

North Devon Conservatives

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Action needed to reverse Labour's binge-drinking culture – Philip Milton *Calls to tackle problems of alcohol-related violence and yob behaviour*

PHILIP MILTON, PROSPECTIVE Conservative Member of Parliament for North Devon, today added his to calls for action to rein back in Labour's licensing laws and take tough action against the uncontrolled spread in binge-drinking.

The latest Home Office crime figures have revealed that across North Devon there were 1,324 violent attacks last year. Based on Government surveys of crime victims, this suggests that 622 of these attacks could have been alcohol-related.

There is growing concern about the overlapping problems of late night drinking, fast food outlets selling alcohol at night, under-age drinking, the easy availability of high-strength alcohol, and retailers like supermarkets selling alcohol below cost-price. Labour's licensing laws, which came into effect in 2005, have created a presumption in favour of alcohol licences being given out, and imposed tight restrictions on who can object to any licensing application.

The Police Federation has warned that the need to police town centres around the clock is making it harder to answer emergency calls elsewhere.

Conservative leader, David Cameron, has explained how the Conservative Party will tackle the problems of binge-drinking Britain:

- Stronger powers and more discretion for elected local councils, and a greater say for local residents on licensing applications.
- Tougher penalties for premises which sell alcohol to under-age drinkers.
- Reviewing the rules which allow fast food outlets like kebab shops to sell alcohol into the early hours.
- Changing the law to stop the 'loss-leading' sale of alcohol by retailers.

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- Rebalancing the duty on alcohol: reducing rates on low-alcohol beers and ciders, and increasing it on very high-strength products (the likes of Tennent's Super) and on alcopops.

Philip said:

"Labour's licensing laws are too lax. We don't want a return to the old days where every pub shut at 11pm. But local councils like North Devon need greater powers to tackle the binge-drinking and violence that plague our town centres. The reckless sale of high-strength, bargain-basement alcohol is damaging health and fuelling violence.

"Conservatives believe that socially responsible adults should be able to have a night out in North Devon without fear of violence. Parents should be reassured that their children are not going to come to harm. North Devon's community pubs should not be tarred with the same brush as irresponsible 'vertical drinking' bars or fast food outlets peddling booze into the early hours. We need to make our town centres feel safe at night once again."

Notes to Editors

GROWING PROBLEM OF BINGE-DRINKING BRITAIN

- **Massive expansion in late night premises:** Nationally, four-fifths of pubs, bars and clubs now close after 11pm, at least part of the week. One in five of all pubs, bars and clubs are open beyond 1am. By contrast, under the old licensing regime, 80 per cent of pubs, public bars and night-clubs closed by 11pm (DCMS, *Licensing Key Statistics*, November 2006).
- **Fast food outlets also fuelling nuisance:** After the second full year of the new licensing laws, over 76,800 fast food premises are now licensed into open into the early hours. The so-called 'late night refreshment' outlets can open as late at 5am. Such outlets are often magnets for post-pub/post-club anti-social behaviour. Large numbers of intoxicated customers gather at places into the early hours, creating nuisance and disturbance for local residents. Many are licensed to sell alcohol into the early hours.
- **Alcohol-related violent attacks:** Last year, there were 973,000 violent attacks where the offender was under the influence of alcohol, equivalent to nearly half of all violent incidents; 57 per cent of all assaults with minor injuries are alcohol-related (Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2008-09*, July 2009).
- **More crime in the early hours:** The Home Office's own review of the new licensing laws show rising levels of criminal damage under the new licensing laws: 'Substantial increases occurred in all evening and night-time hour periods from 9pm... The number of offences happening between 3am and 6am were consistently higher in each of the four three-monthly periods after the introduction of the Act compared with the equivalent periods in the previous year... The peak hours of criminal damage offending during the evening and night-time were between 6pm and 1am.' The study noted a 22 per cent increase in all offences committed between 3am and 6am (Home Office, *Violent Crime, Disorder and Criminal Damage since the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003*, July 2007, p.12-13).
- **Increased pressure on the police:** The shifting of such crime to the early hours has increased the pressure on the police to man town centres around the clock, diverting resources from neighbourhood police in suburban areas. The Police Federation has warned: 'All too frequently our members cannot attend to emergency calls because they are tied up with intervening in pub fights or drunken street brawls' (Police Federation, *Consultation Response to the Culture, Media & Sport Committee Inquiry: Licensing Act 2003*, 30 September 2008, p.2).

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- **Alcohol misuse rising:** Since 1997, the number of alcohol-related deaths has increased by 47 per cent (Office of National Statistics, *Alcohol-related deaths*, 25 January 2008). The number of under-18s hospitalised for alcohol misuse has increased by nearly 40 per cent since 2002-03 to 12,388 in 2007-08. The number of adults hospitalised for alcohol misuse has increased by 80 per cent to 194,050 over the same period (*Hansard*, 1 July 2009, col. 332W).

LOCAL FIGURES

Number of licensed premises

Figures on the number of licensed premises in each local authority area can be found at:
http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/5571.aspx

(Excel chart link)

http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Number_of_Premises_Licences_and_Club_Premises_Certificates_by_licensable_activity_authorized_2008.xls

Alcohol-related violence

The table below shows the number of 'violence against the person' offences recorded in 2008-09 according to Home Office records. It then lists Conservative Party analysis estimating how many of these offences might be alcohol-related.

Violence against the person data source: Home Office, *Crime in England & Wales 2008-09*, July 2009.
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0809.html>

Methodology:

- According to the official 2008/09 British Crime Survey, victims believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol in nearly half (47%) of all violent incidents.
- Violence against the person is just one sub-set of violent crime. The table below takes this 47% national figure and applies it to the specific offence of violence against the person. This is an estimate and projection.

ENDS