



ST. CLERE

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Dear Committee Members

I am writing to ask you to grant the license for the Southbeats Music Festival.

I hope the committee is aware of St Clere's impact on the local economy and landscape. As well as employing full and part time staff from the local area, the dynamic enterprises at St Clere support a huge number of local businesses. Evidence of this can be supplied to the committee if this would be helpful. Across St Clere Estate every decision is taken based on what will be best over the next 100 years. Current 100-year-view projects include entering the Higher Level Environmental Scheme with Natural England and undertaking a Woodland Management Plan with the Forestry Commission. We have planted 40,000 new trees/hedging plants in the past ten years which will create an extraordinary landscape for this part of the world for generations to come as well as the environmental benefits we all know are so desperately needed. This kind of work that we are committed to doing is costly and takes place against a backdrop of a failure of farming across the country. It is increasingly difficult to make profits from farmland or woodland and the government has concluded that it is essential for landowners to diversify in order to keep the rural economy healthy. Certainly diversification is the only option if we want the St Clere Estate to continue having a positive impact on the local economy through these challenging times.

It is clear that most of us who live in the countryside would prefer the peace and beauty of farming (ideally pastoral) to the alternatives. Unfortunately pastoral farming is no longer an option. Our land use will change, or the rural economy will fail. For our rural economy to flourish; parish, district and county councils will have to actively support diversification. There will always be people who do not want events to happen in their backyard, and if they are allowed to influence decisions without good reason the local economy and our shared landscape will suffer.

At St Clere we are approached regularly by organisations wanting to use land for events and festivals. Although we start from the point that it is a good thing for the economy of our local community to share our beautiful countryside, we have a strict sieve process as we understand that we need to build up the trust of our neighbours.

Southbeats is the first major festival we have agreed terms with, and this is largely because Proud Events is well known at delivering the highest quality events. We investigated any difficulties from the previous Southbeats Festivals which took place before Proud Events came on board, and assured ourselves that these issues would not reoccur. We were persuaded by three main factors; by the new input of the experienced management team at Proud Events, by the more appropriate road network and access around the proposed site, and by the increase of the age limit to 18 from 16.

Wings of the Morning Field has been used in previous years to host car boot fairs and the Wrotham Steam Rally. Neighbours complained that the 15 car boot fairs per year caused disruption on a too

regular basis and we have therefore temporarily stopped them in order to pursue options that cut down on the regularity of disruption. In order to make up the shortfall in income, we have proposed two weekend events (this year; Spartan and Southbeats), plus the community Steam Rally. Neighbours who directly adjoin the site and therefore are likely to experience the bulk of the disruption caused by these larger events have been offered alternative accommodation for the duration of the Southbeats Festival.

Whilst I understand some of our neighbours have concerns about Southbeats, we have never had such a positive response to anything we have done on the Estate from other neighbours. The message that is coming through loud and clear is that the 18-25 year olds locally are incredibly excited that a nationally recognised event may be happening in their area, and that their parents are also very supportive. The majority of our neighbours understand it is a good thing to allow people to have fun in a controlled environment, they understand the benefits such an event bring to the local economy, and they also appreciate the importance of event income to allow the Estate to continue our 100-year-view projects.

There are rightly strict criteria that any event of this scale must satisfy. On behalf of St Clere, I ask that any decision be taken on the basis of the legal criteria rather than political pressure applied by the strong opinions of the minority. The Wings of the Morning field is the perfect site for a larger event, with safe access, very few direct neighbours, and an excellent free flowing road network to use directly from the site. If this site is not considered suitable for a large scale event, it would send the message that the district is closed for business to such events. The income which will be generated by this festival is vital for us to be able to continue with our environmental projects, and for the economic health of the estate and the wider community.

Yours,

Eliza Ecclestone  
Managing Trustee