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Applicant: Chief Constable of
West Midlands Police
Name: Ali Wood
Statement No: 1
Exhibit AW/01
Made 15th January 2021

In the Licensing Hearing (Birmingham Licensing Authority)

Licensing application for 24-7-365 Local, 109 Villa Road

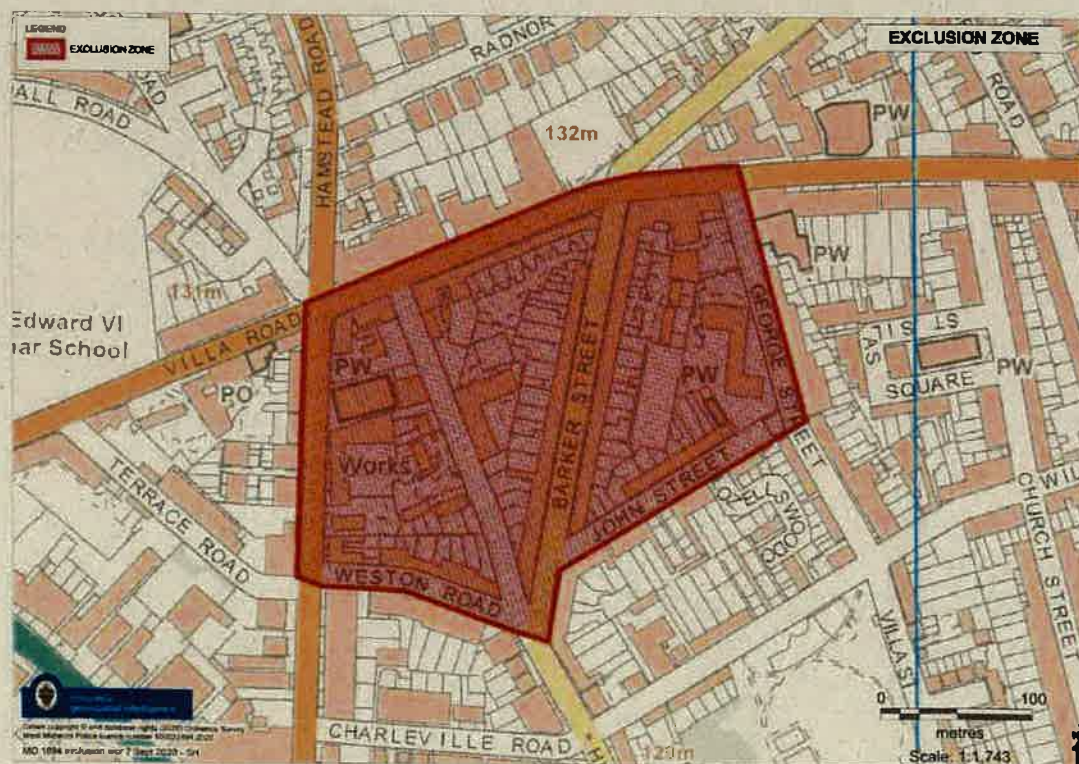
Premise applicant – Samuel Berhane

Objecting responsible authority – Chief Constable West Midlands Police

Witness Statement Pc Ali Wood

1. I am PC 9255 Wood of the West Midlands police. I am an officer on the Lozells and East Handsworth Neighbourhood Team.
2. Lozells has a high population density and is an ethnically diverse area with a population of Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins. In recent months the community has seen an increase of Eritrean, Somali, Sudanese and Ethiopian nationalities moving to Lozells.
3. The area also faces high unemployment rates and has the 8th lowest average income out of the 69 wards that make up Birmingham. It is also considered one of the most deprived wards in the city and has a higher population of young and BAME individuals. (Birmingham City Council, 2020).
4. The housing in Lozells is a combination of private and council housing which include several House in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and hostels.
5. The crimes in the area include robberies, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour such as street drinking and drug dealing, sexual offences; violent crimes and assaults.

6. Villa Road itself is a postcode within the Lozells ward, which is part of the Perry Barr Constituency. Villa Road itself runs from the junction with Soho Road, over the junction with Hamstead Road and through to the junction at Villa Cross, with Lozells Road, Heathfield Road and Barker Street. Villa road itself is only approximately 600 metres in length in total. The area which is defined as being the impact area is only approximately 200 metres in length. This part of Villa Road runs from the junction with Hamstead Road to Villa Cross (the junction with Heathfield Road, Lozells Road and Barker Street).
7. The area itself is a very small section geographically of the area we police as a neighbourhood team.
8. The demand that this one piece of road places on our team is disproportionate to the area we cover as a whole.
9. Below is a sample map of the exclusion zone that is issued to recipients of Community Protection Warnings (CPW).



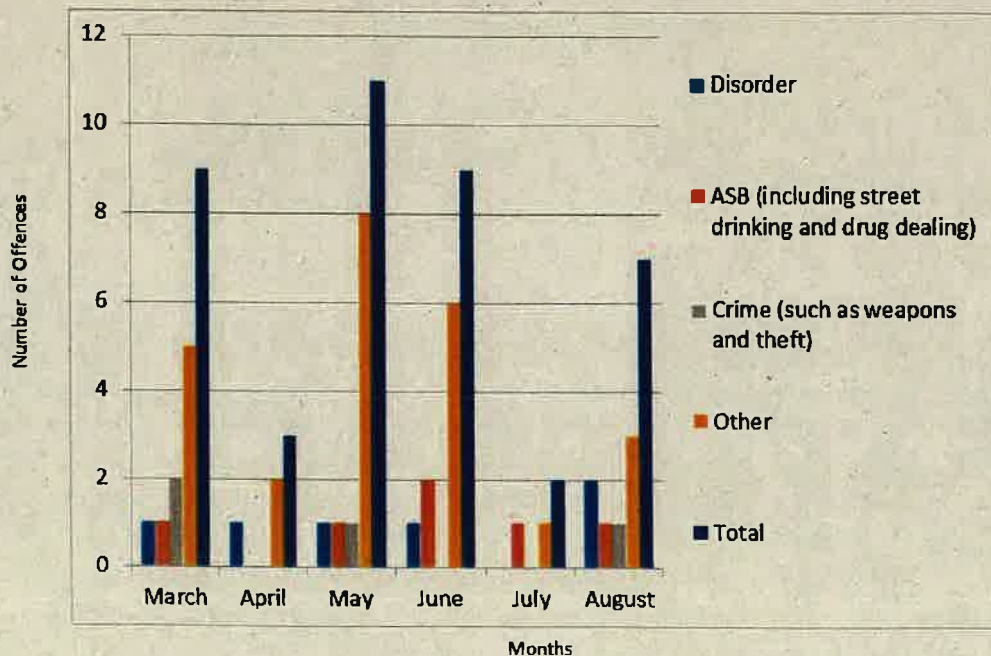
10. Below is the map of our neighbourhood for comparison, the area highlighted in red is the CPW exclusion area.



11. The area has been labelled an 'Impact Area' by WMP and is defined as an area that requires long-term action which is suitable for police and partnership work.
12. As a neighbourhood team we have produced a problem solving plan to attempt to address the issues in the area of Villa Road.
13. The plan addresses anti-social behaviour which is seen through drug dealing and street drinkers on Villa Road. This causes issues primarily for the businesses in the area, but also residents, the wider community and those visiting the area.
14. The plan considers both short-term and long-term strategies, implementing this and then using measures to understand how successful the strategies had been and what improvements needed to be made. Much of this focuses on the immediate needs and on the offenders to try and incorporate intervention strategies.

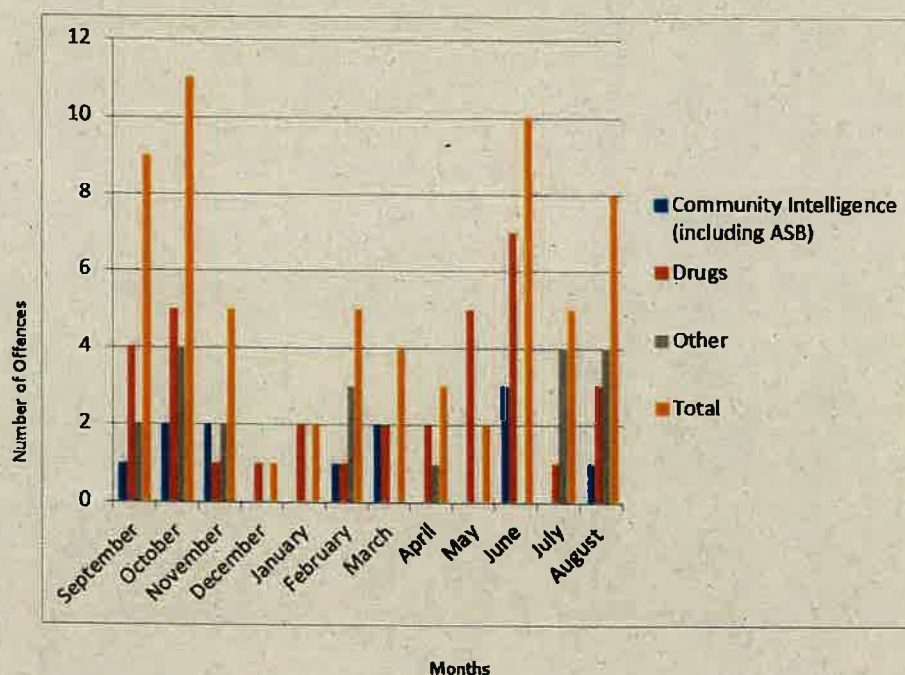
15. There has also been a focus on creating change and helping improve the issues over a dedicated month before looking at long term approaches. This was done by using Targeted Area Patrols (TAP) where two officers during each of their shifts would have a dedicated presence on Villa Road.
16. Initially, the most prominent issues were identified which was done by examining police logs that involved the geographical location being examined, as this gave an indication of the scale of the problem.
17. This was divided into two categories, firstly police logs that came in as a result of calls from March 2020-August 2020 examined on WMP Controlworks system. There were 45 logs during this period, as shown by Figure 1. This was narrowed down to most common which were disorder, anti-social behaviours (including street drinking and drug dealing), crime (including weapons and theft) and then other offences. The purpose of doing this was to understand where NHT focus should be.

18. Figure 1: A graph showing ControlWorks log data for the types of offences occurring on Villa road over a 6 month period between March 2020 and August 2020.



19. It was also important to understand the intelligence picture on Villa Road; logs were examined from September 2019-August 2020, to understand exactly what types of information were being inputted. There were 94 intelligence logs during this period, as shown by Figure 1.2; the most common of these were drugs related.

20. Figure 1.2: A graph showing IMS data for the types of intelligence inputted regarding Villa Road between September 2019 and August 2020.



21. Crime reports were also examined to understand the demand. From 01/04/2020-31/07/2020 there were 44 crimes reported, of note there were two robberies, four assaults, and possession of Class B following stop and searched being conducted and cannabis found.

22. It was important to speak to local businesses to understand what exactly their problems were. This was done in person and by examining previous community impact statements, some of these were from 2019 but reiterated the most common problems were drug

dealing, street drinking and groups outside shops causing ASB. It was clear that from their perspective this was an on-going issue and there had been little improvement.

23. The scanning highlighted the two main problems, the drug dealing and the anti-social behaviour such as street drinking. These were identified as the two areas of concern that could be dealt with in tandem and could be tackled during the dedicated month. This would then help reduce other crimes and offences in the area and improve policing responses.
24. The problem was then broken down further with considerations given to short term and long-term ways to combat the issues. This was integral to the strategy as the dedicated month would allow a focus on the immediate problems on the road, but the long-term approach would ensure a strategy was in place.
25. There has not previously been a dedicated unit on Villa Road with a consistent presence. Often those congregating on the road experienced no consequence to their behaviours. On initial glance it appears that there are just individuals and groups on the road, it is only police logs, reports from the community, CCTV from businesses and observations that have indicated the issues. The dealers for example, would conceal the drugs so they were not noticeable on their person.
26. Some of the businesses that felt intimidated failed to report incidents occurring or provide CCTV which likely led to under reporting. Many were enabling the problems to exist; some for example sold empty coffee cups to the dealers who used the cups to store drugs and had the appearance of consuming a hot drink.
27. Initially, there were a variety of partners that were considered in supporting and delivering the response strategy that included, Trading Standards, Licensing, Housing, Environmental Health, Waste Enforcement, Parking Enforcement, Faith Groups and Outreach Programmes.
28. However, the planning of this was difficult with COVID-19 and adjustments made accordingly. Therefore, there were certain issues that were prioritised, such as collaboration with Trading Standards due to businesses breaching regulations and Drugs Dog Operation to help combat the drug dealing.

29. A joint visit was conducted with Trading Standards as a result of examining the intelligence logs and also witnessing breaches taking place during Targeted Area Patrols (TAP). This was a priority as the business had previously been subject to a closure order yet continued breaches. The business was selling illegal tobacco and single use cigarettes which was linked to one of the reasons the street drinkers congregated on the street and often outside the business. This required expertise from Trading Standards and Licensing as they also had the power to search the premises and seize items that failed to meet standards.
30. Local community engagement took place through interactions with the businesses and residents to understand their concerns. Engagement took place not only in person, but also on social media which allowed the work being conducted to be shared. This involved taking photos of officers during patrols and inviting the community to approach and engage in conversations.
31. There was also concerted effort to engage with one of the children's home that was located within the area and had previously experienced youths attending Villa Road. Therefore, officers attended the home and delivered inputs around knife crime and county lines to raise awareness and highlight the dangers to the children.
32. The difficulty in implementing the response was largely in the resources available as there were just two officers focusing on Villa Road throughout the month. As a policing team we also patrol the Soho Road and Birchfield Road, which are also identified as impact areas. The expectations held by businesses and residents were at times an issue. Due to the strong police presence with TAP, there was the assumption that this would continue indefinitely. Although during interactions these parties were made aware the dedicated police presence was for just 1 month to allow us to tackle issues and build relations within the community, there was still the belief the dedicated response would continue. The increased focus on Villa Road meant that there were fewer patrols on other roads and streets in the area which may have allowed other issues to go unattended in the meantime. Although, TAP was an incredibly important aspect of the strategy, there was also the consideration that should an incident or demand require, then Villa Road officers would be deployed accordingly.

33. This also highlighted the need for partner agencies so that responsibility could be shared as opposed to sole police ownership of Villa Road, this would then also help with a long-term strategy as the community would be equipped to handle issues.
34. Following the intensive month of policing there were 18 crimes reported from 01/08/2020 to 26/10/2020; of note were two robberies and three assaults and possession of Class B following stop and searches being conducted and cannabis being found. TAP patrols have been successful as there has been a clear reduction in reported crimes helped by the neighbourhood strategy.
35. Across September, there have been 23 police intelligence logs which has been a significant increase. This can be seen as a positive increase due to the emphasis placed on submitted IMS in line with the with strategy and in order to help improve the intelligence picture built. 12 of these logs were community intelligence based and 8 were related to drugs.
36. Examining the Controlwork logs, there were 4 logs, this was a decrease from the previous month. There was the first time in 7 months that there were no logs related to disorder, ASB or Crime which demonstrates a marked improvement. TAP has worked effectively to deter not only the targeted crimes of drug dealing and street drinking, but also having an effect on other crimes in the area.
37. A survey with businesses across Villa Road was conducted following the month of intensive patrols. This was so that feedback could be provided and a measure of how TAP were working and if anything needed to be adjusted.
38. Every business said they experienced an improvement over the course of the month, in some cases this was significant.
39. As a team we are working hard to maintain the improvements made due to the area from the period of intensive activity. We are continuing to work with partners, schools, children homes, hostels and HMO service providers, residents associations, businesses and the local community. However, COVID-19 and other demands on our resources make maintaining this level of police presence in the area challenging.



40. In relation to calls to service to Villa Road, there were 19 Controlwork logs, between 26th October 2020 and the 14th January 2021.
41. Three of these logs related to ASB, five related to Covid breaches, one related to an assault and one related to drug dealing.
42. There were 14 recorded crimes on Villa Road from the 26th October 2020 to 14th January 2021. There were 7 assaults, two racially aggravated public order offences, two possession of cannabis, a theft from the person and an arson with intent to endanger life.
43. In relation to intelligence reported there are 19 reports from the 26th October 2020 to 14th January 2021. There is intelligence relating to drug dealing activity still occurring on Villa Road.
44. There is currently a licensing application being made for a 24/7/365 premises at 109 Villa Road, Lozells, B19 1NH.
45. The males we have encountered who are involved in the drug dealing are associating on the footpath outside the premises on 109 Villa Road, Lozells.
46. Drug dealers regularly congregate outside this location and drugs have been recovered from the letter box of this location as the drug dealers tend to hide their drugs in letterboxes, in empty coffee cups and other litter and underneath vehicles. We have regularly recovered drugs from these locations.
47. Street drinking is a persistent problem whereby offenders will buy alcohol from already existing licenced premises on Villa Road causing ASB and other issues. There have been physical changes made to the location to try and prevent this from occurring, such as fencing off areas previously used to congregate, but this problem still exists.
48. There are residential premises above the shop and directly opposite the shop, these will be directly impacted by a 24/7 premises selling alcohol on Villa Road.



49. There is already this 24/7 shop and one on nearby Lozells Road (approx. 30 metres away). To have another one within close proximity on a relatively small road would seem unnecessary.
50. On the 4th January 2021 officers on patrol on Villa Road have entered the premises of 109 Villa Road, trading as 24/7/365. There were four persons in the frontage of the shop and the door was open to allow access. The till was on and there was a female behind the till. There was a male who identified himself as the owner of the premises and two other males. No-one within the shop was wearing face coverings, in breach of Covid regulations. There was no signage or social distancing measures in place. There was alcohol clearly on display on the shelves. There was no signage to indicate this was not for sale. The owner was challenged and advised about the alcohol being on display and the Covid breaches. The owner stated he understood he could not sell alcohol and that he was not selling it. He was advised that as he did not have a licence he should not be displaying the alcohol within the shop. He stated that the shop was closing shortly and that the alcohol would be removed. There is body worn video uploaded to Evidence.com, ID-9255,04/01/20 of this interaction.
51. On the 5th January 2021 officers on patrols on Villa Road have entered the premises of 109 Villa Road, trading as 24/7/365. The shop still had alcohol displayed on the shelves within the store for customers to purchase. When challenged by officers regarding having a license to sell alcohol they have removed the alcohol and placed it in the rear of the premises. They were advised that officers were aware that they had been spoken to regarding this the previous day. There is body worn video uploaded to Evidence.com , ID - 9255,05/01/20 of this interaction.
52. This also raises concerns over the premises behaving in a responsible manner.
53. As a neighbourhood team we have devoted a lot of time and resources, with the support of partnership agencies to have a positive impact on the area of Villa Road. I strongly believe that if an alcohol licence is granted to these premises it will have a negative impact on the work that has gone into the area.
54. I would object to this application as I believe that it will result in an increase in demand in an area already identified as a priority area for West Midlands police.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts contained in this my Witness statement are true

Signed -  PC9255

Dated 15th January 2021



WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r 27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s. 9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5B

Crime No. URN

Statement of Alastair John Wood

Age if under 18 O'18 (if over 18 insert "over 18")

Occupation Police Constable 9255

This statement (consisting of page(s) each signed by me) 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: *A. Wood* (witness)

Date 21/09/2019

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

I am PC 9255 Wood of the West Midlands police, currently based at Handsworth police station, Thornhill Road.

I am making this statement on behalf of a member of the local community. This is in relation to issues they are experiencing in the area of Villa Road, Lozells and the impact it is having on the local community and businesses in the area.

One of the main concerns they raised is a group of Somali youths selling drugs on the road. They stand on the pavement smoking cannabis openly. They are selling cannabis and crack. They use vehicles as cover for their activities so that they cannot be seen by passing vehicles. They have been seen to take cash from individuals and exchange this for small resealable bags of cannabis. One of the males will normally have this in a small shoulder bags. The money will also be placed in these bags. The males also store drugs under vehicles to retrieve. They are also believed to be selling crack and tablets. These are sold by separate males within separate groups on the street. They do this every day depending on the weather. If it is raining they are normally not there. They are not welcome in the local businesses and have no where to shelter. They are normally there from the afternoon and early evening. The busiest times for them are Friday and Saturday nights. They will still be there normally after 10pm.

These activities attract drug users and prostitutes into the area. They are approaching these groups to buy their drugs of choice.

The street drinkers also congregate regularly on Villa Road and from 11am until 6pm but they are also there at other times. They are from the local area and most reside in nearby hostels or shared accommodation. The street drinkers will normally be near the junction with Villa Road and Heathfield Road. They also congregate at the junction of Heathfield Road and Lozells Road by Villa Cross. They will have occasional fights between themselves but generally do not cause disruption to the businesses.

Signature

Signature witnessed by

03/2016

OFFICIAL – (when complete)

OFFICIAL – (when complete)

MG11

Crime No.

URN

Statement of Alastair John Wood

There is high level of crime with regular fights between the Somali youth. Sometimes this occurs when new faces come into the area. There has been a recent spate of burglaries of local businesses. Some of the businesses have been targetted more than once. They know of six burglaries within the last month. Some of the local businesses are unwilling to report as they feel nothing will be done and it is a waste of time. Some of these are believed to have been committed by one person who is believed to be a drug user, to fund his habit.

All these factors are having a negative impact on the area. People from the local community are not using the shops and businesses are being affected. The area is being blighted by drug related crime and they feel that action needs to be taken.

They are not willing to attend court as they are concerned that there may be repercussions. The content of this statement is from their account of issues in the area and they were present with me when this statement was completed and have clarified that the content is correct and true to their best knowledge and belief.

Signature

03/2016

Signature witnessed by

OFFICIAL – (when complete)

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r 27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s. 9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5B

Crime No. URN Statement of [REDACTED]

Age if under 18 Over 18 (if over 18 insert "over 18")

Occupation [REDACTED]

This statement (consisting of 2 page(s) each signed by me) 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: (witness) [REDACTED]

Date 20/10/2019

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

I am making this statement to communicate my personal concerns about behaviours on Villa Road. I am here to speak about the issues and impact the behaviour has on the neighbourhood with the hopes the situation will improve. I have owned my business [REDACTED] and it is situated on Villa Road. I have had so many issues linked to the shop that I have decided to sell the business, but I am having trouble finding a buyer who wants to move into the area as it has such a bad reputation.

There is always a group of people outside the shop that engage in anti-social behaviours such as street drinking, swearing and constantly fighting. They are there all hours of the day, from as early as 6 in the morning to as late as midnight. This group are also frequently spotted by the church and mosque and I know other residents are upset having to deal with this. Just yesterday, 19/10/2019 I counted thirteen individuals hanging about and drinking. The group sometimes also play loud music. I believe this type of behaviour, including urinating and drug dealing, to be the reason why the previous two owners have left because customers and residents are constantly intimidated and it causes huge problems.

Drug dealing is another big issue that takes place, I have spotted one particular individual who deals from his car and spends the majority of the day doing so. Recently, I spoke to a woman who entered my shop who was a local resident and lived just opposite my shop. I commented on the fact I had never seen her which I found unusual as she was so local. She told me that she was intimidated by the groups standing outside the shop and around the street and therefore did not come by this way. She was actively avoiding the area so she did not encounter the behaviours from the group as she did not want to expose her children to it.

Recently, I saw a couple about 6pm in the evening who were in front of the shop and engaging in sexual activities, one of my customers saw this and it has deterred them from entering the shop again. There have been multiple condoms littered outside my shop and I believe it to be a regular space for such sexual activity to take place. [REDACTED]

Signature [REDACTED]

Signature witnessed by

N. [Signature] 23376

03/2016


OFFICIAL – (when complete)

OFFICIAL – (when complete)

MG11

Crime No.


URN


Statement of 

Another customer, refused to buy any fruit from outside as she could smell urine due to individuals gathering outside the shop and urinating near it and on the street. This behaviour happens consistently and has caused a loss of income to my business. There have also been a few incidents where customers or residents have parked their cars on the road and individuals have urinated on the actual car or nearby them.

This part of the neighbourhood, due to the behaviours that take place, is extremely off putting for potential residents and customers alike. There is constantly rubbish left on the street with multiple bags left outside by the shop. The area just looks very unappealing and unattractive and means that no one wants to engage with businesses or look to move into the neighbourhood.

The situation has caused me stress, worry and fear for the safety of customers and residents, as well as myself. The impact of the anti-social behaviour has been significant and residents and business owners are forced to look upon individuals partaking in this behaviour. The community feel incredibly intimidated by their presence. Residents and customers actively avoid the areas to protect themselves. It has been an ongoing issue and I fear something worse will take place if these individuals are not dealt with appropriately. It is important action be taken so that the area can improve and become a much more welcoming and safe place.

 *Nedvi* 23376

Signature 

Signature witnessed by

Nedvi 23376

03/2016

OFFICIAL – (when complete)

15