

MANIFESTO CLUB
REPORT

***AGAINST
THE BOOZE BANS
&
THE HYPER
REGULATION
OF PUBLIC SPACE***



19 AUGUST 2008

Provocation Picnic Against the Booze Bans

Mayor of London Boris Johnson has claimed the banning of alcohol on the London Tube as one of the great successes of his first 100 days in office. But it isn't just Boris – and it isn't just London. There has been a creeping introduction of alcohol bans in public spaces all around the UK – and throughout many other countries, from town centres in the Czech Republic, to beaches in New Zealand, Australia and the USA.

We oppose booze bans, and all other paternalistic regulation of public space. We believe that public space should be exactly that – a place where we can come together as a public – to argue and campaign, to chat with friends and socialise. We also oppose the puritanical move to prevent under-21s (who can vote!) from buying alcohol at off licenses.

This report is being launched at a Provocation Picnic Against the Booze Bans, on Monday 25 August (bank holiday Monday in England and Wales) in central London. The event is open to all those who want to join us in taking a stand against booze bans, and calling for public spaces to be reclaimed by the public from bureaucrats and politicians.

The Manifesto Club

The Manifesto Club is a campaigning group that stands for a freer and more humane society. This campaign against booze bans is part of our work against the growing regulation of public places: we campaigned against pointless safety signs <www.attention-please.co.uk>, against the ban on smoking in public <www.manifestoclub.com/thinkpieces>, and against the regulation of public debate and argument <www.manifestoclub.com/freespeech>.

Manifesto Club members attended the protest party against the London Tube booze ban, handing out leaflets and talking to partiers. This summer, we're going to take our protest against the regulation of public drinking around Britain. Our aim is to question and challenge bans on drinking alcohol in public – and to reclaim summer parks and squares for the free enjoyment of citizens.

www.manifestoclub.com

**Manifesto
Club** History is still young



Executive Summary

1 This summer, many of Britain's town centres, parks and beaches are no-go areas for those who want to drink a can of beer or glass of wine.

Over the past few years, there has been a massive growth in restrictions on drinking in public, including: the ban on boozing on London Tubes and buses, brought through by new Mayor Boris Johnson on 1 June 2008; 613 designated areas of the country where drinking is restricted by local authorities; Scottish bylaws banning drinking from many town centres, beaches and beauty spots; and a ban on bring-your-own (BYO) alcohol at summer music festivals. Similar regulations have been brought through on beaches and town centres in New Zealand and Australia, on San Diego beach in the USA, and in city centres in the Czech Republic.

2 Booze bans are not the result of public demand, but instead come from the petty and anti-social concerns of police, politicians and local councillors.

Measures are often brought through with little public debate or assent: before Boris Johnson banned it, for example, few Londoners had even thought about the issue of Tube drinking. Booze bans are in part about politicians trying to prove themselves; when they want to make a statement, they ban something. Booze bans are also the work of officials who seek public order above all else, and see unregulated groups of people drinking as potentially explosive and criminal.

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3 Booze bans are infantilising, treating citizens like irresponsible wards of the state.

Grown adults should not have their cans taken off them, as if they were toys that they could not handle. Booze bans are also part of the hyper-regulation of public places, which are increasingly defined

according to official specifications about what we *cannot* do. Public places were once – by definition – places where citizens could mix and mingle freely, setting our own rules and deciding how that space should be used. Increasingly, though, so-called public places are defined and regulated from above, and there is a presumption that you can only carry out expressly permitted activities.

4 Police and councils have taken liberties with drinking laws.

According to the Home Office, police and councils have overstepped their legal powers: some police alcohol confiscation could be challenged by those affected, as could many council signs promoting drinking controls. Police officers claim that booze bans are necessary to tackle a swathe of problems, including: drink driving, domestic violence, fear of crime, murder and vandalism. These justifications are fanciful. What is clear is that the police feel much freer to regulate people's everyday behaviour, and politicians are reluctant to rein them in.

5 The Manifesto Club calls for public places to be reclaimed for the public.

Police powers to confiscate alcohol should be scrutinised, and rolled back. We argue that the niceties of public civility should be negotiated by free citizens, deciding how we want to live. The police should step in when crimes are committed, but they have no right to micromanage our drinking habits. We need to reaffirm the assumption that public places are ruled by the public, and that officials only step in when there is good reason. Only then would we be able to achieve public places that are both free and civil.

1 The Creeping Growth of Alcohol Bans

There has been a massive growth in booze bans – which now stretch from Scottish beaches and town centres, to bus stations, parks and car parks across the UK

The restriction of public drinking in England and Wales has occurred not in a flash but in increments. A government 2001 provision allowed local authorities to apply for powers to control public drinking in particular areas. In these zones – known as ‘Designated Public Places’ – a police officer has the power to ask somebody to stop drinking; to confiscate any alcohol (or anything believed to be alcohol); and if they refuse, the person could be arrested and receive a £500 fine.¹

There are currently 613 Designated Public Place Orders in England and Wales, covering parks, stations and beaches the length and breadth of the country, including places such as: town centres in Barking, Bedford and Bath; the Municipal gardens and princes gardens in Aldershot; the Westwood coach and car park in Scarborough; Yeovil Town; the sea front in Southend; and Victoria Park in Stafford.²

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These orders started to take off in 2004 and have grown rapidly, particularly in the past two years. Almost every announcement of a controlled drinking zone comes with plans to extend it to other areas; local authorities often start with ‘known trouble spots’, then extend the zone ‘beyond known trouble spots’.³ Every application produces more applications, as councils emulate each other’s restrictions. The London Tube booze ban, for example, prompted transport bosses in Merseyside to propose a ban on their own region’s buses.⁴

The Growth of Powers to Control Public Drinking in England and Wales

1987

Coventry passed a bylaw to restrict public drinking; some other local authorities followed, although police had no powers of arrest.

1997

The Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act allowed police to confiscate alcohol and containers from under-18s.

2001

Criminal Justice and Police Act introduced Designated Public Place Orders, which allowed drink to be confiscated from adults, and gave officers powers of arrest if the person refuses.

2003

Licensing Act allowed 'sealed' as well as open alcohol containers to be confiscated; it also allowed for an emergency blanket ban on alcohol.

2006

Violent Crime Reduction Act allowed pubs and other licensed premises to fall under a Designated Public Place Order, 30 minutes after alcohol had last been sold.

In Scotland, the situation is worse: the Scottish Executive encouraged local authorities to pass bylaws banning all drinking of alcohol in specified public spaces. On 30 June 2008, East Lothian Council enacted a law banning drinking in many town centres, beaches and beauty spots where people gather for summer barbecues.⁵

The local bylaws pasted on lampposts are draconian: one bylaw bans carrying around an empty drinks carton,⁶ while another bans carrying a drinks container 'when it could be reasonably assumed they would want to drink it in a "designated public place"'.⁷

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This is not just about new legislation, though. There is a growing instinct to regulate public drinking, and officials use any legislation that is to hand. The ban on drinking on the London Tube, for example, was brought through under sports ground and transport legislation.⁸

There are also more temporary drinking bans and bans on bring-your-own (BYO) booze at festivals. These measures are sometimes devised by private event organisers, in most cases after collusion or pressure from local police

or councils. In 2007, some music festivals banned people from bringing their own alcohol, and said they could only buy beer or wine from council-regulated drink tents. In 2008 more festivals followed suit, and BYO bans are now the norm, with cans and bottles confiscated in security searches at festival gates.

Dry Festivals and Temporary Bans

Darwen Music Live

May 2008

BYO alcohol banned by council bosses for 'health safety reasons'⁹

Music Live

Shropshire, 2007

banned by Oswestry town Council after talks with police¹⁵

Ashton Court Festival

Bristol, 2007

BYO alcohol banned to keep the festival 'fun, friendly and family orientated'¹⁰

Crewe Carnival

2007

an 'alcohol free zone'

Stamford's Riverside Festival

July 2008

BYO banned to 'stamp out under-age drinking and rowdy behaviour'¹¹

Guernsey Liberation Day

May 2007

banned public drinking in town centre

GuilFest

Surrey, July 2008

council and police said ban is 'a condition of the licence'¹²

Merseyside events

July 2008

transport bosses banned drinking on Merseyside trains, on the weekend of the Chester Races and a Liverpool football match¹⁶

Godiva Festival

Coventry, July 2008

decision made to 'prevent rowdy drunkenness'¹³

Northern Ireland marching season

made it illegal to 'drink alcohol on the route of a public procession (this applies six hours prior to the parade taking place)¹⁷

Haigh Music Festival

Wigan, 2007

banned to 'make sure the atmosphere remains friendly'¹⁴

Booze bans have also grown in other parts of the world, taking off at the same time as in the UK.

Booze bans now stretch from San Diego beaches,¹⁸ areas of Prague and other cities in the Czech Republic,¹⁹ to streets and street fairs in New York,²⁰ and Bondi beach in Australia.²¹ New Zealand's no-drinking zones even ban people from driving through the area with cans in the boot of their car: one sergeant said that 'Police can and will search suspect vehicles for alcohol'.²²

Yet the drive to regulate public drinking goes beyond specified legal powers. It seems that police and councillors feel they have *carte blanche* to control public drinking habits – even over-stepping the law in the process.

2 Police Take Liberties With Drinking Laws

Officials have abused powers to confiscate alcohol – indeed, many of their actions could be illegal

Police and councils in England and Wales have taken liberties with drinking control powers – to a degree that could be illegal, or at the very least open to challenge by those affected. Legally, Designated Public Place Orders (DPPOs) don't ban *all* public drinking; they are intended to tackle 'alcohol-related disorder or nuisance'. Yet in some areas, police have been overstepping the law and confiscating cans and bottles from anybody and everybody.

On the Merseyside police's Operation Beach Safe, officers confiscated booze at the beach entrance in June 2008. Richard Clarke, acting sergeant of Operation Beach Safe, welcomed visitors: 'If you're coming to the beach to drink don't bother, go and drink in your gardens or somewhere else'. His officers posed for trophy photos with their confiscated cans of Fosters.²³

In practice, many councils have presented their alcohol-restricted areas as all-out bans on public drinking. Local news coverage of DPPOs often describe the measure as an alcohol 'ban'; and council signs announce an 'alcohol-free zone' or 'no alcohol zone', or show an image of beer cans slashed with a red line.

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The Home Office spokesperson on DPPOs, Joanne French, said that these signs are overstepping the law: 'Some people have incorrectly put up signs saying "this is an alcohol exclusion zone"'. In addition, French said that if police 'did use [the law] inappropriately, it would be open to challenge' by the people targeted. This may be welcome news to victims of Operation Beach Safe.

Yet the Home Office hasn't exactly reined police and councils back. Joanne French said that 'if we go out and about and see that a sign is incorrect, we can say to them that it's wrong'. But if Home Office officials do not happen to pass by, local councils continue to put up their 'alcohol free zone' signs. A UK Google search for 'alcohol-free zone' gets twice as many hits as 'designated public place order', showing that this is common parlance in councils. Indeed, the first adviser I spoke to at the Home Office said that there *were* all-out bans on alcohol.

The Home Office says that it will publish corrective guidance: 'We are publishing guidance in the next few months, which will go out to local authority areas. The signs should say: "You are now entering a designated public place – a police officer has the power to stop you drinking or confiscate alcohol".' Perhaps the Home Office will also remove Newquay police's reference to 'alcohol-free zones' from the 'best practice' section of the Home Office website.²⁴

The law gives police officers *discretion* to ask somebody to stop drinking – the offence is to continue drinking when a police officer asks you not to – so it is no surprise if the police use this power freely. Nor is it surprising that the Home Office and police seem not to communicate about how powers should be used. A contemptuous attitude towards public freedom means a lax, over-implementation of powers.

Officials and citizens have competing priorities for public space. The goal of police is above all the maintenance of public order, and they will take any possible action to counter the possibility of rowdiness.

In July 2008, police officers threatened to ban all pubs and retailers in Torbay from selling alcohol, after the idea of a beach party was floated on Facebook. Pub owners said that banning alcohol on a busy summer weekend would be 'catastrophic'. The police admitted that the order was 'unprecedented', but said: 'The event is likely to cause disruption and difficulty for our community. The supply and consumption of alcohol would add to those difficulties.'²⁵

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The trouble, though, is when police worldview and logic dictates the use of public space. The goals of citizens – which may include the freedom to enjoy a quiet drink in a park, or even to throw a wild beach party – are eclipsed from public priorities.

Booze bans don't come from public demand, but from the anti-social attitudes of bureaucrats – and their view that unregulated public drinking is a threat to social cohesion, law and order, and much else besides.

3 Anti-Social Legislation

Drinking regulation is motivated by the anti-social and puritanical attitudes of councillors, police and politicians

Police justify the crackdown on public drinking as a means to tackle a swathe of criminal offences and social problems, including: domestic violence, murder,²⁶ drink driving, under-age drinking, criminal damage, street disorder, or (in Australia) sunburn and drowning.

Behind the booze bans lies a new understanding of crime: not as an individual wrong, but as the result of uninhibited crowds of people. The restriction on public drinking implies that there is something latently *criminal* about a group of drunk people in a public space; that relaxing with an unlicensed bottle is likely to lead to vandalism at the very least.

There is also the infantilising assumption that alcohol in the bloodstream will turn previously reasonable people into raving rampagers. Ultimately, that we are not adult enough to handle a can or three, and so the police must supervise us for our own good.

Eighteen – to 21-year olds are particular victims of this attitude – with proposals to stop them buying booze from off-licenses and supermarkets. So they can vote, marry, buy a house, hold down a full-time job, and are full legal adult citizens – yet they cannot buy a can of lager at the corner shop. Their state supervisors say that such freedoms to drink will only lead to ‘antisocial behaviour’.

We are heading towards the hyper-regulation of public space, where public spaces are defined by official diktat. The police fantasy is that public drinking is presumed banned unless explicitly permitted by officialdom.

Officialdom on Why the Public Drinking of Alcohol Is ‘Dangerous’

**Chief Inspector Phil Littlechild
Thames Valley Police**

‘[young people] sit and drink this alcohol and quickly become affected by it and go out and commit crimes.’²⁷

**Hampshire Councillor
Alan Dowden**

‘under the influence of alcohol many change their behaviour patterns and resort to vandalism and general antisocial behaviour.’²⁸

**Assistant Chief Constable
Duncan McCausland
Northern Ireland**

‘The illegal consumption of alcohol can lead to anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, assault and fear of crime.’

**New York Police Commissioner
Howard Safir**

‘Alcohol on the streets in large crowds has great potential to cause disturbances.’³⁰

**Mayor Peter Moscatto
Waverley, Australia**

*(justifying the Bondi Beach booze ban):
‘If you’re going to be drinking in the sun, you’re going to get sunburned, get sick, make a lot of mess and if you dive in the water, you’re likely to drown.’³¹*

**Inspector Colin Mowat
Aberdeenshire**

says that bans on public drinking could help stop ‘under-age drinking, drink-driving, domestic abuse and street disorder’.³²

After the 2007 murder of Cheshire man Gary Newlove by a gang of drunk youths, the leading police officer called for a blanket ban on public drinking: ‘At the moment, you can drink anywhere you like in Great Britain in public unless the local authority have designated that you can’t drink in that area. I would actually like to see the emphasis changed the other way – that we actually say drinking in public is not permitted apart from in those areas where a local community, local authority says: “Yes, in this particular park, this particular location, people can drink.”’³³

Yet a space where we require permission to act is no longer public. The first public spaces were defined by the fact that people mixed (and generally drank) freely. British *public houses* were laws unto themselves, rowdy hubs of social life where deals were done both above and below the table. Markets and coffee houses were other places where the newly formed citizenry exchanged and argued freely, away from the private control of lords and kings.

Public means a free space, a space where citizens set their own terms. Now, the meaning of public is almost exactly the opposite: it becomes a space that is defined by its relationship to the state. As a result, public space gets divided up into officially labelled zones – based not on public function, but on what you *cannot* do in that space.



Signage from London (above) and Somerset



4 The Bureaucratic Zoning of Public Space

Public place is mapped from above – with bureaucrats dividing cities and towns into different prohibitory ‘zones’

We start to see the zoning of public space, where the use of public space is structured from above, rather than defined from below. Maps for drinking control zones specify in detail, street by street, which areas fall into the ‘zone’, and the premises (*eg* pubs) that may be temporarily excluded.³⁴ These maps are reminiscent of CompStat, the high-tech policing strategy developed in New York – yet now it is meant to prevent behaviour that is not only not criminal, but is in fact a normal and healthy part of everyday life.

Drinking zones are laid like stencils over towns and cities. Rather than a map of local amenities and points of interest, government guidance recommends that local authorities put up maps showing regulated zones, also providing details on ‘each category of premises ... that ... do not form part of a designated public place, or where relevant, that ... do not form part of a designated public place at particular times’.³⁵

When alcohol restriction rules are suspended, for example at a local-authority-backed carnival or event, this means another set of signage, called in the jargon a ‘temporary event notice’ (TEN). ‘Local authorities may want to consider erecting appropriate signage in a designated public place for events involving the supply of alcohol authorised by a TEN where the terms of the DPPO will be suspended’.³⁶

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Zoning is indifferent to the ground-level use of public space, drawing lines around bustling playgrounds and dark alleys alike, and often including spaces that consider themselves self-regulating. Winchester’s controlled drinking zone included the university campus, whose administration protested that it was capable of policing any drinking problems for itself.³⁷

Informal zoning also occurs outside pubs and bars: pub street drinkers are roped off from the pavement or must stand behind a line,³⁸ as must many smokers outside clubs. Beyond drinking, there are also ‘privacy zones’ in front of cash machines, CCTV zones,³⁹ dispersal zones, congestion zones and low-emission zones,⁴⁰ even Home Zones (where car use is restricted).⁴¹

Glossary of No-drinking Zones

no drinking zone	designated enforcement areas
alcohol control area/zone	alcohol exclusion zone
designated public places	alcohol restricted zone
temporary event notice	

This jargon is quite different to traditional zones in cities or towns. Many street or area names come from their public use: in London, for example, Covent Garden was first a garden then a fruit and vegetable market; and there are streets in the City called Friday Street (where fish was sold on Fridays), Milk Street, Bread Street and Wood Street. A map is a record of the way people of past and present used their streets. By contrast, official zone jargon is based not on public use, but on how you *may not* use the space.

Demarcated zones override the spheres of social regulation in cities – which are the ways in which people set appropriate standards for behaviour. Modes of acceptable behaviour, dress and speech vary greatly from city to city, and area to area. Behaviour that is the norm in one part of town could get you thrown out in another. With drinking regulation zones, codes of acceptability are drawn up in council meetings and drawn in red ink around streets and parks.

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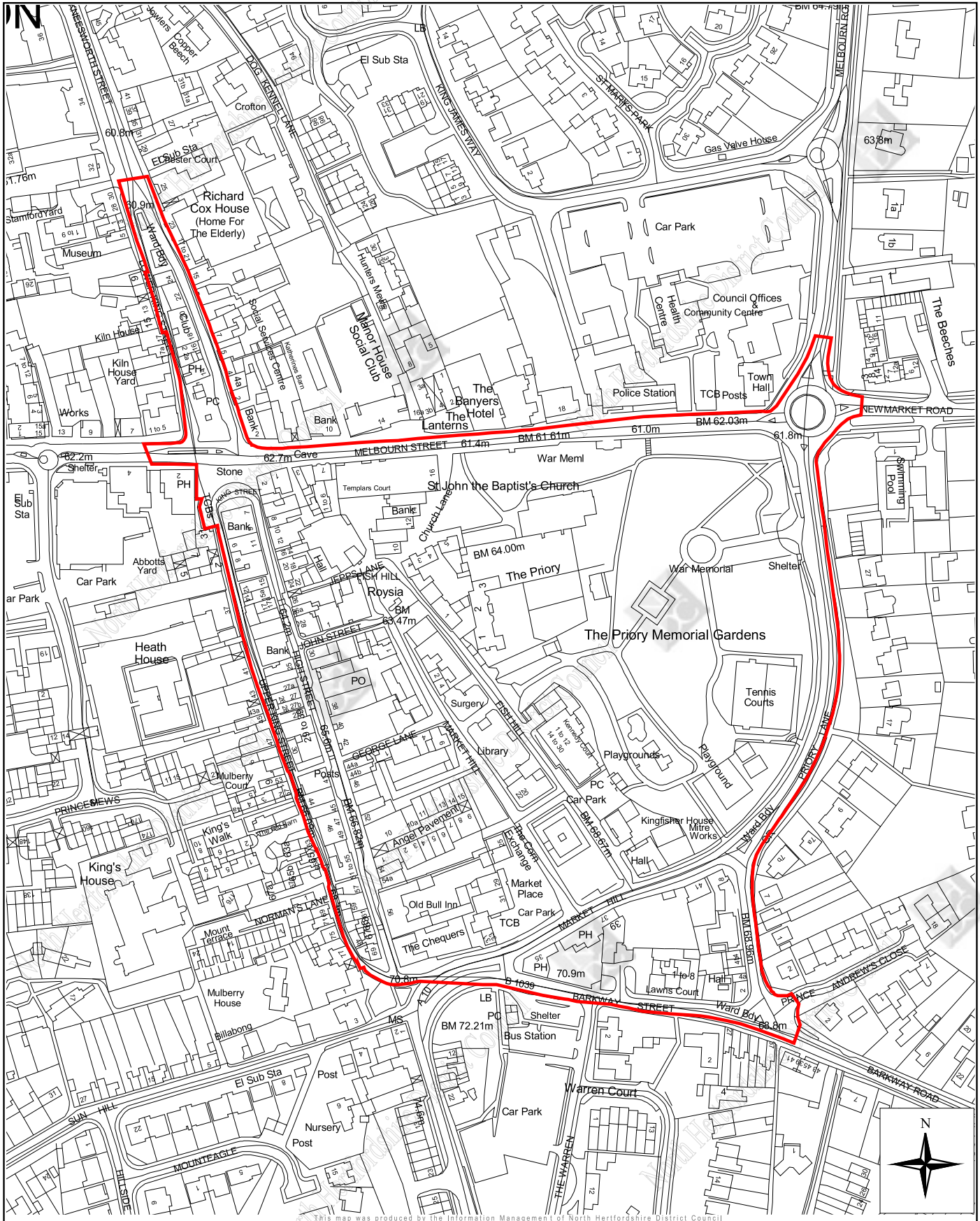
Drinking laws also mean that police have a monopoly on the definition of ‘anti-social’. Bureaucrats mark out certain groups and behaviours as legitimate targets of drinking regulation.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



Proposed Alcohol Free Zone: Royston

Purpose: Zone Location



5 Targeting ‘Unpleasant’ Street Drinkers

Officials’ list of ‘anti-social’ drinkers includes groups of young people, winos, and football supporters

There is legislation enough to target people who are causing serious public disorder, or who have committed offences such as vandalism or littering. The alcohol-ban legislation is not about tackling serious offences, but is instead used against people who haven’t yet done anything wrong. In one police officer’s words, it allows them to ‘nip problems in the bud’ – to pre-empt disorder or crimes.⁴² In practice, this often means targeting particular groups of people who are considered troublesome types.

Some officials say that they will not bother those having a ‘quiet glass of wine in the park’. They then proceed to identify the ‘undesirable’ groups that *should* be subject to alcohol-confiscating powers. Certain classes of citizens who drink in public – winos, groups of young people, football fans – are cast as ‘unpleasant’, ‘unacceptable’, and as justifiable targets of drinking control. Confiscating alcohol is a way of trying to expel or break up the group.

This shows the danger of bureaucrats defining what is and is not acceptable. Much of the anti-social behaviour cited could seem perfectly harmless, if not to everybody’s taste. Many people – including the author – have cracked open a can on a London tube or bus, or got drunk underage in a park, without causing much trouble to others. Most of those ‘persistent street drinkers’ cause little trouble too; they are often self-absorbed, and carry themselves with deliberate composure.

Of course, there are times when drunk groups do annoy others, be it hen nights belting out eighties hits on the train, or groups of young lads shouting on a street corner. But these situations are part of the everyday business of negotiating public space. There is a choice: people can put up with the hen night’s singing (they are having fun; it is mildly amusing) or they can

‘Unpleasant’ People and Behaviours

Tube drinkers

‘Too many people have the unpleasant experience of sitting opposite someone swigging a can of lager.’⁴³

Boris Johnson, London Mayor

Young people

Welsh Councillor Hefin Thomas said that the Holyhead alcohol free zone would target ‘groups of young lads drinking on the streets, making a nuisance of themselves’, and other forms of ‘totally unacceptable’ drinking.⁴⁴

Twentysomethings

‘When you have young children, the last thing you need is a group of twentysomethings drinking and playing football and spoiling things.’⁴⁵ Flintshire’s countryside manager, on why his park needs a booze ban.

Sports fans

‘Drinkers are also causing a general nuisance during sporting events.

This is unacceptable.’

Councillor Brian Dillingham, Bedford⁴⁶

Winos

The Brighton public drinking crackdown targeted what it referred to as ‘persistent street drinkers’, or winos on the seafront.⁴⁷ Another council tried to get a drinking control zone in response to a single vagrant, known as Mel, who frequented the town square.⁴⁸

ask them to please keep it down. Either way, we have to choose, and these choices between tolerance and social sanction define the rules of civility in public places. Booze bans short-circuit the public process.

When there is public support for drinking regulations, this often comes from a view of one’s fellow citizens as hostile, alien beings. People may support measures targeting ‘unpleasant’ public drinkers when they themselves cannot talk to a rowdy fellow passenger, or tick off a young lad. The perception of others as an incorrigible nuisance is often an expression of our alienation from one another, and our reluctance to play a part in setting the terms for public space. Far from overcoming mutual alienation, booze bans simply institutionalise it.

It is heartening, then, that protests against booze bans are live – and growing fast.

6 Protests Against Booze Bans

Protests against booze bans are growing, from London to Leeds to San Diego

Few booze bans have come in with significant public support. Councils must consult the public when they apply for a regulated drinking zone, but they generally receive only a small number of responses, and often canvas the views of establishment-minded community groups.

The booze ban in a district near Aberdeen was supported by the ‘Banff and District Community Safety group’.⁴⁹ One Scottish consultation received unanimous support for an alcohol ban, but there were only around one to three responses per local area consultation.⁵⁰

A more live public reaction has been to protest, and many citizens object to the official micromanagement of their behaviour. Some have made a point of breaking the London Tube booze ban, as if to say: what exactly is so *wrong* with sipping a can on a Tube train?

The London party against the booze ban formed on Facebook, and the night before the ban several thousand people took to the Circle Line in colourful protest. The Mayor claimed that the booze ban was ‘Making everyone’s journey more pleasant’, yet this was ‘pleasantness’ enforced by bureaucratic sanction. In general, the protest party was a model of more public-spirited civility: there was an easy friendliness and camaraderie; people offered strangers drinks, and when new groups joined a Tube train they greeted each other with cheers. Bystanders generally treated the event with good-humoured curiosity.

Other booze bans have also sparked lively protests from local residents. People have set up online petitions to oppose the control of alcohol in areas ranging from Leeds Park to San Diego Beaches, from Soho publicans who

want to keep outdoor drinking free from regulation, to the thousands of UK summer festival-goers who signed petitions against BYO beer bans. Others have carried out more individual protests – like this group of Dubliners who snapped themselves next to a no-drinking sign, bottles and cans in hand.⁵¹



Dubliners raise a bottle to their 'Alcohol-free area' sign

Petitions Against Booze Bans

Ban the alcohol ban at DMF

Facebook group

Remove the ban from private alcohol at Ashton Court Festival⁵²

Lift the Alcohol Ban at Coventry's Godiva Festival 2008

Facebook group

Soho publicans' petition against bans on outside drinking⁵³

Don't let them ban alcohol in Hyde Park (Leeds)

Facebook group

Ban the Ban 3 – Keep San Diego Beaches Free

Facebook group

The official version of civility is a sanitised list of dos and donts. Yet genuine civility is more complicated than this, and drunkenness or sobriety has little to do with it. Groups of happy drunkish Tube-goers on a Saturday night treat each other with more friendliness and respect than do growling commuters on Monday morning. One protester – shown here in a homemade protest t-shirt – noted to me that sometimes ‘people are more sociable when they have had a drink’. Genuine civility results from people sharing a space together, and negotiating its rules, not from behavioural codes imposed from above.



Londoners in protest t-shirts. T-shirt caption reads ‘Prohibition – Ignore the Unreasonable’

What is at stake is not just the right to drink alcohol in public, which is a pleasant but not necessarily crucial part of life. What is also at stake is the principle that public space is for own free use and enjoyment, and that we set the terms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The more things that we can do only at police officers’ and local councillors’ discretion, the less public is public space, and the less we are citizens.

7 Manifesto Club Campaign: Against the Booze Bans

The Manifesto Club calls for drink bans to be challenged and rolled back – and for citizens to reclaim public space

At the Manifesto Club, we believe that people should be able to crack open a can in public this summer, without breaking the law.

An alcoholic picnic in a square or park is one of the nicer parts of summer, and this informal use of public space should be defended and celebrated.

The Manifesto Club calls for booze bans to be rolled back and challenged, and for police powers to be kept on a very tight leash.

These powers have come through with little public backing or debate, and as such are illegitimate. We also oppose bans on BYO alcohol, which turn music festivals into sterile and chaperoned affairs; and the puritanical move to ban under-21s from buying alcohol at off licenses.

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Councillors and politicians do not have a monopoly on the definition of 'anti-social'.

Indeed their definition is often just personal opinion. Many people may not mind at all if twentysomethings drink and play football in the park, or if somebody swigs a can of Carling opposite them on the Tube. There is no code for making a public place civil: people who actually use that space must work it out.

Politicians could concentrate more on freeing up public space and enabling us to do more, rather than searching around for things to ban.

For example, rather than banning Tube drinking, a London Mayor could mark his inauguration by putting on free transport for an evening, reducing ticket prices, or extending the Tube later at night.

The police could focus more on actual assaults and burglaries, rather than policing the habits of free citizens on summer evenings.

Strongbow does not *actually* cause murder. Officers are spending their time confiscating cans from people who have no intention or prospect of committing a crime. As the pre-emptive policing of social life goes up, response times to real crimes must start to go down.

Meanwhile, citizens could take more responsibility for defining the terms of public civility – and particularly dealing with young people’s misbehaviour.

Each train or street is a mini-public sphere, and citizens are capable of negotiating inevitable disputes when (for example) one person’s outdoor party conflicts with another’s night sleep. Rather than officially defined zones, this would lead to a rich patchwork of areas, with different uses and different norms of civility.

We should reclaim the original meaning of public space, which is space where the public sets the terms.

This means reversing the growing presumption that we can act only with permission, to an assumption that it is the police who need good reason to act. Beyond booze bans, and the mass of other official micro-regulation, lies the project of citizens making their streets and parks fit for both freedom and civility.

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Join the Manifesto Club Campaign Against Booze Bans

www.manifestoclub.com/boozebancampaign

Endnotes

- 1 See details on DPPOs
www.respect.gov.uk/members/article.aspx?id=7902
- 2 See the list of local authorities that have introduced designation orders
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- 6 Bylaws for Aberlady
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- 7 Bylaws for Dirleton
www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/DIRLETON%20F-21872.PDF
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