WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE

**APPLICATION TO RENEW A
SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT
VENUE LICENCE**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF Steve Russell

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1. My name is Steve Russell. I am employed at Vanity Bar & Nightclub, 4 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BJ ("the Premises") as the Designated Member of Staff in relation to pedicabs. I have been employed since February 2019.

2. My role, as I understand it, is to work outside the Premises in Carlisle Street up to an including the junction with Dean Street to ask any pedicab drivers, even those not looking to attract custom from the Premises, to:

   a. Move away from the Premises; and
   b. Keep any noise to an absolute minimum.

3. In relation to both of those tasks, I believe I am doing a good job.

4. I started my job without formal training in dealing with pedicabs. That is not my employer's fault - as far as I am aware there is no formal training for the role I fulfil. I have, in effect, learned on the job.

5. During the past 12 months I have learned what works and what does not work in relation to pedicabs in the vicinity of the Premises.

6. Pedicabs are an issue throughout Soho. I have found that they tend to congregate or loiter in areas which experience the highest footfall, therefore giving themselves a better chance of attracting customers. The corner of Carlisle Street and Dean Street is one such location because there is always a flow of people, regardless of the hour, coming into, and out of, Soho.

7. When I first started out I took a robust stance with the pedicab drivers that were looking for business near to the Premises. I would tell them in no uncertain terms to "go away" and that they were "not welcome here." This did not have the desired effect and in several instances led to a disagreement between myself and the pedicab driver with him raising his voice. I won't repeat what was said, but you can probably guess the kind of responses that I got.

8. Having realized this wasn't going to work I modified my approach and approach the pedicab drivers calmly and politely. Instead of telling them to leave I would ask them to leave and I would explain to them that it was to help local residents sleep and to stop them making complaints about the Premises. By doing this I was able to build a level of rapport with the pedicab drivers in order to get them to comply with my instructions. The pedicab drivers that frequent the area are not just there to collect customers from the Premises, they have identified the junction of Dean Street and Carlisle Street as a good location for picking up customers coming into and out of Soho.

9. During all of my work with the pedicab drivers I am mindful that I actually have no powers whatsoever to stop them doing what they are doing or to require them to do anything that I tell them to do. A member of the public has the same powers I do.

10. Until the latter part of 2019 I was able to convince most pedicab drivers that I found congregating in the area to pick up fares from nearby premises to base themselves in Dean Street north of the junction with Carlisle Street. This seemed a sensible location for them and kept them away from sensitive residential premises. For the avoidance of doubt I don't think there is a perfect location for them. Their presence is always going to upset someone, somewhere.

11. Unfortunately, the streetscape in that part of Dean Street has changed and it is no longer a suitable location to keep pedicab drivers away from the Premises and they now wait slightly closer than they did previously (at the top end of Carlisle Street by the junction with Dean Street). Again, I must make it clear that the pedicab drivers using the area to wait are not doing so purely to pick up customer from the Premises. I often see those pedicab drivers picking up customers from other premises who are either walking up or down Dean Street.

12. The pedicab drivers that wait there, in my experience, do so quietly because I have asked them to. They know that if they are loud or if they misbehave then I will make a note of it and report them. The pedicab drivers talk quietly amongst themselves. They do not play music from the (sometimes very large) speakers attached to their pedicabs. I rely on their goodwill to manage their behaviour.

13. Loud music becomes a problem when a pedicab that is in use passes the Premises on its way somewhere else. Pedicab drivers tend to play music whilst on a trip to gee up their customers and to secure themselves a tip. A few times I have tried to stop these

pedicab drivers as they pass the Premises but they drive around me. There is no sense in shouting after them as that would cause more disturbance than they have already caused.

14. During my time working at the Premises I am not aware that there has been a specific nighttime enforcement operation in relation to pedicabs in Soho. If there was, we would fully support it. I am aware that there has been some enforcement activity in relation to pedicabs, but my understanding is that has been to do with motorized or electrically powered pedicabs that do not require the driver to pedal and are therefore captured by legislation.

15. As far as I am aware we are the only Premises doing this kind of work with pedicabs and I am sorry to learn that residents do not feel it is effective. I respectfully disagree - I think things would be much worse if I was not engaged and did not have the rapport with the drivers that I do.

16. Customers leaving the Premises are encouraged, by way of signs and verbal warning, not to engage with or use pedicabs but to be perfectly honest, if they choose to get into a dialogue with the pedicab drivers or to engage them on a trip there is not much I can do, or the Premises can do, about that.

17. The Premises is doing its utmost, and I am doing my utmost, to deal with a problem that affects large swathes of the West End of London and as I have said above, I think we are doing it, and I am doing it, well.

18. I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

Signed: _Sprussell_

Name: Steve Russell

Dated: 30 - 1 - 20