

The Impact of the Licensing Act 2003 on three Norfolk Local Authorities.

Report for Alcohol Education and-Research Council

Research Undertaken by:

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Executive Summary/Abstract

This research, based on a series of elite interviews from a range of stakeholders, assesses the impact of the 2003 Licensing Act upon three Norfolk Local Authorities. Although there were initial confusion and teething problems surrounding the implementation of the Act, the existence and activity of informal networks comprising a range of stakeholders helped overcome these difficulties. The shift of local responsibility for liquor licensing from licensing magistrates to local licensing authorities is a central feature of the Act and has been regarded as beneficial by our interviewees. The improved networking and efficiencies appear to have vindicated some of the democratic aspirations of the Act and has facilitated a good deal of partnership among relevant agencies. On the other hand, the scope of this participation is limited, with some voices largely excluded: notably stakeholders with an interest in health and social problems. The much-feared rise in alcohol-fuelled, anti-social behaviour! stemming from greater availability of alcohol and longer hours! appears not to have occurred in the areas investigated for this research. It emerges strongly that a key factor in explaining this is the extensive preparatory work carried out by local crime reduction initiatives based upon extensive networking. However, there was no sign that the Act had fostered a 'cafe culture' or Continental pattern of drinking which had been one of its objectives. There has been a shift of late night drinking away from city and large urban centres to suburbs! but the research found conflicting views as to whether this had led to an increase in anti-social behaviour in these areas. It is no surprise, perhaps, that the research revealed the tensions licensees face between social responsibility and minimising social problems stemming from excess alcohol consumption and maximising alcohol sales. The role of off licences and supermarkets in contributing to alcohol problems, such as low-level anti-social behaviour and underage drinking, is an under-researched area and interviewees felt that the extension of hours in this sector had been detrimental. The report concludes by identifying a number of areas where further research is needed.

1. Background.

The 2003 English and Welsh Licensing Act/ which came into force in November 2005/ marked a major change in the administration and processes of liquor licensing. Much of the considerable media attention paid to '24 hour drinking' and the extension of opening hours was misplaced, given the liberalisation of the sale of drink over the past twenty years. Rather than deregulation, the purpose of the Act was to provide more flexibility in licensing hours in order both to meet the changing social and leisure patterns of Britain, especially the 'night time economy'/ and to obviate the excesses of the 'last orders' rush and associated problems of disorder in the streets. Furthermore, the Act was hailed by its proponents as a step towards encouraging a more Continental style pattern of alcohol consumption and promoting a 'cafe culture'. Equally significant were the new institutional arrangements for licensing. Responsibility was switched from the Home Office to the Department for Culture Media and Sport and at the local level the licensing authority was moved from the licensing justices to the local authorities. Another aim of the Act was to improve local accountability, in the words of the Secretary of State, to 'empower the local community' (Hansard 25 January col. 217). Transfer to local authorities tied in with another of the Act's aims: to give more teeth to the relevant local authorities and regulatory bodies (including the police) to deal with disorderly premises and tackle abuses of the licensing system. The Act had four objectives: the prevention of crime and disorder; public safety; the prevention of public nuisance; and the prevention of children from harm (Kolvin 2005). Critics of the Act, however, saw it as out-of-step with research and international experience which showed that greater access and availability of alcohol exacerbated alcohol problems. It was also criticised for not including the promotion of health as one of its objectives (Room, 2004; Plant and Plant 2005; Plant and Plant 2006).

2. Scope and purpose of the research.

The effects of the Licensing Act upon crime or nuisance-disorder on the one hand, and upon consumption levels and health on the other/ require . extensive, long-term research. The aim and scope of this research is more limited. It is concerned, first, to assess the effects of the new arrangements in the localities upon local drinking patterns and, secondly/ to examine at the local level how various stakeholders - licensing committees, local politicians, officials, police, social workers, residents' groups etc. - interact, how they perceive the operation of the new Act and how they sought to influence policy at the implementation stage. Three contrasting localities in Norfolk are chosen: the districts of the City of Norwich; Great Yarmouth and South Norfolk. Norwich is a large city, an urban regional centre in a predominantly rural region; it has a large commercial and service sector and a significant night-time economy, with several 'hot spots' where there are concentrations of night clubs and venues for late night entertainment catering for the youth market. Great Yarmouth is a major, popular seaside resort with a strong leisure-based economy, although suffering problems of economic recession; South Norfolk is a mixed district which comprises rural areas, a cluster of market towns that draw people in from villages, and outer suburban areas of Norwich.

The work has been undertaken in consultation with the Norfolk Drugs and Alcohol Action Team (NDAAT) which is currently seeking to gain a greater understanding of the relationship of liquor licensing practices to alcohol issues and alcohol-related problems.

Accordingly the research seeks to examine the manner in which the new licensing procedures were rolled out, and the ways in which the various stakeholders and interested parties interacted. The research is a qualitative and not a quantitative study, in so far as its chief concern is to examine the perceptions of a wide range of persons involved in the introduction and workings of the new procedures and policies in the three districts. It also attempts a preliminary assessment of the impact of the Act upon drinking habits in the three areas and upon patterns of behaviour and consumption, based upon an analysis of the views of the various interviewees. It aims to identify gaps in our knowledge and to point to future areas for research that would require larger scale funding and involvement by the NDAAT and others.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research methods were appropriate and were employed in this study. The bulk of the research consisted of a series of semi-structured elite interviews, carried out by Dr Handley; these were supplemented, where appropriate, with documentary analysis. Mr Daniel Harry of the NDAAT and his colleagues, Michael Hutchinson, Lynn Preston and Katie Hammett, assisted in identifying some 24 potential interviewees drawn from a range of stakeholders who had some interest in licensing matters, ranging from a local, prominent Member of Parliament to local neighbourhood wardens. 14 of these were completed from the final shortlist of 15. Individuals were interviewed for approximately 40 minutes each, and the conversations tape recorded. In addition, a number of telephone interviews were carried out towards the end of the research period. Summaries of all the interviews were written up by Dr. Handley and Dr. Greenaway as soon as possible after the interviews had taken place. Care was taken to ensure that a proper balance of stakeholders was achieved e.g. those involved in licensing administration; police; those in the licensed trade; community groups; and voluntary organisations. Interviewees from Norwich, however, were somewhat over-represented as compared to those from the other districts.

All interviewees were very cooperative and were keen to talk about their experiences and perceptions. All were happy to be quoted, although two in the commercial sector, preferred to remain anonymous. Few major problems were encountered, but the most noteworthy was the English local elections of May 2007. The elections prompted a number of staffing reshuffles and reorganisations in each of the local authorities targeted for this piece of research. Consequently, individuals earmarked for interview had to be tracked down as they moved out of old positions and into new ones, whilst some others were unavailable or unable to make space in their diaries. The effect of this was to extend slightly the interview period beyond the time earmarked. The findings that follow are based upon the general impressions from a range of interested and knowledgeable parties. We have not relied upon any single interview to draw any conclusion, but have triangulated the findings across a number of interviews or documentary sources.

4. Findings

4.1 Initial confusion and teething problems.

Almost all our interviewees testify to the difficulties of the initial transition period in November 2005. This was partly due to the delays on the part of licensees in applying for licences and a last minute rush which led to 'horrendous' pressures on the various licensing agencies (Pridmore; Stephenson). South Norfolk, anticipating 'a painful process' managed the transition relatively smoothly by taking on extra staff and also establishing an itinerant roadshow, staffed by specialist staff that enabled communication with stakeholders and licensees in the various towns, providing direct guidance on how to fill in the license application forms (Evans). But Norwich and Great Yarmouth were more complicated, both in regards to the numbers and variety of establishments. The environmental Health Officer in Great Yarmouth talked of a 'steep learning curve' and a 'real struggle' to deal with the amount of work. Most of the businesses were not given sufficient information and she estimated that some 90% of the local application forms were filled out incorrectly and this clogged up the process (Flatman). The criticisms of the DCMS by the House of Commons Committee concerning the implementation process were almost universally endorsed by all the interviewees who took part professionally in the transition (HC 606). The police Community Safety Officer in Norwich complained that the statutory guidance was not properly amended in the light of the 'endless feedback' and this led to 'endless glitches' and 'a lot of potentially wasted effort'. He felt that the shift from the Home Office had not helped: it was as if, after the initial push, 'it was not their [DCMS's] main agenda anymore...People were sending in these concerns and they weren't taking any notice' (Tempest). From the drinks industry side the manager of a major Norwich City centre night club, for his part, also complained of 'limited, very limited information' being sent out in the run up to deregulation and an unhelpfully short timescale which coincided with the very busy run-up to Christmas (Night Club Manager). Nevertheless, the various professionals quickly developed their own communication systems comprising informal networks: a lot of learning between councils and a lot of chatting by email and telephone (Evans; Flatman). Tension in the transition period was also exacerbated by the media exaggerations of the issue with all the talk of '24 hour drinking' as well as apprehensions by residents' groups and the like (Foster; Colbey and Small).

4.2 The Importance of Informal Networks and Procedures.

The existence of informal networking among local authority officers at the implementation stage has been continued in the subsequent licensing and liquor control processes and emerged as a recurring leitmotif from our interviews. Thus the Norwich Community Safety Officer worked consistently and constantly with Norwich City Council offices and administrative staff as 'really close partners' (Tempest). Generally speaking, the networks developed out of existing local government networks, fire, environmental services, health and safety etc. (Senior Legal Figure in Norwich). The centre of Norwich, however, presented particular potential problems given the existence of a large number of entertainment and night club establishments catering for young people from a very wide geographical area. Here an active community citizens' group, the Central Norwich Citizens Forum, from the start engaged with informal networks consisting of corporate lawyers and local nightclub managers.

A Norwich City Centre Licensing Forum was set up which consisted of police, residents' associations, and the licensed industry which mediated between licensees and local residents to try to deal with residents' concerns before they became formal objections (Foster; Night Club Manager; Tempest). This pattern of informal negotiations operates even in the licensing hearings. A member of the Norwich Licensing Committee stated that her aim was to seek out as much as possible compromise solutions. One of the main purposes of the hearings was for people to air their grievances and she saw her role as trying to make sure all the parties were as happy as possible. Indeed it was not uncommon for the various parties to discuss issues informally while waiting to go in to the formal committee hearing (Stephenson). The South Norfolk Electoral and Democratic Services Officer similarly stressed that 'what we have been quite good at doing, I think, is to try and get the applicants and the objectors together and actually sort out the issues without taking them to committee' (Evans). In Great Yarmouth there is also evidence of networking among the local government professional agencies, but here there seems to have been less involvement from representative community or citizenry groups. Parish councils and residents' associations were active in many areas, but did not seem to have had a significant role in formulating or implementing the borough's licensing policy (Jermay).

4.3 The effect of the shift of responsibility to local authorities

There was a clear consensus of opinion among our interviewees that the shift of responsibility from the magistrates to the local authorities had been beneficial. Two reasons were adduced for this. First the process was seen to run more efficiently. The Chair of the Great Yarmouth Licensing Committee felt that the new arrangements had 'curbed a lot of hassle' and allowed more flexibility (Jermay). This view was endorsed by others who pointed to the simplification of the licensing process with the licences for the sale of alcohol now being linked to other licences on matters, such as safety and the like (Night Club Manager; Senior Legal Figure in Norfolk; Clarke). However, a dissenting voice on this point came from the Environmental Health officer of Great Yarmouth who felt that the old annual joint inspection arrangements with the magistrates were 'more stringent and clear cut' (Flatman). Secondly, the linkage enabled more of the informal networking to take place smoothly. As one interviewee put it 'It has helped us build up relationships with other organisations. We [already] looked after public entertainments before this change ... The Act brought it all together under the local authority and I think that made sense' (Evans). Another stressed that now it 'felt more like teamwork' (Pridmore). The word 'partnership' in this context was voiced several times in the interviews. In all three of the areas which we studied the number of appeals from licensing committees to the magistrates was negligible or non-existent and this was hailed as showing the effectiveness of the new procedures.

4.4 The extent of local democracy and exclusions from the process

The Act had been justified by the Government as part of its broader aim of stimulating democratic renewal at the level of local government. The generally favourable assessment of the operation of the Act - with its improved networking and efficiency that we have noted above - was seen by the majority of our interviewees as a vindication of this aspect. Others thought it more desirable on the moral grounds that decision makers should be held accountable by those they represent.

However, we received mixed messages regarding the question of stimulating broader local communities' participation in the democratic process. The Act had certainly attracted some initial strong community interest in certain areas: notably among residents of Norwich city centre and inner suburban areas in Norwich where there was a large student population. This was not mirrored in the majority of areas, for example the outer suburbs or the South Norfolk district or in Great Yarmouth. Some interviewees involved with the licensing process reported the numbers of members of the public at licensing meetings varies widely (Jermamy; Stephenson). The introduction of the Act was accompanied by a good deal of public apprehension which was played upon by the local newspaper and it seems likely that, now things have settled down, participation of the public at licensing meetings is likely to diminish. One interviewee reports that members of a residents' association exhibited great willingness to defer to him in representing their interests at such meetings rather than attend themselves (Foster) and one suspects that as time goes on this pattern of diminished interest will become more marked.

The general limitations of the Act, with its tensions between democratic aspirations and the high degree of central control was also remarked on by a number of our interviewees. Fees, for example, were set by the central government and did not cover all the costs of licensing hearings. Some concerns, such as the impact of car parking upon residential neighbourhoods, were raised at hearings but did not come within the ambit of the Act. Moreover, the committees had to take each licence on a case by case basis and were not really able to take the whole picture of the neighbourhood into account, except in formally designated cumulative impact areas. Thus, for example, if it tried to impose a relatively early closing hour on a side street pub in a residential area, there was always the possibility of an appeal to the magistrates on the grounds that a pub a few hundred yards away was open later even though it might be on a main road (Stephenson).

However, one interviewee, Penny McVeigh of NORCAS, interested in the health aspects of drinking, challenged the whole tenor of the democracy rhetoric. In her view the 'politicisation of the licensing process' had had an adverse effect by putting licensing decisions into 'the purview of people who had agendas which are not necessarily about public well-being to do with the consumption of alcohol. They are about the development of the night time economy' (McVeigh). She also pointed out the proximity to government of some favoured interests (i.e. the drinks industry), rather than others (e.g. health groups), as well as widespread public apathy with party politics, particularly at the local level.

On this point it was notable that the degree of democratic participation in the form of networking operated effectively to exclude interested parties from certain areas. NORCAS, McVeigh stressed, had not been asked to attend any meetings about licensing policy in Norwich or offered any opportunity for involvement, a situation she found 'bizarre' (McVeigh). The Norfolk Youth Offending Team had also not been involved in any way in the networking or debates, although they did not think that this had adversely affected their work (Colbey & Small). The Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Action Team had very limited involvement in the development of local responses to the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003.

The notable exceptions to this were: the participation in Operation Enterprise in Norwich and NightSafe in Great Yarmouth; consultation on local authority licensing procedures; and work at a strategic level, through crime reduction and community safety partnerships in Norfolk, to highlight the public health and treatment issues associated with the Act. 'There was a desire the work through the wider partnership to generate debate on the Licensing Act 2003, but there was the perception that the introduction of the new licensing regime was an administrative issue and little could be done to effect change. In retrospect, this may have been a missed opportunity' (Harry). Moreover, it was clear from our interviews with those involved in the licensing process that health issues were not really ones that they felt it appropriate to address which, of course reflects the absence of health as one of the objectives of the Act.

4.5 Preparing for implementation and managing anti-social behaviour.

The impression we gained from our interviewees was that the three areas had prepared well for any anticipated social problems stemming from the implementation of the Act. The much-feared rise in crime and anti-social behaviour does not appear to have materialised in urban areas. And, recent Home Office statistics give some support to this (Babb, 2007). However, this is not to say incidents of anti-social behaviour do not occur. Media reports, though, tend to focus on often isolated headline grabbing incidents (EDP, 2007), rather than on instances of more persistent low-level nuisance such as littering, noise, and vomiting.

Julian Foster, the Chair of the Central Norwich Citizens Forum who was also involved in the national Network of Residents' Associations, considered Norwich to be 'quite different from anywhere else' and he drew stark contrasts with other cities, such as Nottingham, Cardiff, Swansea and Brighton. The Norwich City Centre Licensing Forum, that included police, residents' association, licensed management and other interested parties, had successfully defused problems. It was pointed out that this forum had built upon a pre-existing crime reduction initiative, 'Operation Enterprise', in Norwich and South Norfolk (www.operationenterprise.co.uk). This had been a police initiative to ensure better communication between the police and the locality. Local residents and licensees had worked together along with people from the voluntary sector - such as outreach workers for young people (Foster; Tempest; Evans; Operation Enterprise 2005). A broadly similar scheme, 'NightSafe' (www.gycdrp.org.uk), had been developed in Great Yarmouth (Jermaine). The informal networks and contacts developed before 2005 had been carried over into the implementation of the Act. It may be, therefore, that in our areas it was as much the improved policing and more sophisticated attention paid to city centre problems as the operation of the Act itself that had led to improved public order and social behaviour.

Indeed some interviewees displayed a clear sense of pride in the ways in which their pre-planned measures had ironed-out potential flashpoints, such as the 'pub-to-club' rush around 11.00pm in Yarmouth (Jermaine) and Norwich (Evans; Foster; Tempest). Moreover, the fears surrounding the potential for anti-social behaviour stemming from premises opening for a full 24-hour period have not been realised. Indeed, 24-hour opening is minimal, being restricted to some branches of the supermarket chain, Tesco.

Generally, most licensed premises have shifted their closing hours forwards approximately one hour, chiefly on the grounds of economics. It was pointed out by some how once customer numbers fall below a certain figure remaining open simply becomes uneconomic (Night Club Manager; Tempest).

A number of alarmist predictions had been made at the time of the passage of the Act concerning the impact on law and order and a consequent politicisation of alcohol issues, but it is noteworthy that neither of the Norwich MPs had experienced any upsurge in constituency complaints after its passage: in fact it had been almost non-existent as an issue in their postbags (Clarke; email communication from Ian Gibson's office, 25 June 2007). Nor had local councillors raised complaints with the Chair of the Norwich Licensing Committee (Stephenson).

4.6 Conflicting pressures on licensees: social responsibility vs. increased profits.

There are signs that those in the alcohol and licensing trades are under conflicting pressures to be responsible and minimise social problems stemming from excess alcohol consumption and simultaneously to maximise its sales. However, when confronted with this suggestion the manager of a major Norwich city centre night spot was quick to reply, 'I take the responsibility of 2,000 people, four nights a week, very seriously'. The interviewee continued, stressing the extent to which social obligations drove the parent company's alcohol sales policy, which consisted of 'very little discounting, very, very little'. This interviewee, distancing himself further, continued; 'We don't sell alcohol; we sell experience, euphoria, escapism'; 'alcohol is ancillary to the product that we sell' (Night Club Manager).

There is strong suggestion that to sell alcohol irresponsibly is not in the interests either of specific employers or the wider industry. The night club manager made clear his own approach to alcohol sales reflects what he considers to be best practice. He believes his approach will have a 'trickledown' effect so that consequently, 'fly-by-night operators (i.e. smaller operators) [will] buck up their game'. He suggests this will lead to a more general rise in standards of social responsibility amongst licensees.

However, a contrasting view emerges from Alison Colbey and Chris Small of the Norfolk Youth Offending Team. They pointed to the widespread continued existence of 'happy hours' as evidence of how the alcohol industry does not take its responsibilities seriously. Licensees might remove customers who had drunk too much on behavioural grounds, but never on health grounds, despite the much-vaunted promotion of 'responsible drinking'. They also drew attention to the broader drinking culture among the young that stresses the aim of drinking is to 'get trashed' (Colbey and Small).

We were not able in the course of our investigations to come to any very definite conclusion concerning the effects the Act had had upon improving policing and behaviour within licensed premises. Most of those involved professionally in the licensing process felt that the Act had the potential to bring about improvement in this respect by virtue of its new powers and better accountability.

There have also been a range of related measures designed to increase responsibilities of managers or club owners with regard to public safety, for example the licensing of door stewards. However, the broader question of the extent to which the Act has helped change consumption patterns of customers remains open to question. We certainly found no evidence that the Act had encouraged calmer and slower patterns of consumption, although any such shift would probably take some years.

4.7 Changing drinking habits and locations.

There is some suggestion among interviewees that those seeking late night entertainment are shifting locations and altering their habits somewhat. Some interviewees suggested that drinkers are migrating from Norwich city centre to the city's suburbs and to pubs and clubs there, which are now able to compete with the city centre establishments. Equally, on the same grounds, there is some suggestion that drinkers are opting to remain in their home towns rather than journey into Norwich city centre, particularly at weekends (Tempest). This same interviewee reports 'there's been a drift back to [market] towns and an increase in alcohol-related violence in them'. He continues, 'signs are that things are improving in the city centre: seemingly deteriorating in the market towns' (EDP, 2007; Tempest). Instances of anti-social behaviour also appear to be occurring later than previously i.e. into the small hours of the morning. (Babbr 2007).

However, with reference to any switch from city centre drinking to suburban drinking another interviewee offers the contrasting view that there is no significant evidence of this happening (Stamp). Equally, on the issue of people seeking their entertainment in their home towns at the weekend rather than making the trip into Norwich, another interviewee in South Norfolk suggests that to the best of his knowledge there has been no increase in numbers in the market towns in his area at weekends and no significant rise in anti-social behaviour either (Evans).

Given the equivocal nature of the evidence there is a clear need to research this point much further in order to see if drinkers are migrating away from city centres and, if so, the extent of this migration. Additionally, further research needs to be carried out on the extent to which anti-social behaviour has shifted from city to suburbs and rural areas and the nature of any such anti-social behaviour e.g. low level nuisance such as noise or vomiting as opposed to more serious disturbances or violent behaviour.

Part of the rationale of the Act was to alter drinking habits in England and Wales to reflect more of a continental-style cafe culture with slower more measured consumption patterns. However, although a number of interviewees noted the greater extent of seating outside various venues the overwhelming response to this issue was that this fundamental cultural shift had not yet materialised (Tempest; Foster; Evans; Flatman; Stephenson). In general interviewees considered that any shifts in the nature of licensed premises (e.g. the increasing prominence given to food or the development of up-market wine bars) was the result of general social change or commercial pressures rather than the Act itself.

Our research was undertaken on the eve of the introduction of the smoking ban in enclosed spaces, and some of our interviewees expressed apprehension that, when the ban was enforced, it might lead to some spilling over of drinkers onto the streets in late-night entertainment areas, thus recreating some of the public order problems which the act's flexible closing times had sought to obviate.

A certain amount of concern was expressed concerning the role played by off licences and supermarkets and the effects of the extended opening in this area. The very few 24 hour licences granted have been to large supermarket branches. Norwich licensees claimed that competitive pricing by supermarkets was the greatest contributor to anti-social behaviour and a Norwich police representative pointed out that people would tend to arrive at nightclubs already 'tanked up on booze' that was available far more cheaply from off licences, a view that was echoed by other interviewees (Tempest). Obviously there is a tendency for one section of the drinks industry to blame another for social problems and caution is necessary in assessing such claims. However, the interviewees from the Norfolk Youth Offending Team expressed the clear view that problems of under-age drinking and anti-social behaviour were due to the low prices and easy availability of alcohol from off sales. It was not so much a question of off licences or supermarkets breaking the law, but simply that groups of younger teenagers would usually have one or more among them that was over 18. Alcohol, they maintained, was 'the most problematic single substance' that they dealt with in relation to youth offending. Few of the youngsters they dealt with could afford nightclub prices and mostly did their drinking in areas outside (Colbey and Small). These interviewees stressed that young people were receiving very mixed messages about alcohol: it was glorified in much of the media and extreme behaviour was now regarded as the norm: the shift in behaviour among girls was particularly marked (Colbey and Small). Penny McVeigh expressed similar views. In her view it was not so much that licences were open longer that directly caused problems, but rather the message that the new law gave out that it was 'OK to drink more alcohol for greater periods of time; ergo, more alcohol is consumed.' The re-framing of the alcohol issue in terms of leisure was concealing the broader picture of sharply increased alcohol consumption in relation to such problem areas as domestic violence, motoring accidents and the recent rise in sexually transmitted diseases (McVeigh).

5. Conclusions. Summary of Findings

1. The introduction of the 2003 Licensing Act was accompanied by considerable initial confusion and teething problems and the advice and support forthcoming from the DCMS was not altogether satisfactory. The process placed considerable strain upon stakeholders at the local level.
2. Nevertheless, the implementation of the new procedures quickly bedded down well and was facilitated by a good deal of very successful informal networking in all three of the areas studied.
3. The situation in Norwich city centre, which was the most problematic area due to the large number of entertainment outlets attracting young people, was greatly helped by a good deal of prior work in establishing community involvement and cooperation between various agencies in the period before the Act. In fact Norwich seems to have provided a model of good practice.

4. Interviewees felt that the shift of responsibility from magistrates to local authorities had been beneficial. The new licensing process was more efficient and flexible. It also encouraged a good deal of partnership with agencies interested in public health, safety etc.
5. The democratic aspirations of the Act - in terms of improved networking and efficiency - appear to have been met and they receive vindication from data generated by this research. Equally, these aspirations appear to have met the moral requirement that decision makers should be held accountable by those they represent. However, the research also reveals the extent of participation is limited by the statutory provisions of the act and with some voices and interests excluded.
6. Health and social welfare groups have been marginalised and largely excluded from consultation in the formation of licensing policy.
7. There are signs that those in the alcohol and licensing trades are under conflicting pressures to be responsible and minimise social problems stemming from excess alcohol consumption and simultaneously to maximise sales.
8. In the Norfolk areas studied the Act has succeeded in one of its aims of diminishing late-night disorder and anti-social behaviour. Despite alarmist fears at the time of its passage it has generated neither public unrest nor significant political complaints.
9. There has been a shift of late-night drinking away from city and large urban centres to suburbs. We received conflicting views as to whether this had led to an increase in anti-social behaviour in these areas.
10. Most public houses and other licensed premises have only modestly extended their opening hours, usually closing an hour later closing than before. The handful of '24 hour' licences had been granted to supermarkets.
11. The role of off licences and supermarkets in contributing to alcohol problems such as anti-social behaviour and underage drinking, is an under-researched area and interviewees felt that the extension of hours in this sector had been detrimental. The off-licensed trade, particularly supermarkets, appear to concentrate upon maximising sales. This is an area of concern as the majority of the problems associated with this alcohol consumption will be hidden and associated with long term health problems as opposed to (public) community safety issues. Alcohol is now cheaper, more readily available and more efficiently marketed in these outlets than in recent years.
12. We found no evidence that the Act had helped to foster a continental style 'cafe culture' or more measured patterns of alcohol consumption.

13. It is difficult to view the effects of the Act in isolation from broader cultural and social changes that have been at work over the past two or so decades. Increasingly alcohol consumption has been re-framed in terms of leisure and economic vitality and the Act is symptomatic of that rather than a causative factor. The reframing of alcohol in this way has not been helpful in respect of the health and social problems caused by excessive consumption.

6. Recommendations for further research

Our research has highlighted a number of areas suitable for further research either in the Norfolk area or more generally in England.

1 We found some indications of a shift in drinking patterns and consumption away from the city centre towards suburbs. Research into shifts in consumption patterns here would be very revealing as would an assessment of the implications for anti-social behaviour or nuisance. To what extent does this shift represent an alleviation of nuisance or disorder problems or a change in their nature?

2. Many of our interviewees instanced the important role that off sales in off licences and supermarkets played in contributing to alcohol problems. In the debates in the gestation and introduction of the Licensing Act this aspect seems to have been somewhat neglected. The NDAAT might wish to consider this as a priority area for investigation, particularly since many of the problems associated with alcohol consumption from these outlets will be hidden and associated with long-term health problems.

3. Our research clearly indicated that although the implementation of the Act had successfully led to the development of fruitful networks among many stakeholders and interested parties, those involved in the health and social services arena had been excluded. The NDAAT and others should investigate how such parties having expertise in this aspect of alcohol affairs might be better integrated into the local policy networks.

4. The introduction of the smoking ban on enclosed places was undertaken without much consideration of the effect on alcohol consumption. A study of the relationship between the two areas would be useful. Will the ban lead to less patronage of licensed premises and therefore diminished consumption? Or will it encourage home drinking in a less controlled environment? Will it engender some law-and-order problems with larger numbers of drinkers spilling over into the streets on a Friday or Saturday night as some of our interviewees feared?

5. The implications of the re-framing of alcohol consumption in terms of a leisure pursuit is a large but interesting question that deserves attention. The Act is not itself the cause of this shift but should be seen as part and parcel of a longer term trend which would further investigation, perhaps at the end of a five year period. On a related point there is room for more general sociological research into the changing nature of expectations of a 'night out' particularly among younger drinkers. What expectations did they have for the 'experience' of a night out and where does alcohol fit into this?

6. Our research does not suggest that the extension of hours has aggravated problems of social disorder. However, both the hidden longer-term health problems and immediate issues of accidents will need sustained research. In particular further research into the effects of the Act upon Accident and Emergency services in hospitals would be revealing.

7. We found evidence that the Act had led to greater community awareness and involvement in licensing matters, but it seems likely that this will tail off somewhat as procedures become routine. It seems that the most effective way for the NDAAT to engage with this process and assist local residents is through identifying representative local community groups and associations and by establishing networking with local licensing committees.

7. List of interviewees.

CLARKE, Charles, Member of Parliament for Norwich South, 27/ 4/ 07

COLBEY, Alison and SMALL, Chris, Norfolk Youth Offending Team, 23/ 5/ 07

EVANS, Alex, Electoral and Democratic Services Officer, South Norfolk Council, 14/ 6/ 07

FLATMAN, Sarah, Environmental Health Officer, Great Yarmouth Council, 10/ 4/07

FOSTER, Julian, Chair, Central Norwich Citizen's Forum, 27 / 3 / 07

GOLDFINCH, Julia, former member of Norwich City Council Licensing Committee, 27/ 6/ 07

HARRY, Daniel;

HUTCHINSON Michael;

PRESTON Lynn; and HAMMETT Katy, Norfolk Drugs and Alcohol Action Team, 5 / 5/ 07

JERMANY, GW, Chair, Great Yarmouth Licensing Committee 8/ 6/ 07

MCVEIGH, Penny, Chief Executive, NORCAS, 28/ 3/ 07

NIGHT CLUB MANAGER (Anon), Norwich city centre night club, 3/4/ 07

PRIDMORE, Ali, Environmental Health Officer, Norwich City Council, 1/6/07

SENIOR Legal FIGURE (Anon) Norfolk, 16/4/ 07

STAMP, Lenny, Manager Norwich Neighbourhood Warden Scheme, 26/ 6/ 07

STEPHENSON, Claire, Norwich City Council Licensing Committee, 20/4/ 07

TEMPEST, Gavin, Chief Inspector Norfolk Constabulary, 19/ 3/ 07

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