

REPORT on RESPONSE to Relaxation of Licensing Hours for Exceptional Events

The proposal to allow the sale of alcoholic refreshment to continue until 1 am only on those days when England was playing in the World Cup for Football held in Brazil was circulated to the members of the National Organisation of Residents Associations. Members represent about two million residents in England and Wales, and include resident groups in city and town centres, market towns and villages.

The response was predominantly in opposition to the proposal though a few members considered the restricted extension might not be so serious as to cause problems for their particular residents.

Those against

Those, who objected, considered that the Temporary Event Notices (TENs) regulations were perfectly adequate to allow those licensees wishing to stay open later for such events. There was no justification to relax the licensing regulations in order to side-track the TENs regime, which allows the police and environmental health officers to ensure that disturbance is unlikely so that residents are protected.

They considered that to regard the World Cup as an 'exceptional event' was unfounded. The World Cup did not in any way compare with the Royal Wedding and the Royal Jubilees, which were all once in a lifetime events. To accept the football contest as exceptional could lead to a similar designation for other world competitive sporting events such as rugby, cricket, tennis, Olympics and even golf when contests take place in parts of the world at times in the middle of the night in the UK.

As to continuing the sale of alcohol until 1 am, this did not necessarily mean that those at the licensed premises would disperse at that time. There would no doubt be ample drinking up time after 1 am, so that any disturbance from the venue could continue throughout the night.

Those not concerned

The few, who were not so concerned by the proposal even though their members had licensed venues close by, thought that a 1 am limit would be acceptable especially when they considered that England's appearance in the competition would most likely be short, so that there would be few such nocturnal events.

Expected problems

The problems associated with alcohol consumption and football are too well-known to merit description. NORA members living in the vicinity of football clubs are all too aware of the consequent anti-social behaviour, vandalism and crime and disorder that occur both before and after local football matches. That this also occurs when football matches are televised during normal licensing hours and shown on licensed premises is well-reported by members. This particularly applies to NORA members living in town and city centres where there is a

significant night economy, but it also applies to anyone living in a residential area with just a single licensed venue in its midst. So residents living in market towns, in villages as well as those living in suburbs of towns and cities may all be at risk.

Whilst the street pastor facility may protect the inebriated leaving licensed venues, the police are not always able to control the problems. Environmental health departments do not have the manpower to support the police except in making representations for licensing applications both to premises licences and for Temporary Event Notices.

The problem of alcohol combined with football matches is in total contrast to rugby matches, cricket events and virtually all other sporting events, whether national or local. Why football has this unfortunate effect on a significant section of the population remains unexplained. The relaxation of the licensing regulations for the exceptional events, the Royal Wedding and the Royal Jubilee celebrations, did not result in any reports from NORA members of anti-social behaviour or of serious crime and disorder consequent on alcohol consumption.

Scotland's football authorities have set an excellent example by prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol anywhere near football matches. This policy was a consequence of the serious problems with alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour prevalent in many parts of Scotland, and the Scots deserve much credit for this policy, which has made attending football matches safe for families and for residents adjacent to football venues. The absence of police in the streets around such events is a tribute to its success.

Conclusion

For a significant minority of football supporters alcohol consumption combined with football matches is an explosive mixture. The TENs regime, a simple and economic facility for those licensees wishing to extend their licensing hours, gives some influence to the police and environmental health officers to limit and prevent serious problems where they know they might occur. To remove this facility that protects the community and other football supporters is surely unwise. Granting this proposal to relax the licensing hours regulations for 2014 World Cup matches involving England is highly likely to lead to avoidable serious adverse events affecting residents, who after all comprise the general public.

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