

The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

27 November 2020

Our Ref: EC9287

Dear Prime Minister

**RE: Night Time Economy: G-A-Y**

As we come out of national lockdown and re-enter the tier system, I am very concerned about the impact the heightened restrictions will have on our night time economy, particularly for venues in London and other Tier 2 areas.

I met virtually this afternoon with Jeremy Joseph who, as you will be aware, is the owner of the G-A-Y brand of venues in London and Manchester, incorporating Heaven nightclub in Charing Cross, G-A-Y bar and G-A-Y Late in Soho, and a further G-A-Y bar on Canal Street in Manchester.

Jeremy spoke to me not just on behalf of his own venues but also as a champion of the wider hospitality industry. His view is that the current restrictions, and lack of additional support, is going to decimate the sector, and lead to many bars, clubs, and other venues closing in the coming months – I know that these concerns are also shared by many in the sector. For instance, I have heard today that Magic Mike Live at the Hippodrome is not now going to reopen for some months, with many of those who work there facing an uncertain future.

Jeremy has spent tens of thousands of pounds ensuring that all his venues are COVID-secure, and is disheartened that the restrictions in Tier 2 have been made more formidable. Like many, he has fixed outgoings that he has to make payment on, regardless of income streams, and needs to ensure that he has people coming through his doors – safely – to keep afloat.

He has three specific suggestions, which I think are eminently sensible, that would give him and other venues some breathing room without being any less safe than what is coming into force on 2 December:

1. Removal of the condition that alcohol can only be served with food. I am aware that Jeremy is partnering with McDonald's to ensure food can be available on-site. However, as he himself has said, he is not an expert in food production and delivery, and it not set up to become one. There are substantial concerns around forcing people to eat against their will; this will hugely impact people with eating disorders, already a higher prevalence in the LGBT community than in wider society. There are also concerns about affordability for people who cannot afford to eat substantial meals out, as well as concerns around food wastage.

2. Instead of last orders at 10pm, it should be last entry at 10pm. This would allow live events venues to operate securely and safely, and closer to their normal delivery of entertainment, etc. It would also allow venues to open earlier in the afternoon / evening for a “first sitting”, then close to clean, before reopening for a later evening “second sitting”.
3. Staggered closing, rather than 11pm closure. Local authorities should be given the power to decide venue closing time, dependant on how COVID-secure the venue has been made. This would remove the ongoing issue of all venues closing / “kicking out” at the same time, and forcing people from multiple venues onto over-crowded public transport all at once. All could still have the same 10pm last entry time, to avoid crowds roaming the streets, however a staggered closure would allow, for instance, pubs to close at 11pm, live events venues to close at 12pm, bars to close at 1am, and so on.

These measures, or variations of them, would go a long way to support the night time economy and venues that operate in it.

I would also add, in particular relation to venues like those operating under the G-A-Y brand, how important it is for the LGBT community that these safe spaces do not close permanently, and that they continue to exist for LGBT people to enjoy, given that these are increasingly under threat regardless of COVID.

I have copied this letter to the Chancellor and the Health Secretary, and I should be very grateful if urgent consideration could be given to these points ahead of Tuesday’s Motion to approve Regulations related to Public Health. I understand other colleagues are also making representations and setting out their own concerns.

With best wishes,



**Elliot Colburn**

Conservative Member of Parliament for Carshalton and Wallington

Cc:

Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care