

Dave Green, BCA CEO talks to John Philips about the reasons why BCA is seeking an alcohol licence for its Visitor Centre on Green Lane

John Philips: What is the thinking behind the application for an alcohol licence?

Dave Green: It's about improving the experience for visitors and locals alike. We attract over 50,000 visitors to the cave a year and many are now seeing our café is a very popular destination with a fantastic reputation for our home made cakes and soups. We are asked on a regular basis if we serve local beers, and we hate having to disappoint people. We feel that in line with most other visitor attractions, and venues that to be able to serve the public a glass of wine or a glass of beer would add to the enjoyment of our customers. We hold regular members talks and events at the Visitor Centre, usually in the early evening and recently held a Quiz night for members and their friends. As well as delicious cake we offered a free glass of wine. It was well attended and we were delighted to see many of our neighbours on the night. The disappointing thing was that we were not able to offer a second glass. We also have a strong track record of supplying local produce in the café and our gift shop and this is another opportunity to support the excellent local breweries in the area. It's really about what we can offer to improve the experience for people and recognising what people want to make their visit even better.

John Philips: What experience do you and your staff have running a premises that serve alcohol?

Dave Green: Paula Pickering who is our nominated Designated Premises Supervisor for the licence application, has been part of the BCA community for 17 years. As well as running the café at the cavern, she organises the events that we hold on the premises. As well as BCA members events we are happy to support local organisations and voluntary groups by letting them use the space in the café and school room, in most cases free of charge. She is the obvious person for this role as she works most weekends and is very well known locally. She runs a very disciplined café team, and in addition training and developing staff is a key part of what we are about as an organisation.

Though I am new to the area, I have been involved in running visitor attractions all of whom had a café with an alcohol licence. Over the last 20 years I have been responsible for running premises at the National Trust, The Florence Nightingale Museum (housed within St Thomas's hospital, London) and the WWT. We had an alcohol licence and served drinks in all of them. It added to the visitor experience, and helped us attract new audiences and repeat visit. Events ranged from wakes for those who wanted to be close to nature, to family experiences at Halloween and Christmas.

BCA has supported the community and indeed the local council by managing and looking after many of the woods around Buxton, as well as contributing to the future plans of the town. The current cost of living crisis has put a considerable strain on businesses and charities in particular as well as people and we are not alone in feeling this. Though the financial contribution from selling wine and beer would be small, every little helps as the saying goes, but really it is more about being able to offer more complete experience to our members and customers

John Philips: There have been a number of rumours circulating about what BCA is planning to do if it gets this licence. How do you respond to people's concerns they have about noise and late night parties?

Dave Green: Firstly I should point out that we have a premises licence that enables us to hold events at the visitor centre up to 11 pm at night already. The only things that is missing is that we can't serve alcohol from time to time and where appropriate. For a start we have never had any complaints about events that have been in the control of BCA in the 17 years since the 'new' visitor centre opened. The majority of the events we hold, members' talks and the recent quiz night are finished by 9 pm at the latest. It would be very rare indeed to go much later than this. We see most of the demand being around having a glass of wine or beer with a meal in the café, or sitting outside on the terrace in front of the visitor centre on a warm summer's day. These will be closely monitored and regulated of course. We have CCTV in place and indeed the Police have commended us on our approach.

The stories that are being put about that we plan to hold loud music concerts in the car park are quite simply untruths and misunderstandings. Perhaps the people who have been spreading these stories could contact us and let us know where they got the information from. We have never done this in the past and we have no plans to do so in the future. We are an environmental charity concerned with protecting Buxton's heritage and the nature that lives in our woods. We just would not do anything that caused a disturbance to the wildlife by holding events such as this.

John Philips: What communication have you had with local residents over the application?

Dave Green: Initially we were guided by the licensing authority, they advised against talking to our neighbours directly. The problem with the application on the website is that it is very generic and does not allow an opportunity to clarify our plans. We have however met with a number of our neighbours and explained in detail what we are planning, to allay their fears and counter the untruths and misinformation that have been circulated. Despite this several of them have chosen to plan to object anyway.

It is particularly disappointing given our track record of community involvement and in running events without complaint over the past 17 years.

A good example is coming up in July. We are delighted to be hosting an event for the Buxton International Festival during the festival, "Opera in the Cavern". The audience is from all parts of the world, and used to high quality experiences but despite this being a wonderful opportunity to showcase the town and the cavern to an international audience, they will not be able to have a glass of wine as they would expect to at a venue.

We are more than happy and in fact we encourage any of our neighbours who have concerns to come and talk to us, hear our plans so they can get the facts and not be subject to untruths.

And remember. We only have to overstep the rules once and we will potentially lose not only the alcohol and entertainment licences but also our reputation.

John Philips: Do you have a message for those who have objected and have concerns about the licence application?

Dave Green: We do genuinely understand people's concerns. But we have been here for fifty years and have operated the Visitor Centre with an entertainment licence for the last seventeen years with no complaints. We care about the town and the woods and we would do nothing that could damage or detract from our goals and objectives and our reputation as the leading environmental charity in the town. Our trustees are in place guardians of this place.

You trust us to look after the woods which over 100,000 people love and enjoy every year.

You trust us to look after the wonderful show cave, Poole's Cavern, a recognised heritage site nationally.

You are happy to come along to our member's events and the events that support the festival fringe.

You know us and what we stand for. All we seek to do is to make the experience of visitors and locals alike more complete and to increase the support that we already do with local businesses.

Please listen to us and not the minority of people who are spreading untruths. Don't let this minority spoil it for the rest of us.

We are attaching a link to our licence application,

[Current licence applications – High Peak Borough Council](#)

The end of the consultation period is 15th May 2024. You can indicate your support for the application or make comments by emailing

licensing@highpeak.gov.uk

If you would like to discuss our application with us please email

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