Liberalising Sunday Trading in London’s International Centres

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Add the London International Centres to the exempted list in the 1994 Sunday Trading Act to promote international tourism, boost the economy and create jobs.

London’s International Centres are missing out on over £1.25 billion additional sales every year because of Sunday trading restrictions not faced by their global competitors.

The Dubai Mall, for example, opens 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Shops in Manhattan have no opening restrictions. Paris is allowing longer Sunday opening for shops in tourist areas. Edinburgh has no Sunday trading restrictions.

Under the 1994 Sunday Trading Act stores (over 250sq m) are only allowed to open for just six consecutive hours between 10:00 and 18:00 on most Sundays. Most West End stores open from noon to 6pm leaving international tourists completely bemused when the shutters come down at 6pm.

Opening for just two additional hours in the two International Centres, would result in a net annual spending increase of £260 million and create, at least, FTE 2000 new jobs.¹

The London Plan and the emerging City Plans of Westminster city council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea have now geographically defined the two International Centres so that policies can be focussed on these areas.

New West End Company’s ask is:

- To add the International Centres, as defined in the Mayor’s London Plan, to the existing list of exemptions in the 1994 Sunday Trading Act. Exemptions already include shops in airports, service stations, ports and railway stations, all of which have a focus on the travel and tourism sectors.

How to do this:

- Identify upcoming primary legislation to introduce a short clause adding the International Centres to the list of exemptions.

In 2016, for the first time in 22 years, the Government proposed giving Mayors the power to amend Sunday trading regulations in England (Scotland has no restrictions).

When the measure was voted down in the Commons, even opponents of liberalisation throughout England were clear that they accepted the case for longer hours in the major tourist areas.

We understand the current pressures on Government and the difficult politics of Sunday trading, and we accept that changing legislation may not be easy, however the economic benefit of such a change is enormous.

We envisage this could be achieved with a single clause included within a wider Bill promoting economic growth.

1 New West End Company research estimates that increasing Sunday opening by two hours in the two International Centres would result in a net annual increase in spending of £260 million and create at least 2,000 new FTE jobs in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.