

MOVIE HOUSE

≡ CINEMAS ≡

SUBMISSION OF VIEW ON THE LICENSING AND REGISTRATION OF CLUBS (AMENDMENT) BILL

**Submission of Movie House Cinemas Ltd, (Head Office) Cityside Mall, Belfast
BT15 1WA**

Introduction

Movie House Cinemas Ltd is a family run business that recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary, having opened Northern Ireland's first multiplex cinema in Glengormley in 1990.

The company now employs 194 people across its four cinemas in Belfast, Newtownabbey, Coleraine and Maghera and leisure business The Jet Centre, which offers bowling, soft play and mini golf. As a company we continually invest in our infrastructure and staff. Prior to the pandemic we spent £1.8 million renovating our Cityside (Yorkgate) cinema to develop a higher quality offering with our VIP recliner seats to make a trip to the cinema feel like a luxury outing. Overall, the company has reinvested close on £3 million in the last five years, upgrading seating, soft furnishings and decoration in all its four locations in Northern Ireland.

This has resulted in a lower seating capacity and yet we retained our low prices in order to make this form of entertainment accessible to our local audiences. We feel that being able to serve alcoholic beverages in this setting would enhance our offering and assist in the financial recovery of our business.

Views on the overall policy objectives and whether the Bill will meet those objectives

The call from the Committee for Communities for the public's views on the Bill is welcomed. We believe that one issue has not been resolved by the current proposed amendments to the Bill.

Northern Ireland cinemas currently are not allowed to apply for a licence to sell alcohol, unlike their counterparts in all other areas of these islands. We believe cinemas should be expressly included in the list of places of Public Entertainment, which currently lists only theatres, ballrooms and race tracks.

We feel the distinction between live theatre and cinema is unjust. In fact, our cinemas also show live theatre as part of the National Theatre programme. In addition, many theatres and pubs also screen films so this blurring of the lines illustrates the unfairness against cinemas in the current licensing legislation.

Northern Ireland is the only place in these islands that currently prohibits cinemas from obtaining a licence to sell alcohol. England and Scotland brought together previously separate regimes for alcohol, entertainment etc into a single 'premises licence' administered and policed by the local authority. In Ireland, cinemas can apply for a Publican's theatre licence.

THE INCLUSION OF CINEMAS

We request that the committee, in considering the new liquor licensing legislation, classify cinemas as areas of Public Entertainment so that cinemas are able to apply for a liquor licence. As seated venues showing films and other live events such as the National Theatre, we believe that we should be aligned with the category that includes theatres, ballrooms and race-tracks. In doing so, we are confident that we will be able to offer an environment at least as controlled as any of these other sectors.

There is no logical justification for the continued exclusion of cinemas from the list of premises for which a licence to sell intoxicating liquor may be granted. There is no reasonable basis to exclude cinemas from such a wide list of venues which includes theatres, restaurants, higher education institutions, places of public entertainment and arenas.

It is also important to bear in mind that what this submission advocates is merely the addition of cinemas to the list of premises for which a licence may be granted. As a business with a long history we take our responsibilities to our customers, staff and the wider community seriously. We are not expecting cinemas to be exempt from compliance with, and adherence to, all other provisions of the Bill and/or the 1996 Order. Rather, all we are requesting is for cinemas to be entitled to apply for a licence, but not necessarily to be granted one.

We have invested heavily in making our cinemas a luxury experience with VIP recliner seating in ultra-comfortable surroundings. The sale of alcohol would be an option that our customers would enjoy as part of this experience. Indeed, Queen's Film Theatre (QFT) is already able to offer alcohol as it has obtained a licence as part of a higher education institution. Their experience we believe offers clear proof that customers can enjoy an alcoholic beverage at the cinema without incident or annoyance to other customers, staff or indeed the local community in which it is situated.

As so many businesses, we have been hit hard by the pandemic and our plans to serve a wider range of food and alcoholic beverages would assist in the recovery of our business.

Finally, we would like to draw the committee's attention to the fact that all neighbouring jurisdictions allow cinemas to apply for a liquor licence. We hope to see parity for cinema operators across these islands, specifically allowing the regulated sale of alcohol. As previously outlined, cinemas in the UK and Ireland have been able to serve alcoholic beverages to their customers for a prolonged period without incident or difficulty. It is not clear why audiences in Northern Ireland should not enjoy the same.

Further information in relation to this can be found at:

- Licensing Act 2003 in England
(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/17/contents>)
- Licensing Act (Scotland) 2005 in Scotland
(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2005/16/contents>)
- Publican's Licence Theatre Ireland
<https://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/excise-and-licences/excise-licensing/theatre-licence/index.aspx>.

We are grateful that the committee has allowed us this opportunity to respond to the proposed amendments to the Bill.

Cityside 100-150 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1WA
Coleraine Riverside Park South, Coleraine, BT51 3AW
Glengormley 13 Glenwell Road, Glengormley, Newtownabbey, BT36 7RF
Maghera 51 St. Lurach's Road, Maghera, Co. Londonderry, BT46 5JE
Tel: 028 9075 3300

Head Office, Accounts Dept & Marketing: Cityside Mall, 100-150 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1WA | T: 028 9074 1404

Registered Office: 100-150 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1WA

Movie House Cinemas Ltd: Company Reg: NI 22017, VAT No: 517 3259 49 | Movie House Cinemas (Yorkgate) Ltd: Company Reg: NI 26841, VAT No. 617 5509 34

