

The vane arms  
Durham road  
Thorpe Thewles  
Stockton on tees  
TS21 3JU

To the residents of Thorpe Thewles,

Firstly, I'd like to introduce myself- Ben Icke I have taken over as director of the vane arms in March this year. I had been the head chef of the vane arms since it reopened in 2019, after it was closed for nearly a year. Previously I have worked at: the crab and lobster, general Tarleton, Matfen hall, The derry, vane arms (long newton) and 12 Harland place I have an option to buy the building as first refusal in the coming years.

My role as director is to look after and improve anything business related, which is the reason behind this letter. It has come to my attention recently that the residents surrounding the garden have a few issues of concern, this was brought to my attention by Stockton borough council when licensing, planning and environmental health (noise nuisance) had all received complaints from local residents after the last parish council meeting.

I have since spoken with several of the residents who had concerns at the village hall, worked closely with all departments of Stockton borough council over the last 2 weeks regarding the complaints and added myself to the agenda of the parish council on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 6.30.

Below is a condensed bullet point list of "perceived issues by residents who overlook the vane arms pub and field" – taken from meeting at the village hall on the 31/8/2022.

- Noise from the beer garden- music PA system, customers shouting over music, rowdy and disruptive behaviour, swearing all in close proximity to the residents
- The beer garden size is excessive the numbers of customers is excessive
- There has been no issues with the vane for 20 years but now is a major issue to local residents. We believe the field is not suitable for its current and proposed use due to its close proximity to existing residential properties
- Permanent structure – 9 foot (length) raised area , causing privacy issues customers can see into gardens, kitchens, bedrooms, inconvenience and distress. Residents have been obliged to purchase blinds to reduce the problem. Some residents have installed warning notices on fences and increase the height of fences to minimise visual disturbance, however the noise remains.
- Lighting, heating, loudspeaker are all mounted on the decked area
- No permission was obtained to allow football to take place on the field
- Football – customers are encouraged to bring children to play football. The vane provides goal posts and footballs. On occasion groups of 16 kids in full football strips have played for hours in the field. The play goes on from noon until dusk with different families kicking footballs. Balls fly into adjacent gardens causing damage and crash into fences. Greenhouses and windows are at risk. Kids enter gardens to retrieve balls. The shouting shrieking and disturbance to neighbours attempting to enjoy the garden is horrendous. Relaxation is impossible and I am obliged to go indoors when the football starts. Even pets are distressed and kept indoors. Kids run

riot in the field, around the pub and car park whilst parents enjoy a drink in the beer garden. On occasion adults play football when shouting and swearing is horrendous. Residents regret recently moving to the village due to unreasonable noise levels emanating from the vane

- Last year a group of youths caused mayhem by throwing apples retrieved from an adjacent tree around the field and into residents gardens. This was disturbing and frightening as the fruit were virtual sized cricket ball missiles and the offenders young adults
- We understand the football pitch is to be taken away, but is to be replaced by a play ground with climbing frame? This will be equally noisy, disruptive, with privacy issues worsened.
- There is a SBC public playground 100m away from the vane, Why not use this purpose built facility which is in an appropriate location?
- Customers/staff leaving the vane – shouting, arguing, swearing, car wheels spinning have disturbed the neighbours. This is not acceptable and should be stopped. Cctv should capture offenders so they can be identified and reprimanded.
- The disturbances started last year when the pub reopened but have got worse over time as the beer garden opened and football popularity increased. My summer afternoons/evenings in the garden have been ruined by the unruly behaviour and noise from the vane
- Individuals and the parish council have complained to Stockton borough councils various departments about the vane, with no change to behaviour apparent to date.
- We understand SBC planning, environmental health and licensing visited the vane on Wednesday the 24 august to commence investigations into residents complaints residents have been asked to maintain logs of ongoing issues to support the investigation.

I have obviously answered questions in the meeting from the group and given my opinion as well as made changes straight away. I realise that this is not the opinion of everyone which is why I wanted ALL residents surrounding to know what is going on.

If possible, I would like to come to an understanding with the residents of Thorpe Thewles and first and foremost those who are in direct connection with the vane arms. If you come to me with an issue or problem, I will try my upmost, within reason, to rectify the situation as I do feel through communication from us all this situation could have easily been avoided.

Additionally, those who have been in the vane arms for a meal or a drink will know that our clientele is higher end and I've always tried my upmost to keep a more refined dining experience – through wine menus with house of townend and the a la carte menus offering higher end dishes and specials. The vane arms is a 70/30 food led business we don't have customers turning up and drinking to the point of being paralytic, as again this wouldn't fit in with the vane arms ideology of being a family friendly pub with good food. It is upsetting personally to hear that the residents have gone through a hard time and myself not being aware of the issues or the chance to have put it right until now- so for that I apologise.

I have dismantled the football goals and they will be taken off site, the music (low level) or elevator music as I call it will not be back on until/if an agreement is reached with set times.

This is through my own choice and not through Stockton borough council. We are closely working with the separate departments of Stockton borough council and I will be happy to update you accordingly.

I will be updating the vane arms license in the coming weeks as this has not been done since 2014 and there are a couple of items up for change that are very historic. As well as updating the opening times as we obviously serve breakfast from 10. It will not change anything for the residents – but it would be the perfect opportunity for us to work together if you do have any issues and give me the chance to talk through them with you.

I would like the chance to really emphasise that with cost of living crisis we are all in currently – with businesses having no energy price cap you can appreciate that gas and electric for the vane arms has nearly doubled if not tripled. Water rates gone up from £355 to £920 monthly, the end of the government Vat 12.5% freeze (returning to 20%) for the last quarter, CO2 dispense gas doubling in price, food prices up 30 percent on average. All of this on the back of the vane arms being closed 2018-2019 and then shut through covid and the different restrictions through that time. I am trying my upmost to make the vane arms a viable business and steer it through particularly rocky times, without drastically raising prices. Inevitably this means thinking outside the box of what we can offer, so a classy beer garden with dim lights and low level music and expensive rattan furniture with no smoking allowed was one idea to bring a few more people in on hot days (only in summer) to try and generate some more turnover.

Anything the vane arms has made in the last 3 years has always been reinvested to improve and protect the vane arms. I would love it to be the heartbeat of the village holding any events thorpethewles may have on the horizon, so we can all enjoy our children playing together and the laughter and screams of happiness that are so warming to parents and grandparents.

I would hate to see it replicate the village of long newton – with pub closures and planning going in place for housing.

Moving forward I will run through any thoughts or decisions for the vane arms as well as listen to any recommendation or requests from the residents or parish council (as you can appreciate a lot of decisions previously, I wasn't privy to). In terms of the beer garden and options for children to happily play whilst parents have a meal ill get some ideas together and we can have a resident vote/comment card to make the decision.

I will be on the agenda for the parish council on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September at 6.30 discussing relevant issues. Feel free to come along if you can spare the time.

I have attached my personal phone number at the bottom of this letter and moving forward if you are finding any issues arising from the vane arms, internally or externally please feel free to call me and discuss the issue or even pop in to see me for a drink as I am always courteous and professional and would thoroughly enjoy the chance to get to know everyone.

I've thoroughly enjoyed being at the vane arms and enjoy the daily challenges that arise. I hope we can all move forward together.

Kind regards Ben Icke (07707885366) (b.icke@icloud.com)

This document was classified as: OFFICIAL