

## 2) Deputation concerning Music Venues: A thank you; a request; and still - who is VisitBrighton.com for?

Three years ago, I stood before you presenting one of the larger petitions you receive; bringing with me so many supporters they had to be accommodated in an anteroom with a video link. Such is the passion for live grassroots music in this city.

It was not a hostile petition and it was non-party political. Likewise, this deputation is neither hostile or party political. The petition was the grassroots music scene of Brighton and Hove reaching out to you saying get to know us, understand us and work with us. And you did. Thank you.

In truth, I expected you to slap the petition down, to somehow use council procedure to negate it, or just side-line it. But you didn't. Thank you.

The petition was backed unanimously and furthermore, you moved to create a Policy Panel to explore the issues affecting live music venues in the city. That process reached a milestone last month with the publication of the council's Brighton & Hove Live Music Venue Partnership Report.

This deputation is a big thank you for the work so far, to explain why I feel it is so important all Councillors keep an eye on the developments not just the specific committee members and also to mention a couple of new threats that have appeared since I last stood before you. I want to explain why the council's own Live Music Venue Partnership Report is so important. The second part of the deputation revisits my passionate feelings towards the Visit Brighton website.

The Music...

I appreciate that with your council workload, for some of you, the live music scene only triggers into your council consciousness when something goes wrong or there are negatives involved. These negatives you come across as Councillors only feed into that feeling that the city's nightlife is a problem to be tolerated rather than something wonderful to be celebrated. I'd like you to see past those over-emphasised negatives and join in with the positives.

The B&H Live Music Venue Report is an important step forward and I urge to read it (it's not that long). It sets out the background and history of live music in the city, some of the current challenges for the sector both locally and nationally, and places it within a worldwide perspective. Our city is known worldwide as a grassroots musical hub that attracts a wealth of creative talent across all the creative industries. It's one of the reasons this city has such a high graduate retention.

The report makes 4 key recommendations.

The first of which is to set up two groups: a '**Live Music Roundtable**' and a '**Live Music Venue Partnership**'. To me this is the most important of the recommendations and an expansion of the forum idea that I put forward in the original petition. It is suggested in the report that the Roundtable will consist of around 20 members from across the sector from musicians and sound engineers, promoters, festival organisers, venue owners, etc., and key representatives from relevant council departments

This fledgling initiative needs treating with great care. The right inclusive balance is crucial from the off to get the local music scene fully onboard. If the Roundtable seen as a clique then musicians and small promoters will distance themselves from it en masse. On a personal note, I feel it is imperative that a representative from police licencing is on the Roundtable. They and the local music scene need to bridge that gap of trust and understanding to work together for the benefit of both. For the economic survival of our venues I see this as paramount.

### **Supporting Information:**

The Roundtable is to be supported by a Live Music Venue Partnership open to anyone working within the live music industry in the city to join. It's a forum of individuals supporting and passing ideas forward to the Roundtable.

The reason why I suggest you all keep an eye on developments is because you get people like me helping you out of passion not money. Like 90% of the people who are part of the grassroots live music scene, I don't make any money from it, actually quite the reverse. Yet I am intensely passionate about it though; and willing to put the time and effort in to help the music scene progress - and I'm by no means unique in that. In these times of budget cuts these passionate people are a resource that can really help you. If this initiative is successful, and I am so hoping it is, then the model should be portable to other sectors of council business in this climate of austerity. Please consider how cost-effective that can be.

Since I presented the petition new threats have emerged. The Business Rate review is a major concern. It has levied increases to some venues of 250 and 300 percent. To put that into perspective for you, I was told by one venue owner that equates to a £2 per ticket rise, assuming the night was fully sold out (and of course that is not the norm). When you consider the normal ticket price for the venue is £3 to £7 you can understand what a big hike that is. What is galling, is that you Councillors don't even get to spend the money increase, as you just collect it and send it off to the government.

Though they are smaller, our local neighbours can offer some pointers that can be useful to you. Hastings has an evolving music scene, I'm told supported by the council and is definitely attracting positive reviews. The high cost of living here is making it attractive to some people on the music scene and I know of some grassroots musicians who have moved there and some promoters moving a number of their gigs there too. Worthing Councillors on the other hand have made the retrograde step of issuing a music venue 70db limit without actually understanding what that means. The decibel scale is not linear - each reduction of 10db reduces the sound level by half. I ask you to keep this in mind if you ever plan to put decibel restrictions on venues.

- Most grassroot venues operate at around 100db without complaint from their neighbours.
- 90db is half that 100db volume (50%),
- 80db is a quarter of 100db loudness (25%).
- In asking for a live music venue to operate at 70db that is less than 13% of the volume that venues normally operate at. It is the sound of a vacuum cleaner, less than the average noise level of your TV or radio in your own home.

Three years ago, I asked you to remember my petition every time you saw a musician on the city's streets. Whether it was someone with a guitar strapped to their back, a towering stack of drums walking down the street, a jazz band unloading into a venue, a proud grandpa escorting one of the city's many young musicians to their first gig or an out of town band arriving at the station because Brighton is such a great place to play. I asked you to remember the petition.

This was because live music is everywhere in this city. It is so common we don't notice it any more. It's akin to how we forget to hear the waves when we take a long walk on the beach, because it's there ever present. I still need you to notice it, even now, because it is still under threat, it still needs your help and understanding. Thank you.

#### The Tourist website

The comments I am making here are because I am passionate about this city live, work and play in. I love being a party of this city. I mean no personal disrespect to anyone but I feel I should point out if something is not working.

Regardless of your political position, Brexit is going to make a difference. We are spoilt in this city with what the influx of tourists awards us - an abundance of shops, restaurants and leisure amenities we wouldn't normally be able to support. Will Brexit change all that? Will the foreign tourists and language students still come in the same numbers? Will it increase the number of the country's Staycationers and how can we keep ahead of that game? In the past seaside resorts like Margate, Blackpool and Rhyl became complacent over what they had and then declined dramatically as times changed. We must make sure Brighton & Hove doesn't become complacent in the face of Brexit and other changes.

Which brings me back to the council's tourist website VisitBrighton.com – our shop window as a city, how we offer what we have to the world to entice them in.

When I presented the petition back in 2015 one Councillor accused me of taking a pop at Visit Brighton when I highlighted the complete lack of music scene visibility on the site. Well if 7 of the official 'Top 50' things the city has to offer are not even in the city (including a golf club as far away as Uckfield) and it didn't reflect the live music scene at all, then I felt it far to take 'a pop'. I asked at the time "Who is this website made for?" and I'm now asking the same question again.

Since then the site has had a revamp. It's pretty, it's glossy, lots of huge pictures. It is not pushing far-away golf courses as a city attraction anymore but apparently out of town llama farms are a 'Must See'. Please do not get me wrong, I've no beef nor wish to disrespect the designer here. They will have been working to a brief and done that job very well.

The site reminds me of one of those glossy publications where companies get featured for buying adverts in the magazine. It looks wonderful but when you get down to it, it is devoid of real content. [Councillors I appreciate that for most of you with your normal council workload you may not have extensively looked at this site or be aware of its lack of actual content]

The layout of the site is extra large pictures scrolling across there screen. It's intuitive to click them as links but most of which do not take you anywhere if you do. The pictures are so big you do not realise there is text below them when you scroll, it's almost deliberate to hide the fact that there's not much text at all.

On the new 'Top 50 things to do in Brighton & Hove' page - 7 of the 50 are outside the city with "Go Ape Crawley" having 2 separate entries as does "Laughter Yoga and Chocolate Chuckles Brighton (Activity Organiser)". This isn't something to be laughing over though it is a complete joke. What is the criteria for being feature on the site? There is not a single mention of the live music scene.

The actual Music Venues page [<https://www.visitbrighton.com/things-to-do/entertainment-and-nightlife/music-venues>] is pretty sparse with mainly council own venues and – WOW! - Newhaven Fort as the top music venue on the list. Ironically buried deep on the council's .gov website is a much more informative page that captures most of the city's main venues and other music scene links [<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/arts-and-culture/live-music>]. Please compare the two sites and you'll understand

what I mean. Surely with its importance to the city, the live music scene and its venues should have its own tab on Visit Brighton.

I could go on and on citing other neglected areas not just live music but I think you get the drift by now. Rather than be negative I'd prefer to give some positive pointers.

- Why not have a breakdown of the beaches and what you'll find there each with its own page. From Hove lagoon through to the marina – the family orientated beaches, basketball, i360, beach volleyball, even the nudist beach. Expand it further with the restaurants, cafes, bars and other points of interest around that section.
- Map out the city with link pages of all the local mini-neighbourhoods and what you'll find there.
- How about a map of where all the cycle stations are in the city and the cycle routes you can use them?
- Ask video bloggers to send you their take on the city and what it has to offer. For a link back to their blogging channel you'll get plenty of potential subscriptions for free.

These are just ideas off the top of my head. Open it up to the people who live and work in the city to come up with their suggestions for the top 50 and what should be and they'll tell you what we should be broadcasting about the city.

Councillors, Visit Brighton shouldn't be just pretty pictures on a website for the sake of it. It needs to be an integral part of the council's strategy to attract new people to the city and make it as appealing and informative as possible.

Many thanks for listening and please, each time you see a musician on the city's streets, remember this deputation and our amazing live music scene. Thank you.

### **Spokesperson Mark Stack**

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