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Objectors fail to tear a strip off

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An Epsom strip club has had its licence renewed despite dividing residents on what it brings to the town.

Stir, in the town centre's East Street, has run as a sexual entertainment venue since 2011, though operations manager **Damon Wellman** has been running it as a bar since 2007.

Residents who wrote to the council about the application raised concerns about going into town late at night because of it, while another in support said the bar did not have the "creeps" you would find in other venues.

A licensing sub committee meeting at **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** on Thursday (August 24) granted renewal of the venue's licence, which was due to expire.

Stir is Epsom and Ewell's only establishment licenced as a sexual entertainment venue.

The sub committee considered six letters of support and four objections to the application, as well as hearing from Mr Wellman in the meeting.

Letters of support included one person who used to live very close to the venue, who said they were being followed home one night by three men having left another nearby pub. The letter said: "It was late and we had to walk past Stir bar so we asked the doormen if they could help and they were brilliant. "They let us stay in the bar for free, offered to call the police if the men stayed outside, which they did not, and then after some time walked us back to our flat. After that we would sometimes just go in there for a drink as it was a really nice bar and never had the creeps that we would encounter in other bars."

But one objector said she would not go into town late at night because of the club, saying she had "seen the men coming in and out" and felt "unsafe".

Another person who wrote in support said they understood people's "reservations to this sort of thing", but added "it's important that perceptions and prejudice do not take precedent over facts and reality."

Another letter said the venue "tainted" the town, raising concerns about it being so close to a nursery and to a residential area. They went on to say: "I write to and on behalf of the young women who walk home late at night and ask you to reconsider your renewal and shut the premise down and protect young adults from these dangers."

While another letter claimed there had been a "significant increase in anti-social behaviour associated with the establishment", Mr Wellman disputed this in the meeting.

He produced a response to a Freedom of Information request he had submitted to the council regarding complaints, whether noise or otherwise, about the premises which said there had been none in the last five years.

Mr Wellman said: "We have to run a venue like this strictly. That's why we have a great reputation. We are phenomenally strict. We are very strict on who we let in. We're not a volume-led venue, this industry generally isn't."

The licence was granted, with minor changes including removing the words "female only" from a condition regarding the locations where "exotic dancing" could take place.

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