

## Advice: Boosting night time activity in city centres

17 December 2015 by Ben Kochan

A range of venues and well-managed public spaces can help secure a diverse evening and night time offer in town and city centres, finds Ben Kochan.



*Southend Borough Council organises events to promote activity in the early evening in the city centre  
[Pic credit: Southend Borough Council]*

The evening and night economy is worth £66 billion to the UK economy and the benefits should be widely enjoyed, says Terry Bevan, director of economic development consultancy TBR Consultants. Town and city centres need careful urban design strategies and active management to support the growth of their night time economies and to diversify their offer, adds Marion Roberts, professor of urban design at the University of Westminster.

Here are some ideas for promoting a safe diverse evening and night time economy in town and city centres.

### **Secure a diverse offer**

The relaxation of the licensing laws in 2003 stimulated the growth in the night time economy and brought late night drinking to many city centres. "Many local authorities now want to attract a more diverse offer to their town and city centres which starts earlier in the evening and includes food and entertainment," adds Sarah Walker, manager of the Purple Flag award scheme at the Association of Town and City Management, which was established in 2009 to accredit centres with a diverse high-quality night time offer. Festivals and markets can attract people into centres in the early evening, says Simon Ford, group manager for community safety, and chair of the Purple Flag working group at Southend Borough Council. "It is important to have well-designed spaces where these events can take place and the crowds can be managed," says Richard Eastham, director of urban design and planning consultancy FERIA Urbanism.

### **Flexible planning**

In some centres, planners are resisting retail to leisure change of uses, which is creating dead places, says Eastham. "Empty large stores can be reused quite successfully for bars and bistros," he says. Roberts adds that local plans should allow the evening and night time economy to spread outside the tight confines of town and city centres. "The evening and night time economy is dynamic and operators should be allowed to experiment with new kinds of activities in different locations," she says.

### **Integrate housing**

Bevan is worried that new housing in some city centres is threatening the night time economy. "The new housing needs to be designed to take account of nearby bars and night clubs," he says. This could mean changing the orientation of the housing and also funding double doors and other noise reduction measures in some entertainment venues to limit the disturbance to nearby residents, Bevan says. He suggests contributions for these measures should be part of planning conditions for the new housing.

### **Improve public spaces**

Creating public places which accommodate crowds in the evening and night can help raise the quality of the overall night time offer and make it easier to manage, says Jon Shipp, night time economy coordinator at Bournemouth Borough Council. "Narrow pavements can create pinch points which cause problems for crowds, particularly at night," says Shipp. He points to a project in Bournemouth city centre at Horseshoe Common that involved removing railings along the pavement, creating a shared space and providing benches. "The quality of the space has encouraged the venue operators to improve their offer," he says.

Good street lighting is important to give a sense of safety, says Eastham. Routes from car parks and stations into the town and city centres should be well lit and signposted, he says. Eastham adds, however, that it is important to make the lighting in some areas subtle so that it creates a warm atmosphere.

### **Coordinate strategies**

Development and management of the evening and night time economy involves many departments in the local authority and beyond, says Shipp. He reports to a board which includes representatives from the planning and licensing departments in the council, the police and the venue operators. "They all bring different perspectives and responsibilities but share objectives," he says.

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