

20:20 Vision

Philip Kolvin QC reflects on the changing attitudes to the night-time economy

In the old days, the route into licensing for barristers was through criminal law. The business of licensing was conducted in the conflict setting of a magistrates court, often between advocates schooled in the rhetorical arts of jury advocacy. The genetic codes for such work were rooted in place keeping: the business of regulation of an errant and rather dangerous industry. My own way in was through planning, my native terrain being council buildings where professionals came together to forge visions for their areas, in the recognition that local authorities could take a lead on place shaping, the business of creating towns and cities which work for all, by harnessing the entrepreneurship of the private sector to the will of the people as expressed through policy. This approach involves answering four key questions, what should go where, over which hours and on what conditions? If you get that right, then decision by decision, venue by venue, you inch your town towards being a place of delight. In that world, “what do we want?” is as important a question as “what don’t we want?”

I’ve banged that particular drum for 15 years. I wrote about the principles in my doorstopper of a book *Licensed Premises: Law, Practice and Policy*, and then was, I guess, not too amazed when far more people read my *Manifesto for the Night Time Economy* in which I synthesised the principles into a few bite-sized commandments.

I think that we are now beginning to see the tectonic plates shifting. Authorities are now starting to express what they do want to see in their licensing policies. Schemes such as BIDS and Purple Flag are raising consciousness about how partnership work can increase the quality of whole town centres at night. Great work has been done by the Portman Group in bringing together the voluntary schemes under one umbrella – the Local Alcohol Partnerships Group – to advise the LAAAs areas on the possibilities. A new company – Nightworks – has been formed to research and promote the benefit of diversity in the night time economy. And, perhaps seminally, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, has appointed a Night Czar and a Chair of the Night Time Commission to devise and promote a vision for our capital city. These are the first such appointments in the UK, and if they work we can expect them to be followed elsewhere.

The night time economy is hugely important to the UK economically and culturally. It is bizarre that, with all the care we take about fostering the day-time economy, we should leave the night time economy to case by case decision-making. Thinking is now shifting. In the next few months I will be speaking in Austin Texas, Liverpool and Dublin about how we can put culture and leisure at the heart of town and city regeneration, and am looking forward to discussing what I learn with friends and colleagues in the exciting period ahead.

Philip Kolvin QC is Head of Cornerstone Barristers and of its licensing team. He has recently been appointed Chairman of the Night Time Commission for London and also Chairman of the Advisory Panel for Nightworks.