

Good morning Chair and members of the Licensing Committee.

Unfortunately I am not able to attend the hearing today due to personal circumstances, and I am grateful for the opportunity for my statement to be read on my behalf.

Some members of the committee may recall that last week there were representations relating to another alcohol licence application in close proximity to this one. I raise that simply because it highlights the wider issue that concerns me today — the increasing number of premises seeking to sell alcohol within a relatively small area of Christchurch town centre.

I would like to make it clear that my objection is not directed at the applicant personally, nor at responsible businesses operating within the town. Many licensed premises contribute positively to Christchurch and form a part of its character.

My concern relates instead to the **overall level of alcohol availability in the town centre and the cumulative impact that further licences may have on the community.**

You will already have seen my written representation. I also recognise that the applicant has proposed measures intended to promote the licensing objectives and has accepted conditions suggested by Dorset Police. While such conditions are important, they do not fully address the broader issue that concerns me.

The effects of alcohol availability are often **not confined to the premises that sell it**. The consequences frequently occur elsewhere — in public spaces, in people's homes, and in places such as hospitals and emergency departments. Incidents recorded directly against a particular premises rarely reflect the full scale of alcohol-related harm experienced by communities.

My concern therefore goes beyond the operation of any single shop. It relates to the **overall environment created when alcohol becomes increasingly available within a small town centre.**

Christchurch already has a very high number of places where alcohol can be purchased. Within a relatively small area there are numerous pubs, bars and restaurants serving alcohol on the premises. In addition, there are supermarkets, convenience stores and specialist wine retailers selling alcohol for consumption elsewhere.

I would also respectfully draw the committee's attention to the fact that this is not the only recent application for alcohol sales in this immediate area. A nearby premises has recently applied for a similar licence only a short distance away. While each application must of course be considered on its own merits, the timing and proximity of these applications highlights the broader issue facing the town centre..

When we consider the number of existing outlets alongside this application — and other recent or current applications nearby — it becomes clear that the issue before the committee is not simply about one additional shop.

It is about the **growing concentration of alcohol outlets within a relatively small area.**

This is precisely the situation that the concept of **cumulative impact under the Licensing Act 2003** is designed to address.

The Act recognises that licensing authorities must consider not only the operation of individual premises, but also the **combined effect that multiple licensed premises can have on an area**. Even where businesses operate responsibly, a high density of alcohol outlets can still undermine the licensing objectives.

Research in public health and policing consistently shows that **areas with higher concentrations of alcohol outlets experience greater levels of alcohol-related harm**.

These harms include increased levels of violent crime and disorder, higher rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions, greater prevalence of binge drinking, and increased public nuisance such as noise, litter and public intoxication.

One explanation for this pattern is often referred to as **availability theory**.

In simple terms, when alcohol becomes more readily available and easier to obtain, overall consumption tends to increase. As consumption increases, so too do the risks of harm — both for individuals and for the wider community.

High outlet density can also encourage **price competition**, particularly among off-licence retailers. When multiple outlets sell alcohol within close proximity, prices can be driven down. Cheaper alcohol is closely associated with heavier consumption and higher levels of alcohol-related harm.

Another issue linked to off-sales is what is commonly referred to as **pre-loading**. Individuals may purchase relatively inexpensive alcohol from shops before going on to pubs or bars later in the evening. By the time they reach licensed venues, they may already be significantly intoxicated, which increases the risk of disorder and anti-social behaviour in the town centre.

There is also the issue of alcohol purchased from off-licence outlets being consumed in nearby streets, parks or other public spaces. In areas where off-sales are widely available, this can contribute to noise disturbance, litter, broken glass and behaviour that local residents may find intimidating or disruptive.

Importantly, these issues are not necessarily caused by one particular premises. Rather, they arise when **the overall availability of alcohol in a concentrated area becomes too great**.

This is why cumulative impact is such an important consideration in licensing decisions.

Christchurch town centre is relatively compact, yet it already contains **a substantial number of licensed premises of different types**. People living in, working in, or visiting the town already have many opportunities to purchase alcohol.

It is therefore difficult to see that there is any genuine **unmet need** for additional alcohol outlets.

Granting further licences in this environment does not increase choice in any meaningful sense. Instead, it increases the **density and visibility of alcohol availability** within everyday community spaces.

There is also an important consideration relating to **children and young people**.

The proposed premises is located in an area used regularly by families and young people, and within reasonable proximity to schools and other places where young people spend time.

Convenience stores are locations that young people visit frequently in their day-to-day lives. Increasing the number of outlets selling alcohol in such settings inevitably increases exposure to alcohol and creates greater opportunities for proxy purchasing.

Research has shown that areas with a higher concentration of alcohol outlets are associated with **higher levels of alcohol consumption among young people**, as well as earlier exposure to alcohol within their communities.

While age-verification policies and licensing conditions are important safeguards, they cannot entirely mitigate the broader impact of **increasing the number of outlets where alcohol is visible and easily available**.

Ultimately, the Licensing Committee must balance the interests of businesses with the responsibility to promote and protect the licensing objectives.

In considering this application, I believe it is important to look at the **bigger picture of Christchurch town centre as a whole, and clustering in a small area**.

The key question is not simply whether this individual premises could sell alcohol responsibly.

The more important question is whether **adding yet another outlet to a small area that already has many places selling alcohol is in the best interests of the community**.

At some point, a town moves from having a reasonable level of choice to experiencing **saturation**.

My concern is that Christchurch town centre may already be approaching — or may already have reached — that point.

Christchurch is a historic town with a strong community identity, and decisions such as this play a role in shaping the character and environment of the town in the years ahead.

When alcohol is already widely available, increasing that availability further carries a real risk of undermining the licensing objectives through cumulative impact.

The decision before the committee is therefore not about access to alcohol, but about whether increasing the number of outlets further is likely to benefit or harm the wider community.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the committee to refuse this application.

Thank you for your time and consideration.