

Licensing Sub-Committee

Meeting held 8 September 2016

**PRESENT:** Councillors Alan Law (Chair), George Lindars-Hammond and Josie Paszek

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 There were no apologies for absence received. Councillor Andy Nash attended as a reserve Member, but was not required to stay.

**2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1982 (AS AMENDED) - VILLA MERCEDES, 4 SUFFOLK ROAD, SHEFFIELD, S2 4AG**

4.1 The Chief Licensing Officer submitted a report to consider an application made under Section 10 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, for the grant of a Sexual Entertainment Venue Licence in respect of the premises known as Villa Mercedes, 4 Suffolk Road, Sheffield, S2 4AG.

4.2 Present for Part One of the hearing were Paddy Whur (Woods Whur, Solicitors, for the Applicants), Andreas Baskoutas (Manager, Rockwave Leisure, Applicants), Michelle Webster, Bridget Kelly, Rosalind Wollen, Justin Rowntree, Nikki Bond (on behalf of Louise Haigh, MP), Helen Phillips-Jackson, Shelley Roches-Jacques, Lizzie Ellen (on behalf of Paul Blomfield, MP), Pam Marshall, Meera Kulkarni, a representative of Zero Option Sheffield, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Lisa Markham, Steve Slack, Rob Unwin, Lizz Tuckerman, Carolyn Leary, Councillor Douglas Johnson, Jonathan Cook, Clare Turner, Jonathan Macaskill, Elyse Peacock, Claire Williams, Rebecca Walker, Andy Tucker, Chris Scarlett, Kath Housley, Kate Whittaker, Martine Taube, Harriet Johnson (barrister on behalf of Women's Equality Party, Sheffield), (Objectors), Georgina Hollis and Matt Proctor (Licensing Enforcement and Technical Officers), Marie-Claire Frankie (Solicitor to the Sub-Committee) and John Turner (Democratic Services).

4.3 Marie-Claire Frankie outlined the procedure which would be followed during the hearing.

4.4 Georgina Hollis presented the report to the Sub-Committee, and it was noted that

written representations had been received from 181 interested parties, 29 of whom were in attendance, and who addressed the Sub-Committee, and details of all the representations were attached at Appendices 'B' and 'C' to the report. Reference was also made to the additional information sent by Woods Whur, Solicitors, on 22nd August 2016, in support of the application, which had been circulated to members of the Sub-Committee.

4.5 Paddy Whur, on behalf of the applicants, stated that there was an error in Question 20 of the application questionnaire, in that the opening times of the premises should read 24:00 hours to 08:00 hours, Monday to Sunday, and not 12:00 hours to 08:00 hours. Mr Whur also wanted to point out that there was no connection between Mr Baskoutas and the licensee who lost his licence in Harrogate.

4.6 The interested parties who attended the hearing made representations as follows:-

4.6.1 Michelle Webster

Ms Webster stated that the application should be refused on the grounds that the opening of a sexual entertainment venue at this location would have an adverse effect on the character of the locality, which was a gateway to the City, and the first thing that visitors and Sheffield residents saw when driving into the City, or leaving the train station. The locality comprised student housing, creative small businesses, a nationally recognised and admired local music venue, charities working with a range of diverse and sometimes vulnerable clients and volunteers, as well as a college for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The premises closing at 08:00 hours would result in people arriving for work in that area seeing employees and customers leaving the premises. Ms Webster also believed that a sexual entertainment venue directly discriminates against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women, and that this contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society. Reference was made to the decision of Harrogate Borough Council to refuse an application by Villa Mercedes to renew a Sexual Entertainment Venue Licence in Harrogate, for reasons including physical contact with the dancers and allowing audience participation. Ms Webster also pointed out that there was another sexual entertainment venue within 200 yards of the proposed venue.

4.6.2 Bridget Kelly - Chief Executive, Sheffield Independent Film and Television (SHIFT)

Ms Kelly stated that SHIFT objected to the application on the grounds that the venue was very close to a number of educational institutions, including SHIFT, who worked with young people aged 16 to 18 years of age, and very close to the City's railway station, which could possibly define the area as a destination for sexual tourism. A second sexual entertainment venue in the Cultural Industries Quarter represented further poor modelling of adult sexual behaviour and its location was in the gateway to the City, which would give a bad impression for people arriving in the City. Ms Kelly referred to the City Council's 'statutory obligations in relation to disability, race and gender', and indicated that she believed that a sexual entertainment venue discriminated directly against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women, and that this

contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society.

4.6.3 Rosalind Wollen

Ms Wollen believed that the locality of the premises would be totally unsuitable given that it was in the gateway to the City Centre, and where there was already another sexual entertainment venue. She added that the venue was also very close to student accommodation, Sheffield Hallam University, and was directly next door to Scotia Works, some tenants of which provided help and advice to vulnerable young people. Also next door to the venue was The Leadmill which, as well as the 200 club nights, hosted over 100 events a year for young people between 14 and 18 years of age, with the queues of both types of events running past the Villa Mercedes venue's doors.

4.6.4 Justin Rowntree

Mr Rowntree stated that he objected to the application on the grounds of the inappropriate locality of the venue, both in terms of the character of the area and its close proximity to a number of educational establishments, student accommodation, the Showroom Cinema, The Leadmill, and a number of charities and organisations in the area, which supported vulnerable children and adults. Mr Rowntree also made the point that the venue was located in the gateway to the City, and would be one of the first things that visitor and Sheffield residents would see upon leaving the train station and those driving into the City, from the Parkway. He stated that some women would be made to feel nervous when walking near the venue, and may be forced to choose different routes so they didn't have to walk past it. With Spearmint Rhino nearby, this may deter some women from accessing this area of the City. Mr Rowntree also referred to the decision of Harrogate Borough Council to refuse the application to renew Villa Mercedes' Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) Licence.

4.6.5 Nikki Bond

Ms Bond stated that the venue was in the gateway to the City, and not the kind of place that the Council should want visitors to have as their first impression of Sheffield. It was also next door to The Leadmill, which was frequented by young people from 14 years of age. There were a number of projects for vulnerable women in the area, as well as the Showroom Cinema and the Hallam Students' Union. Ms Bond made the point that by granting the application, this would breach the Council's public sector equality duty, and would therefore contradict all the good work the Council had done to promote equality and celebrate women in the City.

Ms Bond spoke on behalf of Louise Hague, MP, who had been contacted by a number of her constituents who were extremely concerned about the application, and had requested her to represent their views by submitting an objection. Ms Hague had made reference in her objection to the location of the venue, indicating that it was situated in the gateway to the City, there were a number of organisations in the area which supported vulnerable children and adults, it was very close to student accommodation, Sheffield Hallam University buildings and

the Showroom Cinema, and was next door to The Leadmill, which hosted a number of events for young people from 14 years of age. Reference was made to the fact that Spearmint Rhino had recently had its licence renewed, which could potentially mean that some women would feel nervous walking about the area, and may be forced to take a different route, which they should not have to do in their own City. Ms Hague believed that granting a licence for such a venue in a very active part of the City could possibly give the impression that the City condoned both sexualisation and objectification of women, which would be in complete contradiction to the Council's equality policies.

4.6.6 Helen Phillips-Jackson

Ms Phillips-Jackson, who was objecting both as a private individual but also in her capacity as a Commissioning Manager within the Drug and Alcohol/Domestic Abuse Co-ordination Team, stated that the location for the venue was totally inappropriate as it was in an area with a number of counselling and charitable services, and as the venue would be open until 08:00 hours, there was a potential for both employees and clients visiting such establishments to come into contact with employees or customers coming out of the Villa Mercedes venue.

4.6.7 Dr Shelley Roches-Jacques

Dr Roches-Jacques, a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, stated that she was objecting to the application for a SEV licence on the grounds of its grossly inappropriate location, namely with it being within the Cultural Industries Quarter, and close to the train station, a number of charities and organisations supporting vulnerable women, The Leadmill, which hosted events for young people aged 14 years of age and over, and the Sheffield Hallam Student Union building and student accommodation. She stated that the Students' Union had recently objected to the application to renew the SEV Licence for Spearmint Rhino, and that the granting of a further SEV Licence would be met with anger and dismay. Dr Roches-Jacques, and the Sheffield Hallam Students' Union officers, considered that the presence of such venues contradicted the ethos of Sheffield as a City, and undermined the safe, friendly and inclusive environment that people had strived to create for the young people who came to live and study here.

4.6.8 Lizzie Ellen

Ms Ellen, who was representing Paul Blomfield, MP, stated that granting the application would contradict the Council's own SEV policy, namely with regard to the inappropriate location of the premises. The premises were in close proximity to a number of charitable and counselling services, one of which provided confidential support and advice to victims of sexual abuse and rape and another being a sexual health charity, which offered sexual health care and education to young people. The premises were also very close to Sheffield Hallam University, the University Technical College, Christ Church Central and Freeman College, as well as being in the gateway to the City. Ms Ellen also made reference to the decision of Harrogate Borough Council, in refusing a similar application by Villa Mercedes for a SEV Licence in Harrogate.

4.6.9 Pam Marshall

Ms Marshall, who was speaking on behalf of Judith Dodds, Sheffield Council's Equality Hub Network Board, objected to the application on the grounds that the location was totally inappropriate. The organisations/establishments which were in close proximity to the premises included All Saints Catholic High School, the University Technical College, The Leadmill, the Sunday Church in the Workstation on Brown Street, and a counselling and advice service that supported women and girls from 13 years of age who had been raped or otherwise sexually abused. The premises were also very close to the cultural hub of the City and in a central gateway to the City. Ms Marshall also made reference to the fact that another sexual entertainment venue, Spearmint Rhino, was only a few minutes' walk away on Brown Street, and also in the Cultural Industries Quarter, and that the impact of having two such venues so close together, was likely to be associated with an increase in anti-social behaviour as users moved between the two. It was stated that the Sheffield Council's Equality Hub Board would ask whether the Council has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment when considering the application, and ensured that it was compliant with its duties under the Equality Act.

Ms Marshall stated that hiring women to strip or lap dance was a form of sexual abuse, which society was just beginning to openly analyse and understand more profoundly, given our greater understanding of the many ways women and girls were abused. As such, sexual entertainment venues involve the sexual abuse of women, and there was no place in Sheffield, or anywhere else in the world, where this could be viewed as acceptable.

4.6.10 Meera Kulkarni

Ms Kulkarni stated that her organisation had recently relocated to premises very close to the proposed sexual entertainment venue, on the basis that it met all the relevant criteria, mainly relating to the confidentiality and the safety of its clients. The organisation had spent around £40,000 on refurbishing the premises. If the application was granted, this would completely change the view of the organisation's clients in terms of the suitability of the premises. In terms of the proposed location for the sexual entertainment venue, Ms Kulkarni also referred to the existing venue, Spearmint Rhino, on Paternoster Row, and that the locality was a gateway to the City, being the first thing that visitors and Sheffield residents saw upon driving into the City, or leaving the train station. In the locality, there was student accommodation, creative small businesses, a nationally recognised and admired local music venue, various charities and counselling organisations which worked with a range of diverse, and sometimes vulnerable, clients and volunteers, as well as a college for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Reference was also made to the decision of Harrogate Borough Council, to refuse to renew Villa Mercedes' licence in Harrogate for reasons including physical contact with the dancers and allowing audience participation. Ms Kulkarni also stated that she believed that a sexual entertainment venue directly discriminated against women, by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women and that this contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society.

4.6.11 *Zero Option Sheffield*

A representative from Zero Option Sheffield gave a presentation highlighting its objections to the application. The representative referred to the inappropriate location for the premises, indicating that a number of groups and organisations were in close proximity, including charities or counselling services providing support and social opportunities for young people who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) or who are affected by HIV, and which supported survivors of rape, sexual violence and abuse of all ages. Also within close proximity was the University Technical College, The Leadmill, Sheffield College, All Saints Catholic High School, Christ Church Central and Freeman College, as well as the premises being located within a central gateway to the City and close to other city landmarks, historic buildings and tourist attractions.

The representative reported on the potential impacts of such a venue on equality and the Council's public sector equality duty, referring specifically to gender equality issues and a number of testimonies made by former dancers at such venues. Issues such as the cumulative adverse impact of existing sex establishment related activities in the vicinity of the proposed premises were also raised. The representative also referred to an extract from Villa Mercedes' website, which highlighted slogans used to attract customers within their tailor-made packages, such as "Your Mother-in-Law Passing" and "Your Girlfriend Being on That Time of the Month".

4.6.12 *Kevin Fitzpatrick (City Manager, Unite Students in Sheffield)*

Mr Fitzpatrick raised objections on the basis that granting the application would not promote the Council's licensing objectives, namely the prevention of crime and disorder, the promotion of public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. In terms of public nuisance he stated that around 600 students, typically aged between 18 and 21, were housed within 15 metres of The Leadmill, which was directly next door to the proposed venue, and which provided regular music entertainment, which impacted on the students' home life and study. With this and a further licensed premises in close proximity, the proposed venue would exacerbate the University's concern for students being able to maintain a peaceful home life. In terms of public safety, the venue was located on a very busy City Centre corner, opposite the student accommodation, and it was believed that this posed a safety concern as there would be increased traffic through vehicle drop-offs and waiting taxis. With regard to the protection of children from harm, there were many young students in the area, as well as a college catering for 14 to 19 year olds, and the application was viewed as inappropriate for the immediate area. Mr Fitzpatrick stated that granting the licence would also lead to an increase in crime and disorder, and he referred to the fact that police in other areas of the country had submitted objections to similar applications on the grounds of the potential risk of an increase in crime and disorder.

4.6.13 *Lisa Markham (Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Hallam Pastoral Centre)*

Ms Markham stated that she objected to the application in the strongest possible

terms, indicating that, due to its location, she would not be able to recommend the use of the important charitable and counselling services that were located nearby. Due to the location of such facilities, as well as a number of educational establishments and other venues frequented by children from 14 years of age, she had expected the applicants to have visited the area and identified what organisations and services were located there prior to submitting the application. Ms Markham referred to the policies and guidance in terms of the conduct of sexual entertainment venues, indicating that they differed considerably from most other workplaces. She also referred to the abusive/compromising behaviour connected to the operation of sexual entertainment venues, and stated that she believed that such venues directly discriminated against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women, and that this contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society.

4.6.14 Steve Slack - Sheena Amos Youth Trust (SAYiT)

Mr Slack stated that his objection to the application related to the close proximity of the proposed venue to the Sheena Amos Youth Trust (SAYiT). SAYiT was a young people's charity established in 1999, and had a history of working with young people around sexual health, HIV and sex and relationships, with a particular emphasis on the needs of young LGBT people. He stated that it would be outrageous that such an establishment should be sited next to Scotia Works, where young people attend at all times of the day, and pointed out that there were other organisations within the building who worked with very vulnerable people. Reference was also made to the fact that The Leadmill was next door to the proposed venue, which held over 100 events throughout the year aimed specifically at young people between 14 and 18 years old. Mr Slack made reference to a questionnaire, which parents and users of the Service had been asked to complete, with a large number of people indicating that they would be less likely to attend, and some indicating that they would never attend again if there was a sexual entertainment venue so close. He stated that some parents/users would feel uncomfortable attending sessions if there were likely to be employees/customers leaving the Villa Mercedes venue at the same time.

4.6.15 Rob Unwin

Mr Unwin stated that he wished to object to the application on the grounds of the prevention of crime and disorder, including fear of crime, noise pollution, anti-social behaviour or disturbance to residents, and the protection of children from harm. As an employee at Scotia Works, the tenants of which included many third sector organisations who worked with vulnerable adults and teenagers, Mr Unwin was concerned that the sexual entertainment venue would increase the fear of crime that the clients of these charities experience. He was also concerned that the venue portrayed that it was acceptable that women act as sexual objects for the gratification of men, which contributed to society's violence against, and harassment towards, women and girls.

In addition, in connection with the location, Mr Unwin stated that there were a number of young students living in the area, many from overseas, who may be

especially vulnerable, and was also very close to Freeman College. Interaction between students at the College and customers frequenting Villa Mercedes would almost be daily in some cases. It was also next door to The Leadmill, and in a gateway to the City, therefore being one of the first things people would see as they were driving into Sheffield and walking out of the train station in this direction. He also pointed out that Spearmint Rhino, which was very close by, on Brown Street, had just had its licence renewed.

4.6.16 Lizz Tuckerman

Ms Tuckerman stated that she objected to the application on the grounds that it would be inappropriate, having regard to the character of the relevant locality and to the use to which premises in the vicinity were put. She stated that the area was of considerable significance to the history of Sheffield and given the range and nature of the groups and organisations in the surrounding area, including charitable and counselling services, educational establishments and entertainment venues frequented by young people and families, the proposed location of the venue was totally inappropriate. She added that the venue was also located in one of the gateways to the City, which would give a bad impression for people arriving in the City, at the train station, and heading in the direction of the venue.

4.6.17 Carolyn Leary - Conflict Resolution Education in Schools Training (CREST)

Ms Leary worked for an organisation which provided training to primary and secondary schools in connection with supporting children in achieving positive resolutions to conflict. She had serious concerns that people would not attend the mediation sessions as a result of the venue being in close proximity. Ms Leary also made reference to comments made by the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire (Alan Billings) regarding potential links between sexual entertainment venues and child sexual exploitation, and to the dancers' welfare policy, which she believed to be misleading and confusing.

4.6.18 Councillor Douglas Johnson

Councillor Johnson referred to the high level of objections to the application, indicating that there were a number of people in attendance, with widespread knowledge, which highlighted the strong level of feeling against the application. He stated that it was very important that the Council complied with its Public Sector Equality Duty. Councillor Johnson went on to question and/or dispute the information set out in the application, namely regarding comments that there was very little residential accommodation in the areas, the comments about there being no windows in the premises and the applicant's statement that he had not been involved in any other licensing applications that had been refused, referring specifically to the decision of Harrogate Borough Council. He stated that, whilst there was no guidance in terms of the number of sexual entertainment venues in a given area, it was considered that, with Spearmint Rhino having recently had its licence renewed, two such venues so close to each other was not appropriate, and could potentially result in a 'venue crawl' effect.

Mr Johnson referred to the location of the venue, indicating that there would

shortly be a large number of young, vulnerable students arriving in the City, many of whom would be accommodated in the UNITE building, directly opposite the venue. He also referred to the fact that All Saints Catholic High School, Sheffield College and The Leadmill, which hosted a number of 14 to 18 year old nights, were all in very close proximity.

4.6.19 Jonathan Cook

Mr Cook, who lived and worked in Sheffield, and whose workplace was very close to the venue, objected strongly to the application on the grounds of its close proximity to a central gateway to the City or other City landmark, historic building or tourist attraction, all of which were relevant in this case. Mr Cook's objections relevant to the licensing objectives referred to the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm. In connection with the prevention of crime and disorder, Mr Cook referred to the adverse effects of such a venue on young female students, many of whom were accommodated directly opposite the proposed venue, and could, by implication or misunderstanding, be viewed as prostitutes and the club could induce women to work in acting as objects of male sexual gratification, contributing to the atmosphere and attitudes conducive to harassment and violence against women and girls. Reference was also made to the ability of Andreas Baskoutas to operate within the terms of his licence, in view of the closure of one of his clubs in Harrogate and one of his previous companies being compulsorily struck off the Companies House register in 2009.

In terms of public safety, Mr Cook expressed concerns that the existence of such a venue would be damaging to the safety of the LGBT community and that by having two sexual entertainment venues in this area would contradict the idea of the 'Purple Flag' City Centre, which was supposed to designate Sheffield as a safe city for all to use in the evening/night-time. He added that lap dancing clubs exploited vulnerable women, reinforced negative, outdated and dangerous gender stereotypes and behaviours, as well as having a negative effect on the environment surrounding them. With regard to the prevention of public nuisance, Mr Cook considered that, by having two similar venues within close proximity, would be entirely inappropriate and possibly dangerous, and could foreseeably lead to groups of men 'cruising' the area expecting to find street prostitutes, and parties of men traversing the area in search of further sexual entertainment venues. In terms of the protection of children from harm, Mr Cook referred to a number of educational establishments, including the University Technical College and All Saints Catholic High School, as well as a number of charitable and community sector organisations within the immediate vicinity of the venue, some of which worked with vulnerable adults, teenagers and school children. The venue was also next door to The Leadmill, a well-respected music venue, which held a number of events for 14 to 18 year olds.

4.6.20 Clare Turner

Ms Turner stated that the application should be refused under the discretionary grounds for refusal in the City Council's Sexual Entertainment Venues Licensing Policy on the grounds that 'the number of sex establishments in the relevant

locality at the time the application is made is equal to, or exceeds the number which the Authority consider is appropriate for that locality' and 'the grant or renewal of a licence would be inappropriate, having regard to the character of the relevant locality or the use to which any premises in the vicinity are put or the layout, character or condition of the premises, vehicle, vessel or stall in respect of which the application is made'. She also made reference to the City Council's statutory obligations in relation to disability, race and gender, indicating that she believed that sexual entertainment venues directly discriminated against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women, and that this contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society. In terms of the venue's location and the character of the surrounding area, Ms Turner stated that the venue was situated in the gateway to the City, and that there were a number of organisations in the area which supported vulnerable children and adults. Ms Turner stated that the close proximity of the venue would create a barrier for children and young people using the services and education facilities in the area. Also nearby was student accommodation, Sheffield Hallam University, the Showroom Cinema and The Leadmill, which hosted 100 events for 14 to 18 year olds every year, the queues for which would run past the Villa Mercedes venue's doors. Reference was also made to the fact that Spearmint Rhino had just had its licence renewed. Ms Turner considered that women would feel nervous walking around the area because of the existing sexual entertainment venue, which would be made worse if this application was granted. It was also considered that granting a licence would be contradictory to all the good work the Council undertook, funded and promoted, with regard to the recent SheFest, the Equality Hub within the community bringing communities of identity together to tackle equality issues within the Council and the City.

4.6.21 Jonathan Macaskill

Mr Macaskill was objecting on behalf of Ethical Property Company, who owned and managed Scotia Works, and which was committed to providing office and meeting space to charities and voluntary groups, retail space which supported small businesses and social enterprises and workshops for organisations in creative industries. He made reference to a number of the charities and community groups, some of which were located in close proximity to the premises. He considered that the venue was located on a prominent corner, and was highly visible, and would have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the whole area. He made reference to The Leadmill, which was next door to the proposed venue, which held regular events for young people aged between 14 and 18 years, the queues of which would pass the proposed venue. Reference was also made to the Freeman College, which provided support to vulnerable adults, while many of the flats nearby were occupied by students. Mr Macaskill also made the point that Spearmint Rhino was very close by, and had just had its licence renewed, and that a second such venue in the area would not only have a negative impact on the immediate neighbours, but also on the neighbourhood as a whole.

4.6.22 Elyse Peacock (The Leadmill)

Ms Peacock stated that the application should be refused under the discretionary grounds for refusal in the City Council's Sexual Entertainment Venues Licensing

Policy on the grounds that ‘the number of sex establishments in the relevant locality at the time the application is made is equal to, or exceeds the number which the Authority consider is appropriate for that locality’ and ‘the grant or renewal of a licence would be inappropriate, having regard to the character of the relevant locality or the use to which any premises in the vicinity are put or the layout, character or condition of the premises, vehicle, vessel or stall in respect of which the application is made’. Ms Peacock stated that the Council had statutory obligations in relation to disability, race and gender, and to ensure that these factors were not used to discriminate against anyone. She also believed that a sexual entertainment venue directly discriminated against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of women, and that this contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society. In terms of her objections regarding the location of the premises, Ms Peacock stated that the venue was situated in the gateway to the City, being one of the first things that visitors and Sheffield residents would see upon leaving the train station and those driving into the City from the Parkway and from the south of the City into town, Meadowhall and beyond. There were a number of businesses and organisations in the area, some which provided support for vulnerable children and adults, and the venue was located within close proximity to a number of educational establishments, including Sheffield Hallam University, the University Technical College, All Saints Catholic High School and Freeman College.

The venue would also be in very close proximity to the Showroom Cinema and Workstation, which was a cultural hub in Sheffield and next to The Leadmill, which hosted over 100 events for 14 to 18 year olds, the queues of which would run in that direction so would potentially see under 18 year olds queuing past the Villa Mercedes venue’s doors. The Leadmill also hosted over 200 club nights a year, with the majority of its customers at peak times being very young students, who, again, would be queuing past the proposed venue’s doors. The Leadmill also hosted events from ‘Under the Stars’, which was a local social enterprise, and welcomed customers with disabilities and learning difficulties, giving them a safe and secure environment to experience a club atmosphere and to socialise. There was concern that The Leadmill could experience a loss in attendance and business if the SEV licence was granted due to its customers feeling vulnerable and intimidated, and no longer wanting to attend. Reference was also made to Spearmint Rhino, which had just had its licence renewed, and which was less than five minutes walking distance from the proposed venue. Ms Peacock considered that a sexual entertainment venue in the heart of the City, or indeed anywhere in the City, was completely contradictory to everything that the Council says it stands for.

4.6.23 Claire Williams

Ms Williams stated that she agreed with all the comments raised by the other objectors, and considered that, for all the reasons stated, the application should be refused.

4.6.24 Kate Whittaker (On behalf of Michelle Turner)

Ms Whittaker, attending the meeting to put forward Michelle Turner’s objections,

stated that the application should be refused under the discretionary grounds for refusal in the City Council's SEV Licensing Policy, in relation to the number of sexual establishments in a given locality and that it would be inappropriate given the character of the locality. Ms Turner also considered that such a venue would discriminate against, and be intimidating to, women, and objected strongly on the grounds of its proposed location, specifically its close proximity to a number of organisations providing support for vulnerable adults and children, student accommodation, Sheffield Hallam University, schools, the Showroom Cinema and The Leadmill. She considered that granting the licence would contradict all the excellent equality-related work the Council had undertaken, and made reference to the reasons behind the decision in Harrogate, to refuse to renew Villa Mercedes' SEV Licence.

4.6.25 Rebecca Walker (The Leadmill)

Ms Walker, who was responsible for promoting events at The Leadmill, stated that she had received a number of calls from parents, expressing concerns in terms of their children attending the club for the first time. She would reassure such parents that their children would be safe on the grounds of the club's excellent safeguarding policies/arrangements, but indicated that having a sexual entertainment venue next door to the club, would make it much more difficult to convince parents. Ms Walker stated that The Leadmill has a Performing Right Society (PRS) Heritage Award, and that local artists showcased their work there, which attracted tourists from all over the world to this area of the City.

4.6.26 Andy Tucker (Chair of Governors, All Saints Catholic High School)

Mr Tucker stated that he wished to register a strong objection to the proposed application, as Chair of Governors, and that he totally agreed with the comments made in the objection by Claire Scott, Headteacher of the School. He stated that having such a venue at this location would be harmful for students attending the school, who needed to walk through this area to access transport to and from the school. Staff spent a considerable amount of time working with students to alert them to the dangers of sexual exploitation and yet, by agreeing to this proposal, the Council will effectively be condoning this. He considered that the Council should refuse the application under the discretionary grounds for refusal in its Sexual Entertainment Venues Licensing Policy on the grounds that 'the number of sex establishments in the relevant locality at the time the application is made is equal to, or exceeds the number which the Authority consider is appropriate for that locality' and 'the grant or renewal of a licence would be inappropriate, having regard to the character of the relevant locality or the use to which any premises in the vicinity are put or the layout, character or condition of the premises, vehicle, vessel or stall in respect of which the application is made'. Mr Tucker also considered that the Council had statutory obligations in relation to disability, race and gender, and ensuring that these factors were not used to discriminate against anyone, and believed that a sexual entertainment venue would directly discriminate against women by normalising the sexualisation and objectification of them, which contributed to their sexualisation and objectification in other areas of society.

In terms of objections regarding the venue's location, Mr Tucker stated that the venue was situated in the gateway to the City, and was also on an access route for young people travelling to and from Sheffield College, the University Technical College and All Saints Catholic High School. There were also a number of counselling and charitable organisations in the area, which supported vulnerable children and adults, as well as the venue being in very close proximity to Sheffield Hallam University buildings, the Showroom Cinema and The Leadmill which, as well as hosting over 200 club nights a year, held over 100 events for 14 to 18 year olds, the queues for which would run in the direction of the Villa Mercedes venue's doors. Mr Tucker stated that some women felt nervous walking around this area due to the existing sexual entertainment venue, Spearmint Rhino, and having a further such venue would make the situation worse, by forcing them to take a different route, which they should not have to do. He considered that the Council had a duty under the Equality Act to work to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and that granting a licence would be contradictory to other work that the Council undertook, funded and promoted, including the recent SheFest, the Equalities Hub within the community bringing communities of identity together to tackle equalities issues within the Council and the City.

4.6.27 Chris Scarlett

Ms Scarlett, Chair of one of the organisations providing support and advice for vulnerable adults and children in the area, stated that she objected to the application on the grounds that her organisation had recently increased its opening hours in order to provide more flexibility in terms of pre-school appointments, resulting in parents and clients seeing employees and customers leaving the Villa Mercedes venue, when it closed at 08:00 hours. It had taken her organisation a number of years to find suitable premises, with the current premises being ideal, and meeting all the relevant criteria, but its close proximity to the proposed venue would create major problems if the application was granted. The siting of such a venue so close would not only raise concerns for parents and clients visiting her organisation, but would also result in funding issues, which could ultimately result in the organisation folding, which would be tragic for both the organisation and the City as a whole.

4.6.28 Kath Housley

Ms Housley stated that, in her opinion, it beggared belief that a sexual entertainment venue could be located in an area with so many educational establishments and charitable and counselling services, some of which provided support for vulnerable children and adults. She considered that the applicants should apologise to all the individuals and groups and organisations who had objected to the application on the grounds of the inconvenience and upset caused in terms of the apparent lack of research undertaken by them, as well as the incorrect declarations in the application questionnaire.

4.6.29 Martine Taube

Ms Taube, who was in the final stages of transgender surgery, expressed concerns for the safety and wellbeing of young people having similar surgery,

mainly in terms of their ability to walk round this area. She stated that Sheffield was proud of its diversity, and considered that transgender and LGBT people would no longer feel safe, or could possibly be subject to verbal or physical assaults by people attending the sexual entertainment venues. She stated that people who visited sexual entertainment venues were most likely to be drunk, therefore more likely to be abusive to people they considered different to themselves. Ms Taube stated that she was speaking from experience, having been subject to a violent assault on Corporation Street, and was very concerned that such assaults could increase if there was a further sexual entertainment venue in this area. She stated that the location of the proposed venue was totally inappropriate in that people arriving in the City, at the rail station, were directed straight towards the venue.

4.6.30 Harriet Johnson (Barrister, on behalf of the Women's Equality Party, Sheffield)

Ms Johnson stated that the Sub-Committee had the power to refuse the application, under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, on the grounds of its location. She stated that the points and arguments in terms of the inappropriate location of the venue had already been made eloquently, and in great detail, by the other objectors who either worked for, or were linked in some way to, the various organisations, establishments or services within close proximity to the venue. Ms Johnson referred to the possibility of employees of, or parents and clients visiting, the various organisations, establishments or services within close proximity to the venue, coming into contact with customers of the venue on the basis of the venue closing at 08:00 hours. She referred to a survey of people in the queue at The Leadmill, on a recent club night, the results of which indicated, in general, that they considered the application to be a bad idea, in terms of what organisations and services were in the surrounding area, a high number of people indicated that they would be worried when leaving the venue, and would feel uncomfortable queuing, with the sexual entertainment venue so close, and a high percentage of people indicated that they would like to see the application refused. Ms Johnson referred briefly to the character of the locality, specifically to the attractive walkway from the rail station, which then led directly to the area, with the venue sited at a prominent location within it.

Ms Johnson made reference to the discrepancies in the application questionnaire, specifically to the integrity and business dealings of Andreas Baskoutas in terms of the operation of former premises he managed. Reference was also made to the close proximity of the venue to a number of projects and counselling services, including those providing emotional and practical support to people with a wide range of needs, including housing, parenting, substance misuse, health, benefits and debt, domestic abuse, education and employment, and confidence building. The proposed venue was also very close to student accommodation, which could possibly lead to an increased temptation for young female students to consider employment at the venue. With the granting of a further SEV licence in this area, there was a potential, particularly given that the opening hours would be from 24:00 hours to 08:00 hours, for an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour from patrons attending the venue who would be likely to have otherwise returned home. Ms Johnson concluded by stating that ultimately, considering the vulnerable

women, the student population and the crime statistics in Sheffield, the granting of a SEV licence would have a detrimental effect on the local area, and would therefore be inappropriate. Furthermore, the fact that the applicant has a history of disregarding licensing conditions, despite the intervention of the police and local Councils, which were designed to safeguard its employees, as well as members of the public, demonstrated that he is not fit to hold a SEV Licence.

- 4.7 Part One of the meeting was closed, and present for Part Two were Paddy Whur (for the Applicant) and Andreas Baskoutas (Applicant).
- 4.8 Paddy Whur stated that, after listening to all the views and representations now made, the applicant had agreed to withdraw the application for the granting of a Sexual Entertainment Venue Licence in respect of the premises known as Villa Mercedes, 4 Suffolk Road, Sheffield, S2 4AG.
- 4.9 Mr Whur conveyed his apologies to the Members and objectors present at the hearing for the administrative errors made in the application and responded briefly to the allegations made in terms of Mr Baskoutas' integrity and relating to Wood Whur Solicitor's involvement in terms of acting on behalf of Mr Baskoutas.

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