

Motor Fuel Group

Robyn Walker

Date

April 2023

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROBYN WALKER

I, ROBYN WALKER, of Motor Fuel Group of Gladstone Place, 36-38 Upper Marlborough Rd, St Albans AL1 3UU ("MFG") say as follows:

1. I am employed by MFG as area manager, a position I have held since December 2018. I was previously an area manager with Spring Petroleum from 2013. Spring Petroleum was acquired by Malthurst Retail for whom I also worked as an area manager and Malthurst Retail was then acquired by MFG in 2018.
2. The petrol station at 377-385 Wilmslow Road, Manchester ("the Store") was acquired by Spring Petroleum from Total, so I have been familiar with the Store and the Fallowfield area since 2013.
3. The Store was licensed to sell alcohol when it was acquired by Spring Petroleum from Total. The directors of Spring Petroleum did not wish to sell alcohol for religious reasons and surrendered all of their licences. This is why the Store is not licensed to sell alcohol.
4. I am aware that when Malthurst Retail acquired the Store they applied to reinstate the surrendered licence. This was in 2017 but the application was refused as the Store now fell within the Council's cumulative impact zone and so there was a presumption of refusal.
5. I am responsible for 19 stores. With the exception of the Store, all are licensed to sell alcohol and most are licensed to sell alcohol 24 hours a day. The MFG store in Didsbury is in my area. I am aware that the licence was granted there notwithstanding multiple resident representations. The store is licensed to midnight and there have been no complaints from residents or authorities. The fears expressed at hearings by residents did not materialise.
6. None of the stores that I am responsible for have seen their licences reviewed.
7. I visit each of my stores at least every 2 weeks. I have a check list to ensure that the contract manager is undertaking his or her duties to MFG's standards.
8. I have been visiting the Store more frequently in recent weeks as we had a change of management in February.
9. I have not been made aware of any crime and disorder issues at the store or any complaints from residents.
10. I did observe that the forecourt and the planters were not being kept free from litter. This has now been resolved with the new management.
11. The manager is Mohmed Javid Talati (Javid). Javid is an experienced manager also responsible for our licensed store in Rusholme. He will be DPS at Fallowfield if the store is licensed to sell alcohol.

12. I have read the representations made against the grant of the licence variation and wish to comment.
13. MFG has a detailed training programme for any person who may be involved in the sale of alcohol. This includes onboarding training and then refresher training which must be undertaken quarterly. As area manager I check training records at each store monthly. My own checking of the records is then checked on a regular basis by the regional manager.
14. I do not agree that the addition of alcohol at the Store will result in a significant increase in footfall. Our customers regularly ask for alcohol as they are familiar with our other stores. We wish to service existing customer demand.
15. We do not experience gatherings on the forecourt. This was also a feature of resident representations for our Didsbury store which also does not suffer from such issues.
16. People do not congregate at the rear of the Store. They would have no access to this area in any event.
17. I do not expect groups of people to migrate to our store simply because we have a small selection of alcohol available for sale. There are plenty of other options for them in the vicinity.
18. Our hours will be shorter and our prices unlikely to be the lowest in the area.
19. I have not been made aware of any complaints regarding the use of our tannoy system.
20. We have had no issues with intoxicated persons posing a risk at the Store.
21. I am aware that there are homeless people who have temporary accommodation in the area. They do sometimes frequent the Store as they are entitled to do. We had one issue with a person who set up a tent on the edge of the forecourt and the police were involved, but otherwise I would say that these people do move on when asked politely to do so.
22. I do not agree at all that the Store is a well-known flashpoint for crime and anti-social behaviour or that it is a "no go" location for local residents. To the contrary lots of our customers live locally and enjoy the facilities that we provide. I have had many discussions with local residents when I have been in the store.
23. We have had one incident of graffiti at the store. This was linked to the person who set up camp on the edge of the forecourt.
24. I have heard about the theft of a large Costa Coffee Cup which made local news in October 2015. This was an isolated incident and I do not believe that this should be an impediment to our selling alcohol.
25. One resident has referred to litter in the planters. I noticed this too and this has been addressed with the new contract manager. The store has regular litter patrols to ensure that the forecourt is kept tidy. I have received no complaints about litter.
26. The licensing officer has referenced Londis promotions. Londis is a supply contractor only. We have our own pricing and so Londis offers are not necessarily available at MFG stores.
27. I am familiar with the other licensed stores in the area and would offer the following distinctions:
 - Our hours will be significantly shorter
 - We do not sell high strength beer or cider
 - We do not sell beer or cider in single cans
 - We do not promote alcohol in our window

28. I am, of course, aware that there is a large student population in the area. They have access to alcohol at multiple stores and they tend to be price sensitive. We will not be targeting the students.
29. I would describe the Store as being quiet at night, certainly in comparison to stores in other locations.
30. I have never been made aware of any issues with drug taking or dealing at the Store.
31. I have read the comments about knife incidents and sexual assault. There is no connection with the Store. I would have expected some contact from the authorities should this have been the case.
32. We wish to be good neighbours. I would be very pleased to provide my contact details to resident representatives and to meet with them on a regular basis. I believe that this will help to build a better understanding and we can contribute in a positive way to the neighbourhood.
33. I believe that we will be operating to more restrictive conditions than any other licensed premise in the area. We will be selling alcohol in a responsible manner consistent both with the licensing objectives and your own statement of licensing policy.
34. Your policy has been carefully considered in the preparation of our application. In particular we have addressed the following:
 - The hours sought do not add later or earlier hours to those already licensed at other stores in the area. We have been realistic in seeking a terminal hour of 10pm.
 - We do not offer irresponsible promotions. It is my belief that our pricing will, if anything, be higher than the independent stores operating in the area.
 - Our product range is carefully controlled to ensure that we are not attractive to the street drinking community or indeed to students.
 - We have a rigorous Challenge 25 policy – till prompts remind cashiers to check age of customers and the store is subjected to test purchases by a third-party contractor.
 - I will ensure that the Store management is aware of the PSPO and will display any signage that may assist officers in ensuring that customers are aware.
 - We maintain refusal logs and incident logs.
 - We have an up-to-date CCTV system.
 - MFG has received no reports of nuisance or complaints from responsible authorities.
 - I am not aware of any complaints from nearby residents.