



SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL

From
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18th January 2011

Dear Councillor

Draft Southwark Sex Establishment Policy

I write on behalf of my Cathedral colleagues to thank and congratulate you, as the Council Member with responsibility for community safety, on the draft Sex Establishment Policy. As you may know, Southwark Cathedral was involved in a long and extremely expensive legal process to achieve the closure of an illegal sex club next door. That process was prolonged by the inadequacies and ambiguities of licensing procedures at the time, which frustrated us, the Council and the Metropolitan Police.

We accept that in today's culture, sex establishments are regarded by many as morally neutral. Although we do not share that view, I am not writing in order to fight that battle, but to support you in your attempts to control and moderate the proliferation of such establishments.

We congratulate you on distinguishing in some detail the wide variety of establishments in which sex is part of the offer, in order to ensure that they can be recognised and licensed as such.

We are grateful that you set the policy within the social context (in paragraphs 9 and 10) of social and economic disadvantage and teenage pregnancy in the Borough. We do not believe that the community needs more establishments (gaming, betting or sex clubs) that prey on the hopes of the poor and vulnerable and take their money, or promote sex as a consequence-free leisure activity among young people.

We therefore welcome the proposals in paragraph 6i that acknowledge that sex establishments can have a wider impact than on local residents alone. They can tarnish an entire neighbourhood and corrode people's lives and values. We therefore welcome paragraph 73c that will limit the number of establishments in an area.

We would, however, hope that paragraph 100 could be modified to allow for limitation *before* an area reaches 'saturation'. By the time the situation is judged to have achieved saturation, damage has already been done. That could be avoided by setting the acceptable limit quite low.

We are aware that Councillors and Community Councils have sometimes found it very difficult to resist some licensing and planning applications (in the case, for example, of a new gaming club in Borough High Street). Although objections were lodged at Community Council meetings and although

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councillors declared themselves to be unhappy at the proposal, these wider 'quality of life' considerations (which impact on the character of the area) were not deemed to be relevant.

We very much hope that this draft policy on Sex Establishments not only reflects the Council's will to be more proactive in protecting and enhancing the quality of life in this borough (not only in connection with sex establishments but in both licensing and planning consents more generally), but will give the Council and the Police the technical and legal means to do so, without being outplayed by clever lawyers who find loopholes in the policy.

It is sometimes argued that Southwark, and particularly the northern part of the borough, has always been 'colourful'. Historically, the raunchy character of the area was closely associated with and largely the result of the extreme poverty of its people. In the interest of helping people towards a better quality of life, we would happily jettison some of the seedier aspects of our Dickensian past.

Some north London boroughs have greatly tightened up their policies on planning, licensing, street drinking etc, and some of the activity now deemed unacceptable there appears to have crossed the River. If this policy is an attempt to manage some of these aspects of urban life in a way which is rational, consistent and responsible, we greatly welcome it and wish you well in its implementation.

Yours sincerely,

cc

Southwark Licensing Service

Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis

Simon Hughes MP

Bankside Residents Forum