

A0 Arena alleges Co-op Live's licensing application is 'simply unlawful' as row between venues goes on

A row between Manchester's two largest arenas has deepened, with the A0 Arena suggesting Co-op Live's licence application is 'simply unlawful'.

But Co-op Live hit back at the A0 Arena by accusing it of making a 'ludicrous and disingenuous' objection to the £385 million venue's opening. Its barrister, Jeremy Phillips KC, also repeated claims that A0's objection was 'only about trade protection'.

His comments came as the hearing into the licence application came to a close after [two days of discussion](#) in the Town Hall – which have featured mud-slinging from both sides.

Gary Grant, representing A0 Arena operators ASM Global, said his client took an interest because 'we are significant stakeholders in Manchester's cultural and leisure life'.

"It's important that when a new arena comes in that reputation is not damaged," he added. "That's the risk if too much flexibility is given to Co-op Live in a residential location."

That 'risk' was prevalent due to the new arena – set to open on April 23 with a Peter Kay show – having a 'location outside the city centre', the 'limitations of concrete transport options', and 'the absence of existing methods of dispersal in the early hours of the morning without disturbing residents or endangering public safety'.

Although ASM accepted they had no issue with the 23,500-

capacity venue opening until midnight, the firm railed against a bid to keep Co-op Live's 'ancillary spaces' – a series of restaurants and bars around its main auditorium that can hold 6,000 people – open until 2am at the weekend.

“It’s the equivalent of the night time economy the size of somewhere like Didsbury inserted into a place with very little night time economy,” Mr Grant said. “There’s a famous Mike Tyson quote that says ‘everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face’. The same is true of [Co-op Live’s] dispersal policy. Humans will go where they want to.”

Although Co-op Live’s barrister, Jeremy Phillips declined to ask questions of the A0 Arena after its submissions, he did go after the venue by Victoria Station in his closing arguments. He claimed Co-op Live’s opening ‘would add very welcome competition, we would say, for the existing arena’, and reiterated claims that ASM had tried to prevent competition moving into the city.

“The Arena has taken every opportunity to restrict the proposal before you. Mr Grant complained that the attack on his clients and [ASM-appointed expert] Dr Hadfield ‘does not bode well for good neighbourliness’.

“There’s a saying about pots and kettles. It would be clear to the committee that it was not us that started any animosity to the Arena, or tried to strangle this venture from the outset.

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“I accept entirely that A0 is entitled to comment on the application. All that I ask is they be open and transparent about their motivation and admit fundamentally [this is] only about trade protection.”

He went on: “It’s wholly a trade objection to add restrictive conditions to our licence. If they had acknowledged the position and said ‘we are struggling financially and because of that, the arrival of these premises will impact on how we operate’, that would be a different thing.

“None of that is being done. That’s being done through a residential objection.”

The remarkable hearing also heard a more serious accusation from Mr Grant that Co-op Live’s application to open for 24 hours on 25 occasions annually was ‘simply unlawful’.

Co-op Live previously requested to open 24/7 on 25 occasions every year as – which is an effort to host sports events like UFC for a global TV audience, it’s thought.

25 is more than double the originally-applied-for 12 occasions, with case law finding that applicants cannot increase the scope of opening after consulting with the public.

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“[Originally] that application was 12,” Mr Grant added. “We say trying to more than double that is simply unlawful. The general public has never been consulted on 25 24/7 events. It’s wrong in fact, morality, and in law.”

Towards the end of proceedings, council legal adviser Leo Charalambides, himself a barrister, said he believed the application ‘does not sit comfortably’ with the case law – which involved Manchester council back in 2012. That prompted Co-op Live to amend their bid at the 11th hour.

Instead of 25 opportunities to host a 24-hour event, they asked for 12 – with a further 13 opportunities to open the 23,500-capacity auditorium until 4am.

That amendment proved to be the last meaningful act of the hearing, with a three-councillor panel now deliberating on the

application. Chair Julie Connolly said that a formal decision will be released within five working days.

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