

# Culture and the night time economy - Supplementary Planning Guidance Heart of London response

May 2017

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## About us

Heart of London Business Alliance serves as the voice for 500 businesses and property owners in the Piccadilly & St James's and Leicester Square areas. Our purpose is to support the commercial well being of the businesses and organisations we represent, and ensure our areas remain integral to London's West End offer as a place for people to visit, live, trade and work.

On behalf of our members we welcome the broad direction outlined in the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and the focus on the importance of a diverse and flourishing night time culture in London. Over 400 million visitors are welcomed to the West End every year, with some of the world's best entertainment, culture and hospitality generating over £11 billion in sales. We strive for the West End to have the most varied and high quality evening and night time offer for visitors, workers and residents alike. Heart of London were at the table advocating for the Night Tube, and we embrace the opportunities for growth, while always protecting and enhancing the existing cultural and night time venues that make our city so vibrant and attractive.

For ease of reference we have broken our response into sections following the chapter headings of the draft guidance and have indicated relevant paragraph numbers in brackets if and when they are referred to directly.

## Protecting pubs

Our members share the Mayor's concerns about the loss of pubs and we are supportive of the use of additional measures in the planning system to offer protections to these venues. However, we are unsure why the emphasis is solely placed on pubs, rather than a broader category of venues including nightclubs, casinos and live music venues.

For example, Westminster City Council made an Article 4 direction in 2016 to remove permitted development rights for changes of use from A1 (shops) to A2 (financial and professional services) in the Core Central Activities Zone, which includes the West End, in order to protect its retail focussed character. While any decision to implement future Article 4 directions is through local councils, it may be helpful for the Mayor of London to support boroughs who wish to consider such measures (2.11).

## Sustaining existing venues and providing new facilities

Heart of London shares the Mayor's concern about the loss of venues and cultural spaces, in particular when this dilutes the commercial and strategic character of the Central Activities Zone. We are keen to retain an appropriate mix of services to ensure a thriving daytime, evening and night time economy; so welcome the current protections offered by the planning system and this additional guidance for local authorities.

## Creating a more diverse and inclusive night time culture and economy

Our members are supportive of diversifying the range of evening and night time activities. In particular we seek later opening hours for shops and restaurants, and for West End theatres to be able to operate later. The diverse mix of activities available in the evening and at night is complementary and should be protected and enhanced (4.7).

While outside the scope of this guidance, we would be supportive of the issue of Sunday trading hours being revisited. For tourism focussed areas such as the West End, we do not believe restrictions on Sunday and Bank Holiday trading are appropriate. Given our sizeable weekend visitor population, it does not reflect well on a global city that retail, a key part of our diverse offer, is only able to trade for 6 hours on a Sunday. We would therefore support legislative change which offers additional flexibilities for retail, restaurant, and licensed premises trading hours in the Core Central Activities Zone given its unique global status.

As the guidance mentions, the Night Tube will bring substantial additional visitor numbers to Central London. We support the suggestion that local authorities and their partners must make plans to ensure safe and accessible transport is well lit and signposted. However, with the improved capacity and hours of the Night Tube, there is no reason that the West End could not operate as a 24 hour city, with a greater variety of activities and cultural offers. We note that, for example, 24 hour gyms are now often available across London.

Our members agree that local authorities have a vital role to support cultural events and new activities (4.8). Heart of London recognises that we also have a role in this process. We are a founder partner with the GLA in realising London Lumière in January 2016 and through the return of the event in January 2018, we seek to raise profile, deliver additional footfall, and enliven central London in what has traditionally been a quieter period for trade.

## Agent of change

Our members are strongly supportive of an 'agent of change' principle being applied to new developments. We support proportionate conditions being placed on new noise sensitive development so as to avoid threats of complaints, licensing restrictions or closure to existing venues.

Our members, particularly those who own or manage venues, have told us that they want greater flexibility for expanded night time activities. This includes later opening hours for indoor activity, extended operating times for outside tables and chairs, new opportunities for rooftop bars and restaurants, and later entertainment offerings. More flexible operating hours may result in a steadier level of noise rather than a disruptive 'spike' at closing times and this is in line with the objectives of the Licensing Act 2003. This will also help temper the impact of those consuming alcohol by providing sustenance through a food offering, providing access to toilet facilities, and reduce anti-social behaviour associated with a strict closing time that puts undue pressure on police, council, and transportation resources.

## Places

Heart of London support the Mayor's view that the strategic function and character of the Central Activities Zone should be maintained and that boroughs should develop policies that are sensitive to clusters of night time activity. We welcome the recognition of the West End as a Strategic Cultural Area of "international importance"; to be promoted, protected and enhanced.

We also welcome the recognition that Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) play a vital role in a well-managed evening and night time economies (6.6). Heart of London works in close partnership with the GLA, Westminster City Council, the West End Partnership and the Metropolitan Police to promote a responsible night time culture.

We have worked with Leicester Square businesses to achieve Purple Flag accreditation, in recognition of a well manage night time economy. Work is currently underway in implementing the Best Bar None scheme with our members to encourage high standards not just for licensed premises but for all evening and night time venues. This is part of a wider approach of piloting a range of schemes under a new initiative called the Westminster Licensing Charter, a partnership with Westminster City Council and the Metropolitan Police. The objective is to responsibly manage and grow the evening and night time economy, while being considerate of the needs of area residents and likewise vulnerable people.

Furthermore, as a representative on the Mayor's Night Time Commission, we continue to work with the GLA to find new ways to ensure a vibrant night time economy. The consultation on the SPG should provide a framework for advancing this.

## An integrated approach to managing night time culture

Greater emphasis should be given in Chapter 7 to the role that BIDs can play in an integrated partnership approach to managing night time culture. For example, our West End Ambassadors have a vital role in gathering information and compiling impact statements from business members regarding anti-social behaviour, noise, begging and rough sleeping. Heart of London also funds an additional cleansing programme to tackle staining and gum removal, an additional noise enforcement resource to address anti-social behaviour at night and a responsive service to deal with fouling and urination often associated with the night time economy. Working closely with Westminster City Council, who provide the baseline service; we provide these additional contributions given the intense needs of a busy evening and night time economy. We think it is important to recognise that a strong partnership approach requires more than good integrated working between statutory agencies, but should also involve businesses and BIDs.

## Conclusion

We very much welcome the opportunity to respond to the draft SPG and welcome the Mayor of London's desire for a diverse, well manged and flourishing night time economy.