

MAYOR OF LONDON

Night Surgery Hackney




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Night Surgery: Hackney

In December 2022, London's Night Czar Amy Lamé joined a night surgery in the London Borough of Hackney. She visited Dalston and Shoreditch town centres and was joined by the borough's Night Time Borough Champion, Late Night Levy manager, and officers from the Community Safety, Enforcement and Markets teams.

On 1 December, I visited Dalston and Shoreditch, both well-known destinations for night time leisure and culture. I was keen to catch up with councillors, officers and their partners about how these dense ecosystems of night time activity were evolving and being supported.

Ridley Road Market

We met outside Dalston Kingsland Station and headed towards our first stop of the evening in Ridley Road Market. The market includes the Ridley Road Shopping Village, an indoor market hall and outdoor stalls, which are open from Monday to Saturday, 9:30am to 5pm. We arrived as the market was packing down and the council street cleaning team was starting their daily two-hour shift.

On Ridley Road we spoke to a butcher about his experience of working at the market. He described the impacts of energy and petrol price rises on his business. With trade declining as prices increase, the business is struggling to survive. He explained that he used to live on Ridley Road, but rising rents in the area had necessitated a move to outer London so he now commutes to work. He had also seen a shift in the demographic of market users over recent years, with many of his regular customers, who were predominantly from African countries, also moving outside of London for more affordable housing.

A key part of our work in the 24 hour London team involves research about London's night time workforce. Many are in low paid work and cannot afford to live near their workplace, so advocating for fair pay and safe night time transport is a critical part of planning and managing a fairer London at night.

We next stopped outside the Ridley Road Shopping Village, which was in private ownership until the council secured a long-term lease in 2022. It is currently undergoing extensive renovation and was recently designated an Asset of Community Value following a successful local campaign to safeguard it from being re-developed into housing. The council will soon be able to test later opening hours, starting with 'Thursday Lates'.

The refurbished market hall is set to open in summer/early autumn and will include storage space for market traders. The Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund has also allocated £1.5 million to upgrade Ridley Road Market's infrastructure with new electricity supplies, planters, trees, seating, signage and public Wi-Fi. The investments have also enabled hot food stalls to be introduced.

The market team has seen growing interest from business owners wanting to open new market stalls. Some have recently closed retail spaces and are looking to reduce costs and risk, so markets are an attractive option. Many are operating market stalls for the first time. Hackney Council were recently successful in their bid for the GLA's Innovative Licensing funding and will be rolling out the OpenMarkets app, which allows traders to apply for licenses across different local authorities, rather than making separate

applications. This will reduce admin and costs for operators and enable the digitisation of licensing applications.

The council are exploring opportunities for later trading and evening events on Ridley Road. Some of the shops already stay open until 9 or 10pm and there is an established ecosystem of evening and night time businesses in Dalston. The market is a huge asset for local residents but its 5pm closing time means it can not cater to residents who work elsewhere during the day. Staying open later could attract commuters using the nearby stations, encouraging residents to shop for fresh goods locally on their way home.

The council deals with complaints of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the area and there is a perception that these issues are worse at night. Having inactive, empty public spaces in town centres can tend to attract ASB, but we have seen great examples across London where spaces have been transformed at night through regular events and later opening hours, improving natural surveillance and informal stewardship, and bringing a positive atmosphere to an area. It will be great to see how a night market and events might start to shift perceptions of the street at night.



Ridley Road Market at night

Bentley Road

We then made our way to nearby Bentley Road. The street contains a mix of uses, including an Irish Pub on the corner and light industrial, such as an MOT garage. There is a large car park at the end of the street and former warehouses have recently been converted into housing. The street can be read as a microcosm of the challenges facing mixed use town centres across London. Residents have complained about noise nuisance on the street in the early mornings on Friday and Saturday nights, after local venues close. We heard that the street attracts people gathering in and around parked cars, playing loud music.

We discussed the tools the local authority can employ to address these behaviours on Bentley Road and in other similar locations. One option would be to implement and enforce a controlled parking zone along the street, limiting parking access to residents only. The parking enforcement team operate until midnight and could respond to issues with noise during that period. Alternatively, the council could implement timed closures of the street to restrict vehicular access at night. Finally, enforcement officers suggested they would be able to target resources to the street to identify repeat offenders. Addressing these types of issues requires working across different departments. One of the primary challenges facing regulatory authorities is a lack of resources to intervene and enforce in the early hours of the morning.



Ashwin Street



Bentley Road

100 Hotel Shoreditch

Following a short bus trip, we walked up to the 100 Hotel Shoreditch. The hotel was recently renovated and includes three licensed bars: one in the basement, a lobby bar, and a spectacular rooftop bar. On the seventh floor is an event space and the hotel acts as a hub for local workers and businesses, providing co-working spaces on the ground floor. Tuesdays to Thursdays are the peak days, with Sundays and Mondays now noticeably quieter, replicating a trend seen across central London since the pandemic prompted more flexible working arrangements.

The hotel has a licence until 3am but doesn't use it, usually closing its basement bar at 1:30am. There is a large dining room space with covers for 190 people, but it is currently only used for breakfast service for hotel guests. We have recently seen reduced trading hours introduced by many hospitality businesses as they struggle with increasing food and energy costs, reduced trade and staff shortages on top of the lasting impacts of the pandemic. The hotel employs 30 to 40 people who work overnight across a variety of roles, from the front desk reception to kitchen staff.



London's Night Czar Amy Lamé speaking to Hackney Council officers on the bus to Shoreditch



The 100 Hotel Shoreditch

Autograph Gallery

Our next stop was the Autograph Gallery, which opened on Rivington Place in 2007. Autograph was founded in 1988 and began as an agency in Brixton with the aim of increasingly representation of, and support for, Black artists. The gallery operates as a charity and hosts artistic programmes, international exhibitions and residencies. Autograph owns the entire building and rents out office space to generate income. It also receives funding from Arts Council England and delivers a unique programme for children and young people with special educational needs and their parents. The gallery has developed strong local partnerships and recently arranged for artworks to be displayed on the Old Street digital screens.

Audiences remain below pre-pandemic figures and are currently about 50 percent of what they were in 2019. Thursday evenings, when the gallery hosts a "Lates" programme, have seen the biggest reduction in audience numbers. These evenings had previously been very popular and the managers wondered whether, since Thursdays have become the "new Friday", people are less likely to visit cultural institutions on Thursdays and more likely to go out for food and drink.



Rivington Street



The Autograph Gallery

Clifton Street Market

We then visited Clifton Street, which hosts a popular day market that attracts local office workers. On our way, we passed by a number of night time venues incorporating games and competitive entertainment - a 'ball pit cocktail bar', Junkyard Crazy Golf and Hijingo, a digital and immersive bingo experience. These businesses highlight the shifting trends in the hospitality sector and the rise of competitive socialising.

Clifton Street is closed to traffic at one end and there are no residential properties along it. It would be an ideal location for a night market and I was delighted to hear that the council were considering piloting one. The aim would be to retain people in the area after work.

The council wants to test the concept in the summer, starting with a few traders and expanding according to demand. The market would build on the growth the borough has seen in outdoor dining since the pandemic. It was great to hear how ambitious and flexible the council are with their plans, with a willingness to test new ideas and a commitment to gather evidence and survey people to understand what works and what's desirable in the area.



Hijingo on Worship Street



Clifton Street

Shoreditch Triangle

My final stop of the evening was at Shoreditch Triangle, where Curtain Road meets Old Street. I met Hackney Enforcement officers and Met Police officers to discuss the management of Shoreditch at night.

The Met Police officers I spoke to were working hard to contain the growth in recreational use of nitrous oxide in the borough. This is a relatively recent trend and the health impacts and supply chains for the drug are under researched. The Metropolitan Police have dedicated a lot of resources to tackle the issue and there was a feeling that the justice system was struggling to keep pace with shifting trends and patterns of drug use.

Enforcement officers are on duty in Shoreditch until 5am on Saturdays. Officers reported an increase in levels of inebriation and suggested this could be symptomatic of wider mental wellbeing issues following the pandemic, with some choosing alcohol as a form of escapism. The area now has a dedicated first response team, with the police, enforcement teams at Hackney council, security staff at night time venues and medics all connected by radio. The medical team helps reduce the number of callouts to ambulance services and A&E admissions. They are also connected to the London Ambulance Service and can upgrade or downgrade incidents where appropriate. They carry spare clothing, blankets and water, and provide sexual assault testing kits and training. The team of medics has supported 900 people over the last year. They started in early 2022 and attend to about 8 to 25 people a night, which has helped free enforcement and police officer time.

It was brilliant to see such close working between the council, police, ambulance service, venues and first responders, and they all saw great benefits from the scheme. The council's Late Night Levy manager is very hands-on and works relatively flexible hours, allowing her to be out and about at night and in regular contact with venues and partners. We heard that venue security staff now feel more empowered to intervene when they notice suspicious behaviour, which has helped safeguard people from predatory behaviour at night.



The Shoreditch first response team



Police and Hackney Council enforcement officers



THE BARLEY MOW

THE BARLEY MOW

Final thoughts

My visit showcased the diversity of life at night in London and the challenges facing authorities seeking to manage and nurture these mixed uses within town centres. It was great to see resources being invested to make Hackney safer at night and the willingness shown by the council to innovate and test new ideas.

The night surgery was also a stark reminder that the management of town centres at night is complex and that careful planning and design is needed, particularly where new residential uses are introduced. It also highlighted the impacts of rising housing and rental costs on night workers in central London.

Hackney's approach to night time safety - linking venue security to medical staff and the police – is a great model for partnership working. Emergency services' and council resources are often most stretched at night, so it was fantastic to speak to the parties involved about the benefits and efficiencies the collaboration brings.

I look forward to seeing the fruits of the innovative licensing project in Hackney and hope to visit a couple of night markets there this year!

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