



Eoin Hayes TD
Dáil Éireann
Social Democrats

Minister Patrick O'Donovan,
Department of Culture, Communications and Sport,
Leeson Lane,
Dublin

22 May, 2026

Re: Forced closure of the Silk Road Café, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin 2

Dear Minister,

I am writing as the TD for the constituency of Dublin Bay South on behalf of the 20+ staff members and business owner of the Silk Road Café, an independent café that has operated in the Chester Beatty Library since 2001, with some employees with the business for all of that period. I understand from speaking with the business owner, Mr. Abraham Phelan, that the family-run café was preparing to celebrate 25 years in business this July but is now facing closure for a minimum of 6 months to facilitate enhanced security measures at Dublin Castle required for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

As you know, the Chester Beatty Library was founded by philanthropist Alfred Chester Beatty, who transferred ownership to the State in 1968, and the museum has been sited at Dublin Castle since 2000. Ever since, it has been reliant on State funding, primarily from the Department of Culture, to support its operations. As such, I believe it is your



responsibility as the Minister of that Department, to provide a proper duty of care to the stakeholders and employees of the Library and its associated entities.

The Silk Road Café, as I understand it, is the only private business affected by these events. It was reported to me that during Ireland's last EU presidency in 2013, the café was only required to close for a limited period of 14 days and was also involved in providing catering for some of the associated events at the time. A similar arrangement was established for Queen Elizabeth II's visit in 2011. By contrast, Mr Phelan has expressed to me the severe impact the limited notice period and prolonged closure in this instance will have on the future viability of his business. As you can appreciate, a suspension of business activity for such a length of time is a major shock, and will have a major impact on his operations, his staff's retention, staff pay, and he is very concerned about the viability of reopening after such an extended period of closure. The business has already had to suffer losses as a result of construction and other works inhibiting access at Dublin Castle.

It has to be appreciated also, that while businesses experience downturns (as the Silk Road has weathered in the past) and redundancies are sometimes a part of modern economic life, it is very rare that these things are the product directly of a government decision rather than the vagaries of market capitalism. And while I understand the Chester Beatty Library, as the landlord, has a key role in this matter, I am very concerned about the signal this sends to other business owners operating in State-funded or controlled buildings or campuses and the duty of care and responsibility of the State to the businesses that provide important facilities and services on such premises. Can any business's viability be threatened at any time by a decision of the central government? Will its workers' livelihoods be persistently at-risk of such decisions?

It is also worth noting that compensation for deleterious State actions on private and employee interests has wide precedent. It would be my view at the very least that the business and its staff should be compensated by the State for the disruption, especially as it was central government's decision to prevent all access to the business from its



customers. As you are the Minister responsible for funding the Chester Beatty Library in which the cafe is housed, I believe that such a compensation scheme should primarily be designed by and funded by your department.

I strongly urge you to intervene and engage with the Silk Road Café and all relevant stakeholders to find a solution to support this thriving independent business and its staff in order to protect the ongoing viability of the business and prevent the associated job losses. I hope you might be able to work across government with other Ministers on this issue, who I have copied, to ameliorate the worst effects of this development.

Yours sincerely,



Eoin Hayes TD

Cc'd:

An Taoiseach, Michael Martin TD

Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD

Minister for Enterprise, Employment, and Tourism, Peter Burke TD

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defense, Helen McEntee TD

Minister of State for the OPW, Kevin Moran TD

