

January 2015

B&NES Consultation on STREET PERFORMERS/BUSKERS

Dear Friends,

You may be aware that last summer was a very difficult time for us because of the disruption caused by street performers outside the Abbey.

This has been an escalating problem over the last few years brought to a head by the widespread and indiscriminate use of powerful and portable amplifiers.

It's important that we understand that from Spring to Autumn every year the Abbey, Abbey Offices, and our neighbours are subjected to the same musicians, often playing the same music, at the same volume every day. This has caused serious problems for the hundreds of thousands who seek a space for quiet reflection in the Abbey, those who rehearse for concerts, choir rehearsals, Melody Makers rehearsals, staff trying to do their day-to-day work without constant music, services of worship - in fact, the 7-day per week ministry of this special place.

The Abbey has tried its hardest to work with street musicians. I want to place on record that some musicians have been supportive and done their best to work with us at creating a workable timetable and noise volumes. Sadly, a small number of street musicians have not been so cooperative and provoked the tension last summer.

B&NES Council officers have been understanding throughout but the current noise abatement legislation has, until recently, made it almost impossible to control performers.

New legislation has been passed which may help to address the problem - The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. This enables the Council to create a Public Space Protection Order and involves:

- Identifying the area within which they will ban amplification altogether. This includes Kingston Parade, Abbey Churchyard and Abbey Green.
- Embarking on a 12 week consultation period to give people a chance to make their views known. **The period started on 5th January and ends on 29th March.**
- After that the Full Council will decide whether or not to go ahead with the order or not. As there is an election in May, we have been told that this will not happen until the end of May.

Where do we the Abbey stand on this?

We feel very strongly indeed that the uncontrolled use of amplification affects not only the ministry of the Abbey, but also the quality of life of those who live and work around it.



Since the consultation is about banning the use of amplifiers, we encourage you to respond to the Council on this matter.

We would therefore encourage you to make your views known using the on-line questionnaire. Go to <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/latestnews/consultation-amplification-street-entertainment> . (Note that if you press the 'next page' button at the bottom of the questionnaire you will submit your response whether or not you have finished it. THERE IS NO 'NEXT PAGE'! Only one submission is possible from one e mail address.)

You may wish to consider writing about the following in your response;

- The area identified by the Council for the ban on amplifiers excludes the North and East area of the Abbey. Buskers excluded from Kingston Parade and Abbey Churchyard could relocate there and cause more disruption to services as it is nearer to the East End;
- The order only excludes amplified music. There are plenty of examples where non-amplified music- operatic voices, drums, saxophones, xylophones - have disrupted Abbey services.

There is a better alternative

We feel strongly that the Council would have served the city better by making the area around the Abbey and Roman Baths a place where visitors would not normally be subject to any unlicensed street performances. It is already bursting with people at the busiest times of year and street performing ought to be encouraged in the streets away from the city centre. This would help disperse large crowds and increase the footfall where the city would like to encourage a stronger commercial life. The Abbey, the Baths and the area around would then be better enjoyed by visitors and all who use it by preserving a calmer environment appropriate to this small, sacred and ancient space. We have put this proposal to the Council but they have asked us to include this through the consultation process.

- You may think that our proposal to restrict all performances around the Abbey to protect the World Heritage Site environs a more positive way to end the disruption and upset currently being caused. If you do, consider saying you would support such an approach in the consultation response.

Please consider sharing this information with your neighbours and colleagues and indeed with anyone who cares about this wonderful and precious city. Bath belongs to its residents and workers and this is about our city centre. With over 750,000 people visiting, worshipping and concert-going there during 2014, the Abbey makes a huge contribution to the life of this city. We are working to ensure that Bath continues to be a wonderful place in which to live, work and stay with the Abbey at its heart. We would appreciate your support.

Edward Mason
Rector

