

# **The Prime Minister's Speech**

## **ippr Responsible Drinking Forum**

**20 May 2004**

... the industry, from voluntary groups, from pubs and clubs and lots of different interests here. And we're all, we're all I think here really with the same thing in, in mind. We, we recognise that the, the licensed industry plays a huge part in the economy of our country, in the employment of people. Millions of people drink alcohol responsibly every day and no one wants to stop the pleasure. But there is a clear and growing problem on our town and city centre up and down the country on Friday and Saturday nights and other nights indeed too. And at a time when overall crime is falling alcohol related violent crime is actually rising.

New powers are there, they need to be used and as a society we have to make sure that this form of what we often call binge drinking doesn't become a, a new sort of British disease. And as I will set out, there are a lot of excellent partnership schemes up and down the country to tackle irresponsible drinking and I know the industry also is working hard on codes of practice to ensure that we avoid advertising and manufacturing that glamorises binge drinking and attracts under age drinkers.

The Government's working with the industry on the development of a social responsibility scheme which may well include some financial contribution to the costs of policing our town centres and tackling some of the costs of alcohol misuse, for example it could be used to pay for additional Community Support Officers, additional bus services, or for additional street cleaning. And we've also given the Police new powers to tackle anti social behaviour and lower level disorder. And these powers should be used. They can give fixed penalty notices, they can close down problem pubs. The Licensing Act will set out further powers from next year, for example giving local residents a greater say in licensing decisions where there are problems.

And let me be clear if the Police need further powers then we will look at what more needs to be done. There should be safe and enjoyable drinking for the majority, but zero tolerance of the anti social minority.

And we need to work with the Police and industry and local government to make sure that the problems of anti social behaviour, which are often, let's be clear, focused on say two or three pubs in an area don't lead to more serious trouble across a wider area.

It is unfortunately plain that the current drinking culture causes problems in our town and city centres and that people do worry about low level crime and anti social behaviour which is often linked to alcohol abuse. The British Crime Survey tells us that forty four per cent of victims of violence thought that their attacker was under the influence of alcohol at the time and around seventy per cent of weekend night admissions to casualty are due to alcohol and alcohol's a factor in over thirty per cent of city centre arrests.

Now there's no point in taking a, a one size fits all approach to this problem. The Home Office has recently published some guidance for Police officers and Crime and Disorder Partnerships called Tackling Violence in the Night Time Economy and I know that for example the Manchester City Centre Safe Team is represented here today, this is a really effective scheme which set out to tackle the negative impact on tourism and investment and the burden on the Police caused by alcohol related violence and disorder at the weekends. The scheme tries to take a holistic approach if you like to ensuring that the night time infrastructure is able to cope with the huge numbers of people travelling in to the city centre at weekends. And bus companies, taxi companies are now fully involved in making sure that people are able to leave the city centre quickly and easily at closing time.

Manchester City Centre Safe also includes an awards scheme, Best Bar None, for pubs and clubs which is allocated according to a wide ranging set of criteria, including door policies and policies on crime prevention and since the scheme was introduced two years ago serious assaults in the

city centre have reduced by some eight and a half per cent in the first year and twelve per cent in the second.

So as the Manchester example indicates there are things that can actually be done and I know there's a lot of constructive work by the industry to combat this problem also. For instance the Burnley Against Night Time Disorder Initiative banning violent individuals from pubs for a year and the High Peaks Safer Pubs and Clubs scheme. And we need everyone in the industry to follow these examples.

I'm aware too of the work already being done by many in the industry to clamp down on irresponsible selling to minors and those already drunk and this is why representatives from the licensing industry are closely involved in the summer enforcement campaign announced by Hazel Blears at the end of April.

This joint Home Office ACPO campaign will target the irresponsible few who encourage under age and binge drinking whilst ensuring that Police and partners are aware of the powers that are available to them. And again this will build on some of the local initiatives including those led by the industry to deliver a co-ordinated approach to tackling alcohol related violence. And we have to ensure that everybody who's involved in this is actually aware of the powers that are there and available.

I know too that the industry is already working on codes of practice with their members to ensure that we avoid irresponsible advertising and manufacturing that as I said earlier glamorises binge drinking and attracts under age drinkers. But it is important that these codes have the ability actually to make a difference and I want to give the industry a chance to build on the good work that I know is already being done around social responsibility and to prove that it is committed to attacking the problems of binge drinking.

The one million people employed in the alcohol industry can also be a strong force for cultural change. But only if the industry finds a way to harness their talent and ability. Now we've already put some of these new measures in place to help combat anti social behaviour caused by excessive drinking and new Police and Licensing Authority powers will come in to force when the Licensing Act is implemented next year and the prevention of crime and disorder is obviously a key part of the Act.

The Act puts responsibility for licensing firmly in the hands of local authorities, communities and the Police. It balances new rights with new responsibilities. It combines liberalisation of opening hours and the creation of new venues with stronger powers to combat premises which cause problems in the community and powers in this new Act include introducing or increasing fines as well as the potential for suspension or revocation of a licence at premises which allow disorderly conduct. There will be increasing powers to close licensed premises or events thought to be abusing the terms of their licences and there will be an improved system for renewing licences when problems arise, including as I say giving local residents a greater say if they believe there is a problem.

The Act will also introduce flexible opening hours for a range of venues, restaurants, cafes, cinemas as well as pubs, with the aim of encouraging a better mix of people in towns and city centres at the weekend. And I'm very pleased that the Act has received widespread, widespread support and the Police have welcomed the new powers and we will be monitoring their Act overall.

So what's really happening I think is this, that I mean everybody recognises that the critical issue is to make sure that people have the, the power to and the freedom to enjoy themselves provided they are acting responsibly, that we need to create a situation in which there is more flexible opening because that is what people enjoy in other parts of Europe and why shouldn't we enjoy the same thing here, but that we have to be very, very clear that where there are problems being caused to local communities or city, city centre disturbances on Friday and Saturday night we're prepared to deal with them.

Now I think to, just to set this in context for you, this is part of an, of an overall programme which is about introducing if you like almost a different contract between the individual and the, the society or community around them so that we are allowing people greater freedom, but we're demanding more responsibility at the same time. And you know it's very hard to, to appreciate, particularly for some of the most vulnerable people in our community, what

problems can be caused by the sort of anti social behaviour and disorder that come from excessive drinking and alcohol abuse. I mean if you are an elderly person and you're, you, you live near a city centre and there's continual problems being caused to you or if you are just a, an ordinary family trying to, to live and make your way and there's, there's, there's continual disturbance going on in and around your, your home, it's, it's almost impossible to overstate the sheer nightmare that becomes for people in their daily lives.

And what we're trying to do as a Government is to one make sure that we give people as I say the freedom that they require in any sensible society so that more flexible licensing hours and so on, so on come in. Secondly however to say that we are going to give the Police and the local communities the powers they need to deal with an irresponsible minority of people who abuse that freedom. And thirdly to say that as the industry that we want to work with you to try and make this happen in a sensible way and to engage you in trying to deal with the problems of abuse and excess.

And, you know, I think that we, we all know from our, from our own experience that when we're trying to get business buy in in something like this there's a very thin line that we have to tread because if we go too far one way we start over regulating the industry or piling costs upon the industry and bureaucracy and that's a problem for them. On the other hand if we don't actually respond to the public concern then the industry itself gets damaged as well as the people who are the victims of alcohol related violence or anti social behaviour.

We are, you know, it's important to see this in a broader context. We're introducing reforms in our criminal justice system to make it work more effectively, in our Police service with more community support officers and Police out there in the street, with anti social behaviour where there are a whole series of new powers that are coming in to effect for the Police, things like fixed penalty notices, the ability to shut down drug dealers' houses, to confiscate the assets of drug dealers and the powers that I was mentioning earlier in relation to problem pubs or clubs. And we're trying to say to people look we've got to get back respect on our streets in the hands of the law abiding majority.

Now that's not to say that people shouldn't enjoy themselves and have a great time, but they need to know that comes with, with a, with a, an obligation of responsibility to others and there's absolutely no reason why people can't enjoy themselves and have a great time and enjoy a, the wide cultural and city life that there is without being a pain to other people and sometimes actually a threat to other people causing violence and disorder and, and, and difficulty. And I think that's what we're trying to do and I know that you in the industry want to achieve those ends as well.

The question is how do we do it and that's what we are, you know, the purpose of today's gathering is that people sit down and discuss well what are the things are really going to make this work. And the final thing I would say to you is we've introduced these new powers, we've got the Licensing Act coming in, all of it is, is tremendously important, but we will then need to continue the dialogue and get the feedback. You know, there, there will be some of these things that work properly, there will be some of these things that work less well. There will be issues that arise for industry, there'll be issues that arise for the Police and local communities. We need the feedback as to how this thing actually works in practice.

But its purpose as I say is very clear and all the changes that we're making in the, in, in the criminal justice system and in the, the new laws are really to put the law abiding citizen back at the centre of the system, to put the law abiding citizen as the one whose interests and whose civil liberties and whose rights come first and that I think is, is what people expect us to do. And if we can do that in a modern world taking account of all the changes that are happening and working with the industry, then I think we will have achieved something of tremendous importance.

I don't say incidentally that this is simply a British problem. It isn't. I think it's a problem that is in other countries as well to be fair. But there's, it's not an excuse for us and it's not a reason for not tackling it and today's seminar is one important part of that. Thank you.