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Sadiq Khan urges Westminster to scrap Soho licensing curbs.

He says the draft rules would favor resident complaints over London’s night-time economy in Soho and the West End.

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London Mayor Sadiq Khan has urged Westminster City Council to drop key parts of a draft licensing policy for Soho and the West End, arguing that the plan would tilt too far toward the concerns of nearby residents and could damage the capital’s nightlife economy.

In a formal response to the council’s consultation, submitted on Monday, Khan asked Westminster to remove both its cumulative impact policy and its approach to core hours from the draft rules. The proposals would keep Soho and the West End inside a

cumulative impact zone, where new pubs, bars and nightclubs would normally be refused unless applicants could show exceptional circumstances.

Khan said decisions on licensing in central London can “make or break” the city’s night-time economy and, in his view, the draft policy gives too much weight to “a handful of highly vocal residents and councillors” and not enough to the broader economic and cultural role of hospitality. He said the proposals would work against City Hall’s effort to strengthen London’s standing as a global nightlife destination.

The dispute centers on one of the busiest hospitality districts in Britain. Soho and the West End attract local residents, office workers, tourists and late-night crowds, and they are home to a dense mix of pubs, cocktail bars, restaurants, clubs and music venues. Any tightening of licensing rules there can carry effects well beyond a few streets, because operators often see the area as a test case for how local authorities balance residential concerns with business growth and tourism.

Under the draft policy, Westminster also recommends that venues move away from high-volume “vertical drinking” and open bar space, while encouraging more table service. It further suggests that newly licensed pubs should call last orders at 10 p.m. Nightclubs, under the same draft guidance, would have to close by 11:30 p.m. on weekdays and by midnight on weekends.

For pub and bar operators, those limits matter not only as a question of trading style but of basic economics. In central London, late-evening service is often when beverage sales are strongest, especially for beer, wine, spirits and mixed drinks sold in on-trade venues. If licensing becomes harder to secure, or if permitted hours become shorter, that could reduce the incentive for new openings and put pressure on revenue models that depend on evening foot traffic. The impact would not be uniform, but the policy could affect demand across the hospitality drinks trade in one of the country’s most important urban markets.

Khan said Westminster should set out what he called a more positive vision for growth rather than focusing on activity to be restricted. He pointed to Manchester City Council as an example of a less restrictive model, noting that Manchester does not operate with the same kind of core hours policy or cumulative impact policy. He also said the

licensing system should start from a presumption in favor of granting applications when operators can show that they are capable of managing their premises well and complying with licensing objectives.

The intervention adds to a broader political debate over how Britain’s cities regulate nightlife after years of pressure from noise complaints, rising business costs and concerns about the decline of late-night venues. Khan had already criticized Westminster’s draft as restrictive and anti-growth before filing his formal response. His latest move increases pressure on the council as it weighs feedback from the consultation.

The issue has also drawn attention from national government. The British government is expected to give the London mayor new powers to call in some local licensing decisions, a change that could alter the balance between borough councils and City Hall in disputes over nightlife policy. Downing Street also weighed in last week, when a spokesperson said busy pubs were “not a public nuisance” but part of “British life,” signaling support for a more business-friendly view of the sector.

Westminster City Council has defended the draft guidance as a way to help venues manage customers, reduce disturbance and stop people from spilling onto sidewalks outside premises. The council has also said it is under a legal duty to assess every licensing application on its own merits, rather than imposing blanket outcomes without regard to the details of an individual case.

That leaves the dispute at the intersection of several competing pressures. Residents in central London want quieter streets and less late-night disruption near their homes. Operators want clearer routes to open and trade profitably. City Hall wants to protect the economic and cultural value of a night-time industry that supports jobs, tourism and tax revenue. Westminster, for its part, is trying to show that it can manage one of the most crowded entertainment districts in Europe without losing control of noise, congestion and public order.

The consultation outcome will be closely watched across the hospitality industry because Soho and the West End remain a major barometer for licensing policy in Britain. If Westminster keeps the cumulative impact zone and early core hours in place,

operators may see the district as a harder place to expand, particularly for pub and nightclub concepts. If the council softens its approach, that could be read as a sign that local authorities are under growing pressure to give more weight to growth, tourism and the commercial realities of night-time trade.