



Open All Hours?



PRESS RELEASE

**Embargo: Not for publication before
00.01 hours Monday 1 November 2010**

6/10

“PASSIVE DRINKING” DAMAGING TOWN AND CITY LIFE Civic societies and residents groups call for stronger alcohol licensing controls

Towns and cities will continue to be blighted by the effects of irresponsible drinking without a stronger say on alcohol licences being put in the hands of local communities.

This is the call from the Open All Hours? network of civic societies and residents groups working with Civic Voice and the Institute of Alcohol Studies¹ to strengthen the Coalition Government's proposals for licensing reform². A summary of the submission is below.

Commenting on the Government's proposed licensing reforms Matthew Bennett, Chairman of the Open All Hours? network said, “The Coalition Government will only achieve its ambition of putting *‘local communities in the lead’* on alcohol licensing if it addresses growing public concern about the impacts of stress and disturbance from irresponsible drinking on public health. Too many of our streets and town and city centres are plagued by shouting, vomiting, fights, urination and other rowdy behaviour.”

The campaign is urging the Government to:

- Address these wider impacts of “passive drinking” on public health in the same way as attitudes to passive smoking have been transformed in recent years
- Simplify licensing regulations and improve publicity for licensing applications
- Allow anyone with an interest in the quality of life of an area to influence licensing decisions not just local residents

- Strengthen local councils' hands in requiring all applicants to show how their alcohol licence will contribute to and not damage the local area
- Support local communities concerned about the multiple impact of different licensed premises on an area
- Tackle the loophole of temporary notices which gives freedom from all licensing conditions for up to 96 hours for commercial premises.

A study in Richmond upon Thames reported by the Richmond Society and Friends of Richmond Green found around 1,000 incidents of anti-social behaviour in four evenings in April 2009³. The Societies estimate that 95% of such incidents are not recordable crimes.

Matthew Bennett concluded, "We all deserve vibrant, well managed and successful town and city centres which everyone can enjoy. The Coalition Government needs to ditch lax licensing controls which marginalise the community voice and support businesses that promote a responsible drinking culture."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Open All Hours? is a network of civic societies and residents groups urging licensing and other reforms which seek to ensure a better balance between alcohol consumption and the quality of life in our cities, towns and villages. Open All Hours? was established in 2001 and works in collaboration with Civic Voice, the national charity for the civic movement (www.civicvoice.org.uk), and the Institute of Alcohol Studies (www.ias.org.uk) which campaigns for more sensible alcohol consumption.

2. The Home Office consultation on *Rebalancing the Licensing Act* was published on 28 July 2010

3. MAKE Associates for London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, 2009

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Open All Hours?

Seeking a better balance between alcohol consumption and the quality of life in our cities, towns and villages.

Institute
of Alcohol Studies

REBALANCING THE LICENSING ACT A fairer deal for communities

The Coalition Government's commitment to "*put local communities in the lead*" on alcohol licensing decisions has been widely welcomed by communities blighted by irresponsible drinking and the impact of noise and public disorder on the quality of life. This briefing summarises the views of the Open All Hours? network of civic societies and residents groups working with Civic Voice and the Institute of Alcohol Studies on how the Coalition Government's commitment can best be delivered:

Remove the presumption in favour of granting licenses – we welcome the proposals for licensing authorities to be given direct powers take action to refuse, review or remove licences which conflict with the licensing objectives agreed for the area and to require applicants to demonstrate how their applications fit in

Take action to involve and engage the community – the current licensing arrangements are discouraging for local communities and residents and the Coalition Government's proposals need to go further if the ambition to put "*local communities in the lead*" is to be met. We urge that:

- Any person or organisation with an interest in the quality of life of the area can make representations, not just those who live in the vicinity or who are included in a list of "interested parties"
- The guidance and regulations are overhauled to remove jargon and qualify for a plain English crystal mark
- Noise, litter and other forms of public nuisance can blight an area as much as crime and disorder and licensing authorities should place greater emphasis on licence holders to prevent such nuisance
- Publicity and consultation are improved, including clarifying that the period when objections can be made is 28 days from when an application is accepted by the council as valid and it appearing on the council's website
- Communications by email are accepted without the need for additional paper copies
- Incomplete licensing applications which do not set out the steps that will be taken to reduce or avoid adverse impacts are considered invalid and returned to the applicant
- A new licensing objective of preventing health harm is added which embraces the impact of what might be termed "passive drinking" – the effect on the local community in terms of stress and disturbance on public health
- A clear appeals process to the magistrates remains so that local communities can question council licensing decisions

Control cumulative impacts - local councils should be allowed to introduce policies controlling the cumulative impact of licensed premises in response to public representations, not just those of official bodies, to prevent a build up of problems before they occur

Close the four day loophole for temporary events – we can see no reason why commercial licensed premises should be able to obtain "temporary event notices" that give them freedom from all licensing conditions for up to 96 hours. Temporary event notices should be limited to charitable and community events

Support for better management of the night time economy – the welcome review of licensing laws should be accompanied by support for other measures which promote good management of town and city centres at night, such as Purple Flag.

October 2010