

Cllr Pat Marsh

Leader of the Opposition, Harrogate Borough Council



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Liberal Democrats
14 Victoria Avenue
Harrogate, HG1 1ED

Ms Dee Ford

Managing Director
Bauer Media Group UK
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Letter sent electronically

Tuesday 7th July 2020

Dear Ms Ford,

I am writing to express concern on behalf of many across the Harrogate district following Bauer Media's decision to merge Stray FM into a 'GREATEST HITS RADIO' conglomeration, effectively ending the our community's radio service as we know it.

'Proper local radio' – as the Stray FM tagline goes – is a much valued community service. For decades, Stray FM has provided truly local news when it is needed most, especially during severe weather conditions; it has been at all the major community events like the Knaresborough Bed Race and Harrogate Christmas Lights switch-on; and it has done much to support the community, such as promoting local charity fundraising pushes. This is the service I am concerned will no longer be available as part of a much larger conglomeration.

Local Liberal Democrats have set up a petition which has received over 3,000 signatures, asking that Bauer Media reverse its decision to merge Stray FM into this much larger GREATEST HITS RADIO service and continue to offer a truly local service. This is a considerable display of community anguish at Bauer Media's decision, especially at this time when so much else is going on.

Well over a hundred residents from Harrogate, Knaresborough, and right across the area Stray FM serves have shared their stories about what Stray FM means to them. I urge you to take some time to read them, so you can take their views into account when you decide on the next steps.

I do, however, recognise the intense pressure that Bauer Media must be facing in respect to the economic fallout resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This must be having a considerable impact on revenue resulting from decreased advertising on your stations.

Cont.

It is disappointing then that, with these intense financial pressures being seen on local radio – accompanied by the community’s strong support for local radio – the Government has still failed to offer any significant support package for the industry. I’m urging Harrogate & Knaresborough’s Member of Parliament, Andrew Jones, to listen to residents, seek this financial aid, and fight for government subsidy for independent, local journalism to enable this essential service to survive. I am therefore copying him into this correspondence.

Please could you offer reassurances as to the following questions:

- Would the news retain the same level of locality to the Harrogate district? If not, could you please clarify where the news will be ‘local’ to?
- Would the station still attend major community events, such as the Knaresborough Bed Race and Harrogate Christmas Lights switch-on?
- Would GREATEST HITS RADIO continue to support Harrogate community’s fundraising and recognise local achievement?

I am, however, urging Bauer Media to reconsider its decision and explore alternative arrangements which recognise the community asset that Stray FM is in its current form, providing ‘proper local radio’ to the area it has so excellently served the past several decades.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Pat Marsh
Leader of the Opposition,
Harrogate Borough Council

C.C. Andrew Jones MP

My husband and I retired to France, but unfortunately he died while we were over there. Obviously, I felt lost and lonely. I was considering coming back to Harrogate and started listing to Stray FM online. Hearing the good music and local news began to make me feel nostalgic and gave me a sense of belonging. I'm back in Harrogate now, and I still listen to Stray FM every day while I go about my daily routine. (I'm listening to it now). I would sorely miss Stray FM if it was taken away from us.

Pauline, Harrogate

I enjoy the community involvement. The presenters live in this area and get really involved in all things local. Just yesterday, Will Smith ran 7 miles with a Harrogate teenager who was raising money for MIND, the mental health charity. That is what local radio is all about.

Elisabeth, Harrogate

I have enjoyed listening to them when they have come to turn on the Christmas Lights.

Di, Wetherby

It means I always know what's going on in the local area and when I am at work we always have it for the music.

Elaine, Wetherby

I am housebound and stray fm keeps me ip to date with whats happening in my local areas . I find the facebook page most useful to me.

Dorothy, Harrogate

Stray FM is a vital link to our community giving us up to date news and information about what is happening locally. It is also plays a very important part in promoting and supporting local charities and helplines.

Christine, Harrogate

A friendly, community radio station which gets involved with its local community to bring everyone together

Sj, Harrogate

Stray FM is the only radio station I listen to and I have it on all the time during the day when I am at home. I love the fact that it is local and it talks about what you know about. I even felt put out when it extended to Skipton and Ilkley. The music is great, I love the silly competitions, and I just all round love it. If I wanted to listen to a national radio station I would do so as there are plenty to chose from, but I don't want to. Why on earth do Bauer think we want another one of those. They don't they just want to save costs. Well they won't have me as an audience.

Sara, Harrogate

Stray FM is a source of local pride. It communicates news and information about Harrogate District and supports local causes and organisations. The news is up-to-date and enhances everyday life for those in and around Harrogate.

Jane, Harrogate

When i travel to work i always have Stray FM on as it has great music and keeps me up to date with events and travel news.

Sandra, Ripon

Stray FM is brilliant for Harrogate and the local community.

Nicholas, Harrogate

I listen to stray fm every day I never even think about listening to anything else. They make you laugh and cry, they make you feel like you know them personally all the presenters equally. If they go I certainly will not listen anymore.

Helen, Knaresborough

We are very lucky to have a local radio station which focuses on people in the area. I will be devastated if we lose that.

Michelle, Harrogate

I did quite a lot of advertising with stray for a few years and got to know some of the presenters personally. Love that local feel that meeting them gives you.

Tom, Harrogate

Stray FM are everything a local radio station should be; along with local travel and weather they raise awareness of stories and fundraising activities in the local community, speak to local people on air, broadcast from a range of locations and events, and always bring a smile to the face with a positive, upbeat take on life.

Alice, Harrogate

Absolutely love stray FM listen to it everyday on my way to work. With working around Harrogate it's good to know the What roads are closed where road work s are where accidents have happened listening to the news weather music.The presenter s Nick Hancock and the rest rest of them they all do a fantastic job and bring a smile to my face with there jokes their comments and even Nicks singalong count down to Christmas going to be a very sad day will miss it terribly.

Susan, Starbeck

Stray FM have supported Soroptimist International of Harrogate & District in its many community and charitable events over the years. They were one of the main organisations that leapt into support the launch of the Christmas Lights and Christmas Market appeal many years ago. They are our community.

Pat, Harrogate

They are an important part of our local identity.

Andrew, Harrogate

Listening to Stray FM makes me feel connected to the area, and more willing to contribute to whatever is going on, whether with time, money or energy. It's the first radio station we switch on when flying back into the airport, because it makes us feel at home. Stray FM creates part of our identity as an independent Historic spa town. Please don't strip it away from us. How will we know what is going on anymore?

Carolyn, Harrogate

A class act local radio at its best x

Steph, Greater Ouseburn

I have always enjoyed the scope and quality of the service. I like to use it when I am traveling away from home. It greets me like an old friend as I get near to Harrogate.

Sue, Wixley

Stray FM are part of our annual calendar. Summer songs for the school holidays, school closure notices at Christmas, local heroes within the community throughout the year and advertisements to remind us of businesses that need support in our town during song breaks. Presenters that are part of our community and a station that is just a phone call away and who can react to breaking news. When I appeared on National TV, it was Stray who contacted me and got the town behind me, it was Stray who kept in touch with me and it was Stray who followed up long after the programme aired. They did this because they are part of our town, represent our people and they care that we are represented, celebrated and berated when needs be. To lose this vital link in our community will take away our regions identity and investment. Keep it, cherish it, support it and allow it to grow. Sarah and her team strive to stir the businesses to invest, the public to contribute and the listeners to enjoy all on offer. Long may Stray FM reign.

Ruth, Harrogate

Unique to harrogate and a tonic as I go about my work will not be the same without it.

Jayne, Harrogate

I first listened to Stray FM breastfeeding through the night 20 years ago, always great choice of music and my go to source of local news and events. Love Nick Hancock's breakfast show. Stray FM has really proved it's worth during the Covid 19 pandemic, with information, support and publicity for local support organisations. We need a local station based on the needs of Knaresborough and Harrogate.

June, Knaresborough

Means a lot to our family if we lose stray FM radio.

Mary, Wetherby

Music might be cheesy but harrogate and area would be worse off without Stray, the community spirit is great and WE NEED THAT NOW MORE THAN EVER. sorry for shouting!

Janet, Harrogate

I like that I can go in my car put stray fm on, and it's constantly letting me know about the traffic, it's so useful. I like that the presenters aren't stuck up, not fake, just normal people which I think Harrogate appeals to. I really don't see why it has to go. Stray fm has helped the community so much, it'll be a massive loss. And listening to this new radio station that doesn't interest most people. May as well put a CD on. Good look at fm, I hope you stay.

Jennifer, Harrogate

I listen to Stray FM everyday, the local news and travel updates are great. Stray FM has a vital role in the community sector. I remember way back when it first started, one year it snowed and snowed, traffic couldn't move on any roads, stray stayed on air all night, giving updates and helping trapped motorists to be given help. We lived on the A61 on the south side of Harrogate and my lads, who were mid teens, were inspired by Stray FM's efforts to go out and take warm drinks to trapped motorists. I will really miss Stray FM if it changes.

Chris, Harrogate

Whilst Caring for my Wife and as I Volunteer with Handicapped people locally Stray fm makes each day spin along nicely.

Richard, Harrogate

When I was new to the area, Stray FM was hugely helpful in getting me to know my new community. Now I feel involved and up to date about my own local area. It isn't always about focusing on broad swaths of the country. Stray FM reflects our local issues and events.

Pamela, Starbeck

Stray FM is a community based radio station, & provides local news & travel. A vital service for rural communities in the area. It would be a travesty if the station lost it's local identity.

Adrian, Starbeck

Stray FM is both entertaining and informative, I listen first thing every morning to get the very latest up to the minute news of both weather and Road conditions. Parents are informed very early on snowy mornings of school closures. The team are also very active in the community. I'm not sure I would listen to a station that did any less than this amazing format.

Sue, Starbeck

You see.. stray fm is more than a radio station.. stray fm is the harrogate craven and warfdale community in a radio station.. stray fm is what makes yorkshire, Yorkshire.. stray fm is what keeps my happy and has had a positive impact on my mental health.. it's what keeps me updated in the world.. it gives me my favourite 70s 80s 90s 00s songs, as well as keeping me up to date with the modern stuff.. stray fm is love.. stray fm is life..

Oliver, Bramhope

I look to Stray FM to keep me in touch with local news. We only have a weekly paper in Harrogate so the radio is vital.

Morag, Harrogate

In these uncertain times stray means more to the community than ever, I would be extremely upset if we was to lose stray at this important time in all our lives, we're all in this together.

Martine, Harrogate

Very local travel news is important to arrival for hospital appointments for my wife's cancer treatment. Something a national broadcaster can't do.

Granville, Hampsthwaite

I have listened to Stray FM from the beginning almost everyday it is on in my car from start up. It gives me up to date music, local events, travel, and supports the local community and businesses. Will we get that personal touch from Bauer Media? NO. All we will get is 70s 80s 90s music we can get on numerous other stations NOT WHAT WE WANT.

Derek, Ripon

Our family grew up listening to the school snow closures list every year it was so helpful and my kids loved waiting to hear their school called out! Stray FM have supported and been present at many community events - the race for life, Stray bonfire and Knaresborough bed race to name a few! To lose Stray FM would be a devastating blow to our community. We don't just listen to the station for music, we listen for the local news and it helps the isolated keep in touch with their community! I won't be listening to a golden oldie radio station. When my best friend emigrated to Australia 5 years ago, Stray FM read out a dedication and played a song especially for her!

Eleanor, Harrogate

Stray FM is the first thing I have on in the morning and through the day. It has been supporting the local community with stories and local news.

Nigel, Harrogate

Stray FM is the heart of Harrogate. They bring the community together and make us smile. Christmas definitely won't be the same without "sleeps for Santa!"

Laura, Harrogate

I like being able to access local news with just one touch of a finger. So easy.

Shiela, Harrogate

It was my parents 57th wedding anniversary on 27th April. As my dad's blind, at high risk and likes to be independent he got in touch with stray fm. They made his day and he was really humbled to get so much love from everyone, even from Ripon, Wisconsin USA.

This was above and beyond what we had thought would happen. Many thanks to a great local radio station xx

Dawn, Markington

The value of local radio to the community really comes to life when we look at travel reports and incidents. The community uses Stray as a way to get the latest incidents out to everyone saving everyone (and the police and ambulances) time and effort to manage these situations. Everything from loose wild stock to broken down vehicles and accidents sounds so simply but is hugely helpful when you're getting kids to school, going to the airport or commuting to work.

The other focus on local issues and businesses allows the community to understand the issues in their areas, and rallies the community to help. Everything from local businesses needing support, COVID community responses, events across the region - this connects the community in a way papers or email simply don't.

Austin, Harrogate

Stray FM keeps me informed about local news, traffic news, contribution to local events & charities and supports Harrogate Theatre especially at Christmas time when there is the annual pantomime. They always get involved in community projects and generally awareness about local issues. They provide a platform for members of the local community to express their non partisan views. The team of presenters is professional & excellent. In conclusion I would add that in my opinion about is a wonderful asset for Harrogate & district.

Mike, Harrogate

I look forward to local news and details of problems on the roads and road closures. very good advertising. Very friendly presenters. everything you wish from local radio.

Janet, Harrogate

Great station can relate to broadcasters who attend and support local events. Up to date news and traffic information very valuable when travelling to avoid jams. Great app, discounts to events and services.

Pat, Hampsthwaite

I love Stray FM. I have a Guesthouse in Harrogate so it keeps me up to date with all the local news and what is happening in Harrogate. I have it on in the kitchen when I am cooking breakfasts. My guests are most amused when they hear me singling along.....

Badly!

Sandra, Harrogate

There is something very comforting, that is difficult to articulate, about listening to a 'home' radio station, rather than national. Will be a big loss to Harrogate and the community, at a time when we need it the most.

Nicole, Harrogate

I worked for the town pastors, at 3am on Sunday morning when you are providing shelter and sustenance for the waifs and strays on the streets of Harrogate Stray FM gave us something to bop along with and helped keep us sane.

Rebecca, Harrogate

I feel so sad about this decision. I think Stray FM offers the listeners excellent local knowledge with the most enthusiastically brilliant Presenters, covering community events and businesses with such gusto. The spirit of Harrogate and Craven will sadly be lost once you have regional/national shows taking place. It will just become another soulless station.

Juliet, Green Hammerton

I listen to Stray FM every day at home and at work. It gives you all the local news and plays a great variety of music.

Yvonne, Knaresborough

Stray FM has helped us when we need local news and traffic information. The DJ's are local and talk about local things all the time. They helped us a few years ago when we were stuck on the A658 in snow, just kept our spirits up. We need local radio to be local.

Peter, Coneythorpe

It plays a great variety of music, lots of great new hits alongside some of the best classics of all time! the presenters are local, really passionate about the community they serve and are funny and have a good connection with the listener. The news service is very good with local stories, traffic news and weather delivered to a high quality standard. It would be devastating to lose stray fm, as the community aspect will not be there if it is gone.

Anthony, Royston

Local news for local people keeps you in contact with everything local.

Bill, Harrogate

Always a pleasure to tune. Music is great, presenters are knowledgeable and friendly. Local news, weather and traffic are invaluable

Margaret, Earby

Stray FM has always supported local charities and organisations, providing them with a platform to educate and enable people to engage with what is happening in their local area.

Carol, Staveley

Always tune in to Stray FM for local news, weather, travel news etc. Stray FM is a very important radio station for me and lots of local people.

Val, Whixley

I am partially sighted and to me stray FM is a lifeline I put it on in the morning when I get up the contents is so good I feel as if it's a friend and I will be so disappointed to lose it.

Anne, Knaresborough

Can I just say that you closing down is a huge huge mistake. My son who has cerebral palsy and autism loves stray fm so so much. It's part of his routine that he listens to you in his bedroom, in the car and on my phone. He is obsessed with your station he finds it very funny especially with nick Hancock. Why oh why are you doing this???? Its outrageous! How do I tell my son this? Your the only station I listen too, your the only local radio who is unique, entertaining, vibrant and current. I moved from wales 2 years ago and never ever listened to a local radio station every day like yours. Please reconsider! What about the presenters? Are they lose their jobs?! Moving to national station doesnt make the smartest move, nothing of this will be like stray fm.

Francesca, Steeton

Was a regular advertiser & sponsor of many Stray events - can't see me doing that for the generic non-local radio.

Bob, Harrogate

I have lived in Harrogate all my life and I listen to stray fm everyday, the local news,travel and charity support is the best I have heard anywhere. It would be a great loss to Harrogate as a district if it was to stop broadcasting.

Jessica, Harrogate

Good all round Information for local people.

Jean, Harrogate

As a new resident to the area it has helped me find out about the locality.

Janet, Harrogate

I've been listening to Stray FM since the start but will now be listening to BBC2 if this goes ahead.

David, Knaresborough

Stray fm for me has been the best local radio station I have listened to (I've lived in 3 other districts as an adult). It has the perfect blend of local news and music. I can't see how it can be improved.

Helen, Harrogate

I enjoy it because it's local & you feel as if you know them all, Nick Hancock is great & full of fun.

Allyson, Knaresborough

Stray fm helps my mum and dad get to work safely and on time as they know what the roads are like and I also can go to events that I might not have know about.

Lilly, Knaresborough

I have listened to Stray fm in the car and in the home. The presenters are friendly and feel like family. Stray fm brings the community together and helps everybody from fundraising to helping the loneliest by playing in their homes. I love Stray fm and now my own boys also listen 15 years later. I love them and without Stray Fm our lives will be less enriched. Please keep Stray Fm it would mean so much now in a time of uncertainty.

The Martin Family, Knaresborough

Stray FM gets people involved in their community through interviews, news, competitions and by attending and reporting local events. The presenters are extremely friendly and knowledgable about the community plus the music is excellent a great mix. To lose this would be dreadful for the Harrogate area.

Christine, Harrogate

My mother has cancer, stray fm visited her in hospital whilst she was having chemo. I'd won a Mother's Day competition, they were expecting to deliver to her house, but they went the extra miles to sort out going to the hospital. The McMillan centre still talk about it and it really made my mums day.

Michala, Knaresborough

It's the best radio station in the Yorkshire area.

Donna, Skipton

Had my first daughter in July 1994 the same month Stray fm started and have been listening ever since, very important part of our community. Don't want it to end.

Tracey, Harrogate

Stray fm provides us with local news and traffic. I can't see how a wider radio station to cover most of North Yorkshire can provide us with that local news and traffic when we need it. Stray fm is spot on why change? Oh that's right, money.

Paul, Harrogate

They were amazing when my friend's father went missing. They mentioned it all the time and the news reader and DJ's were brilliant.

Lisa, Newton-on-Ouse

Love the local news traffic news and the music I have listened to stray fm right from when it started the presenters are great.

Mel, Summerbridge

I absolutely love Stray fm, I listen to it every day and I have done for as long as I can remember! It has been a godsend through good and bad times, especially through the COVID lockdown. So many of us rely so much on Stray fm for local news, events entertainment and great music. Keep Stray fm as it is PLEASE.

Margaret, Harrogate

I really value the local news and traffic reports - Stray FM have saved me so many hours during my daily commute from Otley to Harrogate.

Jane, Otley

I have my radio on low during the night. I moved from Radio 2 when they brought in Chris Evans and Vanessa Feltz. I like that there are DJs during the night.

Lynne, Harrogate

Stray FM is the heart of Harrogate to loose Stray FM wouldn't be the same for Harrogate.

Victoria, Harrogate

It's all I listen to whenever in the car or at home. Love listening to what's going on locally in the local news and information about local events. It feels like family, the presenters share their lives with you, great to hear familiar voices every day. Love the amazing special discount vouchers they offer. They do some great charity events and raise awareness to those charities needing people's help. And I love the music, they play a little bit of everything to suit all ages.

Carol, Silsden

I like to listen to stray FM when I'm driving to work as it updates me on local news and traffic. And the play reasonable music. Just good to find out what's happening in our area.

Fiona, Harrogate

The Stray FM team are an integral part of the local community. They play a great mix of songs and strongly support local initiatives. If I wanted to listen to a greatest hits radio station I would search one out. E.g. at Christmas I often tune in to Countdown to Christmas and similar stations when present wrapping.

Louise, Harrogate

Such same to lose local community radio station. I personally use it daily for travel up to date events in my area. Now especially as covid is still prevalent I want to use local company's and support our town. Stray fm light up my day!!

Val, Harrogate

Local radio for local people. Supporting local businesses, supporting local causes & supporting the local community. That will be lost with a national radio station that pays lip service to the Stray FM area & concentrates on profit rather serving the local community.

Katherine, Harrogate

It feels party of the community, it is the community hub really! You hear all the local news, weather, events and about the staff. It's just a great service and would be extremely sad to see it go.

Becky, Harrogate

Absolutely essential for ALL things local. Supporting local schools, charities and businesses. An ESSENTIAL service.

Katrina, Knaresborough

I work in the Community for HDFT, driving between patients, as you can imagine, driving in the area can be a challenge, Stray FM keep me up to date with all road closures, I can then get to ly patients in a timely manor, Stay also give me much needed restbite between patients, with all their antics, I know about Harry the singer spaniel, and Nicks lovely kids, they are part of our family life, to take this away from the Community would be a travesty.

Amanda, Harrogate

Pre lock down, when I worked as a volunteer in a local St Michael's Hospice charity shop, the music played, the presenters and the amount of local news broadcast, kept us volunteers informed and uplifted. We would so miss our cheery local station. The present concern about mental health should incorporate our local stations as a vital way of keeping all those isolated, lonely people in touch with the world outside their door.

Cathy, Harrogate

My friend's son recently died in St Martin's Hospice. Stray FM was a wonderful supporter of charities like this one. They help to organise the Bonfire on the Stray every year which is an amazing event rain or shine and every year for the past 18 I have had them say Happy Birthday to my kids on their special day. There is SOOOOO much that they contribute to the region and they need protecting from takeover!!

Deborah, Knaresborough

I work at the hospital with stroke and dementia patients. We have stray fm on the radio. it helps orientate people to where they are and what's going on in the local area. The local traffic reports and new are fab. Traffic reports by somebody who knows the local area are invaluable. If stray fm gets switched to something else we won't be listening any more.

Casey, Harrogate

From a business perspective and personal it's priceless. It keeps the community linked , supports all local businesses. It's a real shame to lose it.

Louise, Thornthwaite

Stray fm have always provided good informative local news, Events, charity & things like weather, traffic disruptions, school news etc. Basically things we need to know on a day to day basis. Good friendly presenters. Will definitely miss it if it goes!

Karen, Harrogate

The presenters give a fresh perspective to our area in the way that they know the towns and the people that listen to them. It so that personal touch that is needed on a local station if you want the local businesses to thrive. I have also had good banter with Nick via twitter and I know that this wouldn't be available if the station was consolidated into a more faceless one. The personal touch is what local radio is all about and anything replacing this local station will pale in comparison and I know you will definitely lose listeners. This station is used by all ages but I can see that it is an important platform to help older generations in knowing what is happening in their community. Please don't kill off this station as I need it and who will I bother when it's time to ask Nick to wish me a Happy Birthday on air?

Nicholas, Harrogate

It is very important that stray fm remains. It gives people in the community a sense of belonging and that is vital to our wellbeing, especially in difficult times. We want a local radio station that is run by local people, for local people. It will be very sad for everyone if we lose this wonderful radio station.

Nichola, Harrogate

Stray FM is a great radio station for the Harrogate area which it would be to sad if it went and massive impact on Harrogate so it should be saved because it tells you everything that goes on in the Harrogate area like local news, events and among other things aswell

Louis, Harrogate

Stray FM provides me with up the date local news and traffic delays for my journey to work. That's important to me. Nick Hancock on his early morning show is a good guy. Please try and save the station.

Simon, Harrogate

I listen to Stray FM every day they always keep you updated with traffic problems regular updates on news and do so many good things within our community. I also was lucky enough to get free tickets food, and drink when we turned up at the Cinema for a girls afternoon. They would be a huge loss to our community.

Anita, Knaresborough