

IAN CLAUGHTON & LESLEY CLAUGHTON

PERFECTED SENTENCING REMARKS

1. Ian Claughton, in 2024 you were deeply involved in growing cannabis at your home and selling it (most likely by the kilogram) to drug dealers so that it ended up on the streets. I am sure this was your business and in which you played a leading role. You eventually pleaded guilty in Summer 2025 to being concerned in the production of a controlled drugs (in other words, growing cannabis) and possessing cannabis with intent to supply it. Lesley Claughton, you were convicted by the jury of these offences and you were both convicted of possession of criminal property (money laundering) which represented the proceeds of selling cannabis.
2. When police raided your homes in May 2024 you Ian Claughton had two secret rooms in your own house given over the growing cannabis and two secret rooms plus two shipping containers in the next door property that were each given over the growing a total of 59 cannabis plants. There was also a significant quantity of harvested cannabis that was ready for sale.
3. There were text message conversations from at least December 2022 which indicate that you, Lesley Claughton, were well aware of cannabis being grown in these properties. In February 2024 you recorded a conversation with Ian Claughton which indicates that you knew what was going, and the money it generated. It is also the case that you, Ian Claughton, expressed satisfaction for the quality of the job you were doing and admitted you took the harvested cannabis to Leeds and were expecting to make around £40,000 from growing and selling cannabis for the benefit of you both.
4. It is therefore no surprise that the police found a large quantity of cash hidden in your sofa, Lesley Claughton, which the jury were sure was derived from selling drugs.

5. The drug business was not confined to cannabis. Ian Claughton, you pleaded guilty to possessing amphetamine with intent to supply it. The amphetamine was hidden in Lesley Claughton's fridge. The messages recovered suggest you had a single customer for that amphetamine and you were selling him quantities over time depending on what he could afford. There may only have been one customer but it is nevertheless selling directly to the user.
6. The police came to your houses – and found what I have described – because in August 2023 you, Ian Claughton, ordered some realistic imitation firearms from China and used Lesley Claughton's eBay account to do so. They were intercepted by Border Force and were never delivered to 74 Brierley Road. The significance of this transaction however is in what it led the police to discover at the house when they executed search warrants in May 2024.
7. You, Ian Claughton, had rigged up an improvised explosive device connected to a tripwire, you had fashioned an apparently working flame thrower out of a fire extinguisher which was to hand in your workshop, and you had two guns which looked like sawn-off shotguns (even though they were air weapons) and which were found loaded and ready to fire rubber-steel projectiles.
8. I am sure all of these items were collected by you or made by you in order to protect your cannabis growing operation. This is surely the case because you posted a notice outside number 70 explaining that the property was protected by methods including a flame thrower. It was clearly the cannabis that needed protecting, not least from other dealers who you realised might want to steal it. A video recovered from your phone showed you testing a similar contraption in 2021. I am sure what was found in 2024 was equally a viable and working flame thrower that you would have used if the need arose to protect what you were growing.
9. I am equally sure that the guns would have been used to confront any potential robber or thief. It is not so much their muzzle velocity that was important as their appearance. Any potential thief confronted by you holding one of these weapons

would undoubtedly have believed it was a real sawn-off shot gun and would be terrified they would be shot. I am sure that was the whole purpose of acquiring them.

10. Ian Claughton, whilst you pleaded guilty to some of the offences you had a trial on the weapons and explosives charges and the count of money laundering. The jury saw through the lies you told about why you acquired each gun, about who possessed the flame thrower (as I am sure it is properly described), about why you rigged up the explosive device, and where the money came from that was found in Lesley Claughton's sofa. I am sure that all of your intentions were thoroughly criminal in nature.
11. I am required to follow the sentencing guidelines for each of the offences for which each of you was convicted. The first thing I am required to do is to assess your respective roles in the criminality for which you must be sentenced.
12. As I said at the start, this was your idea, Ian Claughton, and this was your business. Lesley Claughton, although I am sure that although you were happy to share in the proceeds of selling class B drugs, I am also sure that you would not have become involved were it not for your ex-husband. You knowingly stored amphetamine in your fridge, and you knowingly hid money which you knew was derived from selling cannabis. Your acceptance of what Ian Claughton was doing and your tacit encouragement of him for your own benefit as well as his is the basis upon which you were convicted of the drugs offences as a secondary party. To put that more simply, it is obvious to me that whilst Ian Claughton had a leading role in this drugs business, you Lesley Claughton had a more limited role in what was going on. The correct way to describe your role when assessing the drugs offences is principally a lesser role but with an element of significant role because at the same time you had some expectation of significant financial reward.
13. I deal with the drugs offences and the money laundering offence first.

14. On count 8 – possessing amphetamine with intent to supply, although there was more than twice the indicative quantity for category 3 harm, but much less than category 2, your role in that offence cannot really be described as leading. You were supplying the drug to a single individual over time from amphetamine you had previously bought yourself from a dealer. Doing the best I can to correctly categorise the seriousness of your offending on this count I class your role as being significant with an upwards adjustment to the category 3 harm starting point to 2 years custody.

15. Ian Claughton: on count 9 – possessing cannabis with intent to supply it, a leading role with category 3 harm has a starting point of 4 years custody.

16. On count 10 – being concerned in the production of the cannabis plants the scale of the operation means that this was a setup capable of producing significant quantities of cannabis for commercial use, albeit the number of plants recovered is much less than sometimes seen in cases such as this. What you said in the recorded conversation about expecting to make £40,000 supports that assessment of harm albeit with some downward adjustment for the number of plants even though the evidence is that this was an operation capable of renewing cannabis crops again and again, in six locations, to an overall high value. The starting point for a leading role with category 2 harm is 6 years custody which I adjust downwards to 5 years for the reason I have given.

17. Lesley Claughton, you did not take part in the growing or the harvesting or the distribution. In the case of the amphetamine you simply provided a place for the drug to be kept. I am satisfied that in each case yours was generally a lesser role. However, you shared in the money derived from sales. That is the significant role characteristic which causes the lesser role starting point to be adjusted upwards.

18. Using the same categories of harm, the starting point for you on count 8 (amphetamine) is adjusted upwards to 26 weeks On count 9 (possessing

cannabis with intent) the starting point is adjusted to 12 weeks custody, on count 10 (producing cannabis) it is adjusted to 21 months custody.

19. Turning next to the money laundering offence (count 11). In this case I treat you the same as you were plainly intending to share the money derived from the same of drugs. This is a case of medium culpability within category 5. Based on £50,000 the starting point is 18 months. I adjust the starting point downwards slightly in each case to reflect the lower amount laundered in this case.

20. In each case I take account of the fact that neither of you has any previous convictions – although you Ian Claughton have a relevant caution for a cannabis offence which diminishes the value of that mitigation. In each case your sentences on the individual counts must also reflect the fact that each of you committed several offences. I also take some limited account of the fact that each of you has significant medical conditions.

21. Ian Claughton your sentences are as follows:

- a. Count 8 – possessing amphetamine with intent - 15 months custody after reduction for guilty plea.
- b. Count 9 – possessing cannabis with intent – 2 years 9 months custody after reduction for plea of guilty after PTPH but well before trial.
- c. Count 10 – being concerned in the production (growing) of cannabis – 4 years custody after reduction for plea of guilty at the same stage.
- d. Count 11 – money laundering – 15 months custody with no reduction for plea.

All of those sentences are concurrent making 4 years so far. I will come to the weapons offences in due course.

22. Lesley Claughton your sentences are as follows:

- a. Count 8 – 28 weeks custody.

- b. Count 9 – 18 weeks custody.
- c. Count 10 – 21 months custody.
- d. Count 11 – 15 months custody.
- e. There is no separate penalty on count 1 which in your case would not on its own attract a custodial sentence. I am not satisfied that you were so involved with the cannabis grow that you were complicit in what was to be used to protect it. The prosecution did not charge you with possessing the gun that was found loaded in your house. That persuades me that the prosecution case overall does not include that allegation.

All of those sentences are concurrent making a total of 21 months custody in your case.

23. I tell you straightaway – not least because there is still quite a bit to say about Ian Claughton's sentences – that I am going to suspend those sentences for 2 years.

24. The reasons are as follows: there is a realistic prospect of rehabilitation in your case given the way you were led into this offending and the fact that you have no previous convictions. Secondly, there would be others adversely affected if you were sent to prison immediately. Third, you have very significant medical conditions that could be made much worse by being imprisoned immediately and that, taken with the other features mentioned in all of the references in this case, amounts to strong personal mitigation. Furthermore, I do not conclude that appropriate punishment can only be achieved by immediate imprisonment.

25. In your case I take account of the 21 months you have been on curfew and for that reason only I do not attach any community punishment or other elements to the order. If you require medical or psychological support it is available without attaching it to a suspended sentence.

26. The total sentence is 21 months imprisonment suspended for 2 years. Warning on breach [and allow her to leave the dock].

27. Ian Claughton, your position is far more complicated because of the weapons offences. First, I have to decide whether or not I am required to impose the 5 year minimum term for possession of the prohibited firearms, which I am required to do unless there are exceptional circumstances relating to you or to the offences which justify not doing so.

28. In case there is any doubt, I reject totally your basis of plea which I am sure is lies and fantasy on your part. From the evidence I heard I have no doubt that this was your business and the profits from it were shared between you and Lesley Claughton and not given over to some Albanian or Traveller gang. You were therefore a drug dealer at the time and used these weapons to protect your cannabis growing operation. There is nothing relating to you that would amount to exceptional circumstances.

29. Whether or not there are exceptional circumstances relating to the offending is a different matter. The technical evidence is that these guns only barely exceeded the power threshold which means they were classed as firearms. I accept the submission that several of the test firings returned results that were within the threshold for an air weapon excluded from the firearms legislation (i.e. not one which is especially dangerous). I must be careful not to confuse the reason for possessing the weapon with its inherent characteristics.

30. Sections 5(1) and 5(1A) of the Firearms Act provides for a number of different weapons to be prohibited weapons. The list includes firearms that are likely to cause serious injury or death if used in the manner for which they have been designed and manufactured. The two guns in counts 5 and 7 respectively, as the results of the test firing, were very unlikely to cause serious injury if used in the way they had been manufactured and with the ammunition with which each was loaded. The evidence was that darts or other more dangerous projectiles of similar calibre could be fired from each gun, but no ammunition of that kind was found. Each expert agreed that each gun was *capable* of firing a projectile with a muzzle velocity greater than 12 ft.lbs and for that reason each was a firearm, and

because of its dimensions was therefore a firearm prohibited under section 5(1)(aba).

31. I have no doubt that a person confronted with either gun would believe it to be a shot firing lethal firearm but, in reality, that is not the case. In an Act of Parliament designed to punish severely possession of obviously dangerous firearms, I am satisfied Parliament did not also intend to include such punishment for relatively low velocity air weapons which are unlikely to cause serious injury. To impose the statutory sentence in this case would result in a sentence disproportionately long for the offences. It follows that I have concluded that the circumstances surrounding the offence are exceptional and justify not imposing the mandatory minimum sentence.
32. That is not to say possession of these two guns and the improvised flame thrower is to be treated as in some way incidental to the drugs offences. It is one thing for a person to grow significant quantities of cannabis, it is another entirely for him to protect his operation by using, what in any other scenario would be considered, realistic looking firearms, a working flame thrower, and a tripwire attached to an improvised explosive device. Your sentence for possessing those items must include an upwards adjustment within the category range to reflect the fact that you had them for the purpose of crime.
33. Paragraphs 13 and 14 of the sentencing guideline provide guidance where exceptional circumstances are found. Paragraph 14 advises that courts may find it useful in this case to refer to the range of sentences under culpability A of table 2 when assessing seriousness and impose a sentence appropriate to the individual case. I agree with that guidance.
34. It seems to me that the scenario where these guns might foreseeably be used would be one where other individuals came prepared for theft or robbery. The introduction of a loaded gun resembling a sawn-off shotgun in that scenario would have very considerable implications for the risk of serious disorder. In my judgement a high risk of serious disorder is a foreseeable harm in the scenario

for which you were prepared. The starting point for the offences on counts 5 and 7 is therefore 3 years. As a cross-check, this appears to me to be an appropriate sentence for the case where these two weapons were but two of the devices deployed to defend this cannabis grow.

35. I have already taken into account your lack of previous convictions and the other mitigating circumstances and balanced them against the other features of the case. I have already taken the references in your case into account. As I am going to impose this sentence consecutively, I am careful not to double count the same mitigation.
36. Count 3 (possession of the improvised flame thrower) was possession of a potentially fearsome weapon in order to protect your cannabis grow. This was to hand in the workshop and the effect of it was clearly demonstrated by operating a similar item in the 2021 video recording. When following the sentencing guideline for this offence the sentence is 2 years custody.
37. Count 12 (possession of the explosive substance) is not a terrorism offence and relates to unlawfully making a device intended to scare away an intruder but which the explosives expert said would not likely cause any injury to the person. In the context of this case, and the reason for making the device being to protect a significant cannabis grow, the offence still warrants a sentence of imprisonment, which is 12 months. All of the explosive material – the crow scatters – and the accessories will be forfeit and an order made for their destruction.
38. Count 1 – importing the realistic imitation firearms for the purpose of protecting the drugs – 6 months custody after reduction for plea of guilty.
39. Count 4 – possessing the ammunition – in the overall context of this case, the sentenced is 4 months imprisonment.
40. All of those sentences are concurrent with each other, but the 3 years is consecutive to the other sentences, making 7 years in all.

41. I have taken totality into account when making the 4 years and the 3 year sentences consecutive. 7 years is just and proportionate sentence for all of your criminality.
42. The prison will advise you whether you will serve only 40% of each sentence served one after the other, or half of the full 7 year sentence. In any event, time spent on remand will count.
43. The Proceeds of Crime Act timetable for confiscation is adopted and all other orders for financial or other measures are postponed until the conclusion of the confiscation proceedings against each defendant.

HH Judge Reeds KC
Sheffield Crown Court