

Convictions

Convictions for noise-related offenses rose to a peak of 72 in the year 1999, with an accompanying peak of a £4000 fine, and declined to 38 convictions in the year 2000. This was disclosed in a written answer by Hilary Benn (Home Office Minister) on December 9th last year in response to a question by Simon Hughes (Lib. Southwark).

National ambient noise strategy

In the House of Commons on 12th December last year,

Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs said,

'I am pleased to announce that today we have published a summary of the results of the consultation, Towards a National Ambient Noise Strategy.

There was very clear support for the Government's proposals for the development of an ambient noise strategy and I am pleased to confirm that we are taking the next steps to develop the strategy. These include: continuing the mapping already underway across England, the establishment of an expert working group to address the effects of noise and to establish cost-effective techniques to take action to improve or preserve noise levels, as appropriate.

A significant number of respondents indicated a need for a more strategic approach to neighbour noise. I agree that there is a need for a separate Neighbour Noise Strategy and as a first step towards developing this I am pleased to launch a study to examine neighbour noise, both

from the point of view of the noise makers and their victims. The research will generate appropriate and realistic options for action to both raise awareness and influence behaviour and, with many of the proposals identified during the consultation, should provide us with a solid basis to also develop more strategic approach to the control of neighbourhood noise.'

Pyjamas win

In the House of Lords discussion, on 17th December last year, of the Licensing Bill, which encourages 24 hour drinking licenses,

Lord Phillips of Sudbury said,

'I am sure that other Members of the Committee have, like me, sought to curtail noise at eleven or twelve at night. The only thing that works in the part of London in which I live is if I go down in my pyjamas into the pub and up to the manager. That does cause a minor stir. If, in such state, you ask very politely whether they might not turn the noise down, you do tend to get a rather shocked and co-operative response.

Any licensee or brewer with any sense will apply for a 24-hour license, which is what the framework document tells us we should be pushing for. The Minister shakes her head. She will have her tum; I have got mine. I believe that that is what most people will apply for—not because they intend to open their pubs for 24 hours a day but because now and then they may want to and do not want to go back to the licensing authority be able to do so. Now and then a big coach party will come in at 10 o'clock at night; people will be drinking heavily at 12 o'clock, one o'clock two o'clock and the profits will be rolling in. The licensee will wish to stay open, and who can blame him?

The Bill goes on to state that the only public objections which can be made to the licensing authority are those which are defined as "relevant representations".

Those are themselves confined to representations about the likely effect of the grant of a premises license on the promotion of the licensing objectives. This is a long way round to make absolutely plain that unless we change the licensing objectives there is no effective power of objection to the grant of a 24-hour license. The licensing objectives refer only to public nuisance, and

that is wholly inadequate to protect against ordinary conduct which is conducted at unordinary times to the detriment of local amenity.

The Bill will destroy, in a way that many noble Lords may not realise any power of reasonable objection on the part of any member of the public when any of these licenses come up for review. That is why in opening I said that this would be a catastrophe for local amenity and would ultimately rebound on both us, as legislators, and on the licensing trade.'

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