
WITNESS STATEMENT

Name: Elizabeth Morris

Occupation: Owner/Operator

Dated: 13 April 2016

My name is Elizabeth Morris and I am the owner of Silks Gentlemen's Club, Sovereign Place. I make this statement in support of the application made by Red Carpet Leisure (Leeds) Limited for the renewal of the SEV licence for the premises, and in response to the representations received against this.

Background

Silks has traded at Sovereign Place since 2009. We were initially granted an SEV by Leeds City Council in 2012. In 2013, when the Council introduced a new Sex Establishments Statement of Licensing Policy, we were granted renewal of our licence as one of the maximum of four which the Council deemed appropriate in Leeds City Centre.

A number of the representations received urge the Council to introduce a 'nil policy' in relation to SEVs. With respect, I do not propose to dwell on this matter, as that is not the subject of this application. The status quo in terms of the maximum appropriate number has remained since 2013, and as such we remain, at this time, one of the four. This application is in respect of the renewal of our licence in the context of the maximum of four, and is not an examination of whether this number should be revised.

Location

I of course understand that this maximum is caveated with the proviso that these premises not be in sensitive locations. I do not believe that our location is sensitive. In fact I believe it to be very discreet and in many ways an ideal location for our operation. In respect of previous renewal applications, there has been the suggestion that the proposed open space at Sovereign

Square present a sensitive location, but, given that this does not form part of the content of any of the representations, clearly this is no longer a concern.

One of the representations refers to close proximity of residential premises to commercial establishments in Leeds City Centre in general. However, this is not a characteristic of our premises, we are very much located in a commercial area.

Staff Welfare

A number of the representations express concern for the women who are employed at our premises, referring to 'poor/abusive working conditions' and 'pressure to offer extra sexual services'. This simply is not the way our premises works.

Our employees are treated extremely well, and their welfare is always my primary concern. The Committee will have had the opportunity to review the documents submitted with this renewal application, which include our Dancers Welfare Policy, Welfare Notices and a Customers Code of Conduct, amongst other things. We have CCTV throughout the premises to ensure the safety of our staff, including in each of our booths.

Our dancers work at our premises voluntarily, and absolutely none of them feel, or would ever be, 'compelled' to do so.

In terms of allegations that extra sexual services are offered in gentlemen's clubs, the absolute opposite is true. This is explicitly and expressly banned. If this sort of behaviour was engaged in or condoned in any way at our premises, I highly doubt that we would have been permitted to trade for as long as we have done. We are subject to regular licensing inspections, and have never received any complaint or allegation of such services being offered or provided in our premises. Whilst I realise that the comments made in the representations are general rather than specific to our premises, I would resent any suggestion whatsoever that this is the way that our premises trades. This absolutely is not the case.

Women

The representors also refer to Gentlemen's Clubs as places to 'objectify women', and places that foster a 'feeling of entitlement to women's bodies' amongst customers. There is a suggestion that premises like ours are part of the sex industry rather than the leisure industry.

This simply is not the case. We provide a leisure service to customers from a variety of different backgrounds and walks of life. We are not doing anything wrong in this. Our customers are respectful and understand the boundaries in place at the premises – which are there to ensure the comfort and safety of dancers and customers alike.

I feel that these representors simply object to our operation and the service we offer because it is not something that they would engage in themselves – they clearly find it distasteful and I feel that their objections have a moral basis.

Our premises does not promote inequality, or put our dancers in a position of inferiority. It is their legitimate decision to work for us. It also the legitimate decision of some women to visit our premises as customers. These representors clearly would not wish to visit the premises, and clearly have opinions about working at a Gentleman's Club, but their moral objections should not bar others from doing so.

Public Safety

However, the representors do not only raise concerns about women in our premises, but are also concerned that we have 'a negative impact on women's safety in wider society'. Again, I would disagree with this assessment.

One representor mentions 'street harrassment' and intimidation. Our customers do not engage in anti-social behaviour. Indeed, it is generally accepted that Gentlemen's Clubs are far less associated with this sort of behaviour than other licensed premises.

In any case, we always employ doorstaff at the premises, so if, on a rare occasion, customers attempted to engage in rowdy or intimidating behaviour outside the premises, they would be prevented from doing so. Further, far from our premises making the area dangerous, I believe that our door supervisors actually make the area safer. Without their presence, I would imagine that many people would avoid walking down Sovereign Place after dark, as it is not a busy, well populated street.

I absolutely agree that women have a right to be safe. However, I take issue with any suggestion that our premises threatens or jeopardises the safety of any woman in or around Leeds. The existence of our premises does not influence negative attitudes towards women, either in our customers or in the wider community. As I outline above, our premises provides

a leisure service, which is offered by women who make an informed decision to work at Silks, and who are treated with respect throughout their work. I do not dispute that there are men who have negative attitudes and who objectify women. Some of these men may even attend our premises, but any behaviour which exhibits these attitudes simply would not be tolerated. What is certain though, is that such attitudes and opinions are not influenced by the presence and existence of our premises.

Reference to instances of rape outside Gentlemen's Clubs is somewhat alarmist. I am not aware of any evidence which supports the claim that numbers of reported rapes outside such premises are higher than elsewhere. What I am certain of though, is that there have never been any reports of sexual assaults taking place in or near the vicinity of our premises that we have been made aware of.

I would tend to agree with the email of support submitted in respect of this application, that much of what is referred to in the representations is based on misinformation, and moral biases. It is disappointing that this year's annual renewal is challenged by a 'campaign' which has been orchestrated, but it appears that this is more of a general moral campaign against the concept of a Gentlemen's Club in general, rather than based on any specific concerns about our premises. Similar challenges were not made in the previous 7 years that we have been trading, and I cannot think of any changes we have made that would account for this unexpected development.

As the email of support also identifies, many people do walk past sexual entertainment venues without ever knowing they are there. I believe that this is very often the case in respect of Silks. It is a very discreet usage, and during the daytime it simply would not be evident that the premises trades as it does.

Daytime Usage

However, the Committee will be aware that at the previous renewal hearing, we acknowledged that it may be the opinion of some that a blank daytime frontage is detrimental to the area.

If the Committee agree with this assertion, we have provided a solution to this in the daytime usage proposal submitted with the application – for which we have recently sought and been granted planning permission and Landlord's consent. Should the Committee consider this

necessary and desirable, we would be happy to implement the daytime usage within 3 months of the conclusion of this hearing.

Naturally, this will require investment, and therefore if the Committee consider that the implementation of this daytime usage should be requisite, we would respectfully invite the Committee to provide us with the greatest degree of certainty possible under the SEV regime, by granting the renewal of this licence for a full 12 months.