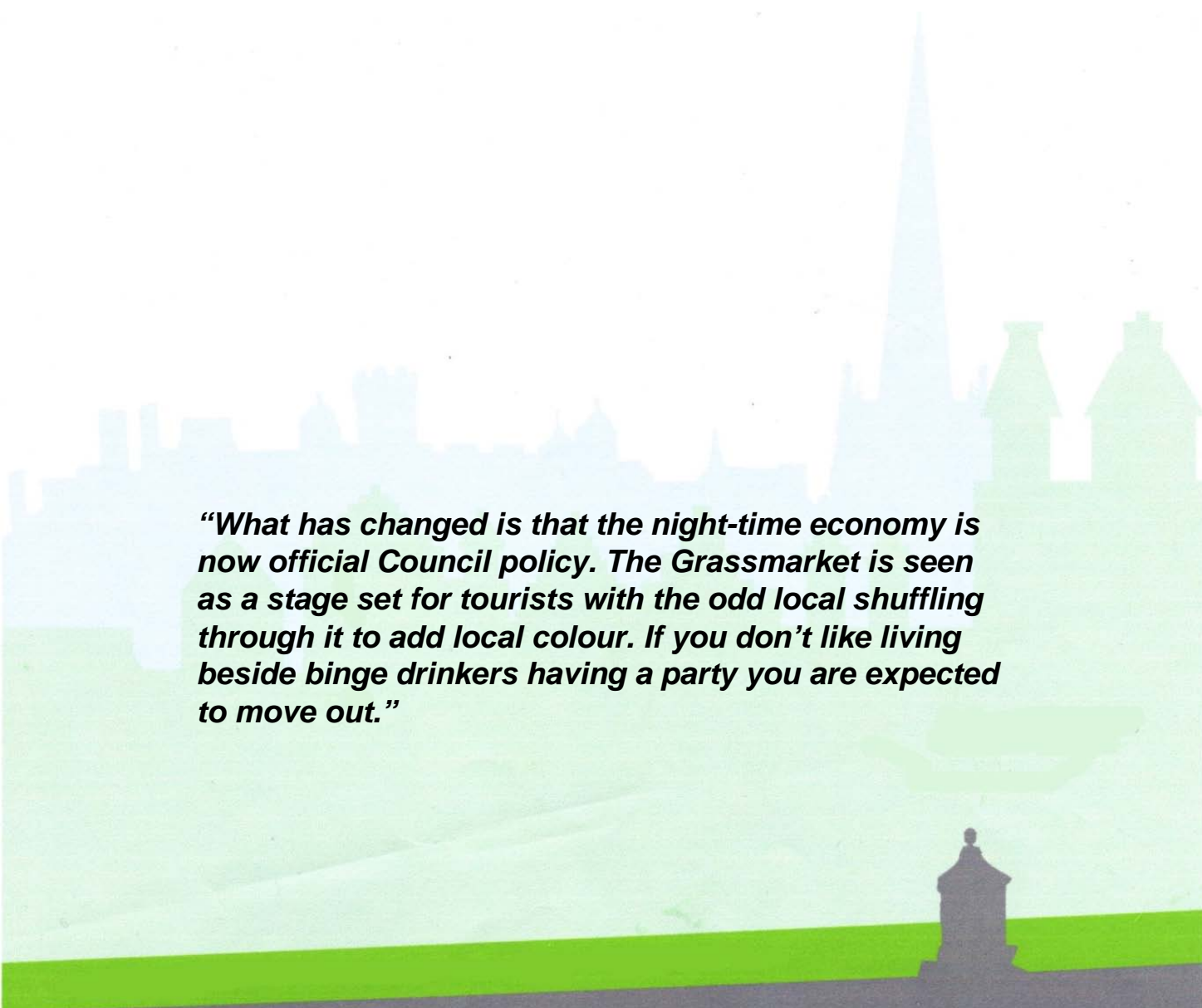


Here Comes the Night

A report by Grassmarket Residents' Association on
the impact of the Night-Time Economy on
Edinburgh's Grassmarket – first draft.

August, 2010



“What has changed is that the night-time economy is now official Council policy. The Grassmarket is seen as a stage set for tourists with the odd local shuffling through it to add local colour. If you don't like living beside binge drinkers having a party you are expected to move out.”

Grassmarket Residents' Association A living community

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1. REPORT SUMMARY

Our response to Councillor Mowat's motion addresses the issue of the 'residential impact' of the Night Time Economy. The account is given largely in the voices of the people who stay here and who directly experience life in the Grassmarket area 24 hours a day. It has been compiled by members of the Grassmarket Residents' Association with contributions from a number of local residents.

In Section 2 we argue that the ongoing promotion of our neighbourhood as a tourist destination and leisure area has adversely affected the quality of life of local residents. We describe our area and how things have changed since licensing hours were extended and with changes in the 'drinking culture'. We express our concern about the impact on the residential population and condemn the view of some that residents who don't like the 'party culture' should move away.

Section 3 tells you how it is throughout the night from 6pm to 6am. This illustrates graphically how the Grassmarket changes as night comes – the serious drinking starts and families and shoppers disappear. As the night progresses: the atmosphere changes to something darker, more sordid and unpleasant. The revellers eventually depart to find their beds, leaving the residents with the aftermath, the litter and vomit and more, then the sounds of the clean-up vehicles – and the noises of the start of a new day.

Then in Section 4 we look in more detail at certain aspects, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, and the measures taken by those in authority to curb these problems. We point out that security cameras, for instance, do not seem to be effective in reducing crime and we call for quicker responses and more action by the Licensing Board, along with the Police and the Council.

Section 5 explains how the operations of different types of businesses, such as the hotels, impact on the local community, giving a different slant on the much-used Edinburgh tag line, 'A Living City'. It concludes by giving the views of residents from different parts of the Grassmarket and their personal accounts of life here.

In Section 6 we look not only at the way that Edinburgh and the Grassmarket are 'sold' as a destination, but also what people who visit the area say about it. Reactions are mixed: some love the pubs and clubs and the 'buzz', some see the mess and experience the noise and rowdiness and advise others to avoid the area.

In Section 7 we review the issues and start to look for solutions.

Finally, as an appendix, we have included a selection of recent press articles to illustrate some of the points we make in the main text.

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2. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared in response to the Night-Time Economy Motion to City of Edinburgh City Council's Economic Development Committee by Joanna Mowat, Conservative Party Councillor for Edinburgh Central (Appendix 1). The motion arose from a growing concern among the local population that the night-time economy was having a detrimental effect on the lives of local residents, the wider community and the city's reputation.

The relentless growth in the night time economy (NTE) in Britain's towns and cities over the past ten years has resulted in most Councils taking stock of how the activities associated with the NTE affect communities. The reports produced invariably focus on incidents of violence and other crimes and do not always deal with wider impacts. In addition, the reports also presuppose that such night time activities are, in the main, 'good for business' and the local economy, and all that is needed is better management rather than any major policy re-think. In this context, it is unsurprising that the costs of policing, other emergency services, street cleansing and health services, and the wider social costs, are not always taken into account. This report attempts to present a broader - and therefore more realistic - picture of how our community is affected by the night-time economy.

We have decided to present our report largely through the voices of local residents, telling of their experiences rather than the statistics of economic outcomes. We should welcome the opportunity, however, to comment on the consultancy reports commissioned by the Council on the night-time economy. It is the people who live here who know best what a unique and special place the Grassmarket is for both Edinburgh residents and visitors to enjoy, and how retaining its character is a fine balance between its historic edginess and the current late-night binge drinking culture. That balance is summed up by comments recently overheard from visitors:

"An amazing place for a drink but spoiled by the drunks"

Young American

"Let's get seriously smashed."

Hens

3. NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

“Alcohol consumption is a fundamental activity for many customers in the night-time economy and often central to its commercial enterprise”

Findings Report 214, Home Office

Though it could usefully be summarised as “the sale for consumption of alcoholic drink”, the term ‘night-time economy’ refers to the bars, pubs and clubs and any other business that profit from visitors to a particular area at night. For our purposes therefore it includes hotels, hostels, restaurants, cafes, takeaways, burger vans, and any late night retail outlet or related activities, such as taxis, party buses and rickshaw rides.

The relevant ‘night’ time-frame will vary from one area to another: in the Grassmarket the activities of the NTE run from 6pm to 6am.

3.1. THE GRASSMARKET: AN ‘ESSENTIALLY RESIDENTIAL’ AREA

As an historic part of the city, the Grassmarket has for centuries been an area where people settled and made their livelihoods; sometimes arriving from other parts of Scotland or abroad, especially Ireland after the 1840s potato famine. People lived in tenements or lands above the shops and ale houses. This urban form is largely preserved until today, with people living in very close proximity to the pubs, restaurants, shops and other local businesses.

Between 1950 and 1980 the population of the Old Town fell by nearly 80% from 14,000 to just over 3000. The Grassmarket was a no-go area because of its violent reputation and the presence of a large number of hostels for the homeless. Vigorous community action, especially through the Grassmarket Area Housing Association and with the support of exceptional Councillors and MP Robin Cook, turned the area around and met the untapped demand for people to live here again.

Perhaps the community was too successful as property prices rose, right to buy options were taken up and parents invested in student flats. The Grassmarket’s image changed following the reform of the licensing laws with the lax interpretation of the new laws by the Licensing Board and their granting of numerous late licences to local pubs and clubs. The Grassmarket was now a ‘happening’ place. Once again there is a trend of families leaving the Old Town and properties being converted to holiday lets or as HMOs.

Yet the area is acknowledged by the Council to be an ‘area of sensitivity’, one of a number of ‘areas of central Edinburgh of mixed but essentially residential character’ Exact figures for the number of residents are elusive but from the electoral roll there appears to be approximately 900 people and over 600 tenement houses in the Grassmarket and the streets leading into it.

Regarding the houses, we know that there are 174 Council and housing association houses. In addition, there are a number of long-established residents who bought their houses under the right-to-buy legislation. Some will have moved on and their

houses are can be owner/occupied, rented or let as holiday lets. At the centre of the Grassmarket is Thomson's Court, a sheltered housing building that has many flats for elderly people.

The remaining houses are either privately let or owner/occupied. As holiday lets do not at the moment require planning permission, it is impossible to know how many of these there are but a glance at the web and a trawl through the numerous 'holiday flat' sites show that there are a number of these in the area.

In the same area, there are:

- 15 pubs
- 3 hotels
- 10 licensed restaurants
- 3 clubs.

In the wider area but still within five minutes' walk from the Grassmarket from Lothian Road to George IV Bridge and from Lauriston Place to Johnston Terrace, there are 40 more pubs, 4 hotels, numerous licensed restaurants and 10 clubs. The pubs are licensed to 1am and the clubs to 3am, seven days a week, so that, on many nights, there is little chance of peace and quiet until 4 o'clock.

Over many years, Grassmarket residents through the Grassmarket Area Group (GAG) have frequently objected to licence applications, mainly ones for regular extensions where pubs have been rowdy, but also to prevent the granting of new licences. Fortunately that was stopped by the Licensing Board's moratorium on new licences in 'areas of sensitivity', but it can be argued that it was too late – the 'horse had bolted' and we already had far too many licensed premises. Establishments like the new ArtRoch Hostel still assign space for a bar in their planning applications and hope that no-one spots it.

In the lead up to further changes in the licensing laws proposed in the Nicholson report published in 2003, local residents' groups and other organisations, as part of the Edinburgh Old Town and Southside Neighbourhoods Project, formed a Community Action Forum (CAF). This made strong representations to the Council about the impact of the late licences on the residential community. It called for better regulation of licensed premises, changes in the way the Licensing Board dealt with objections and other improvements. Many of the proposals were included in the new Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 which finally came into force in September 2009.

It is early days to assess the impact but the Grassmarket Residents' Association is keen to work with the local Licensing Standards Officers to clamp down on badly operated pubs and clubs. It was good news to hear of the recent temporary closure of one of the most troublesome pubs in the Grassmarket, following large numbers of complaints and serious disturbances (see press articles in Appendix 2). Another pub operator, Festival Inns who owns several pubs in the area is reported to be in serious financial trouble, suggesting that the cheap drinks culture is not proving profitable.

In addition to local action through such organisations as GAG, GRASS and CAF, many residents participated in the consultations surrounding the improvements in the Grassmarket. From May 2005 when the Public Realm works were announced and the first meeting with residents was held, until the works were finally finished in 2009,

many Grassmarket residents attended numerous meetings, including the community planning event in September 2005, and contributed their ideas on how the area could be improved.

One of the key issues raised time and again by local people without any acknowledgement by the Council or the landscape architects, was the likely outcome of clearing the area of cars and creating large event spaces. It was felt strongly that this would just create more space for the 'drinking culture' to exploit. It quickly became apparent that these fears were well-grounded as we saw the open area colonised most nights by drinkers, as well as rickshaws, bikers, taxis, pizza delivery vehicles, party buses, stretch limos and the 'pusi wagon', creating an unregulated, unruly, uninviting space.

3.2. IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT ...

“I would say that residents have to also be aware that if you've bought a property in one of our tourist hotspots there are going to be issues that come with it.”

Councillor quoted in Evening News, October last year (Appendix 2)

As this report was being compiled, Grassmarket Residents' Association received the following email. It was the day after the recent Nocturne Event in the Grassmarket when cyclists raced round the area from 6pm-10pm to a commentary which could be followed word for word hundreds of yards away; not to mention the set-up and dismantling noise, which started at 7am and ended in the early hours of the following day.

“For me this has been the final straw and I am actually moving out at the end of August. I haven't decided yet whether I will rent my flat out or sell it but to be honest, I can't imagine ever wanting to come back here. I think it is a real pity that the vast majority of citizens who live in this beautiful area are being made to feel under-represented and walked over by the council. Having stuck out the Grassmarket 'improvements' in the hope of something getting better, I actually feel it is now worse. Not only do we have the late-night activity which was always a nuisance, but now we also have event after event after event so that it is almost impossible to live here happily” ...

Having stuck out the Grassmarket 'improvements' in the hope of something getting better, I actually feel it is now worse. Not only do we have the late-night activity which was always a nuisance, but now we also have event after event after event so that it is almost impossible to live here happily”

“I really do wish you the best of luck with having your voice heard - I just fear that no one is listening. It seems Edinburgh Council would rather make money from the night time economy than protect the residents who make this more than a wasteland of events and alcohol”

Another family moving out of the area

This email, from the mother of a family and an active and valued member of the community, is particularly distressing, and it is another alarming example of how the community is being affected by the local economy. This is bad news for the future of the community. We need to focus our minds on what kind of Old Town we want: one inhabited by a transient population or one that has a sustainable and thriving mixed population.

This email came in two days later:

“You should move to the suburbs...”

“As for moving to the suburbs if we want peace... I am! But not everybody has that luxury. We all understand it's a 'vibrant' area and put up with a LOT of noise, disruption, crowds of people etc on a daily basis already. But we don't deserve to be trampled all over and be told to move if we don't like it. Most people can't just up sticks and move because events planners feel they can do whatever they want with the place. Some are in sheltered housing, housing association or council flats with little or no choice about where they were placed, some people have lived quietly for 30 years in the same place and don't deserve to be chased out of their family homes even if they could afford to move.”

“While living here I have felt completely ignored and disrespected by events organisers and authorities. Yes, it was my choice to live here but the decision was based more on financial constraints than anything else. Just because I couldn't afford a nice house in the suburbs doesn't mean I gave up my right to any respect or consideration whatsoever”

3.3. A BIT OF HISTORY: IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS

When city councillors and others accuse city centre residents of being kill joys and ask “Why do you choose to live in a tourist hot spot if you don't like it “ they may not know that it wasn't always like this ...

A resident provides a recent historical perspective:

“From my experience as a resident for nearly 35 years the pattern of noise and usage has changed several times.”

“In the 1970s it was the rumbling of the brewery lorries on the hours throughout the night. You could tell the score by the noise of the Hibs supporters on Saturday nights. There were occasionally drunken fights in the Vennel or the distressing cries of children in the Salvation Army family unit as husbands hurled abuse at their wives who had sought refuge.”

“With the emergence of the club culture in the 1980s, as well as being a drinking destination, the Grassmarket suffered from being a through

route from Lothian Road to the clubs in the Cowgate. We were regularly woken at weekends at 1am and 3am and the roaring of gangs of drunken youth made the Grassmarket sound like the Roman forum. The streets were pretty unspeakable on Sunday mornings as one picked ones way through pizza boxes and vomit culture emerging. The Grassmarket started to move 'upmarket' with flats being bought for let and a student “

“The closure of several clubs after the Old Town fire had a positive effect as the club scene started to shift towards George St and the top of Leith Walk. The new kids on the block were the stag and hens heading towards the pubic triangle or getting tanked up for the evening. For years the tourist board actively promoted Edinburgh as a stag and hen location, failing to learn from the mistakes of cities like Dublin.”

4. VIBRANT CITY: HOUR BY HOUR

City dwellers like the buzz and it's an odd city that doesn't come to life in the course of 24 hours. But city dwellers, like everyone else, need to find respite from noise and disturbance at some time of the day, and enjoy a bit of peace and quiet. Everyone needs to have a good night's sleep and people who live in the centre of a city do not do so because they have less need or sleep than those in the suburbs and rural areas. Medical research consistently shows noise affects sleep patterns to the detriment of both physical and mental wellbeing.

Edinburgh is sold as having a vibrant night life but vibrant loses its meaning when it threatens the quality of daily lives of the city's residents ...

18:00 The party atmosphere is cranking up on any week-end and most week nights too, especially when the sun is out or an event has attracted a crowd. An 'increase in footfall' is what the authorities wanted from the newly-designed plaza and that is what has transpired. But as the afternoon progresses, families disappear and the 'footfall' transforms into 'staggering' from pub to pub. People living, working or visiting the area can expect any or all of the following: verbal abuse; individuals and groups shouting in the street; drinkers blocking footpaths forcing pedestrians out on to the street.

An incident:

“A young man on crutches is slowly crossing the road at the busy junction around the bar at Cowgatehead. In the vicinity traffic from Cowgate and Candlemaker Row mingles with traffic travelling east along Grassmarket and vehicles both entering and exiting West Bow. A nearby pedestrian crossing complicates the scene.”

“The young man on crutches moves slowly and inevitably traffic slows, stops, backs up. A queue has developed in both directions but he finally reaches the pavement opposite the bar whereupon he raises the crutches above his head and does a jig of triumph for his 5 or 6 pals outside the pub who have been cheering and jeering him all along. This bogus crossing on crutches is repeated at the same slow pace another 3 times before the protagonist falls over in front of a stalled car. He is unhurt and returns to the safety of the pavement where he feigns collapse. In seconds he is back on his feet, brandishing the crutches above his head and dancing his triumphant jig”

19:00 On busy days (sunny, weekend, events), residents will choose to stay indoors. Those who can afford to have already left town for the weekend so footfall of locals is virtually non existent. Here is why

- The verbal abuse is now more threatening and if drunks are challenged, physical violence may not be far away
- Public urination has started despite the lightness of the evening, again challenging this can lead to threats of violence

20:00 The pizza deliveries are in full swing and the pedestrian north side of the Grassmarket becomes a parking bay for pizza delivery vehicles. Despite the 'no access' signs, access is also available at the 'wrong end' of the one way (pedestrian!) street. So, pedestrians don't know what's going on and are in danger. Horns sound. Someone is getting annoyed. Pedestrians are running.

An incident

"A student with an accent that suggests Oxbridge openly urinates in the Vennel. When challenged, he retorts that this is a private place."

21:00 The restaurants start to take in their tables and chairs, adding to the general hub-bub. A beggar moves illegally close to the cashline machine as a queue of revellers gets ready to fund their habits.

An incident

"An older woman returning on her own fails to part the crowd outside the chip shop. When she politely requests them to let her through she is met by jeers and curses. Only last night when she chose not to return the greeting of a drunken reveller but to walk on in silence, the response was 'F up your own a*** you old b****. Is that how the City wants Festival goes like her to be greeted on their way home?'"***

22:00 Time to line your stomach. The queue outside the chippie lengthens. Those who decide, on mature reflection, that this was an unwise idea discard their half-eaten meals on the pavement for the gulls to enjoy. A few whose drink-lined stomachs cannot literally take the strain deposit the contents at a close mouth. The first police and ambulance sirens sound as the Cowgate closes to traffic.

It's a warm night so many of the pub doors are open and live music blasts out. This isn't in the terms of their licences but who's checking? Locals are forced to join in the party, whether they want to or not.

23:00 The party is in full fling on the street. It seems anything goes because it's the Grassmarket. Screams are heard from the ghost tours that file up Candlemaker Row. The rickshaws are tinkling their bells as they do a roaring trade.

While coming home from the pictures...

"Last night outside the bar on Cowgatehead there was a mob of around 30 young males on the pavement and part of the road. . They were shouting and singing to the top of their voices. Some were throwing a sand bag about."

"It was quite disturbing as people could not walk past the bar on the safety of the pavement. One had to go round the unruly mob by walking on to the road."

“I noticed the community wardens, and CCTV van passing by the unruly mob but they just drove on by. So much for paying council tax. Just like the Police and City council officials, they don't serve the Grassmarket residents. What can we do in this area to get the respect that all residents deserve?”

00:00 The second performance of the Tattoo is running late as usual. Although scheduled to end at twelve, the blast of the Saturday night fireworks is still to come. For many residents there is little point in going to bed for another half hour.

01:00 The first pubs close, their clientèle heading for the streets to continue the party. Young tourists look round to see where the action is. Some have been on a free tour earlier in the day where, in between a serious misrepresentation of Scottish history by a guide whose accent betrays his overseas origins, they are exhorted to return at night to the Mecca for stag and hens’.

An incident:

“Yesterday I stood amazed at the “sales pitch” coming from an American girl conducting a walking tour. In the middle of Grassmarket she held court over 20/25 tourists and told them about the benefits of buying 'promotional' cards from her. The first was a £12 card which they could buy for £11 and entitled them to a free shot and reduced price drinks in several bars. She promoted this area as the “place to party all night” and then she tried to sell them cards enabling them to “phone home on cheap rates”.

02:00 People head through the Grassmarket in gangs as they move from club to club. Police and ambulance sirens are regular by now as the casualties are removed from the scene.

03:00 More of the pubs and clubs are closing and revellers are on the move. Once you would hear strains of ‘Flower of Scotland’ and Hibs songs from midnight to 3 or 4am but now it’s more likely to be mindless whooping and screaming. It appears that the i-pod generation has lost the ability to sing! They will love to chat in groups outside windows which the Council says cannot be double-glazed as it’s a conservation area

A serious incident in King’s Stables Road 29 May 2010:

“My daughter who was alone in her flat was woken at 3.15am by shouting and banging in the common stair. Alarmed that someone might try to break in she called 999 only to be told that the police were very busy (significant in itself) but someone would come ASAP. A policeman did call later, when she was back asleep, and she had a report from him the following day.”

“He said an altercation had broken out between some occupants of the tenement and others, the others being spotted by CCTV and ‘dealt with’. During the altercation 4 windows were broken. As there are two HMOs in the stair which seem to have shifting populations, we assume it was occupants of one of them or their guests – none of the owners or council tenants seem to have been involved.”

“The timing is perhaps relevant – the nearby disco/club closes at 3am”

04:00 A few revellers are still wandering about the Grassmarket or have retired up a close to have sex, pass out or doss down. A few nights-out have gone badly wrong, leading to girls screaming in distress and guys hurling abuse at each other. Residents are concerned whether to investigate in case the girl is being attacked.

An email the morning after:

“What on earth was going on last night?? I was woken up at 3.30am by what sounded like half a football stadium shouting and yelling at the top of their lungs. I didn’t go outside to see but it went on for a while. Did you happen to see what was going on?”

“Also did you see the big advertising board from the police that was about how they’re acting on alcohol related violence? I took a picture on my phone ...”

05:00 Last stragglers... and then, just as you’re dropping off to sleep again, the bloody cleaning machines!

An incident:

“I booked a taxi to catch the first London train on business. I would normally walk but not at that hour. I opened the door to find three conscious and one unconscious hens in the back. It took the driver five minutes and a threat to summon the police before they were ejected.”

06:00 All quiet but not for long. The hostel clatters its wheelie bins down the Vennel and the glass from the night before is being tipped into the waste disposal vans. By seven the Tattoo is rehearsing or the first stall holders are clanking poles ready for a Saturday market and the early bird traders are putting out the A boards, that add yet another hazard for pedestrians.

Early morning blues

“The seagulls are tucking into a very noisy breakfast outside Thomson’s Court where the wheelies bins spill out their contents. It appears that when the bins are full the restaurant staff feel free to use the pavement – they’re not bothered because they’ll be long gone by the time the grateful seagulls arrive.”

“Then the sound of running water. It’s my neighbour’s daily ritual: hosing down the urine and other human waste from the doors of the sheltered housing facility. He doesn’t want the old dears slipping on that - but who else cares?”



5. THE IMPACTS OF THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

5.1. CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

“Research consistently shows the peak time for violent offending is weekend nights and the peak location is in and around pubs and clubs”

Allen et al 2003 quoted in Findings 214, Home Office

Crime figures are falling but that is no consolation to a population which is consistently targeted by petty crime and vandalism fuelled by the consumption of alcohol – and little or nothing is being done about it.

King’s Stables Road was meant for horses - maybe that’s why cars in the residents’ parking bays get so little sympathy. Stroll down there any day and witness the numbers of cars without wing mirrors; if you had walked down there on the morning of 1st July 2010 you would see no fewer than 4 smashed car windscreens. What is being done about it, residents ask. Is anyone ever picked up for these crimes?

The joys of motoring and parking – by a long-term resident:

“I have lived in the Grassmarket area since 1987, in West Bow and latterly in Kings Stables Rd. I have parked a car on the streets (and in the Grassmarket when that was possible) with a resident’s permit for the whole period, so I have had the chance to experience and observe at close hand the incidence of petty vandalism to cars (luckily I’ve never had one stolen).”

“In my experience, cars are damaged in different ways in the two locations. Running across the bonnet and roof of cars on foot was popular in West Bow – the steep slope seemed to encourage this. This results in dents, often with clearly visible footprints leading over the car. I also had the rear window of an estate car broken when parked in the Grassmarket. Wing mirrors are the standard target in Kings Stable Rd. I’ve had to replace or repair mine 5 or 6 times in the 5 years I’ve lived there (at around £200 a time for a new one) and on some mornings I have noticed several mirrors broken in the line of parked cars.”

“Kings Stables Rd seems to suffer from this particularly after nights when “Stereo”, the club/disco adjacent to the tunnel under Johnston Terrace, is open (particularly on Tuesday nights when they run a ‘bargain’ club’ i.e. with discounted booze). Such nights also often involve noisy and violent behaviour in the street in the middle of the night.” ...The joys of motoring and parking – by a long-term resident:

“I find the incidence of vandalism in KSR is so predictable that I never park my car there on a club night; instead I leave it up the hill in the

Lady Lawson St / Spittal St area which appears more secure. A useful trick in the days when parking was allowed on the north side of Grassmarket was to leave the car immediately outside one of the pubs, where the proximity of the bouncers appeared to discourage vandalism.”

“I don’t know about others, but I rarely report such vandalism – I would only do so if I decided to make an insurance claim, which necessitates getting an incident number from the police. Few want to risk losing their no claim bonus for a repair which costs little more than one’s insurance excess sum; hence such minor but frequent vandalism does not get into police records.”

“Other vehicle-related problems are the use of Kings Stables Rd as a race-track at night, often involving cars with missing silencers; also very loud bass stereo music from parked and moving cars, and the stretch limos ferrying folk to and from clubs.”

5.2. NOISE

***“O flower of Scotland
When will we see your like again”***

Written by The Corries

According to the Government noise mapping website, www.scottishnoisemapping.org, the Grassmarket is the noisiest part of the city, with noise levels exceeding 80 decibels. Not surprising that we find difficulty in sleeping.

The noise generated by the night time economy is of two main types: noise from business premises and street noise. Amplified music from bars is the most common of the first type and the cause for regular complaints from residents. The worst offender does not answer its phone after 10pm, presumably on the grounds that it will be a resident complaining. The latter, street noise consists of shouting, singing, and regular ‘party buses’ visiting the area.

Getting to grips with who deals with which complaint is a nightmare; if the noise is on the inside, it’s one department; if the noise is on the outside, it’s another department, but both have the same outcome: nothing gets done in spite of a catalogue of complaints.

The arrangements for complaining against noise are complicated with regulatory powers being split between the City’s Environmental Health Department, its Community Safety Team and the Police. And the response is not always very helpful

People in Pyjamas – it would be funny if it was not true:

“We had some interesting activity this weekend (24/08/2009). Our newly declared “events space” seems to be working - for some.”

“The scale of busking in Grassmarket reached dizzying heights with large scale music ensembles and cheering crowds of around 100 people from 11pm to midnight on Friday night.”

“The tattoo had barely left the esplanade when around 20 performers set up to play, Hard to say with accuracy what the musical ensemble comprised of but drums were dominant. There were at least 5 people who phoned the police and the CEC Noise Team. And here's the interesting part; complaints about buskers are NOT handled by the CEC Noise Team, these are processed by the police; while complaints about music inside pubs are NOT handled by the police they are processed by the CEC Noise Team.”

“What it amounts to though is the same outcome - nobody does anything about it, except the people who live here. There were 5 of us (2 still in their jammies) tackling the buskers asking them to stop playing and we were ignored. Some of us were told that if we didn't like it we shouldn't live here. Eventually a random Community Safety van was flagged down and begged to move the buskers on, and the ensemble made their way along Kings Stables Road.....”

“People in Pyjamas” is the new Community Action Force. Forget the CCTVs, The Police, The Noise Team, The Community Safety Strategy, it's up to US. Nobody is coming out on their white charger to sort this out; we are basically on our own. Volunteers for the above Community Action Force should apply stating their preferred colour of matching slippers. ...”

5.3. STREET CLEANLINESS

The new look Grassmarket is not equipped to deal with the rubbish lying around during and after a night's revelling.

A stair in the Market

“We are concerned about broken glass from beer bottles and tumblers which drunken customers take away from pubs then discard in the Grassmarket, the Vennel and elsewhere. This presents a danger to all pedestrians, to children, pensioners, dog walkers.”

“Most mornings there is rubbish from burst rubbish bags strewn across the street and pavement. The area by Thomson's Court is a tip. The seagulls don't help, nor do the drunken revellers in the early morning using rubbish bags as footballs.”

Promoting the night time economy creates its own problems, and not just party buses

A resident writes about flyers and posters

“One aspect of the night time economy that affects us all is litter, and in particular fliers. It is not uncommon to find fliers strewn around the whole area, all over the floor, jammed into crossing buttons and cash machines.”

“In one incident there was a pile of at least 60 fliers for Stereo nightclub dumped on the steps at Castle Wynd South. A representative from a local club told me that “once a leaflet has left my staff's hands they are not legally responsible for it if it ends up on the ground.”

“In June 2009 I took down at least 20 posters that had been stapled onto trees and stuck to all the street furniture advertising someone's stag do. Around the same time I took down 20+ fliers for a local club that had been stuck to lampposts.”

5.4. TRANSPORT

It's a busy street at all times but during events and at week-ends it gets busier yet. Parking increases as the evening progresses, more coming and going of folk in coaches and minibuses and taxis picking up and dropping off ...

Increased demand for parking spaces causes problems particularly for residents.

An incident:

“A taxi is parked on the zig zag lines by the zebra crossing allowing its passengers to settle their fare and disembark. A police van with 5 officers inside pulls up by the taxi driver's window and an officer warns the driver that he has stopped illegally on the zig zag lines. Duty done, the police van pulls on and a few moments later the taxi makes a U turn from where it was parked across in front of the zebra crossing and drives off.”

“My great worry is that one day we'll have a fire here or someone will need an ambulance and they won't be able to reach us. I live up Heriot Bridge which has permit holders' parking on one side and a single yellow line on the other. Since they emptied the cars out of the Grassmarket, people haven't left their cars at home, they park them in places such as our street – it fills up every night and is particularly bad during the festive season and during the summer. Then they park just anywhere, sometimes making it really difficult even to drive a car up into the residents' car park – what chance would a fire engine have?”

“The Council staff seemed sympathetic to the dangers and offered to get double yellow lines but that was 3 years ago and nothing has happened.”

5.5. REGULATION, SURVEILLANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Many residents feel that the dominant factor in enforcement in the Grassmarket, Cowgate and surrounding streets is how the area is perceived by Police, Community Safety and others. The Anything goes or What do you expect attitude is also reflected in pronouncements by council officials and even our elected members. We are told that if we choose to live in the centre of the city.

“As almost all these issues of the NTE relate to the consumption of alcohol and given the Scottish Government’s concern for the issue of alcohol usage, I would like to see a much more pro-active stance taken by The City Licensing Standards Officers to encourage responsible behaviour from pubs and clubs.” ...

“One realisable measure would be the enforcement of a ban on all external advertising such as drinks promotions, which as I understand is already a Council policy. As well as undermining Council policy, such advertising serves to degrade the character of the area. Repeated failure to comply with Council legislation should be enforced with the removal of a licence.”

Surveillance cameras are on the increase but never seem to be pointing in the right direction. Hundreds of cars - windscreens, bodywork, mirrors - are damaged every year but how many of the associated crimes are caught on camera. We have yet to hear of one.

The Grassmarket has had security cameras for a while – but what do these actually achieve?

Serious incident around 3am one night:

“A group of drinkers gathers in the open space in the centre of the Grassmarket, where there is a security camera on a tall pole. After some time a fight develops and goes on for some time, then one of the group is injured and falls to the ground. An ambulance arrives but no police. A neighbour sees this and eventually calls the police himself. The person at the other end of the line says “You’ve got security cameras in the Grassmarket.” The caller replies “But security cameras can’t arrest people!”

The desire for more and more surveillance cameras may follow logically from a night-time-economy out of control; a community policeman recently admitted that at week-ends the force are ‘overwhelmed’ by the size of the policing task) but it may be counter-productive. One reason given for the removal of the trees from the Grassmarket two years ago was pressure from the security lobby to make the area more visible for effective CCTV camera use.

6. A LIVING CITY

6.1. LIVING WITH HOTELS

There are 3 hotels and 1 hostel in the Grassmarket itself. Within 300 metres of Grassmarket there are 8 hotels and 5 hostels. These tourist facilities require round-the-clock servicing and include;

- 6.30am laundry uplift and delivery
- 7.30am food deliveries
- 9.am drink deliveries
- From 10am through to late evening countless coaches, taxis and cars dropping off and picking up passengers.
- Countless incidents with every type of vehicle will involve breaches of several road traffic regulations and include;
- Double parking
- Parking on the zebra crossing
- Parking on the pavement
- Parking with engines still running

6.2. LIVING WITH RESTAURANTS AND FAST FOOD TAKEAWAYS

Restaurants and cafés add an essential ingredient to a living city and research evidence suggests that there is less crime and antisocial behaviour in the vicinity of restaurants when compared with clubs and pubs. However, the restaurateur should respect its neighbours: how it sets out its tables and chairs, how it organises deliveries, where it stores its goods where and how it disposes of its waste. Lack of action by enforcement agencies following complaints have led to residents ending up in the courts.

From a Hillcrest Housing Association Tenant:

“I moved into the Grassmarket in 2007 and was appalled by the litter/broken glass left in our communal close by the neighbouring restaurant. It soon became clear that the restaurant was using their back emergency fire exit as a route through our close to drag all their rubbish onto the pavement at the end of the evening’s business.”

“When I approached the manager I was met with a total ‘I don’t care’ attitude even though my young daughter fell and cut her knee on what was clearly from one of the restaurants broken wine bottles.”

“Attempts were made to get the restaurant to respect the stair’s right to live in a clean environment through official paths, including police liaison officers, housing association managers and environmental wardens. Unfortunately the restaurant seems to make all the right sounds to the official bodies but then do absolutely nothing when they are gone.”

The changing nature of restaurant business in the Grassmarket adds additional strains. More al fresco diners means more equipment – tables, chairs, etc – which needs to be stored somewhere: more to-ing and fro-ing of staff at all hours, more disturbance for residents living above/near these storage area.

A pedestrian's view

“The Cowgatehead is one of the worst spots. The Council spent millions 'improving' the Grassmarket, widening pavements and installing expensive Caithness stone slabs. Then they gave the pubs permission to have tables and chairs on them – and A-boards too. In the Cowgatehead we have to navigate past them as well as the drinkers and the fish supper eaters. Often we are forced to step into the road as the traffic flashes past us – I know to watch my back but visitors don't! How come the Council allows this madness?”

“It must be hell for anyone staying around there too – the noise from the pub-goers, the smell from the chip shop, the litter at the end of the night – and the smell of urine from the closes where they pee.”

6.3. LIVING WITH CLUBS AND BARS

The Grassmarket Area Group has campaigned for over 30 years to limit the number of licensed premises in the locality. It has succeeded to the extent that there is now a moratorium on new licenses being approved but only when the area has long ago reached saturation point. 'Uninhibited growth' is the mantra of the city council - until it reaches crisis point, and that point was reached a long time ago.

The link between licensed premises and alcohol related crime is well documented with concentrations of licensed premises – as we have in Grassmarket – correlating closely with concentrations of violence. Violent crime is not as much in evidence in this area as it once was but anti-social behaviour is growing and endemic, and seems to be accepted as the norm for week-ends in the city centre.

For us it's not just the 50 or more late-night pubs and 13 clubs, plus the numerous cafes, restaurants and takeaways close to where we live. It's the traffic between them, particularly in the early hours of the morning that creates most of the trouble and very late night disturbances.

The Licensing Board monitors the performance of individual licensed premises and their licensed managers, but so much of the trouble and noise comes when their customers move on. This is very difficult to pin on any one establishment so it is difficult to control. The Grassmarket is in the heart of things between the night spots of King's Stables Road, Fountainbridge and Lothian Road, and the subterranean dens in the Cowgate and on George IV Bridge.

6.4. LIVING WITH EVENTS

More and more our public space is being taken over by commercial interests ...

For many years, before the public realm works, Grassmarket residents had the Fayre organised by local residents and Mardi Gras, part of the Jazz Festival, plus marches and fun runs and a few other things. After the works were completed at the end of 2008, the Council funded a 12-month programme of events as a pilot project. These were on a different scale because there was more space without the cars.

There were a number of markets but also a few evening events, such as the Nocturne cycling and the drummers. The main problems have come from poor communications between the Council organisers and the residents – the Grassmarket Forum was apparently supposed to help with that, but with no regular meetings, it has been difficult for residents to engage with it. The events themselves have not necessarily proved unpopular, but all the associated problems of restricted access, setting up and taking down, and clearing up the rubbish have.

From the Ekos report commissioned by the Council after the programme was finished:

“Over half of the respondents (59%) rated the range of events on offer as very good/good, with just over a third reporting that they were average (35%).”

“The 6% that rated the events as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ were asked if there were other events that they would have liked. Two said there were: one suggesting a market for locally produced goods and the other a farmers market and more concerts with unamplified music e.g. classical, jazz.”

6.5. LOCAL STREET VIEWS

The view from West Port

“As a tenant in Westport I'm suffering (and I use that word advisedly) from waste, human waste (yes, drunks of all classes have been caught with their pants down in e.g. Portsburgh Sq), noise, the sound of fights and rude language, neither of which appear to be managed by the appropriate bodies. I'm not alone either I promise you.”

“The plan was to encourage more families to the area with the new “improvements” to the Grassmarket. There surely must be an upper limit to how many of such late night outlets a postcode should have.”

“The more food outlets opening late, the more waste up West Port behind the railing where the sweepers don't go. The more late night customers, the more noise and night time Pava-scrotties “singing” their hearts out at all times of the night. The more planning permissions for flat fronted buildings in close proximity to each other and the road have also done theirs to create an absolute noise tunnel up West Port.”

“Enough has to be enough!”

A view from Browns Place

“My personal nightmare is the Tattoo. Residents in the area are extremely forbearing accepting the benefits that the Tattoo brings to the city and therefore putting up with being unable to go to bed till 12.30 on Saturdays, the fireworks that some conservation experts argue are damaging the fabric of the buildings in the locality and the relentlessness of the noise from tour buses and late night crowds to the relentlessly upbeat commentary that one can follow word for word. Not to mention having to have views of the Grassmarket dominated by the stands for six months each year. One neighbour in Browns Place moved to stay with friends in East Lothian because his toddler was terrified by the noise. Yet are we ever consulted – do the powers that be really think that if they cut out some of the fireworks audience numbers would fall!”

“There are persistent rumours that with the new Tattoo stands the event will be extended to four weeks next year but no way of finding out whether these rumours are true. If they are, there may be one less Grassmarket resident next year!”

A view from King's Stables Road

“I've lived on King's Stables Road for about 5 years now and in my view the place has gone downhill.”

“My main gripe would be around the damage and disruption caused by patrons (primarily) of the Stereo Nightclub; a great many of whom think it perfectly acceptable to treat our street as a playground; screaming, fighting, urinating (sometimes worse!) and blatantly vandalising other peoples property.”

“In the past three months alone, I've had my car keyed, the passenger wing mirror kicked off and the back windscreen wiper removed. I've had people kick the front door of my stair in to urinate. One of the panes of glass on my front door smashed and I've had it sprayed with graffiti. I don't for a moment think this is personal and a quick look around at other peoples property will quickly back this up - and neither do I think it's a coincidence that it happens primarily on student nights and Friday/Saturdays.”

“I'm a 34 year old man, but even I feel intimidated taking my dog out for a walk before bedtime, when I have to pass groups of drunken people standing around drinking the last of their carry-outs next to the stairs/bridge, before they head into the pub (and promptly throwing the glass bottle onto the road/pavement).”

“Meanwhile, I've got a City Council who won't let me install proper double-glazing to soundproof/insulate my home, won't provide containerised waste to stop my street filling up with litter and burst

black bags, tears down trees, legitimises fly-posting in my street - and habitually closes it to parking on the off-chance someone might like to park a coach there for the Tattoo, or ride a bike down it!"

A view from the south side of the Grassmarket

"Over the 25 years I have lived here I have seen a great change and deterioration in the ambience of the Grassmarket: the old winos and lodging house dwellers of the past have, especially since the recent "improvements" in the area, given way to a rather more sinister element in our society, moneyed youngsters who look on the place as a playground where the rules of normal, civilised behaviour do not apply."

"I am exasperated, especially at weekends, by the noise, the random shouting and yelling of drink fuelled gangs, the screams from the occupants of pedicabs as they hurtle down the Grassmarket into King's Stables Road, the use of my pend as a lavatory day and night (and now dossers have taken to sleeping, socialising and having sex there by the dustbins), the tsunami of "live" music which bursts from a pub opposite whenever a smoker emerges (or the pub door is left open, presumably for air), the random vandalism of cars. It is now impossible to sleep at the front of my flat due to this spasmodic, random din, which continues well into the small hours."

"I appreciate that the Council are proud of their new enhanced events arena (formerly a street where people lived) and want to maximise its use with various happenings. I feel it a pity that the residents' opinions and rights to normal lives have been rather disregarded in this headlong rush to appease the young – it certainly does nothing for the serious tourist!"

The view from Castle Wynd South

"I live in Castle Wynd South which leads from the Grassmarket to Johnston Terrace and the Castle. While I do not overlook the main Grassmarket I am still just as affected by the night time economy."

"When the area is busy people use the steps in my wynd as a picnic spot, often leaving take-away litter behind. The wynd is also used to access the Castle so gets a lot of foot fall."

"The main problem though is urine. Drunk young men stagger into the wynd every single night to urinate in every doorway or corner. Sometimes the stench in the morning is overwhelming. Once I came home at about 10.30pm and someone was urinating in the corner above my door and I had to step over the river of urine to get through my door."

“After a few mornings of a particularly strong stench I sat at the stair window to count how many people did it. In the half hour from midnight to 12.30am I saw five people urinate in the Wynd. Multiply that for the whole night, with stag dos or rugby matches and you will understand how disgusting it is”

A view from Heriot Bridge:

“When I came to live in the Grassmarket (approx 16 years ago), it was a wonderful place to live. Over the years with the night time economy it is becoming unbearable. Unfortunately I live in a top flat facing in a North West direction. This means all the noise echoes around my flat. The sound reverberates round every room in the house, sound reflecting off the walls of George Heriot's school behind us . In my living area it is bouncing off the Apex International Hotel. Things that takes place in the Grassmarket are sometimes intolerable because of the noise.”

“When the youths are coming and going every night, that makes a bad situation worse. Rarely do I get to sleep until 4.30 in the morning. Some of them come up to Heriot Bridge and do unmentionable things around our building. My physical and mental health have deteriorated over the last four years. The impact means I will be forced to leave the area altogether. I would do so with great regret.”

A view from West Bow

“The residents of West Bow and Victoria St suffer as much as anyone living in the Grassmarket area as a result of the NTE particularly with rowdy noise from binge drinking party groups and the associated nuisance with this such as doorways and closes being used as public toilets, pavements being strewn with beer bottles, pint glasses and particularly unsightly take away food rubbish thrown on the street. As a secondary consideration this disturbance contributes to significant noise levels in the cleaning up operations of sweepers and the pick up of glass recycling trucks in the early hours of the morning.”

“Regarding the issue of the Tattoo, it is quite unacceptable to me, on top of all the other noise generated from the event, to contend with the aircraft fly over. With all the controversy with this country being embroiled in recent times in “illegal” wars and the concern for the issue of Climate Change, it seems grossly insensitive and inappropriate that such displays should be allowed.”

“I feel that the Council has shown itself to be lacking in valuing the importance of having a living community in the Old Town and would welcome a change that would encourage primary consideration and open dialogue with local residents so that the integrity of this

wonderful city can be protected, having a vibrant community at its heart.”

7. THE GRASSMARKET'S IMAGE: "ANYTHING GOES"

The way that organisations from VisitScotland to party organisers market the Grassmarket speaks for itself in how the image of the Grassmarket has been shaped over the last few years.

Council Policy – a resident's view

"What has changed is that the night-time economy is now official Council policy. The Grassmarket is seen as a stage set for tourists with the odd local shuffling through it to add local colour. If you don't like living beside binge drinkers having a party you are expected to move out."

"The real concern is the shift in the Council's attitude over the last decade. I accept that the downside of living in the Grassmarket is the night time economy and to date it is a downside that is more than balanced by the benefits. At one time the Council, like the residents, were tolerant of the fact that the Grassmarket was always going to be a lively area although without the vigorous opposition by GAG to licence applications it might have been a different story. It essentially let the market dictate. Now through its events strategy, tourism promotion and planning policy it appears to go hell for leather to attract visitors, however questionable the actual income they inject into the economy. The fact that the recent Destination Edinburgh initiative on fun-loving, designer Edinburgh residents failed to profile even one who came from the city shows how little they value their core, longer term residents."

"The Council not only send out mixed messages but also pull their scarce budget in opposing ways. They could save on initiatives such as the Community Safety Partnership if they spent less money on promoting the city's night time economy. Even pub and club owners appreciate the benefits of cleaning up their act through organisations like Unight. Meanwhile the Council goes its own sweet way, licensing rickshaws which have resulted in at least two deaths, closing the Cowgate at night because they cannot control the irresponsible behaviour of party goers, allowing the clutter of A-boards outside every takeaway. They wish events on us without notice despite claiming to consult with residents."

7.1. WHAT THE WEBSITES SAY ABOUT THE GRASSMARKET:

Visit Scotland's Edinburgh.org:

"Grassmarket as an area for eating, drinking and independent shops and is a magnet for visitors."

No mention of residents.

VisitingEdinburgh.com

***“Most stag nights and hen parties end up in the Grassmarket” and
“you will find a welcome for Hen and Stags nights in Edinburgh”***

Edinburgh Inspiring Capital:

Grassmarket is the “heart of the Edinburgh student nightlife.”

Edinburgh University official website:

“Edinburgh’s liberal licensing policy means it’s easy to fill in your time until the wee hours with loads of bars, pubs and clubs open way (way) past midnight.”

Grassmarket.net:

“the Grassmarket area is one of the most vibrant, picturesque and convivial areas of the city.”

Hostelworld.com:

“Grassmarket (an area heaving with bars)”

Smart City Hostel:

“The historic and cultural city is steeped in beauty and booze and the diverse pub, bar and nightclub scene (SmartCity being in the centre of this).”

MyBritishTravel.com:

“well known for hosting stag and hen parties alike and aplenty. If you belong to a rowdy bunch, this is an option that beckons you with open arms.”

Scotland-travel.suite101.com:

“The Grassmarket is now perhaps known best for its nightlife(...) as it seems to be a particularly hot spot for bachelorette parties “hen nights” in the UK.”

BestPubs.co.uk

“The Black Bull is found on the main stag/hen night route in the Grassmarket area. ... Biddy Mulligans - located at the top end of the Grassmarket this Irish bar is very popular with all ages and is on the 'stag' and 'hen' night route.”

LastNightOfFreedom.co.uk

“The Grassmarket is stag heaven with cobblestones - Guinness galore, whisky chasers and marvellous craic. They have real pubs with real people - the kind of place where groups of welsh rugby fans can bring

into close harmony singing without anyone batting an eyelid. Oh, and there'll be plenty of hen groups knocking about too."

Wickedweekends.co.uk:

"Most city-centre bars are open until 1am, and some stay open until 3am (the bulk of the city's DJ bars are in the Old Town's narrow wynds and side streets. This is perfect for stag weekends and hen weekends as drinking after that, you tend to miss the next day."

UndiscoveredScotland.co.uk:

"At weekends it can become more crowded, as the White Hart is on the stag and hen party route along the Grassmarket."

StagEdinburgh.com:

"Edinburgh is one of the most active and party mad cities in the world and at Stag Edinburgh we know how to use and abuse that.... Further along is the Grassmarket which is paved from end to end with quirky bars and pubs"

HaggisAdventures.com/StagandHens:

"The Grassmarket, once a medieval market place and prime location for public hangings, is now home to loads of great pubs and eating places. Why not go to a comedy club or go clubbing?"

partybus.com/edinburgh_party_bus.php:

"Edinburgh has a great party atmosphere all year round owing to the increasing number of bars and nightspots opening up. Our Party Bus winds its way around the Castle stopping off at some of the cities finest nightspots."

clubclassbus.com/edinburghinfo.htm:

"What a weekend! Club Class arranged great accommodation for the girls, a fantastic pole-dancing lesson, a delicious meal and then a hilarious night on board the Silver Bus! The booth seating meant plenty dancing!! Thanks to all, for my memorable last weekend of freedom!"

Yelp Reviewer:

"Anyway, come 11 o'clock that night, I've no doubt the hen party I travelled with by train and their gaggle would have been down the Grassmarket, crudely propositioning young men and performing degrading acts on a disinterested male stripper. At night, it really is one of the seediest, rowdiest and downright horrible city-centre boozing districts I've ever seen, mixing hen / stag parties and rugby fans, surely the most hideous combination imaginable."

Yelp Reviewer:

“The Grassmarket is brilliant fun. Although take it from personal experience - during the day is better than during the night. At night time, particularly at the weekend, the Grassmarket turns into a hen party and stag do bonanza, as well as student pub crawls and rugby haunts. It can get a bit crazy, and a bit uncomfortable.”

Destination Edinburgh:

“This unique city can host a fantastic Stag or Hen and is very welcoming to all.”

Trip advisor San Francisco businessman’s review of Apex City July 2010:

“Lots of street noise until very late at night”

Hostelworld review from ArtRoch international backpacker:

“If you're not one of the people out drinking to 3 or 4 in the morning (on a weekend) expect that you'll be woken up by drunks in yours or the next room periodically. ... There was way too much noise coming from the stairway and the street for a decent night's sleep.”

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1. GRASSMARKET: A SPECIAL CASE?

More residents, more problems

It has been suggested that the NTE affects the Grassmarket unduly because of the high density of residents in the area. The fact that residents are rarely mentioned in publicity about the area may lead people to think that it's a night time playground where no one needs to bother about people trying to get a night's sleep. There are now 550 hotel and hostel beds, nearly as many as there are residents. A fifth of the city's population is now students and guess where they head for when they want to party.

8.2. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS

Other cities have faced problems from the late night drinking culture. In Dublin, for instance, they have tackled the problems head on and brought about change:

'Temple Bar issues guide to go with new image'.

THE PUBLIC image of Temple Bar has shifted dramatically in the past five years, with a 75 per cent reduction in the number of negative articles written about it. That is according to Temple Bar traders, who published a new guide yesterday to Dublin's so-called cultural quarter.'

Irish Times: 05 May 2008

Dermot McLaughlin of Temple Bar Cultural Trust

"To be honest the stag nights and hen dos have moved on," insists McLaughlin, who doesn't seem unhappy to have seen the back of them. "That was only a tiny part of tourism – 6 per cent – but it repelled a lot of business." Now the focus of his organisation, which helped to transform the once-derelict quarter into a thriving area for tourism, small businesses and residential properties, is attracting families and folks over 55 with festivals, street theatre, cultural nights and a variety of weekend markets"

Irish Times: 07 Nov 2009

8.3. SOLUTIONS: A WAY FORWARD

"If we don't wish to see stuporous, violent and risky behaviour on the streets of our towns and cities at nights, then we need to start asking ourselves what it is we do want to see there."

Dr Murray Simpson

A council official responsible for co-ordinating CEC's Committee Report on the Night Time Economy told the Grassmarket Residents' Association recently: "You'll never change the Grassmarket, this is the way it is."

Despite his pessimism, our next report will focus on solutions. Suffice it to say that residents do not believe that simply better management as has been attempted across the country is the answer but a radical re-think of what kind of city we want to live in, and how it supports its citizens both economically and culturally. Neither do residents believe that any solution that excludes the local population is likely to succeed: local people must be fully involved in forming and implementing policy changes.

Dr Murray Simpson (Appendix 2, P?) may point to some of the answers:

"Only the kind of culture change involved in realising a new vision for shared public places will effect a long-lasting, deep change in drinking behaviour..."

"The perception that town centres are exclusion zones and no-go areas for families and people simply wishing to have a quiet night out needs to be turned around. Though these groups may not be an obvious part of the problem, they must be a key part of the solution."

Grassmarket residents have many suggestions of their own to get the debate started. Here are just a few:

- Explore positive ways such as community art to highlight that the Grassmarket is a living community not a stage for tourists
- Ban all A-boards from the Grassmarket
- Provide more amenities for residents and visitors such as: more seating, more planters and a children's play area
- Return to recess bus stops to help deal with chaotic traffic management
- Introduce a system for licensing and regulating the operation of cycle rickshaws, as these are dangerous for their passengers and for pedestrians
- Revive the Grassmarket Forum and make it work as a communications network between the Council and residents that is respected on both sides.
- Arrange for GRASS to monitor adverse publicity for the Grassmarket e.g. promotion of stag and hens and contact the originator to request rewording
- Work with the Tattoo and other event organisers to ensure that they have a good understanding of the issues and towards acceptable solutions
- Introduce as a matter of urgency a licensing/regulation system for 'party buses' and other vehicles that serve drink on board and move to different locations
- Mount a community campaign to encourage local people to adopt a zero-tolerance attitude to anti-social behaviour either directly with offenders or through the police, noise team etc.

- Get the community to run more events – these are more likely to create a benign and welcoming atmosphere in the area

Let Councillor Mowat, who commissioned the investigation of the night-time economy have the last word:

***“We always put an economic benefit on the 24/7 economy and active nightlife but we never put an economic benefit on having a living city centre where people can live and work together.*”**

***“If we lose residents – which I think will kill Edinburgh's city centre – we would lose our heritage, because it is people who live in the city centre who help to uphold that.”*”**

9. APPENDICES

9.1. APPENDIX 1: THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY MOTION

THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

20 August 2009

CONSERVATIVE MOTION

Night Time Economy

Council:

- I. notes the ambition stated in the Edinburgh City Vision 'to lead the most successful and sustainable city region in Northern Europe by 2015';
- II. notes that for ten years Edinburgh has pursued the development of a day and night time economy to strengthen the city's position as a tourist destination;
- III. recognises the benefits to Edinburgh of having a living city centre inhabited by more than 20,000 residents and the valuable role they play in maintaining the heritage which gives Edinburgh its World Heritage status;
- IV. notes unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour and noise occurring on the streets of the city centre in the early hours of the morning, particularly at weekends, which impact negatively on the quality of life of residents in the affected city centre areas and the routes out of these areas;
- V. notes that anti-social behaviour, if allowed to continue unchecked, will negate efforts to identify Edinburgh as a high quality destination and in turn, compromise the City's 2015 ambitions;
- VI. accordingly, instructs the Director of City Development to report on the impacts of Edinburgh's night-time economy drawing on evidence from across the Council and from council partners, examining in particular:
 - the economic benefits;
 - policing and servicing costs;
 - impact on residential amenity;
 - implications for Edinburgh's reputation – both positive and negative;
 - ways in which existing legislation and regulation can assist in ensuring Edinburgh's continued economic development without unacceptable impacts on residents' quality of life;
- VII. this report to be brought back to Council within three cycles.

Proposed: Cllr Joanna Mowat

Double-decker with its own club class

Mobile nightspot takes to Capital's roads

Published Date: 11 November 2002

By STEPHANIE TODD

Theme pubs and clubs are always popular in Edinburgh, with weekend revellers spoiled for choice when it comes to the perfect venue. But the City's latest offering aims to top them all by offering a unique party atmosphere - on wheels.

The "Club Class" bus - Edinburgh's first mobile night-club - has all the trappings of a standard venue, including bright decor, loud music and steady flow of drinks. But the converted double-decker bus is the only club able to offer revellers a night-time tour of the Capital included in their entry price.

Marketed as a "mobile party", the bus is the brainchild of 23-year-old Edinburgh University graduate Alex van Klaveren. "I arranged a bus for me and my mates to celebrate a birthday and it went down a storm, everyone had a great time and people kept asking me about it for weeks afterwards," he said. "That's when I realised it would make a perfect night out for special occasions, and the Club Class idea was born."

The sleek silver-sprayed bus has room for 61 people and lets guest to tailor their own trip, allowing them to stop off at various other pubs and clubs - including Oloroso, the Opal Lounge and Beluga - without having to queue.

Mr van Klaveren, who runs corporate entertainment firm On A Roll, added: "The bus has been totally revamped inside with kitsch decor, bright comfortable sofas and a Club Class crew on board to keep the drinks flowing. "People want to be entertained, they are demanding more out of their nights out. Club Class offers the perfect solution to those boring get-togethers - it works for birthdays, hen or stag parties, office nights out, anything worth celebrating really."

The boogie bus experience doesn't come cheap at £25 per person, but organisers say with entry on a final night spot of passengers' choice included, it is value for money.

Mr van Klaveren added: "As well as being a mobile club itself, the bus will make three stops per evening. Between venues, the cabin crew lay on a tempting selection of complimentary food and drinks, as well as all the latest tunes."

"At around midnight passengers disembark at one of Edinburgh's best nightclubs, where guest list entry allows them to stroll straight in. They can party on the bus until midnight, and then take their group on elsewhere to meet up with friends or clubbers."

If the initiative is successful the Club Class idea could spread across the country.

Mr van Klaveren explained: "We chose Edinburgh first, not just because it is Scotland's capital city, but because of its enchanting views and notoriously decadent nightlife, late licences and a carousing atmosphere. I went to university here and the one thing I love is that there is always a party mood in Edinburgh. The hope now is that Club Class will add to it."

A spokeswoman for Edinburgh and Lothian Tourist Board said the Club Class experience provided an additional attraction for Edinburgh. "Edinburgh is an excellent city for a night out - this new form of nightclub increases the variety on offer and keeps us ahead of the competition," she said.

Grassmarket in bid to bin 'drinking den' tag

Published Date: 23 April 2009

By HAZEL MOLLISON

PUBS, clubs and restaurants in the Grassmarket are banding together in a bid to improve the “drinking den” image of the area. They have formed a new group of licensed traders, with the support of police, council officials and environmental wardens, and they hope to counteract its reputation as a magnet for stag and hen parties.

Managers will be sharing information and CCTV images of any troublemakers. They also plan to promote the area together, as a safe and attractive destination for families.

More than 30 businesses in the Grassmarket, Victoria Street and George IV Bridge have already expressed their interest. They will be holding a meeting next Wednesday. The group has been set up following the multi-million-pound redevelopment of the area.

Anne Allen, the manager of The Lot, said: “We're committed to encouraging responsible drinking and trying to get the Grassmarket back to being a family friendly area. The behaviour of a minority spoils it for the majority. Staff don't want to have to deal with rowdy behaviour, or customers swearing or being abusive. There's a lot of campaigning going on to publicise the fact the area is a hidden jewel. We want to make sure people to have a safe and enjoyable experience.”

The group plan to meet once a month. They will share information in a bid to crackdown on any troublemakers. Police, council licensing officials and environmental wardens will also attend. They are also expected to discuss a ban on stag and hen parties at their next meeting. Many pubs already ban groups wearing fancy dress or football colours.

Ms Allen added: “I think 95 per cent of us would like to see a ban. As soon as we see a group wearing bunny ears or flashing lights we know we want to avoid them.”

Paul Duncan, the manager of Mamma's Pizza and a committee member of the Grassmarket Forum, said: “This is about working together to promote the area and help attract the type of clientele we want. The Grassmarket looks lovely since the redevelopment and its whole ambience is different.”

Nick Cumming, 48, an events manager who lives in the Grassmarket, said most residents were optimistic about the new group. He said: “Hopefully this will make a big difference, especially to weekend rowdiness. We hope they will finally get a grip on the antisocial behaviour that has blighted this place for a number of years.”

A spokesman for Lothian and Borders Police also welcomed the initiative. He said: “We are committed to delivering safer communities for local residents and businesses alike. Our community beat officers already work closely with Grassmarket residents and licensees to promote a safe and secure environment.”

Number of empty shops soars in Old Town

Published Date: 28 May 2009

By MICHAEL BLACKLEY

DOZENS of shops across the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town are lying empty as the impact of the economic downturn hits small independent retailers hard.

New research by the Evening News has revealed that 29 shops and bars are vacant in the area between the Royal Mile and the Cowgate and Grassmarket. The recession has been blamed for crippling small businesses who cannot afford to suffer any decline in already hard-pressed profit margins.

And property experts say that very few new retailers are coming into the Capital, causing many shops to lie empty for several months and even years after firms close their doors or relocate. The findings

come after the Evening News last month revealed that a shop or café is closing at the rate of one a week in the main city centre block, between Princes Street and Queen Street.

Business leaders say that, while many of the 55 empty shops in the main shopping blocks will be available as a result of national chains going bust, today's data shows the impact that the slowdown in consumer spending is having on the smaller independent retailers that dominate the Old Town.

Among the Old Town streets hardest hit by shop closures is the Cowgate, which has been almost wiped of all retail as a result of the closure or relocation of shops, including the Edinburgh Copyshop, Concrete Wardrobe and Window Clean Supplies.

The neighbouring Holyrood Road has also been depleted, leaving empty units dominating a route to the Scottish Parliament.

Michael Dixon, chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses in Edinburgh, said that many of the empty shops will be a result of a lack of confidence about setting up a shop six months ago. He believes, however, that there are signs that interest in opening retail units has started to return as the economy steadies. But it is likely to take up to six months before that translates into new shops appearing in the city.

He expects many of those who have been made redundant by financial firms to be among those reviving the retail sector for new small independents. "The figures that the Evening News have come up with suggest there has been a lack of confidence in previous months about setting up retail business in this part of town," he said. "This is a shame as it is at the start of the key summer season, which could be very good with lots of foreigners taking advantage of exchange rates. Everyone likes to see shops that are a bit different and there is still good business out there for those who can open the right type of shop."

"However, recessions do tend to be times when start-ups become more buoyant, partly because of people coming out of a first wave of redundancy and using their package to do something they have always fancied."

Even those areas well-regarded by shoppers for their unique independent stores have started to show the first signs of the impact of recession.

A prime spot on the Grassmarket has been empty for more than a year since luxury menswear shop Peter Johnston relocated to Queen Street, while Pyramid Imaging also departed the Grassmarket for Jane Street, leaving behind a note proclaiming that it had found "free parking and easy access at last" – a clear swipe at the stream of roadworks and access issues that have hit traders in the area.

Nearby at Victoria Street, another two independents have left. Wooden toy specialist Pinocchio, a finalist in the Toy Retailers Association's independent toy retailer of the year awards in 2007, lies empty, while further up the hill Pine and Old Lace, an antiques business specialising in dressers, kitchen furniture, bedding and tablecloths that had been on the street for 30 years, has had to call it a day.

Ian Clarkson, who has been senior partner at Clarksons` of Edinburgh Jewellers on Victoria Street since it opened 51 years ago, said: "The problem around here is the constant disruption. First it was the Grassmarket revamp, then the demolition of the old Lothian (Regional Council) building, then the Khushis fire. Then when you do get a good Saturday trading there's some event on; a march, a race or the rugby.

"When it is a difficult time, I think people will notice all these things more than ever."

At Jeffrey Street, the Karma womenswear shop closed last summer but there has still been no new tenant willing to set up, despite it being yards from the Royal Mile, the centre of the city's tourist activity, especially during the Fringe.

Culverwell, the letting agent for the site, is now offering flexible short leases at the unit to try to entice potential shop owners to take a chance on setting up a business.

John Conroy, a partner in the retail department at property firm Ryden, said: “There are a few exceptions but you usually find property in the Old Town still getting interest from the secondary market, such as local traders.

“Rents in these sorts of places are a lot cheaper and the landlords tend to be willing to offer more flexibility to get companies in.”

He said that retailers see opportunity for activity at the “value end” of the market and can be enticed to gamble on opening up shop in some of the units if they are offered short-term deals. “There is often a flurry of interest from Easter until early summer, then it's quiet again until August then companies start to take units until October ahead of Christmas,” he said. “So it is around then that we expect things to get moving.”

'IT'S LIKE THE CITY WANTS TO BANKRUPT SMALL BUSINESSES'

DOUGIE DUNBAR was the owner of Pyramid Imaging in the Grassmarket before the shop ceased trading earlier this year. Now relaunched as Pyramid Imaging Limited in Jane Street after his staff bought the company out, Mr Dunbar blames the council for the demise of his business. He said: “All the empty shops are partly as a result of the recession, but I would say it's more lack of support from the council.

“It's almost as if the council has a wish to get all small businesses bankrupted or moved to the peripheries of the city. They are obstructive and unhelpful.” Mr Dunbar said roadworks, over-zealous parking wardens and council regulations had forced him out of the Grassmarket. The company is now run from a 2,200sq ft industrial unit.

Economic report puts city's pubs, clubs and takeaways under the spotlight

Published Date: 20 October 2009

MICHAEL BLACKLEY

CITY development director Dave Anderson is to compile a report examining the problems with Edinburgh's “night-time economy”.

The report, which will also look at the value of the pubs and clubs to the city, has been ordered in the wake of Cllr Mowat's concerns.

Licensing leaders say they are already taking the issue seriously and have recently recruited a team of new licensing standard officers to work with pubs and enforce licensing laws.

Cllr Tom Buchanan, the city's economic development leader, said: “There is a balancing act on all sides. We have to realise there are residents there and they have certain requirements. Equally, I would say that residents have to also be aware that if you've bought a property in one of our tourist hotspots there are going to be issues that come with it.”

Licensing leader Cllr Marjorie Thomas said that the new Licensing Act was already helping to improve the situation, with eight new licensing standards officers already working with pub owners to ensure standards are kept to.

“I am not one for Draconian action,” she said. “We have to balance things up the needs of the city, the needs of people who have put a lot of money into their licensed premises and the needs of residents of the city.”

She added that selling alcohol to people who are drunk is already illegal and training is being provided to licensees on detecting drunk people - while residents can draw the licensing board's attention to problem cases.

“If people think someone is not running a proper establishment, they can ask us to hold a hearing – which we are then obliged to do,” she said.

The new report is to detail the economic benefits of the night time economy, as well as looking at the policing and servicing costs involved. It will also assess the impact on residents, any implications on Edinburgh's reputation and ways in which existing legislation and regulation can help ensure a balance between the economy and residents' quality of life.

Boozing puts Grassmarket café culture under threat

Published Date: 20 October 2009

By HAZEL MOLLISON and MICHAEL BLACKLEY

IT was meant to bring a taste of continental-style café culture to the Capital. The £5 million revamp of the Grassmarket saw restaurants allowed to put out tables and chairs in an attempt to make the area pedestrian friendly and appealing. But barely a year on and the Evening News can reveal the whole scheme is under review amid complaints of antisocial behaviour and bars breaking the rules. There is also some doubt over whether the “central dining space” can be allowed at all under Scotland's new licensing laws.

The news comes as the council confirmed a new strategy is to be drawn up in a bid to tackle drink-fuelled antisocial behaviour in the city centre, following complaints from residents areas including the Grassmarket.

This year, pubs and restaurants were each allotted a number of tables in the central area, in addition to the ones outside their own businesses. The idea was to create a large outdoor dining space, which would be attractive to visitors and families. Licensees were only allowed to serve customers alcohol with a meal.

City centre councillor Joanna Mowat said there had been a number of problems with the area, with complaints from residents about noise and rowdy behaviour. She said: “I've asked for it to be looked at again. We need to get it right.”

“The licences were always given under the condition people are only allowed to drink with food. But I got reports there were drinks being served without food. We do need to do some work with the central area because of the new licensing laws. They weren't written with this in mind. It's common in Europe to have this type of area, but very unusual in Scotland.”

Nick Cumming, a local resident and member of the Grassmarket forum, said they had discussed the issue at a recent meeting. He said: “This year it was a mess. No-one seemed to enforce the regulations.”

“One of the rules was there should be no advertising of alcohol, but one of the pubs had huge umbrellas with a beer advert. There are supposed to be very strict rules that you can only have alcohol with a meal, but these were being broken.”

Bill Cowan, who owns Costume Haha and is a member of the Old Town Community Council, said: “It all got a bit out of hand last summer. Pubs were breaking every single rule.”

“There were branded umbrellas, and the whole thing looked very tatty. Some sections of our community aren't ready for café culture.”

A city council spokesman confirmed a review was underway but said there had been no decisions taken and any change would be subject to consultation.

Meanwhile, Cllr Mowat, who is chair of the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership, said some residents were suffering weekly problems because of drunks, which included people fighting, shouting, singing, and urinating through letterboxes and in closes. And she claims the city's heritage status is at stake if residents start to move out because of the problems they are suffering from.

Cllr Mowat said: “We always put an economic benefit on the 24/7 economy and active nightlife but we never put an economic benefit on having a living city centre where people can live and work together.”

“If we lose residents – which I think will kill Edinburgh's city centre – we would lose our heritage, because it is people who live in the city centre who help to uphold that.”

Cllr Mowat said a “raft of measures” should be taken to reduce drink-related problems in the city centre but said getting tough must be part of the solution. “If we don't try to tackle this problem we are ignoring the elephant in the room,” she said. “There is certainly the issue of enforcement, and the regulatory and licensing committees have to look at this. We have a reputation of being laissez faire and not enforcing things.”

“I'd like to see stronger enforcement. As a city, we have got to take a decision on whether this is acceptable and whether we can tackle it.”

'Life in the Old Town is being blighted by drink'

BOASTING views of Edinburgh Castle, a close sense of community, fine architecture and a short stroll to all local amenities, Nick Cumming's home sounds like the estate agent's dream.

But come 11pm every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night and the events manager's dream home, on Castle Wynd South just off the Grassmarket, turns into a nightmare.

He says that “gangs of totally trashed” people come streaming out of nearby pubs and clubs from 11pm until after 3am and run amok on the Grassmarket, shouting, screaming, scratching cars and damaging property.” He often emerges from his flat in the morning after a night of little sleep to find people have defecated in his close, while one neighbour has had people urinate in her letterbox two or three times in recent weeks.

“It goes on every single weekend,” said Mr Cumming, 48. “And it hasn't always been like this. I've been here for nine years and other residents have been here 20 years and everyone says it has only been in the last two or three years that it has become such a huge problem.

“It's all down to binge drinking. This is a known hot spot yet you barely ever see a police officer.”

He said he would want to see more enforcement of existing laws – such as that licensed premises should not serve people who are already drunk. “When I moved in here I was very happy to walk the streets at night; I felt safe,” he said. “In the last year that's changed. I know single females who are scared to go out alone.”

“Why should we be forced to move out of places we love? Living in the historic Old Town is wonderful but it is being blighted by night time.”

Licensees drink to even more late openings during festivals

Published Date: 30 March 2010

By MICHAEL BLACKLEY

THE number of days that pubs and clubs in the Capital can open late during the summer festivals is to be extended.

The city's licensing board has agreed that the annual allowance for a two-hour extension to opening hours during the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe will stretch over four-and-a-half weeks this year.

City leaders say that the move has come about as a result of the Fringe now unofficially starting earlier in the month, with popular preview days usually taking place in the run-up to the official start. But the move has sparked fears about the cost of the lucrative “night-time economy” to city centre residents.

Licensing leader Marjorie Thomas said: “I have spoken to (Fringe chief executive) Kath Mainland about this issue and the way we have done this in the past has caused problems for shows that started a few days earlier. “I am prepared to be flexible to accommodate the Fringe, which is a big earner for Edinburgh.”

Last summer, licensed premises were allowed to open for an extra two hours for four weeks during the Festival. Previously the extension lasted only three weeks. This year the Fringe will run from 6-30 August, with the International Festival continuing until 5 September. The new ruling will mean late opening is now likely to be allowed from the morning of 3 August – an extra three days.

Patrick Browne, chief executive of the Scottish Beer and Pub Association, said: “This decision will be welcomed by the trade and it gives operators more flexibility and helps to underpin Edinburgh's tourism offer. “It is an important time of the year when we have literally hundreds of thousands of new people in the city and operators will always try to take advantage of that. So hopefully this will be seen as a plus for the city, tourists and operators alike.”

However, the plans have angered residents in areas that suffer from antisocial behaviour linked to late-night drinking.

Nick Cumming, who lives off the Grassmarket and is a member of the Grassmarket forum, believes that late opening hours over the Festival period should not be allowed at all. “Some of them are open until four or five in the morning and their argument does not hold any water because the shows finish at 12 or 1am,” he said. “People come out of bars along the Cowgate at three, four, 5am and cause mayhem. To say it benefits the city is a nonsense because the only ones to benefit are the bars.”

“And the people who are staying out until 4am are not bringing wealth to the city; they're not wealthy tourists they are backpackers and students.”

Dr Murray Simpson: Town centres key to binge drink battle

Published Date: 18 April 2010

AS THE Scottish Government continues to try to press forward with its policies on price-control aimed at changing drinking behaviour in Scotland, one issue is curiously absent: what kind of culture is it that we actually want?

The key plank of the government's strategy is price control; a strategy aimed at reducing overall levels of alcohol consumption, particularly among heavier drinkers. While there is plenty of evidence to suggest that such policies do produce the desired results, we wonder whether the objectives are both too fragile and too limited.

They are fragile because of their permanent susceptibility to change in disposable income (people will still drink heavily if they can afford to do so), future governments' policies and a failure to fundamentally change what people want to do. More significantly, they are too limited in that they are not linked to any clear vision about what we want our culture and social spaces transformed into.

Have we really no more hopes and plans for our town centres at the weekends than that exactly the same people who currently use them will continue to do so, only they will drink less? This seems a very impoverished outlook.

Only the kind of culture change involved in realising a new vision for shared public places will effect a long-lasting, deep change in drinking behaviour.

One only has to consider the fact that Scotland's high incidence of binge drinking has its roots in the harsh conditions of the industrial working class in the 19th century. Even though the social circumstances have radically changed, the cultural behaviour has persisted.

Consider also the mythology that has grown up around the drinking debate. There is a prevalent view that binge drinking is somehow "anti-social". Whatever else it might be, public binge drinking is clearly a thoroughly social activity. The sense of being together and belonging is fundamental to it. We need a more nuanced understanding of the problem.

The trend towards home-based living, principally oriented around the television, the abandonment of the town centres, and the shift of other forms of leisure and entertainment outwards from city centres have produced greater atomisation of individuals and families. The irony is that those not engaged in heavy drinking in town centre pubs and nightclubs are actually less likely to be participating in social activities than those who are.

Merely reducing levels of alcohol consumption for binge drinkers is only half the picture. The Scottish Government needs to begin to change the behaviour of other sections of society, encouraging them to become more social and enhancing their use of town centres in the evenings.

The perception that town centres are exclusion zones and no-go areas for families and people simply wishing to have a quiet night out needs to be turned around. Though these groups may not be an obvious part of the problem, they must be a key part of the solution.

If the Scottish Government is serious about tackling Scotland's drinking problems, it is imperative that it recognises that the cultural context of alcohol consumption can never be under-estimated. While changing culture may be the policy equivalent of turning an oil tanker, it is the only way of producing lasting fundamental change. We need to understand what it is that gives binge drinking meaning and importance in Scottish society instead of treating it simply as if it were a bad but ingrained habit.

For that reason, efforts to change drinking patterns must also be linked to a wider national strategy that redefines and reclaims social spaces for our communities. Town centres on Friday and Saturday nights should be places that cater for more than just teenage and twenty-something drinkers. They should be more welcoming towards other social groups, including families and older people.

At present, policies on alcohol are replete with statements about what needs to be eliminated and how to go about it. What they currently lack is any vision of what we as a society wish to create for ourselves. While efforts to improve our health and reduce problematic drinking are laudable, we need to be more creative. In isolation, they will surely fail.

If we don't wish to see stuporous, violent and risky behaviour on the streets of our towns and cities at nights, then we need to start asking ourselves what it is we do want to see there.

Dr Murray Simpson is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee and a Member of the Board of Directors of Tayside Council on Alcohol. Julie A Bell is a complementary therapist and Chair of Tayside Council on Alcohol. Their views do not necessarily represent those of the University of Dundee or Tayside Council on Alcohol.

Four arrested after street attack

Published Date: **06 May 2010**

FOUR men have been arrested and charged in connection with an attack on a trio of victims outside a Grassmarket pub.

Two men aged 26 and 39 suffered minor injuries while a 50-year-old man was struck in the face and temporarily knocked unconscious during the disturbance.

The suspects fled the scene following the incident outside Bar Salsa at 7.15pm on Saturday before police and ambulance arrived. The three injured men were taken to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary for treatment.

The four arrested men appeared at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on Tuesday.

Two of the men, aged 21 and 20, were remanded in custody while the other two, aged 15 and 23, were released on bail.

Police are now searching for several other men believed to be involved in the disturbance and are appealing for anyone who was in the area at the time and saw anything suspicious to come forward.

A police spokesman said: "While we have identified four of the men responsible, we know there were others who played their part in this incident, which resulted in injury to members of the public.

"Anyone who was within the Grassmarket area at the time of the disturbance and can assist us in locating the remaining suspects is asked to contact police immediately.

"We are particularly keen to speak to a female member of the public who came to the aid of one of the injured men and may have been harassed by the group in the process."

"Lothian and Borders Police will not tolerate violence in our communities and we will use all resources at our disposal to locate the rest of these men.

"We would appeal to the public to assist us with our enquiries."

Councillors call time on out of control bar

Published Date: 01 July 2010

By MICHAEL BLACKLEY

AN "OUT of control" pub on the Cowgate has been ordered to close for four months after police were called dozens of times within the space of a few months.

Violence erupted outside Bar Salsa, on Cowgatehead, when drinkers got involved in a mass street brawl in May.

It was one of 35 times that police were called to the pub since last September.

The city's licensing board has now forced it to shut for four months in response to the wave of trouble.

Councillors on the board warned that a tough approach will be taken against pubs that are badly run.

Councillor Alastair Paisley, one of the members of the city's licensing board, said: "There was no question that this could go unpunished.

"They sell the cheapest drink in town with only one door steward – it's out of control.

"Clearly, licence holders must recognise their responsibilities towards the public and must be in control of licensed premises, or the licensing board will act accordingly."

Police were called to the bar 35 times to deal with complaints about drunken customers, poor management of the venue, overcrowding and insufficient door staff.

During the discussion about the bar, police showed councillors CCTV footage of the May brawl, which led to a 50-year-old man being knocked unconscious after being struck in the face.

Two other men suffered minor injuries and all three men had to be taken to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary following the incident.

Bar Salsa has earned mixed reviews online, with one reviewer hailing it as "a lively little bar", while another says: "I can't understand how it's still open, let alone allowed to trade in the most interesting and historic part of the Old Town."

A police spokesman said: "The suspension of this licence highlights the importance for licence-holders to work closely with police to address issues like this that may arise within licensed premises."

Councillor Paul Edie, the city's community safety leader, said: "To protect the public and our visitors it is very important that we monitor and control this type of antisocial behaviour in the city centre.

"The council uses its licensing powers to keep our city safe and protect our reputation as a great city to visit and live in."

The bar is owned by Bruce Taverns, the Edinburgh-based pub operator that last year bought popular city venue and nightclub Cabaret Voltaire.

Its other bars include The Globe, Whistlebinkies and The Royal Mile Tavern, as well as The Penny Black.

A city council spokeswoman said: "The licensing board suspended the licence in terms of section 39 of the Licensing Act because of the perceived breach of three of the five licensing objectives, relating to the prevention of crime and disorder, the securing of public safety and the preventing of public nuisance."

Nobody from Bruce Taverns was available to comment today.