

Alexis Mather

12 Trafalgar Street

Cambridge, CB4 1ET

To: Cambridge Licensing authority

Cc: West Chesterton Councillors

Re: Licence application 279321 for Othersyde Ltd 'Alcademy' Venue at 54-56 Chesterton Road

5 June 2024

Dear sir/madam:

I write to inform you of my OBJECTION to the above licence application, and to outline the reasons for this objection.

I accept to have my contact details published with my objection with the exception of my email address that I wish to have redacted from any/all publications. I have taken care not to include it in this letter, but anticipate the letter itself will be delivered by email.

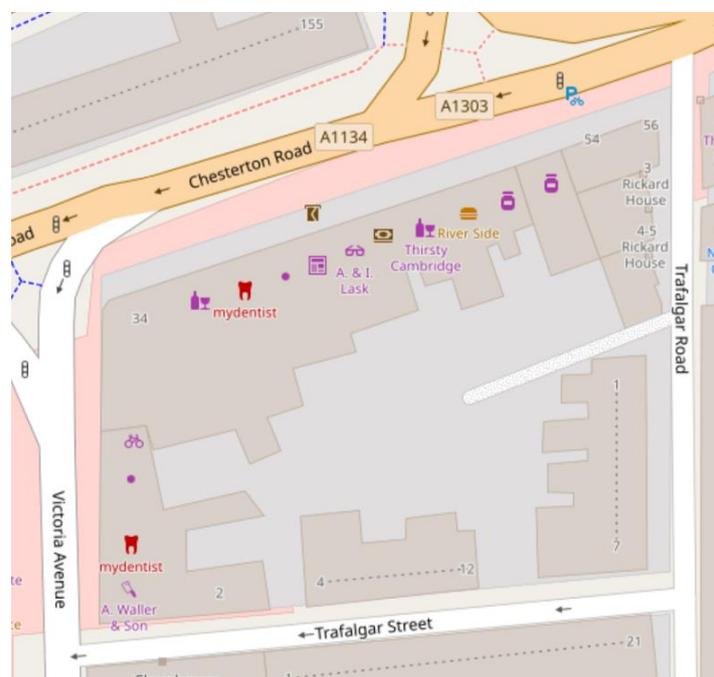
Introduction and Summary

1. Alcademy, absent alcohol sales, looks like an interesting concept that could bring any number of community benefits.
2. 83.5 hours per week of alcohol sales **stands in sharp contrast to positive claims** of Alcademy (gaming community, yoga, wellness, poetry readings, walking tours) and does not remotely fit our community, which is already bursting with alcohol outlets of all types.
3. Specifically, it will certainly and **unavoidably lead to increased** noise on our narrow streets, from departing patrons; we already experience this from existing licenced premises. It defies common sense to imagine or state that a new drinking establishment within 50 metres of my home would not increase this existing issue.
4. As the applicant notes in the 'Description' of the application: "The principle of development of the premises was considered acceptable subject to the proposal not causing harm to the character and appearance of the area, living conditions of neighbouring properties, highways and provided it satisfies Environmental Health Concerns."
5. I am categorically of the view that **this licence, if granted, will cause harm** to the living condition of neighbouring properties; I own and live in one that is fifty (50) metres from the front door of this venue.
6. These harms are sufficient that the committee should deny the licence outright. I have made some effort to detail how those harms come about, below.

Context

The following sets out some local context and history

7. See below map extract (from openstreetmap.org) with Chesterton Road properties from 34 to 56 shown, amongst others.
8. In 2019, two premises on this retail stretch were licensed, or 20% of premises.
 - Newsagent/Off-licence (No. 40)
 - Thirsty (No. 46) – initial licence
9. Since then, licences have been granted/amended to:
 - A taste of Hungary store (No. 50)
 - A taste of Hungary restaurant (No. 48)
 - Grape Britannia (No. 34)
 - La Dispensa (No. 52)
 - Thirsty – expansion with licence variation in 2022
10. If the present licence were to be granted, it would bring the proportion of licenced retail units on this stretch of Chesterton Road to 65%! I am not aware of any other stretch of retail frontage in Cambridge that is so densely licensed, and don't feel my neighbourhood should be experimented on.
11. In the area (immediately outside the below map area, and all within 5 minutes' walk), we have 6 local public houses, some of which have been renovated and extended in recent years:
 - Waterman – expansion of outdoor area
 - Boathouse
 - Portland Arms
 - Old Spring (all-weather covered area outside since Covid)
 - Tivoli – (Renovated ex-Wetherspoons now hosting patrons on 4 floors!)
 - Fort St. George
12. Additionally, we are subjected to several licenced events on Jesus Green and Midsummer Common every year.



Objection Grounds

Noise Nuisance

13. Our streets (Trafalgar Road, Trafalgar Street) are already regularly used after local closing times for foot traffic and by people rejoining vehicles, by individuals (other than drivers, one hopes) who are either inebriated enough to disregard any signage imploring quiet respect for neighbours, or **outright drunk enough to be causing extended commotion** on our roads, causing disturbance that carries very clearly along our narrow streets.
14. **NB:** Trafalgar street is only six metres wide from one brick frontage to the opposite one, and sound/noise **carries exceptionally well** down the length of it.
15. It is my personal and lived experience, in the prelude to the licence variation of Thirsty (46 Chesterton Road) in 2022, that the following are frankly useless, and hold absolutely no merit as preventative of such noise:
 - Signage requesting patrons keep quiet on site and upon leaving.
 - Any arrangement, including training of staff to 'police' excessive sound onsite or upon departure. This appears to be being proposed ("staff training on noise control" in *Conditions Offered, item 6*).
16. **EVEN IF** such measures *could* be effective, it would only be on-site and not further afield (i.e. our streets). The applicant has acknowledged (in our meeting June 4th) this is the case (he cannot police patrons who have left the premises), but offers that his clientele will be of upstanding character and will be unlikely to cause disturbance. This is not a credible remedy, not least in the face of a potential future change of character (clientele) or business plan for the establishment (that would not require a change to the licence).
17. Alcademy, and notably its corner entrance, is located so as to invite patrons leaving the site to use Trafalgar Road (and then Street) if they are Southbound, providing an exacerbated effect (loud-talking pedestrians or worse as outlined earlier) even as compared to patrons of all other licenced locations locally (who, if Southbound, are more likely to exit premises Westbound along Chesterton Road). **Please also see a later note about a misrepresentation the applicant has made to a neighbour regarding this point.**
18. Specifically, it will certainly and **unavoidably lead to increased noise** on our narrow streets, from departing patrons; we already experience this from existing licenced premises. It defies common sense to imagine or state that a new drinking establishment within 50 metres of my home would not increase the existing harm to me and my neighbours.

Other Public Nuisance

19. There is a rear alleyway shared by properties of 38-56 Chesterton road, and several Trafalgar Road and Street addresses. The alleyway is parallel to Chesterton Road and to Trafalgar Street; it is shown in the map extract provided (the alleyway is actually longer than shown, reaching all the way to 4 Trafalgar Street rear and 38 Chesterton Road rear).
20. The access to the alleyway (at the East end) has been measured at **twenty-five metres (25m) from the corner customer entrance of Alcademy.**
21. I have personally witnessed **episodes of individuals vomiting, urinating and even defecating in this alleyway.** I have been informed by others of suspicious activity likely including drug dealing.
22. There is an iron side gate to my property on 12 Trafalgar Street (giving to the street, not alleyway), and on June 1st 2024 at least two individuals urinated *through* that gate onto my property, necessitating the unpleasant task of cleaning up.

23. The neighbouring property to mine (14 Trafalgar Street) has a 'nook' in its frontage, which is also regularly used by individuals to relieve themselves.
24. Other surrounding properties have repeatedly had window boxes removed, upended and/or smashed in the street.
25. These episodes, while not the norm, are, in my view, still too regular AND directly tied to alcohol consumption in our neighbourhood under the existing licencing regime/corpus. The current lived experience underpins my objection to the licence: I see no reason whatsoever that my neighbours, my wife and I should be subjected to an iota more of this disgusting behaviour and the direct impacts (harms) they have on us.

Venue Capacity - General

26. The venue occupies the space of two retail units (54 and 56 Chesterton Road), features a significant basement, and the application seeks to cover the totality of the pavement to the North of these two addresses.
27. The sum of the publicly useable indoor space is in excess of eighty-five (85) square metres. A visual approximation (as no scale or sizing is provided in the applicant's plan) of the outdoor space indicates a further sixty (60) square metres, for a total of almost 150 square metres being served by this business.
28. The applicant has made no effort whatsoever to indicate the capacity of the venue, though in my meeting of June 4th, stated that the capacity is to be "sixty usually, with a maximum of one hundred people". I regard this number as suspect given the very generous floor space allocation this entails and again note that the applicant has made no effort to proactively state or limit what the actual maximum capacity is (in writing, in application, that is)
29. **Without this capacity** (or actual floor area including outdoors, at a minimum) being stated, **how can other factors be assessed?** Of particular concern are:
 - Use of the laneway as a toilet, see 'Other Public Nuisance', above.
 - Additional noise coming from patrons outside, that will not be mitigated by soundproofing promised by applicant, see below.

Venue Capacity & WC provision

30. I note a total of four toilets (WCs) to be provided, with no provision for urinals, and have referred to *British Standard 6465-1:2006+A1:2009 – Sanitary Installations*.
31. According to the above standard, and the floorplans submitted with the application, there is provision for, at maximum, 40 males and 25 females. This does not match with the 'maximum one hundred people' that was verbally represented to me on June 4th.
32. The size of the premises, and the fact that the entertainment area is clearly intended as a dancefloor (viz: DJ nights) suggests a capacity **WELL IN EXCESS** of 65 people, and possibly up to 4 or more times that number, indoors alone.
33. Beyond any formal obligations Alcademy has with respect to provision of toilets, the **current significant under-provision of WCs is very obviously going to increase the likelihood of patrons relieving themselves in our alleyway** (and/or through my gate).
34. Moreover, the remoteness of the majority of WCs (indoors, downstairs) from the outside area relative to a very adjacent (25 metres) laneway, mean that some (particularly males) **may see fit to use said laneway rather than the WCs**. This would be further exacerbated if the venue capacity in fact exceeds WC capacity and people face queuing to use indoor facilities.

Venue Capacity & Outside area

35. The application plan shows, in red outline (presumed to indicate the bounds of the licence), an **inclusion of the totality of the public pavement** on the North side (and none on the East side).
36. There is no reference anywhere in the application to the capacity or floorspace of the outside area, but going by the red line delineation, it appears that Alcademy is expanding its floor space by approximately 60 square metres.
37. The applicant has verbally assured me that outdoor service will cease at 9:30 PM, and that this will be reflected in an amended application. **This amendment is not available/visible to me**; I must presume it does not exist.
38. It is unconscionable that our neighbourhood should have this extensive piece of public amenity used by patrons consuming alcohol until 11pm virtually all days. This will present a noise problem for adjoining properties, and **creates a risk of nuisance or even accidents** given the direct proximity to the corner (Trafalgar Road/Chesterton Road).
39. **EVEN IF** outdoor service were to end at 9:30 pm and patrons asked to move inside (as has been suggested to a neighbour), this simply has the effect 'bottling up' patrons before closing time, exacerbating all the nuisance concerns I have outlined above.

Venue Capacity & Need for Private Security

40. The application states "[...] where it is considered necessary, sufficient SIA registered security officers will be employed [...]". This is frankly scary. It suggests that the Applicant plans to hold events with capacities well in excess of 60-65 and possibly into hundreds.
41. **EVEN IF** the intent is to keep the number of patrons strictly limited to 65, the notion that a clientele only 65-strong requires the presence of physical security is a scary prospect.
42. It is in no way acceptable for the venue to hold events that will attract people to the neighbourhood who are then going to be denied entry by security staff; potentially **inebriated or otherwise unwelcome individuals will be left at our doorsteps**, likely frustrated at their own situation and liable to take it out on our neighbourhood (vandalism of flower boxes being a known, documented, and too-regular occurrence, per above)

Community engagement, lack of

43. In reading the application, it is difficult to regard "*Conditions offered - General: 9. Community Engagement*" as being anything but platitudes, given that the current **application has been made with no prior reference to any of my neighbours**.
44. This is made further apparent by the sudden motivation to start what can only be called a 'charm offensive' that followed the submission of the first objections by my neighbours. Rather than pro-actively engage (as implied by applicant), the applicant has sought to 'ram through' a maximalist licence application and has indicated, in our June 4th meeting, that **compromise, e.g. on reduced licensing hours, is not an option he will consider**.

Actual misrepresentations made by Applicant

45. Under 'Noise Nuisance' above, I made the point about the route that departing Alcademy patrons may take down Trafalgar Road then Trafalgar Street. Sue Rollings, who resides at 3 Trafalgar Road, noted this point too, in her own objection to you.
46. Sue was subsequently contacted by the applicant (May 23rd), who stated (verbatim, but with **my emphasis**): "With regard to noise, I think it is highly unlikely that our customers will leave our venue and walk down Trafalgar Road. **Trafalgar Road only leads to the river** and isn't a

shortcut to anywhere else in Cambridge. I am very confident that virtually 100% of our customers will leave the venue and then walk or cycle back home by setting off from our exits onto Chesterton Road – they will have no reason to leave our venue and then walk down Trafalgar Road – unless they happen to live there or if they are members of a rowing club.”

47. This is clearly an **ACTUAL** misrepresentation of the facts, as can be verified by a map including the one I have provided above, or a few minutes spent on site.
48. When I met with the applicant on June 4th, he stated to me that:
 - Generally, he is very familiar with the Cambridge area
 - He lives ‘off Huntingdon Road’
 - He used to work at/operate the Engineers’ House at the site of the Cambridge Museum of Technology
 - He has had some dealing and/or work with Winter Comfort situated at the foot of Victoria Avenue bridge, **ten metres from the West end of Trafalgar Street.**
49. The above, collectively, is deeply worrying: the applicant, professing to know Cambridge well, and having previously had dealings in the neighbourhood (Winter Comfort), and very likely having undertaken several, if not many, site visits in recent times, appears to be gaslighting a resident of the street about where her own street leads, and vacating the notion that it intersects Trafalgar Street, and that this is an obvious neighbourhood route. Moreover, given the knowledge the applicant has, the misrepresentation he has made is not only ACTUAL, but quite possibly **WILFUL** as well.
50. **EVEN IF** this misrepresentation is not wilful, the applicant has shown himself to have a tenuous grasp of the obvious and/or insufficient rigour in making representations in this important matter; **he has very much undermined his own credibility regardless.** I am not inclined to take his representations until they are iron-clad.

Conclusion

I believe I have outlined clearly my objections above, and in closing, find no reason whatsoever that this licence should be granted. The committee reviewing this matter is urged to reject the application *in toto*, and request that the applicant **ACTUALLY engage** with his community BEFORE submitting a **new application that is not comprehensively objectionable.**

Attestation

I fully understand the consequences of making false or misleading misrepresentations to your committee on this matter, and I attest that everything I have written herein is the truth to best of my knowledge and recollection.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Alexis Mather (by email)