

Press Cutting

Client: Heart of London Business Alliance

Publication: EG

Date: 13.10.22

THE MARKET NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

The darkest hour: fixing London's night-time economy

So much more than just a destination for pub- and club-goers, the capital should be as thriving after dark as it is during the day – to truly make it a world-class, 24/7 city. By Samantha McClary



When the sun sets on London town and those who have returned to their offices spill out of them to make the commute home, the city doesn't quite go to sleep. A new set of workers spills out. Those working in the bars, restaurants and clubs, but also night-shift workers – nurses, doctors, cleaners, security staff, traders etc.

There are some 1.6m people in London who work at night, and prior to the pandemic, the capital's night-time businesses contributed as much as £26bn to the UK economy. The sector nationally provides £112bn in annual revenues, making it bigger than the fashion, beauty and automotive industries. But Covid decimated the night-time economy, and aside from the promise of some night-time enterprise zones by the London mayor to help revive the capital's high streets after 6pm, the sector is getting little help.

The big question is why? With a government so focused on increasing the country's productivity, surely it's essential there is as much focus on the night-time

The panel

- Michael Kill, chief executive, Night Time Industries Association
- Ros Morgan, chief executive, Heart of London Business Alliance
- Matthew Sims, chief executive, Croydon Business Improvement District
- Melanie Williams, head of real estate and hospitality sectors, DWF

economy as there is on the daytime economy?

The heart of the ecosystem

Ros Morgan, chief executive of the Heart of London Business Alliance, a business improvement district that looks after some 96 acres of the West End, certainly thinks the night-time economy deserves more attention.

"The West End struggled [during Covid]," she said. "We were one of the last

to come out of the pandemic as a direct result of the evening and night-time economy being non-existent because it was impossible for it to operate under the conditions that were set. For me, that demonstrated the truth, the real reality of how important the night-time economy is to the whole ecosystem."

"The night-time economy is so important," added Matthew Sims, chief executive of the Croydon Business Improvement District. "It's huge. We are a 24/7 city. We love to go out. We love to socialise. We love to have fun. And that's why it is such an important part of the economy."

But, said Sims, the conditions have to be right to support the sector. Enthusiasm and passion are one thing, he said, but you need focus and you need investment.

DWF's head of the real estate and hospitality sectors, Melanie Williams, agreed. She was keen to point out how diverse the night-time economy is and how important it is for all stakeholders to come together if the capital really is to make the most out of what could be a



We need to look beyond that obvious narrative, and we need to really be grown-up and recognise there is a hell of a lot more going on than just pubs and clubs. We have all that night-time tourism coming in with the West End theatres, but we also have a huge number of workers, whether they are care workers or service workers, and they are in and out of the area all the time. And there are no services available for them other than McDonald's. And that's not even a joke. That is the only place you can get a meal or can use the loo 24/7. And thank goodness for that."

Morgan says all of those issues need to be addressed if London really is to be the best city in the world. And for those issues to be addressed, there needs to be more people making decisions on the evening and night-time economy who understand it.

"You can't have an FIA director directing Formula One unless he understands motor racing," said Kill, "so how do you expect a police officer to enforce against a business that he has no understanding of culturally?"

Morgan, Kill, Sims and Williams all agreed there is a need not just for more night czars, such as the GLAs Amy Lamé, Manchester's Sacha Lord and Bristol's Carly Heath, but for a minister for the evening and night-time economy if attitudes and actions are to change.

That minister should not be a politician, though, said Morgan. "I want someone who has been there and done it and has the experience of the industry."

For Williams, it is more than just having someone focused on the sector. She wants to see more intelligent structuring around getting more, and sustained, private investment into the sector - a collaborative approach that places just as much importance on the night-time economy as the daytime.

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booming economy. "We are not talking about a monoculture here," she said, "we are not talking about drinking alcohol and going to pubs and clubs. We are talking about all the diverse things that we need to sustain a night-time economy, and the investment and collaboration you need between the different stakeholders."

She added: "That runs across property owners, across BIDs, across councils, across government, but also across private investors and how we get that private investment in. It is such a fragmented picture that we have to grapple with. And you need collaboration to be able to tackle the issues that we have."

In the dark

For Michael Kill, chief executive of the Night Time Industries Alliance, the answer to all of this is education. No one really understands what the night-time economy is or how valuable it can be in helping to rebuild the UK.

"The big challenge that we have is educating government on what the night-time economy is," he said.

Kill believes a wide-ranging strategy that looks at 24-hour hubs is needed to really unlock the power of the night-time economy. For him, that strategy would allow the freedom to trade, to access planning and licensing.

"There is going to be a lot of work to do in giving businesses the opportunity to trade beyond pre-pandemic capacity, and without all the constraints, without the bureaucracy," he said. "It's a huge industry. It's got to be given greater consideration in government. And that means that they have to educate, and part of that role is us educating them."

More than pubs and clubs

Morgan added: "I've been working across town centres and city centres for 20 years, and every single council, every administration - bar none - does not understand what the evening and night-time economy is. They only regard it as premises, licensed venues. Pubs and clubs and people being sick.

"That's where the conversation and the narrative absolutely need to change.



To listen to this conversation in full, download *After Dark: How enabling London's night-time economy is vital for the capital's future* from the EG Property Podcast channel, available on all good podcast players.

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