

Temper - Soho Neighbourhood Plan



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Dear Sirs

### **Representation in response to Soho Neighbourhood Plan**

As a restaurant and bar operator within the heart of Soho, I have set out my thoughts on the future of Soho and how the Soho Neighbourhood Plan can help the Soho economy and residents.

Importantly the Plan recognises that Soho is a unique place, it has after all been a main entertainment district in the Capitol since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Soho economy is substantially based around the leisure and entertainment industry and this has been demonstrably impacted by the pandemic. As a food and beverage operator we just don't know what the future will bring. As an industry we are all hoping to recover and need the City Council and the development plans to support the economy. There is no doubt it will take considerable time for the F&B, leisure and entertainment industry to recover. Tourism, theatres, cinema visitors, as well as office/retail workers are fundamental to the recovery of Soho.

Soho has a late night economy and this is a key attraction of the area. The Soho Plan should actively support businesses that support this economy. The emphasis of the Plan seems to seeking to fit the Soho character and economy around the residents. When in fact the Soho Plan needs to work with residents and businesses to work and live together. Soho is an internationally renowned place and is a key part of the London domestic and international tourism scene. To help the Soho economy recover measures such as street trading, longer hours (whether earlier or later) should be supported. Take away service, outdoor seating and road closures should also be supported, during the day and for the evening where possible. Whilst these may be seen as emergency measures now to combat Covid, the Neighbourhood Plan should look to consider these opportunities for the future.

Road closures, pedestrianisation and sustainable transport all help Soho's polices for cleaner air and reduction on dependence on the car.

I have made comments on specific policies within the plan

**SNP Policy 12 – Live Music Venues.** *“There may be locations on the edge of Soho..where larger units could effectively handle arrival and dispersal and/or later hours and may be acceptable. While wishing to support the provision of live entertainment as an important part of Soho culture and identity, this Plan wishes to prevent as far as possible the harmful impacts that continue to be identified by neighbours, police and Council.*

All of Soho benefits from the late night economy, businesses feed off each other, shopping and retail in the day supports the restaurateurs and cafes, keeping customers in the area for later entertainment venues and nightlife. Management of the venues and customers should be the key to the suitability of such uses. If the venues are managed well then the impacts will not be harmful to the residents who choose to live in the heart of a lively entertainment district. Pushing music venues to the edges of the Soho area, undermines the unique character of the area, we have seen too many venues close in recent years, pushing venues to the edges is unacceptable and could undermine the social diversity that Soho is celebrated for.

Shops and F&B are diversifying, increasing wet sales, introducing take away, outdoor trading and seating, or trading longer due hours to reduced covers. As a consequence Soho will change to meet the current needs of the industry. The residents that enjoy living in Soho will understand the need for this transition to sustain the character of Soho and help rebuild its economy. It is hoped the Soho NP and the City Council can set a policy framework that supports these necessary changes in the short and possibly longer term.

***SNP Policy 13: Food and Beverage Developments to Protect Existing Residential Amenity***

*In order to be supported proposals for new A1 cafes, A3, A4, A5 and D2 uses which are in direct physical proximity to residential use must fully apply the 'agent of change' principle and demonstrate that they will not have adverse impacts on residential amenity which cannot be mitigated.*

All uses should be aware and understanding of adjoining uses. Residents and entertainment /leisure industry have had a long established relationship within Soho. If residents chose to live in Soho then there should be understanding that this is in the heart of the nightlife of a major world City. New schemes should have operational management plans to ensure that the businesses do not demonstrably harm the amenity of existing residents. In the same way that new residential units or tenants within Soho should not inhibit the ability for the night time economy to operate and thrive.

***Reasoned justification***

*While there is no clear cut-off point when the evening economy ceases, the nature of the late night economy gradually changes the area to one sometimes more based on the consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs and various forms of anti-social behaviour.*

This Statement should be deleted, It is disparaging of the efforts the business and night time economy.. The Soho NP should be supportive of operational management plans and responsible business and landowners. Working with the business community will mitigate and help manage the impacts from the Soho economy which includes the late night entertainment and leisure industry

***SNP Policy 27: Pedestrian Movement in Development Proposals***

*All development proposals should be designed in such a way as to facilitate pedestrian movement and prevent it being impeded by other uses such as the provision of tables and chairs.*

- Proposals should seek to deliver safe, efficient and inclusive design in line with the Healthy Streets Approach and Vision Zero Strategy*
- Create clear well-lit and well signed pedestrian routes*

***Reasoned justification***

*There has been a substantial increase in the numbers of tables and chairs placed on the highway by hospitality businesses. In the light of the modal shift towards more trips on foot and the opening of the new lines referred to it is important that the use of pavements is reinforced for pedestrian priority.*

In the immediate future, there will be greater reliance on street trading, outdoor table and chairs, take away due to social distancing. The City Council are actively looking at facilitating the use of the street to support the food and beverage trade, including several street closures.. The Soho NP should be actively supporting these measures and assess the impacts of the temporary road closures for the future. In the longer term increased pedestrianisation of Soho Streets will support the ability for pedestrian movement and reduce conflict with outdoor trading and seating. Private vehicle use is being actively discouraged, developing a pedestrian led environment will need to also look at opportunities for less car use and greater use of pedestrianisation of streets and enable Soho to improve regarding air quality and reduced vehicle congestion. .

***Further reasoned justification to Policy 27***

*The Plan expects that pedestrian use of the area will be the priority in line with London Plan and City of Westminster policies while not unduly impeding effective deliveries and collection for businesses. The objective is to see Soho become recognised by vehicle users and cyclists as a 'pedestrian priority area' particularly in the light of the intensification of pedestrian numbers.*

This is supported, clear servicing and delivery strategies will support road closures and pedestrianisation of streets

**SNP Policy 19 - Deliveries and Servicing**

*It must show in a Delivery and Servicing Plan (DSP) that on completion and once in use the adverse effects from deliveries on the immediate local environment and public realm in terms of noise, carbon emissions and pollutants have been mitigated or avoided.*

Westminster City Councils commercial waste collection service operates during the night. This causes businesses to use other waste collection services to meet the servicing plans the Council requires through licensing and planning. Businesses will positively work with the Council to mitigate the impacts of waste collection, delivery and services.

Whilst in principle much of the Soho Neighbourhood Plan can be supported and the policies regarding sustainability, street cleaning, refuse etc are laudable, I have focused my comments on the day to day practicalities of running a business in Soho and where the Plan can support the whole community both businesses and residents.

