

1 March 2004

Director of Community Protection
24/7 Operations
Drinking Control Area Designation
Room 18
Council House
Marylebone Road
London NW1 5PT

Dear Sir/Madam

Proposed Designation of Central and North Westminster Street Drinking Control Area

A number of licensees within Westminster have received a copy of your letter dated 26th January setting out proposals for a Street Drinking Control Area. These have been forwarded to the Westminster Licensees Association (WLA), which wishes to submit a central response on behalf of the licensed trade.

By way of background the WLA is the trade body representing the interests of pub, club, bar and restaurant owners and operators within the borough. Currently around a third of all on-licensed premises are in membership, and we are acknowledged as the collective voice of the trade in local consultative fora such as the Westminster Entertainment Forum. Our membership is diverse and ranges from major national chains such as Mitchells & Butler and Spirit, specialist London operators such as Urbium, Maxwells and Regent Inns to small, independent companies operating under their own branding such as Soho Bars and Interpub. Many flagship outlets in the West End are also members – Rock Garden, Rainforest Café, Atlantic Bar and even Westminster Central Hall.

Whilst the WLA acknowledges that the purpose of the scheme is designed to tackle street drinkers and rough sleepers, we are nevertheless concerned that it may also affect customers of the legitimate licensed trade. We would urge the Council to provide clear guidelines on the purpose and intent of the scheme to ensure that this is not the case and will also be contacting the police to ensure that their discretion is fully engaged in these instances.

Many of our members have licensed private forecourts or small beer gardens which allow customers to drink outside the premises, others will have licensed chairs and tables. As this activity takes place on licensed premises, we have assumed that this would not be covered by the proposed scheme. However, in the case of many traditional pubs, drinking often spills out onto the street during the summer months, and it is the legal implications of the proposed scheme on this type of activity which causes the trade the greatest concern.

Drinking and indeed eating outside is something which is extremely popular in the summer and which adds to the atmosphere of many parts of central London. We do not believe that drinking outside licensed premises should be viewed in the same way as street drinking, which this scheme rightly seeks to tackle. In drafting the proposed scheme, we would therefore urge the Council to take account of this.

We further acknowledge that it should remain the responsibility of the licensee to ensure that drinking outside their premises is suitably controlled and does not cause a public nuisance. We should be happy to work with the Council on voluntary measures to promote this.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or require any additional information.

Yours sincerely

Kate Nicholls
Secretary