

Department of Justice Consultation Review of Alcohol Licence

Submission: Sligo Business Improvement District (BID)

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The Evening and Night-Time Economy (5pm to 5am)

It is acknowledged globally that footfall within urban centres has declined, with many towns and cities experiencing the “doughnut effect” of residents and businesses moving out of town centres and relocating to peripheral housing developments and retail parks, and in doing so decimating the central core. As SMEs in Irish towns and cities are a cornerstone of a regional economy, they now find themselves under threat from changing consumer behaviour, higher consumer expectations and increased competition amongst each other in winning foreign direct investment, residents, start-ups and domestic and international visitors. Research undertaken by Dr Carol Moran of IT Sligo into the Evening and Night Time Economy showed that:

‘ The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) highlights the unique contribution of the Night Time Economy industry to the UK economy, stating that the NTE generates £66billion per annum and accounts for almost 8% of the UK’s employment (Night Time Industries Association, 2020); however, they report in February 2021 that 80% of the night club industry will not survive without government support (Evening Standard, 2021), indicating the devastating effect the COVID-19 has had on sectors that rely on social interaction. This would be a continuation of the trajectory of the pub and nightclub sectors having already reported 44% of nightclubs shutting between 2005-2015 and 25% of pubs closing from 2001-2016 across the UK (Royal Town Planning Institute cited in Masud, 2019). ‘

Ireland has also experienced a downturn in our traditional evening and night time economy businesses post boom that resulted in the number of seven-day pub licenses dropping by 17.9 per cent between 2005 and 2018 (Irish Times, 2019;). Here in the north west region, food, beverage, and accommodation accounts for a significant percentage of employment with 69% of those employed in the sector living outside Dublin.



This demonstrates that as a sector, it is one that is truly decentralised. Unfortunately, those employed in this sector have been unable to keep employment due to trade restrictions and lockdowns and as such 96% of them are availing of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment or Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (Dept of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, 2020).

It must be observed that the Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity (2020) by the government noted that the sector will require a prioritization for recovery as it highly vulnerable to sustaining significant and permanent damage.

Minister Catherine Martin established the Night-time Economy Taskforce in July 2020 with the remit of affording the opportunity for stakeholders from the night-time culture sector to “develop an innovative approach to supporting and developing a vibrant, diverse, and sustainable night-time economy in Ireland” (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2021). Currently the Minister is finalizing the selection of pilot destinations that will form Night Time Economy Teams.

Irish Experience of Evening & Night-Time Economies

It must be noted that the literature related to the ENTE in Ireland is extremely limited. Existing articles and reports tend to be industry specific and there are few policy documents to speak of. The Retail Consultation Forum developed a Framework for Town Centre Renewal in 2016 in conjunction with the Department for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, which was intended to provide a blueprint for local authorities and key stakeholders across Ireland to enhance the vibrancy and vitality of their towns

There needs to be a coordinated approach to developing the ENTE from national and local government working in tandem with the stakeholders and communities to form the basis of any economic development.

Hobbs et al (2005) noted the reorientation of urban governance in Britain from local service provision and the managerial functions “towards an entrepreneurial stance primarily focused up on the facilitation of economic growth” (2006:89) which involved the development of night time leisure economies.

This pivot will also likely be required in the Irish context, to ensure that local government are supporting and facilitating the entrepreneurial spirit of relevant businesses which is required to develop thriving ENTEs. Furthermore, this indicates the need for local and national government to work with business owners to develop the ENTE policies, in a collaborative rather than hierarchical manner.

Sligo ENTE Business Composition Categories 2019

Purple Flag KPI's: Composition Categories	Number	Percentage (%)
Traditional pubs	23	20.9
Café bars/coffee shops serving alcohol	3	2.7
Nightclubs & late venues targeting under 25s	3	2.7
Family restaurants & global cuisine	14	12.7
Coffee shops/sandwich shop/ice cream parlours/specialty deli/patisserie	21	19.1
Fine dining	3	2.7
Fast food & take-aways	8	7.3
Theatre, concert & dance	2	1.8
Cinema, bingo & casinos	2	1.8
Live performance: music & comedy	6	5.5
Late-opening shops & markets	15	13.6
Late-opening museum, art gallery, library, education & community venues	5	4.5
Sports, leisure & fitness venue	5	4.5
Total	110	100



Covid-19 and the ENTE

Covid-19 has, in many instances, exacerbated and accelerated changes underway in our town centres. Whilst footfall counters indicate increased footfall after 5pm as residents engaged in increased walking, running and cycling activities, the commercial activity facilitating social engagement bore the brunt of Covid 19 restrictions and curtailments throughout 2020 and 2021.

Challenges and anomalies within the licencing legislation were issues pre Covid-19 and Sligo BID welcomes the review currently underway.

There is a sense within the licenced community that there will be a strong positive sentiment amongst consumers in re engaging with licenced hospitality venues (both daytime and night-time). This positive sentiment should be tempered with consumer sentiment research from Failte Ireland, that demonstrates a shift in user sentiment, patterns and trends and a stronger desire for better quality and highly engaged social experience.

Whilst we may have to accept that Covid-19 has impacted the public's appetite to gather in large numbers for events for now, the current licensing regime is overdue for a realignment. This is the time to look at a changed society, a changed trading environment and a changed environment of business viability and sustainability and apply creative and innovative solutions to existing outdated rules, regulations, and modes of operation.





Issue 1: Licence Renewal

Under current Irish licence conditions, several individuals attend court and are involved in the renewal of a routine licence application. These can include the business owner, solicitor, court staff, judge, Gardai and possibly emergency services. This is such a consumption of human capital. Having zoomed and teamed our way through Covid-19, this Justice Department review should seek to include these technologies in lieu of in person appearances – particularly relevant to routine renewal applications.

Solution 1: An online application process dispels the operators need to attend the courthouse for a routine issuing of a license and will free up first responder time and resources. So many mandated renewals operated effectively and efficiently through Covid-19 – time to move licence renewals into that sphere in 2022.

Issue 2: Exemptions

Under the current licensing laws, applying for an exemption attracts a €410 fee per night. Additional costs include time taken to attend court and the applicant engaging a solicitor. Considering the onerous impact of Covid-19 on the licensed premises sector, this is an ideal opportunity to review existing practices and costs and look to horizontally integrate current licence silos into a more efficient, fit for purpose model.

Solution 1: Place application process online. This would improve efficiency and reduce cost to the licensed operators in the sector.

Solution 2: Pay an annual entertainment fee in lieu of individual applications that would include x number of exemptions. This would offer a more cost-efficient model to the sector.



Issue No 3: Outdoor Dining

The recently released 'Global Night-Time Recovery Plan' makes many recommendations for attracting footfall back to towns and cities that include street animation, additional or enhanced illumination, increased safety protocols and dissemination of information in a real time environment that reassures consumers as to what businesses are open and what entertainment is available. The recent funding made available via the NTA and Failte Ireland for executing Covid-19 responses to streetscapes that addressed social distancing, queue management, additional seating capacity in the form of parklets, and additional covered dining spaces have assisted in addressing Irish urban centres physical presentation. The granting of the temporary outdoor dining licence should allow the licence holder to serve alcohol to the designated outdoor space. From the roll out of the outdoor dining initiative and discussing with town and city teams in the network, it appeared that Local Authority bye laws and their interpretation had a variety of applications throughout the country.

Solution 1:

Clear, concise, and uniform conditions held within Local Authority bye laws.





Issue No 4: Wine Bar/Bar/Restaurant Licence

Over the last 2 decades the food offering in many of the hospitality venues has contributed to improving Irelands culinary reputation worldwide. Café's, Restaurants, Pubs, Gastro Pubs, cultural venues (theatres, galleries), cinemas – all now may have occasion to either hold a licence or apply for a one-off licence. Post pandemic, many commercial, cultural and community premises are seeking new avenues to be more relevant and move to a more multipurpose platform to maintain viability.

Solution 1:

Streamline Alcohol licence application process

Dance Licence

Issue No 5: Staggering closing times

Sligo BID is a Purple Flag award winning destination. Purple Flag Award Purple Flag accreditation is an international award for towns and cities for the Evening and Night-Time Economy (5pm to 5am). There are 65 Purple Flag destinations in the UK and 15 in Ireland and 30 in Sweden. New Zealand is the latest country to join the programme. Recommended by Fáilte Ireland as a signature award for the Evening and Night-Time Economy, it recognises destinations that reach a standard of excellence and offer a family friendly, safe, culturally diverse product offering and specifically caters to late night shopping and hospitality outlets. Purple Flag has had a decade of experience in understanding the attributes that contribute to a holistic and positive Night-Time economy. Sligo BID is the project lead for Sligo Town in the annual application necessary to retain the award. Through the Purple Flag accreditation, we work to enhance our Night-Time quarters under the tenets of people movement, safety, wellbeing, and policy.



Solution 1:

Sligo BID regularly assesses the user experience and perception of safety and wellbeing in the ENTE in Sligo and would agree that staggering closing times has a benefit of reducing Anti-Social Behaviour across core streets, reducing congestion at late night take aways, taxi ranks and transport hubs. The Sligo Purple Flag award winning team is drawn from a multidisciplinary pool of local stakeholder groups, comprising Local Authorities (including economic development, Local Enterprise Office, engineering and planning personnel), An Garda Síochána, business representatives (restaurants, hotels, pubs and clubs, education sector, resident and community groups, tourism representatives, arts, cultural and sports venues).

Solution 2:

Review of licences and closing times. Are current licence trading times suitable for current and future conditions? Can this review include a future proofing of Irish towns and cities that will continue to adapt to a post pandemic environment combined with a changed consumer preference and sentiment?

Reference material:

Association of Town & City Management, 2021, *Purple Flag Status: How it Fits Place Management Policy* Available at: <https://www.atcm.org/purple-flag>

Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation & the Irish Government Economics and Evaluation Service, 2020, *Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity* Available at: <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Economic-Considerations-for-Reinstating-Economic-Activity.pdf>

Evening Standard, 2021, Around 80% of nightclubs 'won't survive past February' without government support, NTIA warns Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/music/nightclubs-coronavirus-reopening-covid-government-support-b918593.html>

Heritage Council, 2020, *Sligo Collaborative Town Centre Health Check* Available at: <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Sligo-Collaborative-Town-Centre-Health-Report-2020.pdf>

Hobbs, D., Hadfield, P., Lister, S., Winlow, S. 2005, *Violence and Control in the Night-Time Economy* European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, Vol. 13/1, 89–102, 2005 Available: <https://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=c82b1557-b203-48c9-b0a9-0f5a1d38beb3%40sessionmgr4008>

Masud, F. 2019, *The Growing Importance of the Night-Time Economy* BBC World Service Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-49348792>

Night Time Industries Association, 2021, *Homepage* Available at: <https://www.ntia.co.uk/#HOME>

About Sligo BID:

Background of Sligo Business Improvement District Sligo made history in 2016 in adopting a Business Improvement District Scheme (BID), the first such entity located on the west coast of Ireland. There are currently five BID companies in Ireland. These existing five BID companies in Dublin, Sandyford, Dundalk, Drogheda, and Sligo generate €23 million in BID contributions every five years term and collectively represent 7,500 cross sector businesses from multinationals to sole traders. This is a scheme common in the United States (over 1,500 BID companies) and the United Kingdom (345 BID companies) where the ratepayers of a designated geographical area contribute an agreed additional percentage of their rates to be ring fenced for actions and projects. Sligo BID has 758 cross sector members. The members recently held their 2nd ballot for another 5-year BID term and 80% of votes cast were in favour of the BID continuing. Sligo is a Purple Flag award (internationally accredited award for reaching a standard of excellence in the Evening and NightTime Economy - ENTE) winning town since 2015 and the Sligo cross sector team is held within the community of Place Management as an excellent example of a productive, engaged, and informed town team. Sligo, along with 15 other award-winning towns and cities, are members of Association of Town and City Management UK and Ireland, members of the Institute of Place Management and the CEO of Sligo BID represents the Republic of Ireland towns and cities (23 destinations) on the Advisory Council and Board of the ATCM. Sligo is a founder member of the Irish Town Centre Development Association (ITCDA).

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