

● Special Report - Crime in Bridlington

A night on the beat...

To find out what it's like on the front line, reporter Mike Brown spent a Saturday night with police on the streets of Bridlington town centre

FEATURE

By Mike Brown

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Around 50% of violent crime reported in Bridlington is alcohol related - which has led the commissioner of Humberside Police to call for tougher action to deal with drunks. Controversial American style 'drunk tanks' and new cautions which require alcohol treatment have been put forward as solutions to the problem, but is Bridlington really the most violent night time economy in the East Riding? Mike Brown finds out...

Constant good natured 'banter', raised voices, occasional flash points of disorder punctuated by sporadic arrests - this is a regular Saturday night for police in Bridlington. By far the busiest part of the week for the town's police force, weekends out on the town offer a unique challenge. In a week where the idea of introducing American style 'drunk tanks' has been discussed to deal with the problem of alcohol related



NIGHT SHIFT Police arrest a man for drunk and disorderly behaviour on Esplanade.

crime - which is estimated to account for 50% of violent-crime in Bridlington - I spent Saturday night with Sergeant Mark Shingles, licensing officer for the East Riding, and his team policing the town's revellers. Two response teams are on duty, while four plain clothes officers operate inside pubs and clubs. Before leaving the station at around 11pm, Sgt Shingles outlines the current trend in nights out - pre-drinks. With later opening times on offer for licensed premises, and the proliferation of cheap alcohol available as part of supermarket mega deals, it is often the case that a Friday and a Saturday night out does not begin until well after midnight.

"I think there are a number of reasons for this. When later licenses were brought in, it was supposed to try and discourage binge drinking. But instead of people going down the more continental route of choosing to come and go at different times, a lot of

younger people get drinks beforehand and come out quite intoxicated later," said Sgt Shingles.

Leaving the station, Sgt Shingles gets a call on the radio from colleagues who are stationed near the Greyhound pub on Promenade. An 18th birthday party is going on, which according to Sgt Shingles, is a challenge to police. Inevitably, you will have the problem of underage drinkers. Also, we are told of an incident a few weeks ago where around 15 cars were damaged in streets around another pub, after an 18th party had kicked out. Arriving outside, the presence of a camera crew draws an animated response from the young revellers in the smoking area at the front of the pub.

But the majority of the youngsters are in good spirits. After a check with the landlord, and a word with officers stationed outside, Sgt Shingles leaves satisfied. The only incident reported is when a 15-year-old girl, who apparently never made it into the party after enjoying pre-drinks, was taken to A&E after collapsing outside. Officers are deployed to keep

an eye on streets around the pub for when the party kicks out, and we move on.

Opposite a busy New Inn, we meet the Street Angels group, who have reported a "quiet night so far". Going on to Music Nights, we hear that officers have gone in to check on reports of underage drinkers. Nothing comes of it.

We head on to Esplanade, the most popular late night drinking spot where the busy Hook and Parrot, Pavilion and Utopia attract punters. A check in with door staff reveals again that the evening is still quiet, as the clock ticks past midnight. I ask Sgt Shingles what is happening.

"It's still relatively early on in the night, we will see something later on. But the point is, a lot of what we do is to try and prevent trouble. The door staff support us and we have a good relationship with them," he said.

"Alcohol related crime is not just the responsibility of the police. It is the local authority that grants licenses, and licensees have a big responsibility as it is their livelihoods. And alcohol related injuries are a big strain on the NHS. "It is inevitable that arrests

'But the point is, a lot of what we do is to try and prevent trouble.'

will occur, but we also give out section 27 orders which require people to leave the town centre area. These are given out fairly regularly." And despite an encouraging start, it is not long before trouble flares. A second visit to the 18th party elicits a more lively response from some groups of youngsters. Some, frustrated with a camera crew who are also out with police filming in the area, begin to square up to officers.

It is mainly youthful rebellion manifesting itself in petulant backchat, but it is a difficult situation for officers to deal with. No matter how many forceful, yet helpful, instructions telling the youngsters just go home, the arguments continue for more than ten minutes. One 16-year-old is later taken

to the station after refusing to comply with a Section 27 dispersal order.

Heading back to Esplanade, the first arrest of the night is made. After a scuffle at the door of the Tiki bar, a man is given a Section 27 dispersal order by officers. After continuing to try and defy police to get at another man, he is detained by five officers and arrested for being drunk and disorderly. He is thrashing around in the back of the police van, banging his head against the back door, and is restrained by officers to stop him doing himself further damage on the way to the cells. Another half an hour later, at about 1.40am, the second arrest of the night.

After door staff alerted police to trouble inside Utopia, one man tries to follow another into Regent Terrace. Police try to stop him, and one pulls a taser that is eventually not used. They lead him away from trouble before he is also arrested for drunk and disorderly behaviour.

The longer the night goes on, the cheekier the banter from the revellers becomes. Groups shout and swear from a distance, and those that come up close are usually people asking to borrow the police officer's hat for a picture.

Sgt Shingles says: "It is usually good natured, in the right spirit, but there are two types of people: those who can handle a few drinks and those who take it too far. Of course, there are always some people that are going to challenge you, but it's part of the job." And while there have been some flashpoints, I have been surprised by the lack of violence and trouble in Bridlington. "Bridlington and the East Riding are not bad places. We don't have the same level of crime as big towns or cities, but Friday and Saturday nights out are still an issue that we need to deal with," continued Sgt Shingles. "It takes up a great deal of police time and resource. Tonight was fairly quiet although with the darts at the Spa the football was quite busy."



Sergeant Mark Shingles

'Drunk tanks' a good idea, says commissioner

The police commissioner for Humberside believes that 'drunk tanks' should be introduced to deal with the "huge problem" of alcohol related crime.

And Matthew Grove also says that a "pathetic" minority of drinkers are ruining the night time economy in Bridlington and across the East Riding for responsible drinkers.

It is said that more than 50% of violent crime recorded nationally is alcohol related - a trend also seen in Bridlington and across the East Riding, according to Mr Grove and police officers.

Mr Grove said: "I have spent time in custody suites on a Friday and Saturday night and the behaviour I have seen is appalling. The police are a finite resource, and they are completely stretched almost acting as kindergarten supervisors to these people who cannot behave responsibly.

"I want our police force, and our other vital emergency services, to be taken back to act for all our citizens. They need to be freed up from dealing with this."

One way that this could be achieved, according to Mr Grove, is through the introduction of controversial American style 'drunk tanks', where drunks who are a danger to themselves would be put in cells to sober up and then made to pay for their care.

This week, the idea was also mooted by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

"I am pleased that ACPO are finally saying what I have been saying for months. This is still in the discussion stage, but it is time for those who drink to excess to be made responsible for their own care. I hear people blame drink - but it is those who use alcohol who are the ones responsible. Peo-



Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Grove.

ple need a to know there is a consequence that lasts longer than the hangover," continued Mr Grove.

This would even be the case if these 'drunk tanks' are located 20-30 miles away in another town, says Mr Grove: "It is not for the convenience of drunks."

Another way that Mr Grove sees drink related crime being dealt with is through the launch of the conditional cautioning programme, which is being piloted in Bridlington.

This would see those who have committed a drink related offence and have no, or very few convictions, offered an opportunity to accept a conditional caution rather than be prosecuted.

The condition attached to the caution is that they attend an appointment with an alcohol worker who will assess and discuss their drinking and related offending with them and offer further help and treatment if required. The alcohol worker is part of the Compass Drug Intervention Programme Team which has recently been given additional funding by the Police and Crime Commissioner to expand its work with offenders misusing alcohol as well as drugs.

"There is no silver bullet," continued Mr Grove. "But this is a very urgent and important issue. I want to see our police force working in our residential and rural areas combating serious criminality.

"There is also a serious strain on the health service. I know that A&E departments are becoming a no-go zone for families on Friday and Saturday nights."

Humberside Police last week took part in the first of a series of National Weeks of Action led by ACPO under the heading In Focus - focusing on alcohol related crime.

Inspector David Bray-Smith, lead on licensing and reducing alcohol related violence and disorder within the East Riding, said: "This week of action, gives us a good opportunity to continue the focus on reducing alcohol related crime and disorder. This is a priority for the force and has been clearly stated by the Police and Crime Commissioner in his plan.

"The East Riding remains one of the safest places in the UK to live, work and visit, but we have to be conscious that alcohol crime and disorder is a national problem in all areas including ours, which we need to tackle."

Street Angels are also helping out

Another group trying to deal with the busy weekend drinking sessions are the Bridlington Street Angels.

Speaking to the Free Press on Saturday night, the group explain how they provide non threatening, nonjudgemental help to the town's revellers.

Formed earlier this summer, the Street Angels pick up broken glasses and bottles, offer water, flip-flops to girls with aching feet and a sympathetic ear.

Peter Wilson, of the Street Angels, said: "Tonight has been fairly standard. We try and talk to people, and the response we get is almost entirely positive.

"I think people realise that we are out volunteering and we are genuinely just trying to help. We try and talk to people who are having a bad time, we have



The Street Angels team.

dealt with those who have had their head bashed and need an ambulance, those who have had their drink spiked. Anyone."

The Street Angels will be training new recruits in October/November, with anyone interested in helping urged to visit www.bridlingtonstreetangels.co.uk

Sgt Mark Shingles, licensing officer for the East Riding, welcomes their sup-

port. He said: "Anyone is a help. I think it is unfortunate that we have to rely on volunteers to clear up in the town after people who have had too much to drink. It is a sad indictment.

"But I cannot praise them enough. I think people realise that they are not in uniform, they are not us, and that makes it easier for them to provide welfare and support."

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What do you think?

- Is Bridlington a bad place for alcohol related crime?
- Or is it a good place to go out on a Friday and Saturday night?
- Do you agree with the Police

Commissioner about his plans for 'drunk tanks' and conditional cautioning?

- Let us know by emailing letters@bridlingtonfreepress.co.uk

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