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Public enemies: why Prince Harry and Pippa Middleton's favourite nightclub has closed

London's rich young party people are in shock at the forced closure of Prince Harry's favourite King's Road nightclub. Joshi Herrmann investigates a bitter dispute with class undertones



Tonight, a few hundred of London's wealthiest twentysomethings will be feeling somewhat bereft. Their favourite nightclub on the King's Road, Public, was closed down suddenly on Tuesday night, and for the first time in more than a year, they will have to think up an alternative haunt.

"Usually there is no point texting round to arrange Thursday, because everybody knows where we go then," said one Fulham-dwelling regular. To a certain section of the Sloane crowd, their hangers-on and a raft of suited City boys, going to Public tonight would have gone without saying: it was the club that was right on their doorstep and where they felt at home.

Its closure — the result of a failed appeal against a council-imposed 12.30am closing time — has shone light on an ugly dispute, with class undertones and accusations of disabled residents abusing public sympathy.

Yesterday Paul Smith, 30, who lives opposite Public in Tetcott Street, told the Standard: "The bottom line is that hard-working people don't want to hear a bunch of Made in Chelsea types running around with mummy and daddy's money at night."

Hours later, one of Public's joint owners, Howard Spooner, said his hand had been forced by "anti-royals who hate toffs" and claimed: "If someone with a disability complains, it has 10 times the weight of an able-bodied person's complaint", a comment prompted by complaints to the council of clubbers refusing to move out of the way of a wheelchair user.

If any venue had the potential to whip up that kind of antagonism, it was Public. Opened in late 2010 by nightlife kingpin and friend of the young royals Guy Pelly, it established a particular appeal for the well-heeled clientele who used to favour Mahiki and Boujis. It was an open secret that its name was a reference to the public schools from which the vast majority of its regulars hailed.

"The people who went normally went a lot, so they were relaxed there," said a friend. "You didn't get the Essex crowd you find in Movida or Chinawhite," she added.

What you did get was the sight of Prince Harry "leading two stunning girls with perfect legs into the VIP area, top four buttons undone and looking very pleased with himself," according to someone who was known to have flirted with Harry herself on several occasions. Regular sightings of young royals and their blue-blooded friends only added to its appeal. Along with Harry, the Middletons, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie and all the van Straubenzees, Inskips, van Cutsems and Harbords who make up London's poshest crowd were patrons at Public.

Add to that showbiz stars such as Katy Perry, Pixie Lott and Professor Green, and Pelly's venture became a destination club.

Public's popularity, however, was also to taint its short life. From the outset, its neighbours made life difficult for Pelly and his co-owners Spooner and David Phelps, who are now considering starting up in a less residential area.

