

## **Response to the Scrutiny Review on Life in the City: November 2009**

### **Balancing the needs of the local community**

The Scrutiny Review was carried out by Canterbury City Council Overview and Scrutiny and Committee. It was concerned especially with the evening and late-night economy, licensing, community safety, meeting the needs of young people and families, creating a lively and safe city centre, cleanliness and street furniture, and protecting the reasonable interests of local residents. See: [www.scrutiny.canterbury.gov.uk/](http://www.scrutiny.canterbury.gov.uk/)

The Canterbury Society has been set up over the past year and many of the above topics have been raised at its meetings. In responding to the Scrutiny Review we can draw on the wide variety of views expressed in the discussions in which we have engaged over the year. Our views are also informed by the survey carried out by SMACS in 2008 (sent to the Scrutiny Team separately).

#### **1. The night-time economy and licensing**

Many local residents are concerned about anti-social behaviour at night in the city centre. Those who live outside the city say they are reluctant to come to evening events if it means walking down streets full of drunks. Some of those who live in the city are afraid to go out at all in the evening, while others have their sleep disturbed on a regular basis. Guests in hotels and guest houses complain about the noise.

The main causes of the problem are the extension of drinking hours into the time when most residents are asleep and the proliferation of licensed outlets in the city centre. Some parts of the city centre have already been designated 'saturation zones' where applicants have to prove that extensions of drinking hours will not have a negative impact. The smoking ban has had the effect of moving drinkers into the street and into pub gardens, which exacerbates the noise problem, especially if an outdoor TV is also permitted. If then Development Control gives permission for outdoor 'jumberellas' or bars in pub gardens, it can lead to a serious deterioration of the quality of life locally.

We would urge the Scrutiny Review to

- Recommend an extension of the saturation zones in Canterbury
- Ask the Licensing Committee to take more seriously the representations from residents' groups about limiting late night drinking hours
- Recommend that the Licensing Committee use its powers to revoke licenses when there has been a history of complaints
- Urge Development Control to refuse applications involving the extension of pub facilities into gardens

#### **2. Graffiti**

The city council has an excellent website dealing with this issue, which gives information about how to get graffiti removed, and a graffiti removal team which

checks the city for graffiti on a regular basis. Nevertheless graffiti is still an issue which concerns many residents, who see it as a major scourge of our beautiful city. At present, for example, there are long-standing graffiti on:

- The Franciscan Path running from Stour Street to Black Griffin Lane
- The bus shelters in St Dunstan's Street and Whitstable Road
- The St George's Gate underpass

The Canterbury Society is about to launch a graffiti initiative, urging members of the public to report graffiti to the authorities listed on the web site and to monitor the speed of removal. One problem is that the council cannot remove graffiti from private property without a request from the owner, though after such a request graffiti is removed free of charge. We are therefore producing a leaflet to put through the doors of properties where graffiti seems to be a problem, urging the owners to phone the relevant numbers. We suggest that the Scrutiny Review should:

- Increase publicity for the council's graffiti removal service, highlighting in particular the offer of free removal from private property
- Increase the number of staff who work on the removal of graffiti within the Environment and Street Scene division
- Harness the goodwill of residents to report graffiti, remembering that many local people do not have access to the internet

### 3. Litter

Litter is bound to be an issue in a city which receives around two million tourists each year and has a student population of at least 30,000. In particular litter from fast food outlets is a continuing problem. The main streets and parks of the city are kept reasonably clear of litter: Dane John Gardens, for example, which is disfigured by quantities of rubbish every sunny afternoon, is returned to a pristine state each evening and morning.

However, litter in side streets, paths, gutters, hedges and in the River Stour is often left un-cleared for months. The Canterbury Society is concerned about this issue and has taken action by organising a Litter Pick-up in the area between the city and the University of Kent, working in association with the Kent Students Union and the Clean Kent Campaign. This Litter Pick-up has been supported by the City Council's Environmental Promotions Officer and her team and we have been very impressed by their professionalism.

We hope the Scrutiny Review will:

- Urge continued vigilance by the Environment and Street Scene Division with regard to prosecutions for dropping litter and publicity for such prosecutions
- Monitor the contracts of those responsible for litter clearance to ensure that side roads, paths and other areas are also cleared of litter./
- Provide more litter bins along busy routes, especially student routes such as the path between south Canterbury and Canterbury East Station

- Put pressure on fast food outlets to do more to prevent litter, on the ‘polluter pays’ principle
- Consider how litter may be prevented, though education, publicity, and other proactive approaches.

#### 4. **The balance between students and residents**

There is considerable concern among residents that Canterbury is being overwhelmed by the number of students relative to the permanent residents. With a resident population of 43,431 (2001 census) and three universities, at which at least 30,000 students are enrolled, Canterbury has a very unusual demographic profile.

The students bring many benefits to the city. These include the employment offered by the universities and colleges, the impact on arts and cultural provision, the rents paid by students, the volunteering in which many students engage and the quality of the shops, especially those catering for young people.

However, there are also disadvantages. These include the pressure on housing and on house prices, the anti-social behaviour of some students, especially when they have been drinking, their neglect of rules about rubbish collection, and the take-over of some parts of the city by student tenants, leaving families without supportive neighbours and community life weakened.

The Student Community Working Group already exists and considers many of these topics. However, it may be that what is needed is a more strategic consideration of the issues faced by a city with the highest proportion of students to residents in Europe. The proposal to establish a fourth university is just such an issue.

We would urge the Scrutiny Review to:

- Urge the Council to resist the pressure for more students to come to the city, and in particular to resist current proposals for the ‘American University in Canterbury’ for which Girne University in North Cyprus is currently recruiting
- Put pressure on the universities to take more responsibility for providing on-site accommodation and leisure facilities for their students
- Set up a Strategic Planning Group on University/City issues which would review the situation, with the aim of taking a more pro-active approach to the management of the student population.