

PLATINUM LOUNGE – Licensing Committee, 7 July 2015

- My name is John Herson. I am Vice-Chairman of the Chester Civic Trust an organisation with around 500 members which, for over fifty years, has been seeking to promote both the conservation and the progress of the City. This involves taking a view on issues of concern, one of which is this application to renew the Platinum Lounge's SEV licence.
- There is a need to take a strategic view of the PL within the context of the city centre. Your Committee has an essentially simple decision to make – is the PL appropriate to the character of the locality?
- Chester Civic Trust opposes the renewal of this licence because we believe the business is inappropriate to the character of the locality in which it is situated.
- What is that locality? It is The Cross and Bridge Street and the area to the west which is at the historic core of this world-renowned heritage, retail and tourist city.
- What is the locality's character? The Chester Characterisation Study identified this area as 'critical' to Chester because of its varied and intricate buildings, the ancient Old Arches (adjacent to the PL) and the Rows. Bridge Street has long been, and still is, the second most prestigious commercial street in the city. The adjacent area of Commonhall Street/White Friars is an interesting mix of old and new properties and is primarily and increasingly residential. In short, this locality has a valuable and sensitive environment that must be conserved with sympathetic uses.
- In the past 20 years the area has faced challenges, particularly with the decline in the quality and depth of its retail offer, the lack of commercial opportunities and problems with the visitor economy. The very establishment of a marginal use like the PL in this critical location was a symptom of incipient urban decline – but it also accentuates that decline. We understand that the presence of the PL is making nearby property difficult to let.
- We are clearly not arguing that all the problems of Central Chester are due to the PL. However, because of the special laws relating to SEVs a specific decision on this case is the responsibility of this Committee.
- Since the opening of the PL in 2005 the context has changed and the premises are now even more in the wrong location than they were. There is now a set of vigorous policies, which Chester Civic Trust supports, to conserve and regenerate this locality:
 - The Urban Land Institute emphasised the importance of Chester going for quality and value-added in its tourism and commercial offer.
 - The One City Plan has acted on this with its policies for Business Improvement, the regeneration of the Rows and the creation of an open, family-friendly business economy together with residential and artisan business development in the Commonhall Street area.
 - The newly approved Local Plan gives these objectives statutory backing.
- Chester Civic Trust believes the continued presence of the PL in this location is therefore inappropriate because:

- It conflicts with the conservation and enhancement of this area's historic heritage and its attractiveness as a family-oriented tourist, commercial and retail locality. I would also add that the PL is the only club/late night drinking establishment on Bridge Street. It is out of character with the other uses in the street.
- It conflicts with the impressive revitalisation of the Commonhall Street area as a residential locality. The number of houses and flats has more than trebled since 2005 and the presence of a sex venue clearly conflicts with this strengthened residential character.
- It would be frankly bizarre, and Chester and CWAC would look ridiculous, if an SEV is finally allowed take root in this critical and world-renowned location at the heart of the city. It is fundamentally inappropriate and we call on the Committee to refuse the renewal of the PL's licence.