

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

**2pm Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

Meeting Duration: 90 minutes maximum

Chair: Assistant Director - Communities MSDC (Lucy Corrie)

Officers: Paul Turner Head of Communities

Nick Hurley Community Safety Team Leader

Jane Barker Solicitor

Note Taker: Ellen Fisher – Member Services Officer

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

- Introduction of attendees

Attendee 1,

Attendee 2,

Attendee 3,

Attendee 4,

Attendee 5,

Attendee 6,

Attendee 7,

- 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

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

Mid-Sussex District Council is gathering information and views on the request 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.

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

No questions on process so far.

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

PT noted the consultation period had ended, however, statements could still be submitted to MDSC following this meeting.

### **Questions for the Church**

1 To start off with, we are interested to hear your views and thoughts of the 2023 international event and 2024 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. How many years of protesting has there been?***

Attendee 1 provided officers with an information pack for the purposes of the meeting.

Notes: Attendee 1 advised the International Association of Scientologists (IAS) was an annual 3 day event, which had resumed in 2023 following Covid. He noted the event had been the focus of protestors prior to Covid and there had been issues in previous years referencing 2012 as an example when protestors were obstructing Saint Hill Road. However, the Protester 1 campaign started in 2023, about 25 protestors attended the event in November 2023 and an article promoting the protest was published in the Guardian newspaper beforehand. The IAS event usually takes place in October to celebrate the anniversary of the IAS. It was important to note, in 2023 the IAS event took place in early November, after the clocks had gone back, impacting the visibility of guests to the event and road users. Prior to the event the Church were in discussions with the Police and WSCC Highways Authority and it was agreed protestors should not be situated immediately outside the main entrance to the Church. Attendee 1 advised it was agreed with the police that the designated area for the protestors to stand would be next to the Rockwood Park Wall and local residents agreed. The designated area along with crowd control barriers would provide a safe

protest area and would separate protestors from visitors and guests to the Church.

Attendee 1 suggested the Rockwood Park Wall area provided a good and safe solution as almost all traffic is from the Saint Hill Green direction.

Attendee 1 highlighted at the IAS 2024 event, prior to the event, Protester 1 had offered to agree with the Church an acceptable code of conduct. The Church with the agreement of the Police, submitted their proposed code of conduct via MSDC to the protestors, including to stand in the designated space, not to photograph or video visitors and 'not harass, or do anything to cause alarm or distress to visitors to the event'. However, Protester 1 did not engage or adhere to these suggestions as evidenced by the live stream video footage taken over the course of the event, including chanting, calling out to visitors by name and using abusive language.

**Attendee 2, showed extracts from the protestors' livestream video footage from 2023 and 2024 of the protest.**

At the 2024 event there were approximately 12 protestors, and the event resumed its October date taking place between 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October prior to the daylight saving hour change. The Church did not want visitors or guests being subjected to the same behaviour of the protestors in 2024 as they were in 2023 and, instead of using the Rugby Club car park as in earlier years, used their grounds at Fonthill for the overflow car park to mitigate any damage by the protestors and so that guests did not have to walk next to or through the protestors on the Friday night. Note Fonthill is a property to the north of Rockwood Park on Saint Hill Road.

The 2024 livestream footage evidenced unpleasant comments about money and an effigy of David Miscavige the leader of the Scientology Church. LC clarified officers had already seen the livestreams and the few minutes of footage at the meeting had been heavily edited from the protester You Tube channel.

Attendee 1 noted the residents at the meeting would provide their own account of their experience and impact of the protestors, some of whom had already submitted representations.

Attendee 3 said that she was 82 with an arthritic condition and noted the inconvenience and pain of having to park at the Fonthill field and walk the extra distance.

Attendee 4, arrived by taxi to the 2023 event and the disruption caused by the protestors, standing in the middle of the road, knocking on the taxi windows,

made her fearful for her safety. Attendee 4's husband and children arrived separately at the event and they too were upset and distressed by the negative comments towards their Church. Similarly in 2024, she had arranged to meet work colleagues by the entrance prior to attending the event, and again they were disrupted by protestors. Referring to her submitted representation from 2023, the language of the protestors was 'offensive, discriminatory and disturbing' not only for her but also for her children. Her children did not understand what was happening. It was distressing seeing the effigy whilst hearing 'burn down Saint Hill'. Children should not have to witness this.

LC asked for clarification on her testimony from 2023 asking what she meant exactly by "offensive, discriminatory and disturbing" language. Attendee 4 explained the trigger word for her was "abuse". She had to explain to her son what abuse meant.

Attendee 5, representing xxxxxx (mother) noted her mother who is 91 years old and attends and lives directly opposite the Church regards the area as a safe place reassured that she lives so close to her Church. The behaviour of the protestors makes her feel unsafe and intimidated. They have a Jewish background and the protests make them fearful. They should not have to feel that way when practising their religion. In 2024 Attendee 5 took her mother to the event by car, even though she usually walks there, to avoid the protestors, however, this added approximately 40 minutes to a very short journey, due to the disruption of the protestors. Attendee 5 noted she finds the behaviour of the protestors personally very disturbing towards her family. The protesters called out to Lizzy by name and so her name and identity were revealed on the Youtube. JB asked how protestors knew the xxxxx's. Attendee 5 explained that her father used to be a Church leader. She noted the family still do a lot of work for the Church and are therefore well known. Attendee 1 noted some of the protestors were also ex Scientologists.

Attendee 6, expanding on her written representation regarding the 2023 IAS event, noted she had to walk past the protestors with her 11 year old son and there was not much space between them. The protestors were shouting to Irina's son 'she is abusing you'. This was very upsetting and intimidating. In 2024, to avoid this happening again, they walked on the opposite side of the road to get to the entrance to the Church. The protestors were not as aggressive compared to 2023, however, it is debatable as to whether they filmed her son or not.

Attendee 1 emphasised the protestors went to a great deal of trouble to behave themselves at the 2024 event as there were MDSC officers present. This is evidenced by Protester 1's livestream announcement advising protestors there will be MSDC officers observing and Police present therefore 'it is important to

behave ourselves.'

**At the 2024 event, 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2024**, 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. Several attendees were walking in the road, in the dark to access Saint Hill Manor. This has given rise to concern for road and public safety.

***Are you willing to work with West Sussex County Council highways officers to identify alternative access routes for attendees that reduce foot traffic along Saint Hill Road for example by providing a pedestrian access closer to drop off points such as the Sports Club or Rugby Club?***

Notes: Attendee 7 and Attendee 1 confirmed there was already an alternative access route in place for attendees on foot coming from the temporary overflow car park at their Fonthill grounds, There was a one way system in place, especially for coaches transporting guests. The coaches enter at the Saint Hill entrance, drop attendees in the Church premises, leave via the Juhring field exit and then park at the East Grinstead Rugby Club. Attendee 1 noted Fonthill overflow carpark was only a temporary solution as it was in fact a cricket pitch. LC asked if there were other entrances that could be utilised and it was confirmed there were, however, a one way system was currently in operation. Attendee 1 noted, if there were alternative access routes, the protestors would inevitably go to these which would not solve the issue. He added the congestion caused by vehicles and people, was due to the security checks that have to be carried out on all those entering the Church, as a result of the protestors. The level of security could be reduced if the protestors were not present and therefore improve the flow of traffic.

PT asked would additional car parking spaces onsite help reduce foot traffic along Saint Hill Road. Attendee 7 confirmed it would, and they were looking to extend the car park in the church grounds, however, planning permission was required and the preparation for a planning permission application was underway. They currently have approximately 140/160 parking spaces, the additional car park would increase the parking spaces to 1,100 in total.

Attendee 1 drew officers attention to section 7 of his pack, handed to officers at the meeting, and took officers through the profiles of the protestors who attended the events. He confirmed they were all present at the IAS events, although not all the photos supplied evidence this. LC confirmed all the photos in section 7 were not all recording protesters at Saint Hill Road, they were also elsewhere. He referred to the group 'Anonymous' and how just prior to the 2023 event Protester 1 uploaded a video to YouTube, Twitter and Instagram mirroring the

'Anonymous' message with someone in a Guy Fawkes mask saying the words "Your IAS Event in November will be met with fierce opposition". Officers were shown footage of this.

2 Turning to traffic congestion and interaction between your visitors and protesters, would you be willing to adjust the layout or entry point(s) to the event to reduce traffic congestion and contact or friction between attendees, residents and protesters? Is the church willing to develop a drop off one way system on their land to allow all visitors to exit vehicles on their land, thus minimising interaction with any protestors on the road and improving road safety?

Notes: It was agreed that some of the above had already been covered previously and LC asked if there was anything further that could be done to reduce traffic congestion or improve road safety. Attendee 7 advised the only entrance was at the front of Saint Hill Road and the exit is via Juhring field and that all coach companies had been written to in advance of the 2024 event with instructions of where to drop visitors and park. They also offer a shuttle bus service from East Grinstead train station to the venue.

LC asked if there was an option to make alternative pedestrian access to venue, rather than via Saint Hill Road. Attendee 7 noted there was pedestrian access via the public highway, however, this was obstructed by protesters. She noted the Church had tried to get permission to use the grass verge to provide access to the Church, however, this was refused by WSCC. Attendee 7 stated that Church visitors have the right to access the Church by the front entrance. It was an insult to the dignity of their religion for Church goers to have to enter via the backdoor in order for protestors to have access to the front of the property.

3 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted the risks surrounding the event were around traffic and pedestrians on Saint Hill Road. **The road is a 60 MPH country lane without pavements or street lighting.** In the view of both Mid Sussex District Council and Sussex Police there is a risk of a road traffic accident or an injury to pedestrians during the event.

***Are you willing to discuss with West Sussex County Council and Sussex Police options for improving road safety such as i) providing temporary lighting inside your grounds that will light the road ii) improving car parking inside Saint Hill Manor to avoid traffic build up at the entrance and limiting visitors to the Church interacting with protesters. iii) allowing pedestrian access into Saint Hill Manor much closer to the sports club and rugby club car parks thus reducing the interaction of visitors with***

### ***protesters?***

Regarding temporary lighting, Attendee 1 noted the Church has provided lighting at past events, however, they will not provide it for future events as they do not want to encourage or draw attention to the protestors. He noted however, the entrance was concealed, and lighting would help, however they did not want to encourage protestors or upset guests as a consequence. LC reminded attendees of road and pedestrian safety being a priority for MSDC. He stated in previous years, a banner with the entrance directions had been in place, opposite the Saint Hill Manor entrance, however, this had been removed at the request of WSCC. They would be willing to have the banner in place to try to prevent confusion about where attendees should be going.

Improving car parking inside Saint Hill Manor has been covered at question 2.

Regarding allowing pedestrian access into Saint Hill Manor much closer to the sports club and rugby club car parks thus reducing the interaction of visitors with protestors, Attendee 1 confirmed this can be avoided if the protestors stood in the designated area next to the Rockwood park Wall.

A hedge had also been planted at the request of the Police, opposite the entrance to the Church to discourage use of the area. This conflicts with advice from WSCC regarding the hedge, however, the Church are happy to engage with WSCC to improve the ongoing issues. LC said WSCC are willing to discuss using alternative entrances, however, the Church does not think this would solve the road safety issues.

LC noted the temporary planters used by the Church in 2024. Attendee 1 confirmed there were no planters in place in 2024 only 2023. A discussion was held, however, planters were not installed in 2024 as WSCC would not give consent to impeding the public right of way outside the Church entrance.

Attendee 1 confirmed there were barriers however, in 2024, they were removed at the request of the Police. Barriers had been supplied in 2023 at the Rockwood Park Wall which had been supplied by MSDC, Outdoor Leisure Officer.

Attendee 1 suggested changing the 60pmh speed limit along Saint Hill Manor Road. LC advised discussions had been held with WSCC about this principle, and evidence required to implement a change meant this unlikely.

4 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted the church playing loud music during the arrival times for the event. At times this was excessively loud, which could cause a public nuisance and confusion on a heavily trafficked Saint Hill Road?

***Are you prepared to cease or relocate playing loud music (e.g., bagpipes) directly next to protest areas, or limit the time the music is played?***

Notes: Attendee 1 explained the bagpipe theme music was an integral part of the annual event, noting it was slightly intrusive but not invasive to residents and they had not received any complaints from residents. He did not think the music caused confusion or had an impact on the traffic or providing directions to guests and visitors. LC asked if the Police had asked the Church to reduce the level of the music. Attendee 7 said there was no record of this. The Church would be happy to negotiate with the Police the level of noise of the music but not to facilitate the protestors.

5 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted Church security staff were wearing black clothes without hi- viz jackets/vests and were difficult to see or identify in the dark. Whilst it is accepted security staff were not on the highway, the lack of hi- viz made them difficult to identify and see. Several visitors to the event were confused and asked protesters to direct them to parking because the protesters were wearing hi-viz.

***Will your staff or security teams commit to wearing hi- viz labeled “security” or “staff” to allow identification at future events?***

Notes: Attendee 1 advised this was duly noted and they would organize hi-viz for security staff for future events, adding high cost security would not be necessary if protestors were not present.

6 During the 2024 event, Mid-Sussex Council observers witnessed members of the Church filming Protesters. (Nick Hurley asking questions).

***Are you prepared to cease filming protesters in the future?***

Notes: Attendee 1 advised the security cameras at the Saint Hill Manor entrance were for the safety of visitors to the Church due to the protestors and issues with trespassing. The security cameras were only there to monitor any unusual activity. The Church share CCTV footage with the Police. They do not livestream any footage, the CCTV is solely for security purposes. For clarification, at the

IAS events, any other filming taking place by the Church is only filming and facing within the grounds of Saint Hill and the property. The issue was how the protestors film the IAS events. Some of the protestors are trying to make a living out of being anti-Scientology and they post the films on the internet.

7 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted that representatives of the Church ***used open Umbrellas to block protesters visibility. Are you willing to cease this practice in the future?***

Notes: Attendee 1 was surprised this was an issue being raised. LC noted the use of umbrellas had been raised as an issue and therefore needed to be addressed. Attendee 7 advised the umbrellas were used to protect the security of visitors and to keep famous/high profile guests safe. She advised the security company were instructed to use umbrellas to block protesters by the Church. Officers noted the more high profile guests would not enter by the Saint Hill Road entrance, Attendee 7 did agree but said that some of them have gone to the front in the past.

Attendee 1 stated the Church and Police had agreed the Rockwood Park Wall area would be the designated protest area in 2024, however, the protestors refused to use it and therefore the Church security had to employ umbrellas. Again, these would not have been used if the protestors were not present.

8 Mid Sussex District Council observers and Sussex Police noted representatives of the church deployed additional barriers around the protestors on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> & Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The additional barriers blocked the Public Highway. Sussex Police requested these were removed and the Church complied on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October.

***Please confirm similar barriers will not be deployed at future events.*** It should be noted that both Sussex Police and West Sussex County Council Highways Authority are content the Church place planters by the entrance of Saint Hill Manor for the duration of the event as they were in 2023.

Notes: Attendee 1 advised the public highway was blocked by the protestors and not the barriers and they would use barriers at future events on the public highway as they want to protect the public. Attendee 7 noted the protestors stood immediately at the entrance to the Church claiming it is part of the public highway, hence the installation of the planters in 2023. The Church works with

the Police and WSCC to make the area safe. However, the public highway is not just a problem for the IAS event, it is throughout the year at any event taking place. Attendee 2 gave the rugby club as an example and visitors using the Fonthill overflow car park and having to walk along the public highway to get to the rugby club. If protestors had their way, they would obstruct the entrance to the Church.

**9      *Noting that protesters have the right to protest, and will comply with the directions of the Police, where would you like the designated protest zone to be in future?***

Attendee 1 said that the Church is a supporter of free speech, however the safety of visitors, guests and protestors is paramount, hence why the Rockwood Park Wall is the best place for the designated protest zone. Noting, the protestors would have access to more visitors from this area. Attendee 2 advised it was confusing for visitors if protestors were immediately outside the venue.

10      You are required to notify the relevant health and safety enforcing authority (in this case Mid-Sussex District Council) of all upcoming events to be held within the grounds of Saint Hill Manor, **6 weeks prior** to the actual event occurring detailing the nature of the event and any activities carried out on site.

***In the interests of crowd safety and to comply with the requirements of your premises license will you confirm that you will share your event management plan with a traffic management plan to Mid Sussex District Council and Sussex Police not less than 6 weeks before any event. (Section 18 Licencing Act 2003)***

Notes: Attendee 1 and Attendee 7 advised they share the event management plan and traffic management plan with MSDC and the Police in advance of any event, every year. LC advised however, that MSDC do not know far enough in advance of the event to be able to put a robust management plan in place and advise partners such as blue light services. Attendee 1 explained that because the IAS is an international event, it is difficult to provide the exact date 6 weeks in advance, due to the Los Angeles filming schedule. He said they are provided with 3 date options which they provide to MSDC as soon as they have them. The Church prepare for the event to be held on any of the 3 dates provided. LC highlighted the difficulty of this on public services and resources to provide the appropriate safety measures. Attendee 7 agreed to send earlier notification of

the event management and road traffic management plans if she was able. The Church would also ask organisers for earlier notification of the event dates.

**11     *Are there any further/additional steps you could take to reduce disruption, improve safety during the event?***

Notes: Attendee 1 advised they gave this great consideration in 2024 and also every year. Belatedly they explored the idea of creating a safe space for visitors to the entrance, for example, a tunnel from the Rugby Club entrance to the main entrance. However, this would be a lot of trouble and expense for the Church when there are only a small number of protestors. They discussed re- installation of the planters as a good alternative.

**12     *What steps are you willing to take to reduce friction and interaction between your visitors, residents and those protesting? (Could give some prompts? For example, leaflets or advance notice for residents?)***

(open-ended question to finish on)

Notes: Attendee 1 stated the protestors wanted to create friction and aggravation. Protester 1 has made protesting his career and part of this was to create interest and spectacle. The Church has tried to engage with Protester 1 but this has not been constructive. He noted the protestors initiated the aggravation.

**13     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: Attendee 7 reiterated that despite the violations in 2024 they were far less than in 2023, however, to note the protestors had stated they had to be on their best behaviour as they were being observed by MSDC officers. She noted her son works on security at one of the Church's buildings, Walsh Manor and he had been attacked by trespasses. The chants used by the trespasses were identical to those used by Protester 1. Attendee 1 advised that some of their members have been murdered. There was a murder in Australia on the steps of one of the churches.

Attendee 1 reiterated the IAS event was the most important event for the Church and Scientology worldwide. The behaviour of the protestors should not have to be tolerated and as with any recognised religion it was very upsetting. The Church had gone out of their way to allow the protestors to safely carry out the

protests. LC asked if there were any other events the protestors attend, for example, the Easter Egg event. This was a community event rather than a Scientology event. Attendee 1 advised, Protester 1 had only been an active protestor for 2 years, however has made it known he would attend other future events. The Church are concerned the protesting will escalate.

Ends 3.57pm

## **D Summary and Next Steps**

Thank you for your contributions today. Any further submissions to be submitted by 12<sup>th</sup> May.

The notes Ellen has taken will be shared and you will be given an opportunity to submit any further evidence or submissions in writing which you would like the Council to consider.

Would 14 days from receipt of the notes be a reasonable response time?

Clarify what happens next with the Cabinet report and review process. Including provisional timeframes.

Keep this at a fairly high level, but explain in broad terms how this will work - 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 before the Summer holidays

Thank you for attending