
WITNESS STATEMENT

Name: [REDACTED]

Occupation: Owner/Operator

Dated: 13 April 2017

My name is [REDACTED] and I am the owner and operator of Silks Gentlemen's Club, Sovereign Place. I make this statement in support of my application to renew the SEV licence for the premises, and in response to the representation received against it.

Background and Location

Silks has traded at Sovereign Place since 2009. My company was 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.

Since then, our licence has been renewed on an annual basis (and most recently has been transferred to myself personally). Concerns were raised in 2015 in relation to the development of Sovereign Place and the possibility that this development may render the location inappropriate for our operation. I feel, and have always felt, that our location is ideal. It is in a commercial area, and is very discreet. It is my understanding that people who do not or have not frequented our premises invariably do not know where it is.

However, I have also previously acknowledged that it may be the opinion of some that a blank daytime frontage is detrimental to the area in which we are located. In response to this, I came to Leeds City Council's Licensing Committee with a proposal to create an active daytime operation out of our premises. Our SEV licence was renewed on this basis in 2016, and we have been operating a nail salon out of the premises since then.

In respect of this application, there have been no concerns from any party other than SARSVL with regard to the propriety of our location. They suggest that the premises is located 'close' to amenities that are 'routinely used by families', but this perception of closeness is rather subjective. Of course we are located in a city centre, so there are all types of leisure and other uses relatively near to us. However, I would reiterate that our premises is in a commercial area, and what it is actually close to us is a number of office buildings, all of which are closed by the time the gentlemen's club begins to operate. Families do not frequent the Sovereign Place area in the evening, whether we are open or not.

We are not near to any sensitive locations listed in Leeds City Council's policy, such as schools, play areas, places of worship or family leisure facilities.

As such, I would invite the Committee to conclude that our location always has been, and continues to be, entirely appropriate for a sexual entertainment venue.

Representation

However, beyond concerns regarding the location of our premises, the representation suggests that our presence, and the presence of sexual entertainment venues in general are detrimental to women, in a number of different ways.

Firstly, the representation alleges that reports of rape are increased in the vicinity of sexual entertainment venues. I am not clear on the veracity of this claim in general terms, but what I can say is that I am aware of absolutely no instances of rape reported which have any connection with Silks or its customers. If our premises were associated with such awful crimes, I would expect to see a representation from West Yorkshire Police, but there is none. I am concerned that these references are rather alarmist and inflammatory.

There is also a more general suggestion that our premises impacts upon women's safety and/or creates an intimidating environment. 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.

The representation mentions ‘harassment’ 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.

The representation also suggests that establishments such as mine ‘licence the objectification of women’. There is a suggestion that premises like ours are part of the sex industry rather than the leisure industry. This is incorrect. 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 in 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 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.

As well as the safety of members of the public in relation to the premises, the representation expresses concern for the women who are employed at our premises. I would like to reassure SARSVL that 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 employees make an informed decision to work at Silks, and are treated with respect throughout their work.

I feel that the representor simply objects 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. The representor 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.

In light of this, I would invite the Committee to grant this application for renewal. I should also just like to confirm that we have no current plans to expand our premises, and of course that I understand that any such proposal would require approval by way of a variation application.