

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

PUBLIC MEETING

THE EVENING ECONOMY

11 May 2005

1. **Chairman's Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 40 members of the public, representatives of local groups and Councillors. He also welcomed Inspector Chris May, representing Winchester Police. The Chief Executive forwarded the apologies of Graham Love from the Winchester City Centre Partnership who was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting.

The Chairman stated that the programme of meetings for the forthcoming year had not yet been finalised but would be published as soon as available.

2. **Presentation on the Evening Economy**

Simon Eden, the City Council's Chief Executive, gave a presentation on the subject of the Evening Economy in Winchester (copies of slides attached).

At the conclusion of his presentation, the Chief Executive raised the following questions as suggested topics for further debate:

- *What strengths should we build on?*
- *What threats need dealing with?*
- *What does Winchester lack?*

3. **Public Questions**

The Chairman thanked Mr Eden for his presentation and opened the meeting to questions from the members of public. A summary of some of the comments and responses from the City Council's officers are set out below.

- *Concern about the centre of Winchester being a "no go" area in the evenings with an "air of menace" permeating.*

Inspector May responded that in his opinion although there were many people out in the evenings, especially at weekends, the atmosphere was not menacing, so the problem was probably one of perception. He added that the Police made every effort to maintain a visible presence at these times.

Inspector May also stressed that nationally, the majority of people assaulted were young men between the ages of 18-24 years, and the assaults were perpetrated by the same group.

Mr Eden commented that any perception of a threatening environment still needed to be addressed. He suggested that this could be achieved in part by taking steps to encourage a wider cross-section of people into the town centre during the evenings.

Councillor Pearce mentioned that two Ward Councillors had stayed out in Winchester one evening at the weekend and in general they had been very impressed with the standard of behaviour.

- *Concern about anti-social and intimidating behaviour of some people in evenings and the problem of drug-dealing and theft. Should encourage a more “wholesome” evening economy which was less dependent on alcohol and drugs.*

Inspector May acknowledged that there were problems with drugs and drug-dealing in Winchester, as there was nationally. He stated that the Police were not complacent about this and took steps to try and combat the problem. However, he added that the wider issue required improvements in education and social perceptions regarding the use of drugs and alcohol.

- *A request that more small to medium size community venues be available in the town centre for groups to hire at a reasonable cost in the evenings (from representative of the “University of the Third Age”).*
- *An update requested regarding the use of the “Bapsy Bequest” towards providing community facilities at the Guildhall.*

Mr Eden acknowledged that Winchester had a shortage of such venues, which were available in rural areas through the use of parish halls. In the short term, he suggested the representative contact the Guildhall.

Regarding the “Bapsy Bequest”, Mr Eden confirmed that there was approximately £1 million available for the provision of community facilities at the Guildhall but the terms of the bequest were very specific. He advised that the Council had commissioned architects’ drawings last year and would shortly be writing to the Charity Commission to ascertain whether it was necessary for an application to vary the terms of the bequest to be made.

- *If the economy was extended more into the evening there was a need to address sustainability issues (e.g. would result in more energy consumption and more car journeys etc).*

Mr Eden acknowledged this point and stated that it could partly be addressed by, for example, consideration of the public transport available and the type of lighting used.

- *What was the current situation regarding Winchester having a nightclub? There was a need for a venue within Winchester for people to remain out in the evening and dance without necessarily drinking.*

Mr Eden stated that the requirement for such a venue could be added to the Council’s “wish list”. The Council were contacting young people via schools and colleges in order to try and ascertain their requirements in this area.

He stated that the recent planning application for a large nightclub on the old Post Office site had been refused by the Council as it was considered to be unsuitable due to its size and location.

- *Concern expressed by representative of the YMCA about the problem of under-age drinking within Winchester (and nationwide) and the need to provide a facility for the 16-18 year age group. The representative stated that the YMCA would like to work with the Council to provide a facility for*

this age-group and suggested that a live music venue might be appropriate.

Inspector May acknowledged that under-age drinking was a problem in Winchester, as it was nationally. He reiterated his point made earlier that better education of young people was part of the solution. He also mentioned that last year, the Police had brought two successful prosecutions of venues in Winchester for selling alcohol to under 18s.

Mr Eden welcomed the offer of joint working from the YMCA and stated that the Council intended to involve different partners in discussions on this issue.

- *Winchester needs more live music venues, particularly those open to 16-18 year olds and also under 16s. It was suggested that the Council contact such venues as The Railway Inn regarding this.*

In response, Mr Eden also suggested that possible links with the Winnall Rock School could be investigated. A representative from the University College of Winchester's Student Union added that their facilities were often free at quieter times (such as out of term-time and weekends) and could perhaps be utilised. Mr Eden thanked the representative for their offer and confirmed that the Council would make further enquiries about this possibility.

- *What was the current situation regarding new applications under the Licensing Act 2003.*

Howard Bone, the City Council's Assistant City Secretary (Legal), advised that at the current time about 20 applications had been received under the new Act, and these were generally to convert to the new legislation and did not seek altered opening hours. Premises had to submit their applications by 6 August 2005 to avoid losing their existing licence rights and having to apply for a completely new licence under the Act. Mr Bone confirmed that once applications were received, they would be considered under the agreed Licensing Policy and this included taking into account any relevant representations local residents and other responsible authorities (Fire, Police, etc.).

Inspector May added that, despite the negative publicity the new Act had received, it should result in much greater control of licensed premises.

- *There should be more public toilets available and those already in place should be well-maintained.*
- *A suggestion that the Council investigate the possibility of installing a public toilet facility which was sunk in the pavement during the day and only in place during the evening and night times (as had been introduced in Reading).*

Mr Eden commented that the new Cultural Centre at Jewry Street would include the provision of improved public toilets.

- *Difficulties caused by tables and chairs outside premises blocking the pavement and possibly causing damage to the paving slabs. It was suggested that premises be asked to contribute towards the costs of repairs, perhaps through their licence fees.*

Mr Bone explained that the licences for tables and chairs were issued by the City Council and the fees were set by the Council, within the limitations set

out by the Government. In addition, responsibility for pavement maintenance fell to the County Council.

Mr Bone advised that the licences stipulated the area on which the tables and chairs could be placed and any variation from this could be investigated by the Licensing Department.

Mr Eden mentioned that the City Council were investigating the possibility of businesses contributing on a voluntary basis towards environment improvements in their areas.

- *A suggestion that Winchester should have a bigger cinema as The Screen only has two screens.*

Whilst noting this point, Mr Eden advised that cinemas had undertaken research which suggested that Winchester could not support a bigger cinema. He suggested that the use of alternative venues, such as the John Stripe Theatre, for a wider variety of films could be investigated.

The following comments/suggestions were also made:

- *To encourage a wider cross-section of people in the evenings, it was suggested that some shops should remain open later.*
- *Lack of pubs open to families after 6pm*
- *Lack of facilities, apart from pubs, between about 5pm and 8pm. It was suggested that coffee shops stay open longer to offer an alternative venue for people to meet.*
- *Comment that a lot of young people appear to travel to Southampton to go out in the evening and perhaps we should encourage them to stay in Winchester in order to boost the economy here.*
- *The possibility of Winchester having facilities open to all age-groups such as a bowling alley or ice rink should be investigated*
- *Winchester should not seek to copy Southampton in encouraging too many late night entertainments etc without proper regard to local residents..*

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance. Mr Eden confirmed that the various points made would be noted and used to help the debate on the future development of the evening economy in Winchester.

The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and concluded at 8.40pm

Chairman