

ALMR Press Notice

Wednesday 7th October 2009.

Tories to Tear up Lax Licensing Regime

The Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers welcomed today's news that a future Conservative Government would ban below cost selling of alcohol. But the trade body, which is the voice of independent pub and bar operators, urged the Party to proceed with caution in making sweeping changes to the licensing regime to avoid damaging the responsible majority.

Home Affairs Spokesman, Chris Grayling, told today's Conservative Party Conference that the Party would:

- Call time on the drinks that fuel anti-social behaviour: increase the tax on super strength lagers, ciders and alcopops and ban below-cost selling by supermarkets
- Tear up the Government's lax licensing regime: giving communities a right of veto over new licences in their area and giving councils the power to restrict opening hours
- Increase the contribution late night operators make to policing and social costs by increasing the amount they pay for their licence.

Responding to today's speech, *ALMR* Chief Executive said:

"Unfettered and deregulated access to bargain booze sold at pocket money prices through supermarkets and corner shops is undoubtedly fuelling consumption and we have been urging politicians to take action on this issue since it was first identified by the Competition Commission in 2006.

"The licensing regime for the off-trade is undoubtedly too lax. The 2003 Licensing Act swept away all restrictions on the time at which alcohol may be sold and its location in the store. As a result shoppers literally fall over displays of very cheap alcohol and drinking at home has replaced drinking in a well-regulated licensed environment. A ban on below cost selling will go some way to addressing this."

He expressed concern, however, that the Party's proposals to tear up the Licensing Act may have unforeseen consequences for the nation's pubs. He went on:

"The Tory Party must take care that in their rush to talk tough they do not inadvertently damage the thousands of community pubs they profess to want to save. We are disappointed that the proposals outlined today have not been discussed with affected businesses. With over 50 pubs closing a week, the trade can ill-afford another upheaval in the regulatory regime. The 2003 Act took two years to introduce and imposed significant legal and administrative costs on individual pubs. We want gradual evolution not further revolution."

Responding to the specific proposal that late night businesses should contribute more to the costs of policing, he concluded:

“Town centre operators already pay more for their licence and these are the very businesses which the Tories appear to want to target. A top up levy based on trading time rather than location appears to run the risk of penalising responsible operators – for example a community pub providing food and trading occasionally until 1am. Late night operators are already investing through Business Improvement Districts and Best Bar None schemes to tackle the problems which arise in city centre locations. Trading time is not a good indicator of social responsibility.

Lets work together to develop sensible, workable and above all consistent proposals rather than soundbite politics”.

<ENDS>

Notes for editors

- *ALMR* is the only national trade body solely dedicated to representing the interests of pub and bar operators, and to providing them with business support and advice. It has almost 100 member companies, operating over 10,000 outlets.
- Chris Grayling’s speech was made at the Tory Party Conference at 11.15am on Wednesday 7th October
- On 27th September, Caroline Spelman said that community pubs were being driven to the wall and a blind eye turned to binge drinking clubs. She pledged that the Tory party would save our pubs but these proposals will apply to all premises and could irreparably damage community outlets.

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