



Longer pub hours raise residents' concern

By NICOLE KOBIE

Greenwich residents are concerned about noise and public drunkenness, now that licensing officials are proposing to allow area pubs to serve alcohol past 11pm. “It is not a license for everyone to be open 24-hours, seven days a week,” said Lead Consultant for the licensing changes, Stephanie Butcher, at an information meeting 2 November. “It’s the end of blanket 11pm finishing time.” Under the UK-wide 2003 Licensing Act, licensing duties were moved from Magistrates courts to local borough councils, who are now free to set conditions on hours. Greenwich Council’s plan is to put the onus on licensees by letting them pick their hours and take their own preventative measures against crime and noise. At such an early stage in the process, both business owners and licensing officials are unsure of how many locations will extend their hours. “We’ll definitely be looking for longer hours, but it’s hard when they [council] haven’t got a firm policy yet,” said Audrey McCracken, owner of multiple bars and restaurants in the Greenwich area, in an interview after the meeting. However, this already has residents concerned. “One of the biggest problems with late-night places is people coming out of pubs drunk at two a.m. and getting into their cars to go home. Each car seems to have ten doors to slam and they stand around deciding their Sunday plans in the street while there’s people

down the street trying to get to sleep,” said Greenwich resident Derek Rutter, at the meeting. According to an Institute of Alcohol Studies report from January 2000, 59% of the population of the UK think “in general it would be a bad thing to extend drinking hours at night.” While support for later hours is higher among men than women, 90% of both genders agree local residents need the right to object to late hours at drinking establishments. **Preventing complaint** Under the new law, businesses can choose their own operating schedule. In their application, they must also show how they will handle the problems that come with late night drinking. The Council’s Draft Statement of Licensing Policy lists four objectives for license applications to meet: prevent crime and disorder, ensure public safety, prevent nuisance and protect children from harm. An applicant could suggest, for example, that CCTV, door staff and security guards will be enough to ensure those four aims. If the licensing authority agrees, the license is awarded. The bar must then keep to its promises and actually install the measures promised. If there are still problems with the business, residents can complain. According to Butcher, a resident could write about excessive noise from a neighbouring pub one week and have a hearing on the complaint by the next week; issues can be resolved very quickly. However, objections can only be in relation to the four licens-

ing objectives listed above. Residents, however, are worried they aren’t allowed to take part in the initial consultation process. “There’s no reference in here to how residents can consult,” said Rutter. **Policing and Crime** Aside from concerns about noise, there is major concern for binge drinking and the crime that follows with it. The council believes, according to the draft, that one blanket closing time leads to “peaks of disorder and disturbance on the streets”, and that staggered closing times will help reduce incidents. “We think what they’re proposing is worse”, said Andrew McNeil, Director of the Institute of Alcohol Studies. “There’s no reason to think it will reduce binge drinking. This will push extra alcohol-related nuisances later into the night, when there are fewer resources to deal with it.” While Greenwich police would not comment for this story, Michael Gasston, a Greenwich licensing officer, believes their reply would be “very neutral” as they have been involved in all stages of the draft process. “They are fully engaged in the process, and will be included in the final review,” said Butcher. “They’ve been very positive.” However, the policy draft notes “licensing law is not the primary mechanism for the general control of antisocial behaviour.” The burden of preventing crime and antisocial behaviour falls on the business-

es, and where they fail, on local police. The 2003 Licensing Act requires the council to consult with Metropolitan police, Fire and Emergency Planning, Greenwich Council Environmental Health team and the Child Protection Committee before changing policy. There will be another consultation meeting 20 November, and the licensing authority expects to hear from each of these groups before then, especially police. “We’ve done a lot of work with agencies in drawing up the draft,” Butcher said. “They more work now, the less we’ll have to do in the final draft rewrites.” **Apathy** While the residents and business owners attending the meeting had strong opinions, the meeting 2 November was poorly attended, with only six in attendance. But is the poor attendance and general lack of criticism a sign of acceptance or a sign of apathy? “I take it usually as a sign of complete apathy and normally after the event, after things go wrong, people wished they’d gotten involved,” said Butcher. “But, six months down the road, if there are gaping holes in this process, we can fix the problem by going back to consultation. This is the great strength of this legislation.” A meeting, held 21 October for affected business owners and managers, offered the opportunity for comment and complaint. About 20 people attended. “Most of the questions are regarding how it’s going to

work; there’s not many comments on whether they like it or not,” said Gasston, in a telephone interview. “It’s a feeling of resignation—it’s happening, there’s no sort of feedback, they just want to get on with it. It’s an extra layer of bureaucracy as far as they’re concerned.” The licensing consultation finishes 24 November. All submitted comments will be reviewed by the consultation panel and will go to full council in mid-December for review and modification. The policy should be in full use by next fall.

Details

The **2003 UK-wide Licensing Act** takes powers away from Magistrates Courts and into the hands of local councils.

Greenwich proposes to:

- bring an end to the 11pm closing time
- put the onus on businesses to prevent crime
- allow individuals to be licensed, letting people serve anywhere in the UK
- encourage live music
- help prevent “saturation” of bars in one area
- combine all licences into one application.

Sketchy knowledge

We love to hate the States, but do we really understand them?

By EMILY MACKAY

Britain has sustained huge public interest in the US presidential election, which goes beyond recognition of the US as an important global power. For weeks, the race for the White House has received scarcely less coverage than our own general election next year is likely to.

The world-wide implications of US foreign and economic policy partially explain heightened interest in the elections; however, you would be unlikely to find Britons watching all-night coverage of the German or Chinese elections for these reasons.

There is a simple reason for our interest in what happens across the Atlantic: our long standing closeness and shared history with the US.

But the special relationship, like all family ties, is occasionally tainted by rancour and manipulation. Our car-crash fascination with Kerry's defeat and dismay at Bush's triumph in this year's battle have more than a hint of colonial contempt about them.

"Doh! 4 more years of Dubya. How can 59,054,8087 people be so dumb?" asks the Mirror's front page today. The two Americanisms in the headline demonstrate the contradictions perfectly. We would like to distance ourselves from the ignorance of Americans, but our culture is so entwined in theirs that objectivity is impossible to achieve. The Mirror's disgust is understandable in the context of its anti-war stance, but their attitude to the American public is questionable.

The absurdity of people in a country of 241,600 sq km with a population of around 60 million making such sweeping generalisations about a country of

9,630,000 sq km with a population of more than 290 million seems lost on most Brits. The vastly larger population, and huge span of the media incorporates an incredible range of different cultures within American borders. Most individual US states are larger than our entire country.

The American press is constantly criticised for being biased, misleading and uncritical, yet the liberal press in Britain unquestioningly demonises the Bush administration and assumes passive ignorance of the American people.

In the run up to the Iraq war, it was often asserted that most Americans could not find Iraq on a map. This might say more about the worldwide decline of traditional geography teaching than the political myopia of Americans. It's unlikely that most Britons on the street could put their finger on Iraq, but they could probably draw you a wonderful diagram of how an oxbow lake is formed.

Politics in Britain are not much better understood than in the US. Here as there, it is often reduced to the personalities of a few key leaders. Most people in the UK would have an opinion on Tony Blair, but would be hard pressed to identify our minister for international development.

Those wishing to mock the stupidity of Americans and their Commander-in-Chief are not short of material in the UK, in books alone you can buy the *Bush Dyslexicon*, or the *George 'Dubya' Bush Joke Book*. And if they don't offer enough laughs, there is always *George W Bushisms*, *More George W Bushisms* or *Still More George W Bushisms*. One popular gift website features a Bush mannequin with a selection of recorded presidential howlers.



Last month John Pilger appeared at Royal Festival Hall in conversation with Latin American historian Eduardo Galeano. Disturbed by the audience's enthusiastic reaction to Galeano's digs at President Bush, Pilger asked Galeano, "Isn't it rather too easy to make a figure of fun out of him? I believe he's probably a rather clever man."

"I am not so sure about that," said Galeano with a mischievous shrug, a response met with still more laughter from the oblivious audience.

Pilger is a champion of the left and has been at the forefront of the anti-war movement in the UK, but he is too clever to fall into the easy trap of belittling his opponents.

Alistair Campbell, dissecting the election results on Newsnight, also questioned the stereotype of Bush's stupidity, saying: "He's not some kind of moron. This result has shown that he is a very able politician."

British media are unlikely to take their lead from Campbell again, however he does have a valid point. Constantly painting Bush, his supporters, and all too often the whole country as redneck bumbler, is lazy scapegoating. Rather than transferring all the blame for the state of the world on to America, we would do better to look to our own political ignorance.

When it all falls down

By MICHELLE AKANDE

Last week the Government proudly announced plans to plough money into 50 communities in a bid to further curb anti-social behaviour, following the success of 'trailblazers', a trial scheme piloted across 10 cities last year. The emphasis of this scheme was to reduce begging, vandalism and other nuisance behaviour by issuing Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

According to the Home Office, last year alone 100,000 incidents of anti-social behaviour were recorded. Of these, the offenders were issued with 2,600 ASBOs and 418 dispersal orders. The figures more than double all the ASBO's and dispersal orders issued collectively in the previous four years.

In London, Southwark is one of the boroughs due to receive investment. Last year, Southwark issued the highest number of ASBO's second only to the borough of Camden. Ironically, both these boroughs invest the least in leisure activities for young people. Camden spent just two per cent of its budget on leisure activities last year, Southwark four per cent of its budget, and neighbouring Lewisham only one per cent. All three boroughs claim to be committed to tackling anti-social behaviour.

However, this seems to be something of a contradiction. An even bigger contradiction is the fact that although local authorities are urged to spend at least five per cent of their total budget on leisure activities by the Government, it isn't a statutory requirement. While the Government feels it necessary to give the authorities more power to put young people behind bars, it seems it feels it less necessary to provide teenagers with ways to stay out of trouble.

Even Rod Morgan, chair of the government's Youth Justice Board, warned in May 2004 that there had been a rise in the number of children going to prison as a result of breaches of ASBO's. A young person who is issued an ASBO can end up going to prison for five years, the equivalent to the average prison sentence for a rapist in the UK.

So what constitutes a breach of ASBOs? Hanging around on a street corner? Hanging around a shopping centre on a Saturday afternoon when there is little else to do? One in three adults, when asked what they deemed to be anti-social behaviour, noted hanging around on a street corner.

Anyone who has lived through 'teenagedom' will know it's a difficult time, and it would be insane to claim all teenagers are angels. But the alternative isn't to give a generation of young people criminal records, effectively putting them at the margins of society, especially when little if nothing has been done to understand or effectively engage with them.

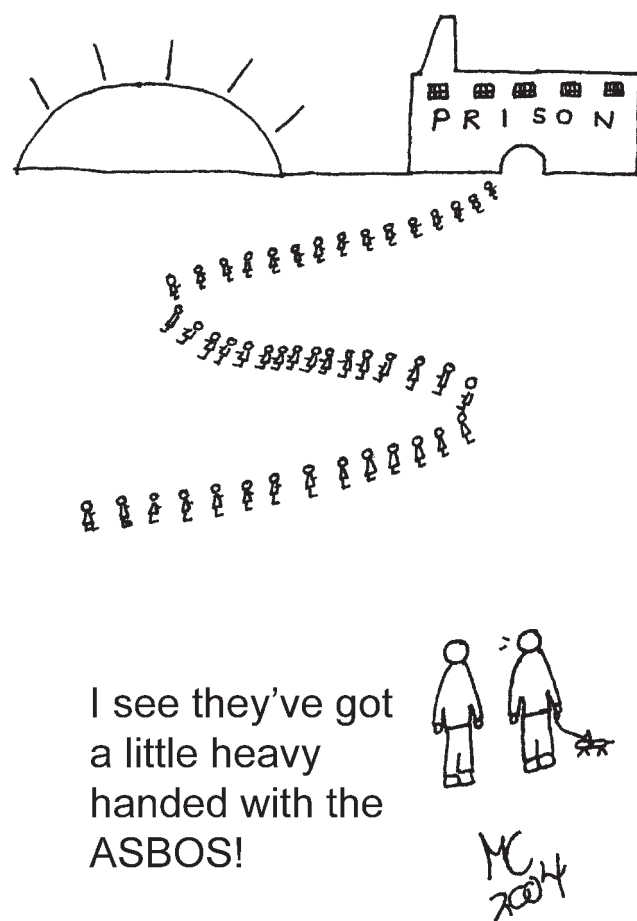
It is easy to turn a blind eye to the problems that issuing ASBO's will create. After all, it will rid our streets of scary teenagers waiting to attack us, wanting to rob us and generally ruining our picturesque landscapes. The reality is discrimination is at the heart of the problem. Most young people who will be issued with ASBOs or dispersal orders will come from working class backgrounds.

Statistics also continuously highlight the fact that young black boys are more likely to be sent to jail than any of their counterparts. More black boys are likely to be expelled from school, and more black working class boys are likely to form counter cultures because they feel alienated from wider society—historically it is also harder for them to come back from that edge. The answer isn't to lock them away, especially when research shows most people sent to jail, black or white, will re-offend within the year.

Civil liberty groups, children's charities and lobby groups are all concerned about the broader implications of the extension of ASBOs.

Responding to the governments' announcement last week a spokesperson for Liberty said, "ASBOs are in danger of being used as a 'back door' method of locking people up for minor offences because of the kinds of conditions applied".

The challenge facing those campaigning for children's rights is to convince the government that



teenagers hanging round the streets are not a big enough problem to justify measures that can lead to a custodial sentence. Teenagers hanging around on the streets should prompt the government and every community into addressing the issues that have placed them there.

It is our collective responsibility to stop failing our youth, it is our responsibility to reclaim our communities, to understand each other and challenge our perceptions. No one is born bad, anti-social behaviour is usually the product of a bad environment. We must make sure that when it all falls down, which inevitably it will we are there collectively to pick it up again.