

Review of HBC Special Saturation policy – autumn 2012 Submission by Hastings Old Town Residents Association

HOTRA is deeply concerned about the way alcohol has a damaging effect on residents lives. It makes this submission in the hope that it will be fully considered by Hastings councillors. The current policy is inadequate, ineffective and favours the proliferation of licensable activity.

First principles

The Hastings and St Leonards Equality and Human Rights Charter was adopted in September 2011. Each signatory pledged to promote and uphold Equality and Human Rights. In particular pledge 2 – ‘we recognise our duties to advance equality of opportunity, protect human rights, eliminate unlawful discrimination and foster good community relations.

‘The local authority with the highest rate of alcohol attributable deaths for men was Hastings, with a rate of 74 deaths per 100,000 people in 2010. This compared with Hart local authority in Hampshire which had a rate of 20 deaths per 100,000.’ [N.W.P.H.Observatory]

It is the unanimous view of HOTRA's Management Committee that currently the Saturation zone is failing to secure Prevention of Crime and Disorder. There are no clear targets or measures of effective support for the 2003 Act's 4 Licensing Objectives.

There are 3 ‘areas’ in Hastings set out by the current policy. The Old Town ‘area’ has the highest concentration of licensed premises in East Sussex. Yet only 2 streets are listed. George Street has 3 pubs. The High Street has 3 pubs. In the rest of the Old Town there are a further 9 pubs [Albion, Cinque Ports, Crown, Cutter, Dolphin, London Trader, Nelson, Royal Standard and Stag] Also outside the existing area are a very large number of bars, restaurants, clubs and an off-licence.

Proposal 1 The area is extended to either include the whole Old Town, or at least added to by All Saints Street and all premises fronting the Bourne and Marine Parade.

Perverse operation of new licence applications out side the existing ‘area’ currently happens. The most recent example is the Wasabe Hut, Marine Parade. This has such a small seating area inside that there is only room for 1 small table and 2 chairs. We objected to their application for both On and Off sales. Our objection was not accepted. The licence was granted. The rear of these premises is in George Street. Similar narrow geographical excuses were offered when the Bamboo Hut [now the Old Town Fryer] applied. Their postal address is Marine Parade, yet their largest frontage is in the High Street.

If Saturation exists then there should be a commitment to reduce the number of licensed premises.

Proposal 2 The total number of licensed premises should be capped. Any future applications can only be considered if another premises licence has been surrendered.

Every premises licence applicant has to pay a fee. Yet the fee does not match the cost of processing the paperwork. In other words the application process is subsidised from the rest of Hastings Council budget. The Human Resource cost is high. This imbalance should end.

Proposal 3 Premises licence application fees should be no less than £1,000. Initially they should only be granted for up to 24 months.

There needs to be an incentive to sustained good premises management. There should be a cycle for renewal This could be say 5 years for existing premises licences. Any premises that operates without Police or HBC involvement can automatically seek renewal. Should there be recorded incidents during the 5 years then a fee would be chargeable for renewal.

Proposal 4 There should be a cycle for premises operating in Saturation zones to secure renewal of their licence at a set period of time. The HBC Licensing Committee should be kept informed about this cycle.

There should be easily accessible information on the HBC website listing any recorded issues dealt with by Sussex Police or HBC, especially Environmental issues. This would lead to greater transparency and help rebuild public confidence that their Complaints are heard.

Proposal 5 All incidents involving a statutory body in their dealings with a licenced premises should be listed on the HBC website.

Operation Blitz happens at the weekends. It requires a high level of Police resources at a time of significantly reduced budgets. The Street Pastors help reduce the number of serious incidents. All licensed premises with an outside drinking compound should help secure the 4 licensing objectives by employing SIA staff at the weekends,

Proposal 6 Sussex Police should be supported by all premises with an outside drinking area being required to employ SIA staff on Fridays and Saturday between 21.00 and 24.00

There is a myth that there is a bye-law that bans Street Drinking. This is not the case but should be. It would help deal with problems arising in public places especially with alcohol bought in off-licences.

Proposal 7 A Hastings bye-law be enacted banning the consumption of alcohol in public places to secure reduction in Public Disorder and Crime.

Large street events need careful planning and wise use of resources to avoid problems. In 2012 there were more unacceptable alcohol related problems AFTER several of these popular events.

It is reasonable to expect the organisers of such events to provide sufficient marshals during the event. After the events are over it is the responsibility of Sussex Police to provide adequate numbers of officers to secure control. HOTRA acknowledges that there have been significant efforts to prepare for these events in a planned way. There is clear evidence that the way in which Sussex Police assess the likely levels of officers needed is still not sound.

Proposal 8 Sussex Police process of estimating the levels of resources needed and the manner in which they are deployed should be reviewed.

After all big street events a Voluntary Code be adopted by all licenced premises. For the 2 hours after the scheduled ending of any big event, especially Jack in the Green, all licenced premises cease to sell alcohol. This must include all off-licences. Any restaurant with patrons sitting and eating a meal would be exempted. Any premises that chooses to continue to sell alcohol must only do so inside their premises. No outside compounds would be usable AND SIA staff would be required to ensure patrons remain inside.

Proposal 9 HBC negotiate a Voluntary code with all Saturation zone licenced premises that seeks to eliminate Crime and Public Disorder during the 2 hours after large street events. Off-licences are key to this being effective and would be expected to employ sufficient SIA staff to help secure the Licensing objectives and help discourage under-age drinking, both during and after any big street event.