

LILITH REPORT ON LAP DANCING AND STRIPTease IN THE BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

“Table dancing has moved into the mainstream. The clubs, previously perceived as sleazy and hostile, are now seen as ideal venues for a corporate night out or a bit of celebrity-spotting.”

The Guardian, ‘Wage Slaves’

Taking your clothes off is big business. Lap dance arrived in Britain in 1997 with the opening of Secrets in Hammersmith, and it’s not going away without a fight. Although striptease clubs have been a familiar sight in Soho for many years, it is lap dance where the money is, where ‘girls’, sometimes teenaged but almost always young, gyrate naked in front of men for £10, and perform private shows for £20. With the chain For Your Eyes Only making £1 million a year profit on its outer London Park Royal branch (the Mayfair branch refuses to disclose), there is no doubt that this is an extremely healthy market. The founder of Spearmint Rhino, an American chain which is one of the more controversial clubs, even models his business on McDonalds, giving the customer a three minute fantasy of being wanted by beautiful women, whilst pocketing a healthy fee.

This ‘fast fantasy’ approach is demeaning and insulting to women as it is, but coupled with the potential impact that such establishments can have upon a community in terms of noise, antisocial behaviour and safety, it becomes far more serious. It must be stressed that the venues discussed in this report are licensed, and therefore the Council that licenses them has some responsibility towards them. The report centres on the Borough of Camden because Lilith and Eaves believe that Camden’s opinion and acts carry great weight with other London boroughs, and that if Camden were to change its policy on lap dance and striptease establishments, then this good practice could spread through London.

PROFILE BOROUGH - POPULATION AND DENSITY

For the purposes of this report we are comparing the borough of Camden to two inner London boroughs, Islington and Westminster, in terms of their relative size and distribution of striptease or lap dancing venues, as well as the interpretations that each Council uses to licence such establishments. Finally, the report looks at the impact of the striptease and lap dancing venues have had on the residential populations of the boroughs, and how the incidence of crime (particularly sexual crimes against women) has altered since the arrival of the first UK lap dancing club in Hammersmith in 1997.

Camden is an inner London borough neighbouring Westminster to the south-west and Islington to the east. Although it is smaller than Westminster, it shares some of the commercial/residential clustering that characterises that borough. However, whereas Westminster attempts to cluster most of its 20 licensed striptease and lap dancing establishments in the Soho or WC2 area away from the majority of its 181,279 residents, Camden's commercial areas are still highly residential. It has a resident population of 191,000, 1200 premises licensed to serve alcohol, 130 premises with entertainment licences and 7 striptease and lap dancing premises licensed by the Council. By contrast Islington, which shares Camden's highly residential character, has only one licensed striptease venue and one pole-dancing bar.

The premises licensed by each borough for striptease and/or lap dancing break down into the following wards;

Camden

Ward	Number of licensed premises
Bloomsbury	2
West Hampstead	1
Holborn	3
St. Pancras/Somers Town	1

Westminster

Ward	Number of licensed premises
St. James	2
Marylebone	1
West End	17

Islington

Ward	Number of licensed premises
Caledonian	1
Clerkenwell	1

INTERPRETATION OF LICENSING

Any premises in Greater London, and the United Kingdom as a whole, that offers entertainment for the public, and advertises or charges for such entertainment, is required to possess a Public Entertainment Licence, or PEL. Any premises that is subject to a PEL is exempt by law from the requirement to register as a 'Sex Encounter Establishment' in order to offer striptease or nude entertainment. As a result most London Authorities impose a standard condition on PELs that any establishment wishing to apply for a PEL or Music and Dancing licence with the intention to show striptease, lap and table dancing or sex entertainment must apply expressly for a waiver (known as 'special nudity permission') from the

Council in question. A fee is charged for this waiver and the Council is therefore free to impose conditions upon the licensee, although this does not always occur.

A distinction is often made at the licensing stage between 'striptease', 'lap dancing' and 'sex establishment', although this is at the Local Authority's discretion. The Local Authorities (Miscellaneous) Act of 1982, which was adopted by the GLC and subsequently by the borough Councils defines 'striptease' as including nudity, wearing see-through clothing, and non-participatory sexual stimulation performed in a designated area (e.g. a stage) only, and no person under 18 being admitted, with notices posted to this effect around the premises.¹

'Lap dancing' or 'table dancing' has additional conditions imposed, that the dancers may only dance at the tables of customers seated in areas approved by the Council with CCTV in operation at all times, an adequate number of Council-approved Door Supervisors, and that contact between dancer and customer is restricted to the transfer of money or tokens at the beginning or the end of the performance. By contrast, a 'sex establishment' is defined as a premises at which performances are given that comprise the sexual stimulation of customers, or performances in which the breasts, genitalia or excretory organs are exposed, or premises selling sex articles to a significant degree. Needless to say these definitions are self-contradictory enough to allow lap dancing and striptease licensees some legal leeway, not to mention the interpretation made by each individual Council. Some choose to enforce rigid interpretations upon their licensees. Camden unfortunately does not.

¹ Local Authorities (Miscellaneous) Act of 1982, Additional Conditions SX: For Particular Control Over Striptease Or Similar Entertainment Involving Nudity
(<http://www.council.blackburnworld.com/feedback/licensing/pdf/exe>)

CAMDEN AND ISLINGTON

Several borough authorities have attempted to interpret this system of conditions and rules in the strictest possible sense. Islington, a borough that is smaller than Camden but is highly residential, has ruled that any premises that wishes to show striptease confined to a stage must apply for a Music and Dancing licence only, in accordance with the GLC ruling, but that the licensee must submit to Council and Police inspection as well as imposed age restrictions and strict rules about contact and Door Supervisors. Any premises wishing to use lap or table dancing must apply for a Music and Dancing licence and also a Sex Encounter licence, costing £10,000. To date Islington has one pub licensed to show stage striptease and one recently opened pole dance club.²

Camden Council takes a different approach. The well-known 'Secrets' chain of table dancing clubs, which operates three of its five London-based premises in Camden, has been permitted under appeal to evade the 'special nudity permission' for one of its clubs by continuing to be licensed under the previous premises' name of Manatiys, and thereby being deemed suitable for a straightforward Music and Dancing PEL. The other Secrets clubs, Spearmint Rhino on Tottenham Court Road and three other lap dancing venues within the borough are licensed with Music and Dancing PELs including the special nudity permission, but Camden declines to set any form of age restriction on these venues, preferring to leave it to the club's discretion. Camden also admits that there are unlicensed premises operating within the borough.

² The Flying Scotsman, Caledonian Road and Hooters, Clerkenwell respectively.

CAMDEN AND WESTMINSTER

Camden operates a 'full nudity' stance on the lap dancing and striptease venues within the borough, which allows dancers to perform fully nude instead of in minimal clothing (usually a G-string). Camden's relaxing of its minimal clothing requirement in 2000 (incidentally the year of the arrival of Spearmint Rhino and Secrets Holborn) has prompted a tide of change among other borough authorities.

Westminster Council recently changed its own policy to fall in line with Camden's after extensive lobbying by its 20 'strip' establishments, culminating in a court case victory by Peter Stringfellow, of Stringfellow's Cabaret of Angels in February 2002.³ Mr. Stringfellow had felt that the minimal clothing rule previously imposed by Westminster was constricting him financially, and had threatened to move to Camden borough in order to keep up with his main rival, the fully-nude Spearmint Rhino. Westminster's decision to capitulate was in part financially motivated, as there were concerns about the loss of business and licensing fees to Camden if striptease and lap dancing premises decided to relocate.

IMPACT ACROSS LONDON

Camden's relaxed stance on full nudity has also made life difficult in other boroughs. Hammersmith and Fulham Council, a member of the North and West Licensing Liaison Group, (of which Camden is also a member), attempted to impose a condition requiring table dancers at their Secrets to wear a minimal amount of clothing, although stage dancers could appear nude. However, the licensee of Secrets, the longest running lap dancing club in Britain,⁴ felt aggrieved by this decision and appealed to the Magistrate. The Local Authority was overruled and the administrative and financial costs of attempting to impose conditions when Camden, Brent and Westminster all stand in favour of full nudity

³ <http://www.ananova.com/sexlife/02/2002>

⁴ Established in 1997 according to Secrets themselves, making them the first lap dancing club in Britain.

has discouraged other authorities. Hillingdon even cited the stances of other boroughs and the Secrets appeal to support its own decision to go 'fully nude'.⁵ As one of the first boroughs to relax its stance towards nudity, Camden has had a great deal of influence on other boroughs. If Camden Council can improve its policy regarding striptease and lap dancing, then this good practice could also be used to positively influence other Local Authorities.

IMPACT: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

It is clear that some concerns exist over the attitudes of the Council towards the licensing process, However, we also believe that the advent of the 'strip club' and its encouragement towards late licensing is also having a detrimental effect on the welfare of local residents, particularly female residents and visitors to Camden. Between April 2000 and March 2001 Camden recorded 2730 noise complaints within the borough. A quarter of these complaints related to commercial noise coming from pubs, clubs and bars at night.

It can be no coincidence that Bloomsbury and Holborn,⁶ the areas that had the most complaints, also have the greatest number of striptease and lap dancing clubs in the borough, all of which have late -opening licences and attract late night noise nuisances such as unlicensed minicabs, individuals soliciting and prostituted women, not to mention the departure of the legitimate customers. The noise generated by these clubs has not gone unnoticed by residents, who lodged objections against the 2002 renewal of Spearmint Rhino's licence for 161 Tottenham Court Road and the licensing of Secrets at Finchley Road for the reasons mentioned here.

⁵ N. Stanley, Environmental Committee Report 1st October 1998, available online at <http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk>

⁶ Holborn had most complaints according to Camden Environmental Health (2001), Bloomsbury had most complaints according to Camden Police's CAD records (2001).

The residents at Finchley Road were particularly concerned that the new lap dancing club would add to the already considerable night noise generated by the O2 centre to push environmental noise up to an unacceptable level. Their concern is well founded. Camden measured environmental noise at Euston and Finchley Road, and found levels had increased from 60dB in 1999 to over 70dB in 2002,⁷ past the level advertised by the Council as being unlikely to cause permanent damage during lifetime exposure. Although this level is mostly due to traffic, the problem can only be made worse by having several late-licence establishments disgorging customers (who then all have to get home) into a highly residential area in the early hours. The Council is aware of this problem and is taking steps to minimise noise to residents, including making sounding a horn between 23.00 and 07.00 an offence. However, as the Police's observations of Spearmint Rhino show, this action may not be enough.

“... 00.20am...a large group of approximately 18 males left the club and hung around outside, making lots of noise, shouting and singing...”

“Touts were overheard offering to take people who have left the club or passing by, to other strip clubs to see girls.”

(from Report of Director, Environmental Health Department 28 March 2002)

⁷ Between the hours of 22.00 and 07.00.
<http://www.camden.gov.uk/green/sections/urban/publichealth5.html>

CRIME

The principal causes for concern regarding the impact of late-opening striptease and lap dancing venues for both residents and visitors can be summarised as the following;

Concerns of residents of Camden:

- **Antisocial behaviour**
- **Fear of crime**
- **Safety of female residents**

Concerns of visitors to Camden:

- **Safety at night**
- **Safety of female visitors**

The problem with antisocial behaviour is that it is difficult to measure or quantify. As Camden Council admits, 'because of the persistent level of incidents and their location and nature the impact they have upon an area and the community who live there can be profound.'⁸ Put another way, the Police cannot take any action against normally rowdy customers exiting a lap dancing club because they are behaving, but this does not mean that they behave all the time. The persistent nature of antisocial behaviour generates more misery for residents who, in the case of Bloomsbury, Euston and Finchley Road, already suffer noisy environments and broken sleep. Camden's Audit also places disturbance 'hotspots' at Kings Cross, Camden Town Underground and UCL on Tottenham Court Road.

Fear of crime is also a key concern of residents. One in five Camden residents fears assault without a motive, compared to one in six Islington residents.⁹ In Westminster 73% of female respondents fear crime, and the residents of WC2,

⁸ Camden Crime and Disorder Audit 2001, p.34

⁹ Islington Crime and Disorder Audit 1998- 2001 p.7

where a quarter of the licensed lap dancing and strip venues are based, are unique in Westminster for feeling more unsafe at night.

RAPE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

With a number of venues in Camden that have a predominately male clientele, as well as being situated near large numbers of female residents and students in the case of Spearmint Rhino and Secrets Holborn, the safety of women in the borough, particularly at night, is a concern. Although all three boroughs have seen their overall number of crimes decrease in recent years, Camden has seen the smallest decrease. Westminster's level of recorded crime decreased by 12.6%, Islington's by 13.2%, but Camden's decreased by just 5.6%, less than half of the other boroughs.¹⁰ Islington has also seen its number of sexual offences (including indecent assault, soliciting, prostitution and unlawful intercourse with girls) decrease by 24% over 2001 (and many of these incidents centred on Holloway and Pentonville Prisons), while the rape rate dropped by 4%.

Camden's female rape rate per 1000 for 2001 was three times the national average, and 12% of these were aggressive, causing mild to moderate injury. Comparing the rape and indecent assault figures for 1999, before the establishment of Spearmint Rhino and Secrets Holborn, Finchley Road and Euston, and 2002,¹¹

Since 1999 rape of women in Camden has increased by 50%

Since 1999 indecent assault of women in Camden has increased by 57%

In addition, several of the venues are close to student accommodation, such as ULU, UCL, LSE and several TEFL schools, and in the Spearmint Rhino renewal application it was suggested that

¹⁰ Statistics from the Met Police web site <http://www.met.police.uk/statistics> for 2000.

¹¹ Financial Years, Apr 1998 to Mar 1999, Apr 2001 to Mar 2002.

'the area around the University Street and Tottenham Court has now been denigrated into a 'no go' area for female shoppers and male passers-by who are often accosted by pimps and other strip clubs offering sexual services and favours.'¹²

This would suggest that the female students, particularly those away from home, are also at risk. Over 60% of rape victims and 78% of indecent assault victims in Camden in 2001 were under 30, which is particularly concerning when the Met reports that over 230 young women were victims of minicab rape in the same year.¹³ The increase in striptease and late clubs can only attract more unlicensed mini-cab drivers to the area, putting potentially vulnerable young women in danger.

There is also some concern over the welfare of the women working in the establishments. The controversy over Spearmint Rhino's alleged 'prostitution' charges, which were reported in the national Press as

"prostitution and brothel-keeping".

From 'My Camden' News online July issue¹⁴

"Clients, it was claimed, were breaking the lap dance taboo by touching the girls and police investigated allegations of prostitution. Prudential Assurance, which owns the building, was horrified..."

From the Evening Standard

¹² Report of Director, Environmental Health Department 28 March 2002 section 3.4

¹³ Numbers taken across London as a whole. (<http://www.sapphire.met.police.uk/minicab>)

¹⁴ <http://www.mycamden.co.uk/camden/community-localnewsJuly01.htm>

“Dancers' contracts appear to be designed primarily to sign away their rights. 'informality' within the business means health and safety rules are not always enforced.”

From the Guardian story ‘Wage Slaves’¹⁵

“Police were worried conduct at the club might amount to prostitution.... Residents have also complained about the club attracting prostitutes and unlicensed minicab drivers.”

From the BBCi online newspaper¹⁶

Because Spearmint Rhino doesn't have their 'girls' dancing on an open floor, but instead uses trademark 'private' booths for a £20 dance, it is feared that coercion to break the 'no-touching' rule may be taking place, violating the worker's terms of employment and the licensing set by Camden Council, who investigated claims of dancers performing oral sex and other illegal acts upon customers in July 2001. Despite this widely-reported investigation, Spearmint Rhino won its last license appeal in March 2002. This report's ultimate intention is to highlight some of the problems that Lilith and Eaves feel are either caused or exacerbated by the lap dancing industry in London. Camden may not have the most strip tease or lap dancing venues in the capital, but we are convinced that it does have the capacity to instigate change if it so wishes. We accept that this industry is financially motivated, but we cannot accept that any public body would wish to be seen as abandoning those people to which it has a responsibility. The Local Authority of Camden states itself in its Equalities policy that

¹⁵ <http://money.guardian.co.uk/work/wageslaves/story/0,11996,714994,00.html>

¹⁶ \BBC NEWS England Indecent conduct claim at lap dance club.htm

“...the Council has an important leadership role in influencing others, promoting and encouraging fairness and equality and contributing to a more just and compassionate society.”

From the Diversity Policy Statement

It is difficult to see how allowing women to continue to walk in fear, while residents go without sleep and licensees can overturn Council decisions imposed to protect others, can be seen as a more compassionate and just society. Of course it would be wonderful if strip clubs could be eradicated tomorrow. Until that occurs it is clear that the licensing rules as they are need to change, and if the Council cannot enforce rules directly onto the venue, they can hurt the pockets of the owners instead.

The Local Authority could impose some forms of standard monitoring for the larger clubs to curb their power to influence policy, and strict procedures for violation of licence conditions , or removing the licence altogether to close down the venue. Camden could adopt a system similar to Islington’s, where lap dancing clubs must pay an additional £10,000 and enforce strict age restrictions on the orders of the Council. The clubs could be made responsible for enforcing noise restrictions outside their premises, including the reputed touts, again on the understanding that they need to do this to retain their licence. This may well also discourage the bogus minicab drivers.

Perhaps in this way, Camden Council could change policy in its own borough, and then share efficient good practice with other boroughs to create a London that bears more resemblance to the description given by Camden Council.

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EAVES AND LILITH

Eaves Housing For Women was set up as a supported housing collective for women in 1977. After a period of recent growth Eaves decided to improve the services across London in response to the appalling lack of service available to women suffering violence in some London boroughs, and the limited availability of services in others.

Lilith, a second tier pan-London agency, was born to address this lack of services available to combat violence against women. In conjunction with Hackney Women's Aid and the Women's Resource Centre, Eaves intends to research the services already available in London to victims of a range of violence, including rape, sexual assault, FGM, stalking, harassment and bullying in the workplace. Where these services are working well, we will share this good practice with other London-based agencies. Where a service is inadequate, poorly funded or needs assistance, then Lilith can help.