can see in both months, the times from 12.30am to 2am is nearly half the takings. That solid 90mins is my biggest sales hours. If I lose this, the bar closes. I am a hard working individual that is navigating what is a really tough times for hospitality.

The added pressure of one single person complaining for one hour a night (two nights only) isn't fair, but you can see the repercussions of closing early will ruin a lot of lives. I have accommodated, been respectful and wise to my surroundings. I just want Bruce to do the same as well. I am willing to work with you all on this matter, and if there is anything I can further do more than what I am doing, which works within the means of running a successful bar, then I will do it. Please also note, Monday through to Thursday and Sunday I am silent as a bar.

Please allow for the bar to continue to operate on the hours of 2am close on the weekend. For my family, for my staff and for our customers and Hitchin.

We are a staple of Hitchin. We are adored and loved by so many people and I plead and pray you can help me remain open to the hours I have always done. I will in turn continue to be respectful and helpful towards all neighbours. I want to keep Hitchin vibrant and exciting, and having a successful nightlife is key to its success.

I really appreciate your time and assistance on this. Thank you for your patience.

Woody x