

STATEMENT OF WITNESS*(Criminal Procedure Rules, r. 16.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s. 9)*

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Statement of: Constable Philip Graves

Age if under 18: Over 18

Occupation: Police officer

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it, anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature:


Date: Thursday 14th of November 2024

Due to the transfer of license application (reference 33304) a meeting was arranged at Brent Civic Centre on 8th of November 2024 at 14.00 hours. Those present were myself PC Phil Graves, PC Steve Hicks, Esther Chan (Brent Council) and Rhea Vagarwal (Brent Council).

Those representing the License transfer were Ana Maria Grama (Proposed Transferee / Management Team) Mohammed Dean (changed to Marcus Dean) – Dean Security & Proposed DPS, Iftikhar Ashard Investor, Mithun Shah – Management Team (Ana's husband) and Sandip Joshi - Accountant

I asked those present if they could explain their intentions for the Aura. Mr Ashard replied by saying:-

1. He was aware that the venue was up for sale in October 2024
2. Those present were the planned new management team,
3. The previous license holders had explained that there were 'problems' but didn't go into detail.
4. The Purchase is 70% in completion, going through numbers. Aim to complete by the new year
5. Over a half million pounds invested
6. Purchase has not happened yet
7. Was not aware of the licensing issues (review etc.) until he had seen the blue notices
8. There is a 15 year lease on the property.
9. The overall theme of the venue was to transfer it into a family run high class restaurant with regulated entertainment, live music and dance.

Mr Dean (security and proposed DPS) explained the following:

1. Confirms it will be a family-oriented establishment
2. To adopt a 25 challenge
3. Atul (current license holder) and Justyna (current DPS) are both incompetent
4. Been in the business since 1994
5. 2004 instructed for SIA services
6. Have more live music
7. He will provide the security

Mr Ashard asked me what the main problems were from a policing perspective. I explained that the venue was attracting the 'wrong type of customers'. The Aura has a long history of violent crime, drugs, incompetent

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Signature Witnessed by:

Continuation of Statement of: Constable Philip Graves

management team and constant breaches of their premises license. I emphasised that the venue had already been reviewed twice in the last three years and there are still continual licensing breaches. I explained that I had made many visits and found many licensing faults. Various warning letters had been sent, but there had been no improvement. Due to this I submitted a review of the venue asking for revocation of the license and I have already submitted representations opposing the transfer of the premises license to Ms Ana Grama.

The investor Mr Ashard suggested that he and the police put a strategy together for a period of time to try and work through the current issues. I explained that I intended to continue with the review of the license unless a set of 'restaurant conditions' could be agreed by all parties prior to this hearing taking place which is due on the 11th of December. These set of conditions would reflect a 'family orientated restaurant' and would move away from the 'night club' theme which appears un-manageable at present.

The proposed new license holder had barley spoken so I asked Ms Grama what her background was and what experience she had in running a challenging restaurant / nightclub. Ms Grama replied by saying that she has never had any experience in the hospitality industry, but she worked in a restaurant back in her home country. She then went on to explain that she was not a personal license holder and it was in fact her husband that would be running the business. I asked why she was applying for the transfer of license when she has had no experience and it was in fact her husband that would be running the business? Mr Dean answered on her behalf saying this was a 'mistake' on behalf of the management team and the wrong name was put on the transfer.

Mr Dean explained that he would be the DPS for the venue and take control of the licensing breaches and the security. I asked why there had been no DPS transfer and again this seemed to be another fault on behalf of the 'new management team'. As of today 14/11/2024 there has been no DPS transfer sent to the police.

Mr Ashard explained that he was planning on a 5-7 day closure to revamp the business in the New Year. He was also going to rename the venue as 'Babylon Bar and Restaurant' with a mixture of Indian, Mexican and Lebanese cuisine. While this was in progress Mr Ashard asked to have a signed agreement with police. I explained that this would not be happening. Again I suggested to Mr Ashard and his team that he submits a set of conditions (via a full variation to Brent Council) suitable for a respectful family restaurant and that they contact an experienced licensing agent to assist with their application.

Ms Chan (Brent Council) raised issues around food safety, smoking area and the concerns of her colleagues in planning over the front of the venue (separate restaurant). Ms Chan asked if anyone knew who the rate payer for the venue was, but no one did. The hearing and consultation dates were read out by Ms Chan to all those present:-

The consultation date for the transfer ends on 14/11/2024 and a hearing date has been arranged for 11th of December 2024.

The consultation date for the hearing ends on 28/11/2024 and a hearing date has been arranged for 17th of December 2024

Summary

The proposed new management team have only in the last month decided to invest half a million pounds in buying the Aura. No money has been transferred and no paperwork showing for proof of purchase has been produced to the police or council, as requested by myself via e-mail on 05/11/2024.

Witness Signature:



Signature Witnessed by:

Continuation of Statement of: Constable Philip Graves


Ms Ana Grama (proposed License holder) has no experience in running a busy and challenging restaurant / night club and the proposed new management team state it was an error on their behalf appointing her and in fact it should have been her husband applying for this post. To date I have received no official communication regarding this transfer that I have already opposed.

This management team state that Mr Dean with the DPS, but no transfer of DPS has been applied for. So at present the old DPS is still shown and the incorrect license holder is applying to run the business. Neither of these scenarios fulfils me with any confidence.

I have had no contact from the new management team regarding a list of proposed conditions for the family restaurant. They are aware that the venue is under review and I have opposed the license transfer. I would have expected a new management team serious in turning a failing nightclub into a prosperous family orientated restaurant to have sent in a list of proposed conditions, transfer of DPS and an explanation of the license transfer.

My overall impression was one of poor management and planning and I hold no confidence in this new team running the venue in an appropriate and legal manner.

PC Phil Graves 3122NW
Licensing Officer - Brent

Witness Signature: 

Signature Witnessed by: