

## **Agenda and Questions for Evidence-Gathering Meeting Protesters**

**11am Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

**Protester 1 has suggested some clarification points to these notes. Please see additions in RED. In addition, it has now been established that planters were not at the entrance to Saint Hill Manor in 2024 when the protest began. They had been placed by the Church in the morning but removed at the request of West Sussex County Council. They were present in 2023. Barriers were placed by the Church at the entrance on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024, but these were removed by Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at the request of Sussex Police. This has been corrected in these notes in RED.**

Meeting Duration: 90 minutes maximum

Chair: Assistant Director - Communities MSDC (Lucy Corrie)

Officers: Paul Turner Head of Communities

Nick Hurley Community Safety Team Leader

Note Taker: Ellen Fisher – Democratic Services

### **A Welcome and Purpose of the Meeting (Lucy)**

- Introduction of attendees

Officers and protestors introduced themselves.

Lucy Corrie, Assistant Director Communities, Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC)

Paul Turner, Head of Communities, MSDC

Nick Hurley, Community Safety Team Leader, MSDC

Ellen Fisher, Member Services Office (note taker)

Protestor 1

Protestor 2

Protestor 3

Protestor 4

- Purpose: to discuss (i) the activities taking place around the Church premises during the international event weekend in 2023 and 2024,

- (ii) options surrounding the request by the Church for a PSPO dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024; and

- (iii) to explore how activities at the event could be moderated for future events

- Explanation that notes will be taken and shared and responses may be used in future reports to Council Members.

LC agreed with all attendees the meeting would not be recorded. She noted the protestors had received a copy of the application for a PSPO by the Church of Scientology and they would be given an opportunity to comment on this during and after the meeting.

## **B Purpose of the meeting (Lucy)**

Mid-Sussex District Council is gathering information and views on the application for a PSPO. We are not making decisions at this meeting. We will be asking a series of questions to help us in this process. Please do ask questions yourself at any point. Understands you are not an official group and understand you are individuals with individual opinions, respect and understand this and know MSDC can't hold anyone else who protests to account.

Protester 1 noted there were many supporters who were not able to make the meeting today and he would be representing their views in their absence.

Hope this is an informal process to gain as much insight **from your perspective** as possible.

- Questions on process so far?

## **C Main Discussion – Questions (Paul Turner & Nick Hurley)**

### **Questions for the Protesters**

PT & NH thanked the protesters for their attendance and noted the communications between Council officers and protesters at the international event in 2024 was very effective.

1      **To start off with, we are interested to hear your views and thoughts of the 2023 international event and 2024 event, PT noted officers were not at the 2023 event.**

**What do you think of both events, how did both events go, what was different between the years, we would like to hear from you.**

Notes:

Protester 1 explained their method of protest was unchanged and the purpose of the protests was to raise public awareness of the abuse within the scientology community by sign posting vulnerable individuals to the relevant support groups. He explained the protest signage and messages of the protestors were consistent, evidenced by photos and livestreaming of the protests in both 2023 and 2024. He advised he keeps a record of all the press coverage and the Church have in the past edited this coverage to portray protestors in a negative light. Citing the protestors chant 'Pip pip, cheerio, Scientology has to go' as one example. He reiterated their message was always consistent, to raise awareness of the abuse within the scientology community, not to undermine the religion and Protester 2 agreed. Protester 1 said the protestors were only asked to submit evidence to the Council of the 2024 event. He confirmed he would submit relevant evidence of the 2023 event to officers.

Protester 2, explained a notable difference between the event in 2023 and 2024 was the report submitted by Hodkin and Company Solicitors on behalf of the Church of Scientology stating the protestors behavior was harassment. There is no evidence of this as the event was live streamed. He noted there were more protestors present in 2023 than 2024.

PT asked how the number of protestors affected the protestor zone. Protester 1 in 2024 the Church installed ~~the planters and barriers~~. The barriers were removed at the request of West Sussex County Council (WSCC). ~~However, in 2024 the smaller planters remained installed on the public highway.~~ The protestors believe the behavior of the Church is becoming more aggressive. Protester 1 noted the frequency of the protests depended on the type of event and a decision to attend was only made after thorough research was conducted, confirming there had only been two protests in the last 6 years. When officers asked if past protests had taken place, Protester 1 confirmed potentially one, 7 years ago, however, none of the current protestors had been present.

NH asked for further information regarding the barrier and planters and whether these were in place at the 2023 IAS event. Protester 1 said in 2023 a 'Ben's Gutters' van had been parked on the verge to obstruct protestors and despite

their attempts to liaise with the Police as to where to stand and the Police advising this would be assessed and confirmed on the day of the protest, a number of cars were parked on the verges, as well as the van, on the day of the protest. The cars were moved under the instruction of the Police, however, the van remained parked on the verge. **Video evidence supports the planters being present in 2023, but not 2024.**

At the 2024 event, Protester 1 explained they had driven past the site prior to the event and noted a number of vehicles parked along both verges of Saint Hill Road, obstructing the public highway and the protesters had a right to be able to stand in that area. WSCC Highways Authority agreed. **The area outside Rockwood Park is considered an unsafe area for protesters to stand, due to the verge being much smaller and being private land owned by Scientologists. It is also next to a residential building, which means it is likely to cause much more disruption. Protester 1 explained the safest area for protesters to stand is on the verge to the south of the entrance to Saint Hill, where they stood in 2023 and in 2024.** He gave another example of how the public highway had been deliberately obstructed and causing road safety issues, where the Police had to intervene and mediate the situation. The Church would not remove barriers in place immediately outside the entrance to the Church, however, through negotiating with the Police they would remove the barriers in place if the protestors agreed to stand on the south side. The protestors agreed. However, on the Sunday, the protestors stood on both sides and the barriers were reinstated.

LC asked whether the key message was the protestors were dedicated to public safety and communicating effectively with the Police. Protester 1 agreed, the first priority was public safety followed by communicating their message in a peaceful manner.

**2 At the 2024 event, Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted Saint Hill Road was busy with traffic and pedestrians during the arrival of visitors at the international event. This has given rise to concern for road and public safety.**

**Would protesters be prepared to remain within a designated protest zone to ensure public safety and reduce confrontations?**

**Notes: Protester zone is to the left of Saint Hill entrance behind “planters”.**

NH suggested the area by the side of the rugby club as a potential designated protest zone. Protester 1 noted the ideal protester zone would be on the verge opposite the entrance to the Church as it is a large separate area, which would

not cause any obstructions to pedestrians, or the road and people would clearly see their messages. Protesters would be further away from event attendees. However, protesters cannot stand opposite the Church entrance due to trees being planted on the verge.

Lucy Corrie advised officers had liaised with WSCC Highways and noted the planters acted as a safety measure. Protester 1 provided a map of the site and explained the planters were actually an obstruction of the public right of way and they had been installed after the protestors had completed a site visit with Police.

NH asked the protestors to expand on the site visits with the Police and Inspector Dave Derrick. Protester 1 explained they endeavor to provide as much notice as possible about the protests to the Police, including maps of the planned protests. Noting this was difficult as the dates for the International Association of Scientology (IAS) events are not publicly available until very close to the date of the event. Protester 1 highlighted their attempts to engage with the Scientology community, emailing every year for further information on the events, times, dates, number of people, in order to help manage the protests safely. They have yet to receive a response from the Church. The protestors suggested a site visit for the 2024 event which was supported by the Police. The Police have the authority to make the decision of the actions required on the day Protester 2 noted. NH confirmed there was video evidence of this agreement recorded on the day of the event in 2024.

The traffic issues were discussed, and officers had been made aware of the poor management of the traffic and pedestrians, impacting the safety of members of the public, protestors and guests attending the IAS event. The security staff for the event were not wearing high-vis clothing and the lighting was inadequate. Protester 1 suggested a pedestrian pavement along St Hill Road would improve the safety measures and Protester 2 flagged the feedback following the events were always regarding traffic and road safety issues, not protestors.

Protester 1 explained the IAS event was an international fundraising event, not a religious event. It is the only fundraising event held in Europe, the remainder are held in the USA. As protestors, they are not only concerned for their safety but also the safety of those attending the event.

**3      Sussex Police have specifically requested that protesters remain within their designated area for road safety reasons.**

**Are you willing to stop standing in the road and crossing the road during event activity to stand on the opposite verge which is too narrow to stand on safely?**

Notes: Sussex police are concerned about safety if this continues.

Protester 1 noted legally they have a right to protest on public land, at any time and would therefore be reluctant to specify a designated area as this contradicts **freedom of assembly**. They would be willing to stand on an area as mutually agreed between the Police and the protestors on the day of the protest **as has been the case in 2023 and 2024**. Protester 2 noted a dynamic risk assessment was always carried out by Police on the day and protestors always adhere to their decisions as there are never any arrests, community protection warnings or Anti-social behavior orders issued. Protester 2 again, emphasized their collaborative relationship with the Police and highlighted their protest website promotes peaceful protesting, drawing attention to the peaceful protest rules. The first rule is do not shout abuse at scientologists. The Police have the powers of arrest, but not necessary and have not been used as the protests are peaceful.

LC referred to the Hodkin report of 2023, which said the protestors were 'offensive, rude and unpleasant.' It was noted the Church and the protestors had different interpretations of what is 'offensive'. Protesters stated that the 2023 event was live streamed and shows no evidence of the protestors being 'offensive.' **Offensive does not necessarily mean anti social or illegal and the fact that some people were offended by a protest does not suggest the protest activity should therefore be banned or restricted and is protected under freedom of speech. Similarly, as protestors we are offended by the Church's abusive practices and harassment of former members.**

#### **4 Would you consider submitting your intended protest timings and numbers of protest attendees in advance to Sussex Police to help them with event planning and resourcing?**

Notes: Protester 1 explained they have a very good collaborative relationship with the Police and liaise regularly with them before any protests take place. This includes regular emails and phone calls between participants with relevant information (number of protestors, timings of the protests) and site visits. He confirmed the Police are emailed a copy of the protestor plans prior to any event and they have a 'register interest' form on their website which captures relevant information which is shared with the Police to help with planning and event resourcing. This information also helps Protester 1 and colleagues prepare their own risk assessments ahead of events to be used in conjunction with the Police. He gave an example that in 2023 they applied to the Police for a road closure order at Saint Hill Road, **which was not agreed**, and through collaboration with the Police a rolling road closure was agreed.

**5 Are you open to coordination with Sussex police to continue to support a peaceful and lawful protest?**

Notes: Protester 1, further reiterated they had a good working relationship with the Police and were always willing to work with them to support peaceful and lawful protests, through continued dialogue and cooperation. He advised all information regarding protests were publicly available on their website and he would share this with officers for information. He noted in 2023, following complaints from the Church that the content of their signage was offensive, they reviewed them with the Police and the Police agreed the signage was acceptable. All material is always reviewed by the Police **before the event**. **Photographs of protestors with their signage have also been published in the national media, which would not have been the case if it was deemed likely to cause offence** The Police have never suggested the protesters are involved in any hate crime.

**6 Will your group commit to avoiding verbal, physical confrontations, with church attendees or staff in the future.**

Notes: Protester 1 agreed and explained they have a code of conduct in place to facilitate this, both prior to events and on the day of the protests. This is available publicly on their website for information. He highlighted the system in place on protest days, where members are briefed and know to report any issues or aggressive behavior to Protester 1, which can be escalated to the Police as necessary. This ensures for peaceful behavior and is in line with their code of conduct. On the conclusion of the protests, Protester 1 has a debrief with the Police to cover any issues and for both parties to feedback on the conduct of the protests. This reinforces the continual communication between both parties and provides the opportunity for any improvements to be made. He noted that protest signage was always publicly available and their commitment to a good working relationship with the Police.

**7 What steps are you willing to take to reduce disruption to residents, attendees, and traffic during the event?**

Notes: The focus is always on public safety, and traffic and event management. Protester 1 noted this was already evident in the fact that their protests are lawful and peaceful, there have never been any arrests, no hate crimes reported, there is continual engagement and discussions with Police. Finally, LC noted there have been no complaints made by members of the public or residents in the area about the protests.

8      **During the 2023 International event, it was alleged that protesters forced cameras and recording equipment into car windows of Church visitors. It is alleged visitors, including children, were filmed and photographed without their permission. During the 2024 event, Mid-Sussex Council observers witnessed a protester photographing inside cars entering the Church.**

**Would you agree not to film or photograph visitors to the Church in future?**

Protester 1 said he was not made aware of these issues on the day, and if he had been, he would have addressed these issues with the individuals and the Police. He noted people had a fundamental right to take photos in public places, however, they also have the right to privacy. The IAS event is an international fundraising event, it is not a religious event. He cited the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom issued a landmark ruling declaring the Chapel at the London Church of Scientology must be recognized as a place of religious worship under UK law. He noted the IAS event attracts both scientologists and those who are not. There is no breach of privacy as they are attending a fundraising event, not a religious event. Protestors do not attend any religious events for this reason. It was agreed that Protester 2 would provide the live stream footage of the event, which proves filming without consent did not take place. It was important to have the live streaming coverage as it prompts awareness, raises money for support and resources and safeguards the protestors from such allegations. The protestors always give a warning before they start filming at a protest **and carry signage to explain they are streaming on Youtube**. Protester 1 said protesters do approach visitors to the IAS only to offer leaflets offering help to visitors leave the Church, but do not force cameras into car windows to film children.

NH, noted a photographer was present on the Saturday of the 2024 event, with a single lens reflex camera. The protestors do not know who the photographer was, however, he was taking photos of the loudspeaker, and these were approved by the Police. It maybe this person was a member of the press. They were not known to the protest group.

**If no, what would you agree to? Not putting cameras in car windows, not recording those who appear under 18 years of age?**

Notes: They said there is no evidence of them filming children or others through car windows as they do not do it. **However, if the Police were to make any of the protestors aware somebody was engaging in illegal activity, steps would be taken to ensure it stops immediately.**



**9 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted during the Church of Scientology international event of the 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2024 that protesters displayed a doll/effigy of David Miscavige the current leader of the Church of Scientology. This caused visitors to the Church distress. It is noted you did remove the effigy on request of Sussex Police.**

**Are you willing to agree to stop this practice on Saint Hill Road in the future and to refrain from displaying banners, placards or posters containing obviously foul, abusive or inflammatory language?**

Notes: PT noted they had already discussed what was considered 'offensive' and 'non offensive' behavior and it was important to note the effigy was removed on the request of the Police, no further action was taken by the Police.

Protester 1 said it was important to consider the effigy and the signage. He stated there was no evidence suggesting the effigy was of David Miscavige. For context, the Scientology community believe the doll is referring to a section of the Scientology community called the Sea organization. He stated the protestors did not make the effigy it was purchased online and took it down at the request of the Police as they did not want to cause harm or distress. It was in place for only 20 minutes. Protester 3 believes the effigy is a moot point, if it wasn't the effigy, there would be something else that would be a problem for the Church, creating artificial confrontation.

**10 Those are our questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the 2023 and 2024 events that would help this council in considering the PSPO application?**

Notes: Protester 1, noted the key points had already been covered. In summary, individuals had a fundamental right to freedom of speech and the right to protest. Their consistent message is one of support and compassion to reach out to those who need help, through peaceful protests which is evidenced by them helping not only protestors but other residents and putting public safety first. The difficulties the protestors face are by the obstructive actions of the Scientology community.

Ends 1.10pm

## **D Summary and Next Steps**

Thank you for your contributions today.

It was agreed the notes would be circulated to the protestors as soon as possible. They would have 14 days to respond and provide an opportunity to submit any further evidence or submissions in writing for the Council to consider.

LC, clarified the next steps with the Cabinet report and review process. Including provisional timeframes with a view to a report being submitted to Cabinet in the summer. The Council will review all evidence of what activities have and have not taken place on site to date, will prepare a report to Cabinet with recommendations.

The report will include,

- (i) summary of evidence/reports,
- (ii) options assessment and
- (iii) EQIA, will be published online, hoping Cabinet will consider it and make a decision at meeting hopefully in June.

Thank you for attending.