

James Matthews

Meadowcroft Farm

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Licensing Service Oldham Licensing Office Sir Robert Peacock House Oldham OL1 4LA

Subject: Review of Premises Licence for Woodhouses Cricket Club

This representation is submitted under the Licensing Act 2003 and directly relates to the following licensing objectives:

- Prevention of public nuisance
- Protection of children from harm
- Public safety
- Prevention of crime and disorder

Dear Members of the Licensing Sub Committee,

1. Introduction and Standing

I am writing as a neighbour who lives beside the cricket ground and cares for horses at Meadowcroft Farm right next door. For more than seven years I have watched events that frighten our animals, disturb families, and put people at risk. At night our horses are in their stables. When fireworks or loud events start, it is my family and friends who help, and sometimes a vet if needed. There are no staff here — just people who love these horses and do their best to keep them calm and safe. This representation is my chance to place on record what we have lived with and to ask the Council to put fairness and safety back at the heart of this place. Silence has not worked. Action is now required.

Please hear this as a person who loves his horses and home.

2. The Outcome We Seek

We are not asking for the end of cricket or community gatherings. What we are asking for is safety, respect, and responsibility.

The actions required are simple and fair:

- A **total ban** on fireworks and pyrotechnics at the premises, including any organised or supplied by **outside companies, private individuals, or hired event organisers.**
- A **total ban** on helicopter landings or take-offs at, from, or connected with the premises — including any arranged by **outside companies, private individuals, or**
- **hired event organisers.** This ensures there are no loopholes or excuses that allow the same harm to continue under a different name.
- Clear limits on non-cricket events that create noise and nuisance unrelated to cricket.
- Enforceable noise and event conditions that genuinely protect residents, livestock, and public safety.

A cricket club should be for cricket. Nothing more, nothing less.

Keep cricket, remove the harm.

3. Why This Matters: What Fireworks and Helicopters Do to Horses

Fireworks bring sudden, violent bangs and flashes of light. Horses have far more sensitive hearing than humans, so every sound is amplified for them. Even when safely in their stables at night, the sudden noise and bright flashes cause panic. Horses will kick at stable doors, rear up, sweat heavily, and try to escape. They can injure themselves by striking walls or metal fittings, or by falling as they spin in fear.

Some refuse food for hours after the noise has stopped. Others tremble or shake. In serious cases, stress like this can trigger colic, a painful digestive condition that can be fatal if not treated quickly.

There have been times in recent years when our vet has had to sedate the horses before an event to try to keep them calm. Even this does not remove the fear or the stress. It brings its own danger, because if anything went wrong and the horses needed to be evacuated, we could not move them safely while sedated.

Helicopters cause similar distress. When one approaches or lands nearby, the deep vibration of the ground and the rush of air from the rotors sends horses into panic. They rear, kick, and can injure anyone close to them. The first time a helicopter landed at the cricket ground, no warning was given by the club or organisers. At that moment one of our horses was being given an important injection. The sudden arrival caused the horse to panic and the handler was injured and taken to A&E.

Every explosion and every landing forces these animals into survival mode, a natural instinct in prey animals that rely on flight to stay alive.

This is not an isolated problem. Across the UK, horses and other animals have suffered or died after being frightened by fireworks, as documented by the British Horse Society, Horse & Hound, and national media. These tragedies show that what happens here is part of a wider pattern of preventable harm.

Every bang and every landing is a roll of the dice with life and limb.

4. Lived Experience on This Boundary

I have lived beside this cricket ground long enough to know the pattern. Each year promises are made that things will be better, but they never are. The same issues keep returning and the same disregard continues.

One year the club's bonfire got out of control and the fire service had to be called. It took them more than twenty minutes to get it under control, and they instructed the club to close the event down. Yet once the fire service left, fireworks were set off anyway. That single act said everything about how little regard there is for safety or for the authority of those who try to protect it.

The problems do not stop at noise and fire. On event days, cars are parked along the narrow village roads and all around the entrance. I have personally watched a fire engine take over fifteen minutes to travel a distance of roughly one kilometre because the roads were blocked. The cricket ground has only one entrance and one exit. If an emergency happened during one of these events, there would be no safe or fast way for people or vehicles to get out. The same blockage would also stop a horse box from reaching or leaving my property in an emergency, leaving us completely trapped.

These are not rare or unlucky moments. They are the result of choices made without care for the people living beside this ground or the safety of those who might one day need urgent help. They also show a clear

pattern of the club operating outside the boundaries of its licence, year after year. It has become routine rather than exceptional, and enforcement has been almost non-existent.

When access is blocked, lives are left waiting.

5. A Pattern of Disregard and Missing Accountability

What has happened at this ground is not new and not accidental. It is a pattern that has continued for years. Fireworks, helicopters, loud music, and late-night events have all taken place far beyond what was ever intended or allowed by the licence. Each time promises have been made that things would change, and each time those promises have been broken.

If the club had acted within its licence in previous years, we would not be here again. The same problems that I raised years ago are still happening now. Back then I questioned why important safety documents such as Event Management Plans, risk assessments, and traffic plans were missing. The same question still stands today.

If those documents were ever submitted, the Council should already hold them on record. If they were not, then the Council must ask why. Either way, there is no public record of them, even though every large event is required to have these plans in place and available for inspection. This lack of transparency alone shows a breakdown in process and in oversight.

I ask the Committee directly to confirm whether these documents exist for past years. If they do, please make them public and part of this review. If they do not, then it must be recognised that the club has been operating for years without the essential safety paperwork that both the law and common sense demand.

These ongoing issues cannot be blamed on error or oversight. They reflect a culture that believes the rules do not apply. It has gone beyond poor management and has become an accepted way of operating.

For too long, enforcement has been limited to words and warnings. The residents, the village, and the animals living beside this ground deserve more than empty assurances.

Seven years of the same outcome means the system is not working.

Transition paragraph: This review is not just about noise or inconvenience. It is about a long history of rules being ignored and responsibilities being passed aside. The Council has both the authority and the duty to ensure the licensing objectives are upheld. Those objectives were written to protect the public, safeguard animals, and maintain trust in local governance. If they are not enforced here, it sets the message that a licence means nothing.

Current Notice of New Event During Live Review

On 10 October 2025, I received a letter from Woodhouses Cricket Club advertising a bonfire and two separate fireworks displays to be held on Saturday 8 November 2025, despite the premises licence being under formal review by the Council. The letter details a children's fireworks display at approximately 7:00 pm and a main fireworks display at around 7:45 pm, stated to last approximately fifteen minutes. No duration is provided for the children's display, meaning the total time of fireworks activity remains unclear.

This is deeply concerning. It shows that even while a formal investigation is underway, the club continues to plan and promote high-risk events beside a live equine yard. It demonstrates a continuing lack of judgement and a disregard for the safety and welfare of animals and residents who have already raised legitimate concerns.

A fifteen-minute display of fireworks directly beside stabled horses is excessive, irresponsible, and unsafe. Government and event-safety guidance, including that referenced by local authorities and the British Horse Society, recommends that community fireworks displays should be brief, typically no more than around five minutes to limit nuisance, stress, and danger to animals and nearby residents. A prolonged display in this setting is wholly inconsistent with those standards and with the aims of the Licensing Act 2003, including: • Public Safety • Prevention of Public Nuisance • Protection of Children from Harm

National and local event-safety guidance make clear that any display should be properly risk-assessed, of minimal duration, and only conducted where it does not pose undue risk to nearby people, livestock, or property. To advertise multiple displays during an ongoing licensing review is unacceptable and shows that the lessons of the past have still not been learned.

This announcement was made publicly to neighbours without any reference to the ongoing licence review or acknowledgement that the premises are currently under investigation. That choice reflects a clear arrogance in timing and a complete disregard for the Licensing Act's objectives of public safety and the prevention of public nuisance.

This new event is yet another example of the same careless pattern of behaviour that led to this review. It undermines public trust, disrespects the authority of the Council, and continues to place both people and animals at unnecessary risk.

7. Licensing Objectives and How They Apply Here

The Licensing Act 2003 sets out four objectives that every licence must uphold. They are not suggestions or ideas; they are the law. Each one has been breached repeatedly at this ground.

Prevention of Public Nuisance: The use of fireworks, loud music, and helicopter landings has caused continuous disturbance to residents and distress to livestock. These are not minor inconveniences; they are serious, avoidable intrusions into daily life.

Public Safety: Blocked roads, poor crowd management, and frightened horses create clear safety hazards. A fire engine delayed by parked cars or a horse box unable to reach safety in an emergency are not theoretical risks. They have already happened.

Protection of Children from Harm: Families with young children have had their nights broken by noise and their pets and horses terrified. No parent should have to explain to a child why their animals are shaking in fear because of a local event that should be properly regulated.

Prevention of Crime and Disorder: Repeated breaches of the licence and continued disregard for the rules undermine public confidence. When residents feel intimidated or afraid to raise concerns, it damages the sense of community and order that local regulation is meant to protect.

If these activities do not breach the licensing objectives, then it is difficult to see what ever would.

The law was written to protect the public, not to be ignored by those who find it inconvenient. If the Council does not act on these ongoing breaches, it would be failing in its legal duty to uphold those objectives and to protect the people and animals it serves.

8. Public Confidence and Pressure

People should be able to raise concerns about their community without fear or pressure. In recent weeks I have seen posts in local groups asking the public to support the cricket club in this review and even suggesting how their letters should be worded. This kind of organised

campaigning is not genuine community support; it is an attempt to influence the process and discourage open discussion.

I was also concerned to see that a local councillor publicly posted about this matter online, sharing a representation letter with the words “who did this”. That was not an innocent post. It sent a message that those who speak up will be identified and shamed. Following that post, the comments section quickly filled with people pointing fingers, making assumptions, and placing blame. Some residents felt they had to defend themselves publicly even when they had said nothing. That atmosphere makes people afraid to take part in a fair and open process.

I have personally experienced intimidation in the past when raising these issues, which has made me think carefully before speaking up again. No one should feel unsafe for asking that rules are followed and animals protected.

A fair review depends on honest voices being heard freely and equally. When residents are made to feel afraid or pressured, the process loses its integrity and trust in the Council weakens.

A fair process listens without fear or favour.

9. Understanding and Balance

I understand that local clubs need to raise money and keep their doors open. A cricket club plays an important role in the community, and nobody wants to see that lost. The problem is not with fundraising or community events, but with the way they have been carried out. Over the years the club has chosen activities that create noise, fear, and disruption, even after knowing the harm they cause.

There are many ways to bring people together without hurting the animals or disturbing the village. Family fun days, sponsored walks, countryside fairs, horse demonstrations, craft markets, and heritage events all build community and raise money safely. These kinds of activities show care for neighbours and respect for the environment around the ground.

Fundraising should unite, not divide.

The choice of fireworks, loud music, and helicopters has divided this community. It has created harm instead of happiness and noise instead of togetherness. The club has a chance to choose a different way forward, one that brings people back together rather than driving them apart.

By helping the club find safer and kinder ways to raise funds, the Council can protect both the community and its spirit.

10. Minimum Conditions if the Licence Remains

If the Council decides not to revoke the permissions that allow these events, then the very least that must happen is the introduction of strict, enforceable conditions that protect residents, animals, and public safety. These conditions must be meaningful and must be followed.

The minimum requirements should include:

- **A total ban on fireworks and pyrotechnics** at the ground, including any organised or supplied by outside companies, private individuals, or hired event organisers.
- **A total ban on helicopter landings or take offs** at, from, or connected with the premises, including those arranged by outside parties.
- A restriction limiting events to those directly related to cricket and community sport.

- Outdoor areas closed by 9:00 pm to prevent late-night disturbance.
- Independent noise monitoring with clear, enforceable limits.
- Advance written notice to neighbours before any event that goes beyond a normal match day.
- A formal review checkpoint within six months to assess compliance, with further action if the club has failed to meet these conditions.

Conditions without enforcement are only words on paper. For them to mean anything, they must be checked, measured, and acted upon.

A condition you cannot measure is a condition you cannot trust.

11. Closing Statement

This review is the Council's opportunity to put things right. It is a chance to restore trust, to protect both people and animals, and to remind the community that rules and fairness still matter. What has happened here should never have been allowed to go on for this long.

I am not asking for special treatment or attention. I am simply asking for the same protection that every resident and every animal is entitled to under the law. The issues described in this letter are not about opinions or personal preferences. They are about safety, welfare, and respect.

The power to stop this harm rests with the Council. You have the authority to act and the responsibility to ensure that the licensing system means something. Please use that authority to protect this village and to bring peace back to the community that surrounds the cricket ground.

Please act with conscience, not convenience.

Yours faithfully, James Matthews

Supporting References

The following organisations and reports support the factual and legal information contained in this representation:

- **The British Horse Society** – Effects of fireworks on horses and owner guidance.
- **RSPCA** – Animal welfare impacts of fireworks on horses and livestock.
- **World Horse Welfare** – Statement on fireworks and equine safety.
- **British Horse Society & GOV.UK** – Guidance on low-flying aircraft and their effects on horses.
- **UC Davis Center for Equine Health** – Veterinary findings on colic and stress in horses.
- **Licensing Act 2003, Section 4** – Licensing objectives in law.
- **Home Office Section 182 Guidance** – Review powers and possible outcomes under licensing law.
- **Oldham Council** – Event and fireworks guidance and community safety expectations.
- **Horse & Hound (2017)** – “This has broken me: horse ‘frightened to death’ by fireworks.” (Solo case) horseandhound.co.uk

- **Horse & Hound (2023)** – “Horse terrified by fireworks breaks his leg in the stable.”
horseandhound.co.uk
- **BBC News (2023)** – “Owner issues firework warning after death of horse.” bbc.co.uk
- **Bishop’s Stortford Independent** – “Horse put down after being frightened and stuck in stable.”
bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk
- **The Independent (2019)** – “Horse impaled itself on fence after being startled by fireworks.”
independent.co.uk
- **Redwings Horse Sanctuary** – “Three resident horses died in recent years in proximity to fireworks.”
horseandhound.co.uk
- **British Horse Society (2024)** – “Four horses already killed this year due to fireworks displays.”
yourhorse.co.uk
- **The Guardian (2024)** – “Fireworks blamed for death of baby red panda in Edinburgh Zoo.”
theguardian.com
- • **The British Horse Society** — Fireworks page: “Firework season can be a difficult time for horses and owners.” The British Horse society
- • **RSPCA** — Fireworks Evidence Submission: horse injuries, deaths, impacts. GOV.UK
- • **Redwings Horse Sanctuary** — “Fireworks and horses” campaign: deaths and serious harm from fireworks. Redwings Horse Sanctuary
- • **Health and Safety Executive** — Guidance on organising firework displays (site safety, risk assessment, emergency access, etc.). HSE
- • **GOV.UK “My safety: fireworks” page** — general public & animal safety guidance around fireworks.
GOV.UK