



**The Ormskirk Night-time Economy Project:
Exploring Positives and Negatives of a Lancashire Town's NTE**

Final report

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INTRODUCTION

During November 2014, West Lancashire Borough Council (WLBC) commissioned Lancaster University (LU) to undertake a scoping study. The aim was to “conduct independent research to assist them in developing a better understanding of the positive and negative impacts of the night time economy for those residing, working and visiting Ormskirk Town Centre” (WLBC Brief November 2014). This report is in three sections, and finishes with some concluding remarks. The first section describes Ormskirk and its Night Time Economy (ONTE). The second section explains the methodology used in the research and explores the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches used. The final section sets out the findings using four main headings.

ORMSKIRK AND WEST LANCASHIRE

Ormskirk was designated a market town by Royal Charter in 1286. It is situated within the district of West Lancashire, an area of 347 square kilometres, and is ranked as 153/ 325 most deprived district in England. 60% of the areas 111,314 population are of working age (NOMIS,2010), and whilst Lancashire experienced a small contraction in employment, West Lancashire increased by 2.8% between 2009-13. Whilst manufacturing has generally declined this is compensated for by the service sector. Between 2012 and 2037 the district is expected to experience a population growth of 1.4%, which is significantly less than the predicted 5% increase in Lancashire as a whole. West Lancashire is also expected to experience an increasingly older population over the next 20 years, which will make it the third oldest local authority area in Lancashire (ONS, 2006). Whilst average house prices are high compared to the rest of Lancashire, they remain below the average for England and Wales. Crime in West Lancashire is also lower than the County average.

In the past two decades the challenges to the economic base of many UK towns and cities has underlined the importance of the night time leisure industry. The simple rationale is that safe and enjoyable spaces attract more people, who spend more money (Helms, 2008). Indeed during the period of this study, WLBC published a draft consultation strategy regarding the proposed future for Ormskirk town centre. The strategy highlights the importance of the night time economy as a ‘crucial element in the success of the town centre’, and whilst recognizing it as ‘currently strong’, explores the further potential for growth. This study examines the present position of the Ormskirk night time economy (ONTE).

POLICING THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY (NTE)

The proliferation within the UK of alcohol based night time economies has led to many areas voicing concerns about antisocial behavior and violence (Hobbs et al. 2005), with many areas placing it at the top of their community safety agenda (Hadfield & Measham, 2015). However the relationship between the NTE and antisocial behavior is not straightforward (Graham & Homel, 2008). As Brands et al. (2015: 442), observes.....‘What triggers fear differs not simply from person to person, but also between unfolding situations’ For example, commentators point out that females often experience more fear in the NTE, and that police presence can both reassure and concern - depending on the method of approach. Further, studies have also shown that antisocial behavior can be mediated by the quality of the environment (Marsh & Fox-Kibby, 1992); levels of intoxication (Homel et al. 1992); reduced anonymity (Levine et al. 2012) as well as the effective use of lighting and wider environmental design (Clarke, 1995). Indeed, Levine et al. (2012) also shows that in small and medium sized towns the familiarity of consumers assist in the reduction of violence. This is because many individuals know each other and influence behavior in a positive way. Studies show consumers often ‘watch out’ for their friends in an attempt to navigate them around potential problems, such as over intoxication, or possible flashpoints.

Although many districts across the UK invest considerable efforts to control and mitigate the negative effects of the NTE, research shows this is rarely to the satisfaction of those affected by it (Hadfield et al. 2009). The Licensing Act 2003 (LA2003), sets out four statutory objectives, notably: the prevention of crime and disorder, the prevention of public nuisance, the promotion of public safety, and the protection of children from harm. Attempts to achieve these objectives rely on multi-agency approaches, with public and private partnerships working together, to supplement the limited numbers of police available ((Hadfield & Measham, 2015; Hobbs et al. 2005). Indeed although the term ‘Policing’ is often synonymous with the local Constabulary, the concept has a much wider application. It has been defined as a “...process of preventing and detecting crime, and maintaining order. As such it is an activity that might be engaged in by any number of agencies or individuals” (Mawby, 2009:17). The table below provides a breakdown of all those who are involved in the policing of the Ormskirk night time economy (ONTE). These consist of agencies and individuals who set and implement policy. The table also shows the level of consultation the researchers had with these agencies and individuals

ORGANISATION	ROLE IN THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY	CONSULTATION
Lancashire Constabulary	Provide assistance (advice or attendance) following a request for service. Provide a dedicated post of Licensing Sergeant to: monitor / support licensed premises, advise on good practice and recommend further action against licensed premises.	Informal discussion with patrol officers whilst on research observations. Formal interview with Licensing Sergeant.
NHS	Provide assistance in relation to injuries sustained in the night time economy.	Informal discussion with paramedic.
West Lancashire Borough Council	Enforcement officers respond to specific problems regarding the management of licensed premises. Licensing Committee grants licenses, set conditions of use, and can remove license. WLBC also coordinate formal multi agency partnerships (Community Safety Partnership; and the Multi Agency Licensing Team meeting (MALT).	Formal interviews with: Commercial, Safety & Licensing Manager; Economic Regeneration Manager; Environmental Protection and Community Safety Manager; Enforcement officers; Chair of the Licensing Committee. Also attendance at MALT meeting.
Owners / mgrs. licensed premises	Adhere to their conditions of license and maintain well managed premises. Maintain effective communication with Police and Council; engage in good practice.	License holders were a specific respondent category in the online survey.
Door Staff	Deal with violent or intimidating incidents swiftly and appropriately. Communicate with other NTE agencies, via personal radio, to highlight potential problems. Take early intervention to reduce the threat of harm.	Informal discussions with numerous door staff at various licensed premises during observations.
Fast Food establishments	Deal with incidents appropriately and inform appropriate agencies (i.e. CCTV, Police). Maintain an efficient environment that minimizes confrontation.	Informal discussions with owner of one fast food outlet during observation period.
Transport (Train/bus/taxi)	The provision of a system that assists consumers leave the town centre in an orderly way, minimizing bad behavior and confrontation (i.e. effective queuing systems).	Observations of the transport system and discussions with users.
Ward Councillors	Act as voice for residents and businesses in the area.	Formal interview with Councillor (Derby ward)
Street Pastors	Maintain good communication with CCTV staff/ other agencies. Assist night time users within sphere of competency, which relates predominantly around safety.	Formal interview with coordinator. Informal discussions with 4 street pastors
Edge Hill University	Increase student awareness re safety and encourage good citizenship to assist integration with the local community.	Formal discussions with focus group comprising former Director Student Services; President Students Union; Head of Student Engagement.
Citizens who use the area	Conform to behavioural standards required to generate a safe environment. Communicate with official agencies to assist in policing of area.	Informal consultation with users of Ormskirk NTE; online survey; formal interview Residents Committee.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a complex subject and one in which many books and articles have been written. It is important to understand all recognized methodologies have strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative approaches allow straightforward collation and analysis of information and trends (O'Leary, 2004), and are less affected by researcher bias (O'Leary, 2004). However quantitative data, in the form of recorded police or CCTV data can not capture all incidents and may merely reflect the effectiveness of the agency in detecting a particular phenomena (Jupp, 1989). Whilst quantitative approaches show what is happening, qualitative approaches are more effective in answering why it is happening by focusing on the individual's subjective view of the world, to provide further understanding and meaning (Sarantakos, 2005). Unfortunately limitations also exist in qualitative approaches, with questionnaires showing variability in the veracity of respondents, ambiguity in both understanding and responses, and distortion through memory or bias (Mason, 2006; Maxfield, 2005). These problems are particularly exacerbated for online questionnaires. This is because a representative sample cannot be guaranteed due to an inherent bias towards internet competent respondents, coupled with the fact that participants are anonymous and multiple submissions are possible.

Problems with methodology can always be mitigated. For example face-to-face interviews by trained researchers, on a representative sample of the population, can generate more reliable results. Also accuracy could be improved by an extended period of observations over a longer time frame. However these improvements come at significant cost. Following discussions with WLBC a **multimethod, multiperspective study** was decided to be the most cost effective option within the resources available. In essence this uses a variety of methods to mitigate the limitations of specific quantitative or qualitative methods, producing a range of data, which can be loosely triangulated to ensure that multiple perspectives on any particular issue are captured as best as possible. The research was undertaken between November 2014 and March 2015, and appropriate ethical procedures followed, with all respondents remaining anonymous and providing informed consent before taking part. Six data sets were compiled:

1. Mobile foot observations between 7pm and 3am on a Wednesday and Saturday evening in Ormskirk's town centre and surrounding areas, during term time (November 2014). During these observations the researchers spoke with customers and those working in the ONTE (venue security staff, fast food restaurants, street pastors, police, ambulance).

2. Ten expert stakeholder interviews were conducted with those directly involved or affected by the ONTE (including the police, local Councillors, WLBC officers, Street Pastors, and representatives from the Residents Group and the local university).
3. A concise public-facing online electronic survey aimed at all Ormskirk's citizens. 192 people responded to the survey across a two week period following considerable publicity from WLBC and the local media. The ten questions produced demographic data, and respondents' opinions about positives and negatives of the ONTE. There was also a free Comment Box, filled in by over 100 people.
4. Time was spent in the CCTV suite viewing live footage and discussing issues with the CCTV operatives. Secondary data was also provided from CCTV operative records.
5. Secondary data was provided from call records to a previously established 'Residents Hotline'. Between October 2012 and December 2014 this line recorded 742 calls.
6. An internet search was made to identify any previously highlighted problems associated with the ONTE.

A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section will be divided into two parts. The first will examine findings from previously commissioned work on the topic. The second section will outline the four most prevalent issues emanating from the data.

Prior concerns

Prior to commencing the project the research searched for any previously highlighted problems regarding the ONTE. One example was found within the Community Safety Partnership plan (2012/13), relating to Edge Hill University freshers week. Whilst outlining concerns about student safety the plan also described problems emanating from a small proportion of the 1100 students residing on campus, as well as the significant numbers (estimated between 2000 – 3000) residing within the town, in predominately privately rented multi occupancy

accommodation. It states “The rising numbers of students creates various issues including a clash of lifestyles with the established residential community, noise, anti social behaviour and parking”. As such freshers week (the period in September when new students are welcomed to the University, prior to classes starting) was seen as a community safety priority. It aimed to “ensure the safe integration of students into West Lancashire and to reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour linked to the night time economy”. The plan was put into place relying on a variety of initiatives, supported by a wide range of both statutory and non statutory agencies, covering areas as diverse as enforcement, sexual health, crime prevention, fire safety, alcohol / substance misuse advice, and a good neighbour initiative. During September 2011 the initiative was evaluated by the CSP as very successful with very low numbers of reported incidents (ASB and alcohol related issues). The initiative also highlighted increased concerns in the following week, which was to be tackled in future initiatives.

Throughout this study Edge Hill University was a recurrent and prominent theme. Free text answers on the online survey often illustrated tensions between local residents and the University. Unsurprisingly as the residential population for West Lancashire has not increased significantly, many of the respondents perceive a direct association between the expansion of the University and the ONTE. In the interests of balance it useful at this stage to highlight some of the benefits the campus brings. Awarded the Times University of the Year 2015, the main campus is at the south east edge of Ormskirk, and covers 160 acres. The University is one of West Lancashire’s biggest employers, directly employing 1040 people on campus, 41% of whom live within the local authority area. The location has seen a significant growth of students. In 1985 there were only 2000 students attending courses on the campus and these have increased over time, especially since 2006 when the College became Edge Hill University. Applications have increased fourfold since 2000, with £100m invested during the past decade (Regeneris, 2011:1). The University currently has 10672 full time students and 6078 part time students (total 16750) (Edge Hill, 2015). A study undertaken for the University in 2011, argued it generated benefit in a number of different ways. The most obvious was business impact, delivered through the direct employment of people and purchase of goods and services. This injected an estimated £2.9m into the local economy, which rises to £27.3m in the North West (Regeneris, 2011:24). It was further estimated the students put approximately £26.6m into the West Lancashire economy, and £86m in the wider North West economy. In fact Regeneris estimated that Edge Hill University generates 1580 full time jobs (1 in every 23 FTE jobs and £1 every £23 Gross Value Added in West Lancashire). Further benefits included: Community and regeneration impact (such as providing theatre and sporting activities); improving the supply of skilled labour; and

providing knowledge transfer (where University expertise can be used locally to assist the private and public sector).

The current study

The data in this particular study highlighted four specific themes, which will now be explored.

Theme One: The Complexity of Balancing Positives and Negatives of Night-time Economies

It is clear that balancing the positives and negatives of the ONTE is difficult for those tasked with the health and wellbeing of all Ormskirk citizens. This was graphically illustrated in the online survey, which received 192 responses, evenly divided across gender (52% male, 48% female), and spread across ages: 18-24 (38%), 25-44 (25%), 45-64 (23%), and 65+ (14%). Here 46% of respondents believed the NTE had predominantly created benefits (explained as increased employment, business revenues and a better leisure experience), whilst 28% believed it had predominantly created problems, with the remaining 26% observing both benefits and problems. However whilst 25% felt the benefits created by the ONTE had increased over the past five years, 35% felt associated problems had increased. It was this changing environment that seemed to generate concerns from a significant proportion of respondents. Although one interviewee felt that the bars and restaurants had changed in format (rather than the actual number of licensed premises increasing), this view was not shared. Indeed two bars/ pubs had emerged in 2014/15, having been modified from a haberdashery shop and an amusement arcade. Many of the survey comments illustrated polarized opinion. For example one stated, "The economy in Ormskirk at night has destroyed the town I grew up in. Money over community. The business people don't care as long as they make money. Students have little regard for Ormskirk, surveys won't change a thing". However this view was opposed by others, an example being, "I love Ormskirk and think its missing out on greater economic benefits due to 'stuck in their ways' residents".

There was also evidence that indicated the night time economy generates employment, especially in entry level jobs. It was also felt to have maintained consumer spending in the town centre, and at the time of this study (November 2014) vacancy levels for ground floor units stood at 6.5%, compared to the North West average of 10.1%.

It should also be added that during the data gathering process the researchers found those individuals tasked with regulating the ONTE were knowledgeable, experienced and committed to the task.

Theme Two: Serious Crime, Violent Disorder and Illegal Drugs

Although such incidents can occur, the study found no evidence of serious crime and violent disorder occurring regularly in the ONTE. Stakeholder interviews, CCTV records, and discussions with ONTE staff and consumers supported this finding; indeed no arrests were made on the two nights of the town centre observations. Time spent with the CCTV operatives, coupled with mobile observations found some evidence of illegal drug and/or novel psychoactive substance consumption, although this was not a particular concern amongst citizens.

None of the Police officers, Council Officers or other stakeholders spoken to during this study highlighted violence as a significant or disproportionate problem in the town centre. Further, a representative from the University felt overall it was a relatively safe environment for students to enjoy. During the two nights of observation the researchers spoke to many revelers, door staff, police officers, street pastors, and a paramedic. Not one highlighted violence as a disproportionate problem. During these two nights of observation the researchers witnessed one minor violent incident, and the Police were observed to respond to one further incident (which wasn't witnessed). Both of these incidents were minor, were quickly resolved, and did not affect innocent bystanders. During the two nights of observation there were no arrests or crimes reported. The general consensus from those consulted with (whether formally or informally) was that the increased numbers entering the town centre, coupled with the availability of alcohol unfortunately led to some incidents of violence; however these were relatively rare and minor. During the period of this study one serious incident was brought to the attention of researchers. This involved police officers being called to the scene of a brawl involving 15 men, at 11:45pm on the 23rd December, outside licensed premises on Moor Street. Two men were taken to hospital; one suffering cuts to the head whilst the second suffered a bloodied and swollen face. Two men were later arrested, and at the time of this report the investigation was continuing. However incidences of violence at this level were extremely rare and it also showed how the wider policing process worked. The Police had already highlighted some concerns about the management of nearby licensed premises, and the incident brought this to a head. Following discussions between the Police and the owner, the premises were voluntarily closed and a new manager was found.

Useful evidence was also produced from the CCTV suite. Ormskirk town centre benefits from excellent CCTV coverage and during the two nights of observation the researchers used the premises as a base. The CCTV operators were found to be extremely motivated, and used the cameras proactively (i.e. continually searching hot-spots and monitoring potentially problematic incidents), communicating well with the police and other partners (door staff, street pastors). For example during one of the visits the researchers witnessed an operator identifying a heated discussion between a male and female. Whilst also monitoring the wider town centre the operator continued to track the movements of the pair until the female was seen to safely drive away with a friend.

The CCTV operators maintain limited records, which since January 2014 are kept in electronic form. The study was provided with access to three months data (between April and June 2014 - 91 days). The definition of the incidents can be interpreted quite widely and relate to the whole day, rather than just the night time. So, for example, the recording of an assault might relate to a lunchtime incident of domestic violence. In the period examined the cameras were specifically directed at 508 incidents, which amounted to 5.58 incidents a day. The following incident classifications were recorded: Assault (18), Burglary (7), Disturbance (43), Drink related incident (47), Drugs (14), MFH (32), Sexual offences (2), Theft (48), Vandalism (11), Warrants / wanted person (5), Traffic related incidents (49), Suspicious Activity (70) General observations (162). Closer analysis of these specific statistics indicated that a drink related incident appeared to be observed and recorded, by the CCTV operators, every other day.

Theme Three: Personal Safety

The perception of personal safety can be very subjective, mediated by individual characteristics, the environment and the context. The vast majority of ONTE online survey respondents (77%) stated the NTE as either "Safe" or "Very Safe", with female respondents more likely than males to indicate they felt "Unsafe" or 'Very unsafe'. Some concerns were voiced about disorderly conduct, threatening behaviour and sexual harassment, each of which can be experienced by male and female citizens. Personal safety concerns were highlighted both within the Ormskirk NTE environment and when returning home from a night out. This issue emerged in the interviews we undertook with the Street Pastors for example, who expressed concern about young intoxicated people unable to "find their way home".

Theme Four: Disorderly conduct and noise in residential areas

This theme generated the most interest and elicited the most emotional responses. Overall the most significant problem highlighted within the ONTE online survey was noise in residential areas (46%). Interestingly, whilst respondents who self-identified themselves as 'Students Living in Ormskirk' were more likely to look on the ONTE favourably than those who self-identified as 'Residents of Ormskirk', both groups placed 'Noise in Residential Areas' as their principal concern. To emphasise this point students were also affected negatively by noise in residential areas.

There were two elements connected with this concern. A smaller proportion of complaints referred to noise generated by young people in their accommodation (mainly relating to house parties). Indeed an example of this was seen during the mid week night time observations, where two parties were seen to be taking place (one had 21st birthday banners visible). During the evening the music was clearly audible on the street and individuals were also stood outside the buildings drinking, and at times shouting. The tension between students residing in the town and other residents was raised by a number of people in the study, and previous attempts had been made to improve this situation. Restrictions in relation to HMOs have been made in the town centre and the researchers were informed that the sleeping capacity on campus had increased to 1947, with further plans to increase it by a further 144.

The more common complaint related to people walking away from the town centre during the early hours of the morning. A local councilor concerned by the level of complaints arranged for a dedicated 'phone number allowing people to record their complaint. The Councilor kindly provided this information to the researchers, with personal information redacted, and as with all self reported information these figures should be treated with caution. 742 calls were made to the 'phone number between October 2012 and December 2014. The calls show a clear peak in September/ October and virtually stop in June, July and August, which coincide with the presence or absence of the students during the academic year. Further analysis showed that although recorded complaints were made from 19 roads, 91% of these calls came from 6 streets. These included St Helens Road (44%); Ruff Lane (12%); Knowsley Road (16%); Station Road (8%); Burscough Street (7%); Wigan Road (4%). The calls cover the period from 10pm – 4am, with the majority between 1am -3am. The main complaint referred to large groups of young pedestrians who disturbed residents through generating a high level of noise (often described as shrieking, shouting, chanting), as well as sometimes urinating in public places; engaging in vandalism (damage to gates, fences, cars and signage), and littering (smashed bottles, take away food packaging, vomit).

The researchers witnessed some examples of this behavior during the two nights of observation. For example on one of the nights a researcher was shown CCTV footage from the previous evening. The footage showed a group of about 14 young people walking along Burscough Street about 1.30am, singing and in general high spirits. Whilst walking a number of the group were banging on steel shutters protecting shop premises, whilst one took a running kick at a shop doorway. The group momentarily congregated outside a bar and whilst doing so a number of them pushed on a restaurant door, which was clearly closed for business. The door opened and two or three of them appearing to go in momentarily. The Police were called by the CCTV operator but were unable to respond immediately. The group then walked back through the town centre, and along St Helens Road where they could be observed singing, walking in middle of road and playfully jostling each other. The group were stopped by the Police and warned about their behavior. Later that night one of the researchers went to St Helens Road, where groups of young people were observed singing loudly and shouting, prior to entering the University grounds.

The level of litter caused by night time consumers was later confirmed by a council employee who stated that staff litter pick, inspect and empty the litter bins three times a week (Mon, Wed and Fri) out of term time which changes to every day (inclusive of Saturdays and Sundays) during term time. However whilst there were significant concerns about this behavior, there was also a consensus that some areas had improved over recent years. One example of this was the rear entrance (Ruff Lane) to the University, which was now closed at 8.30pm, leading to a significant reduction of complaints.

These problems appeared exacerbated by the difficulty people had with leaving the town centre. Trains and buses do not operate in the early hours of the morning, which meant those leaving the area often had to walk or rely on taxis. There are two main taxi ranks in the area but insufficient taxis to cope with the demand. The Police and CCTV operators viewed the taxi ranks as hot spots for potential problems. This is not unusual in town centres and a constant stream of taxis, together with an orderly queueing system, is required to avert confrontation. Although a taxi marshall had previously been employed in this role at the time of the study this position was vacant. The researchers observed queues forming at the main taxi rank (opposite the bus station) from 11pm.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Similar to many towns in the UK and Europe, WLBC has sought to increase the leisure facilities and prosperity of the area by developing the NTE. Although this study was limited in scope, it has been sufficient to highlight the main themes. It is not uncommon that an increase in night time venues, predominantly selling alcohol, creates emotive and polarized views. This is perhaps even more predictable in a town, such as Ormskirk, that has been built on a very traditional image.

During the period of the study WLBC published a draft strategy asking for views on how the ONTE could be improved (albeit acknowledging the care in which this should be done). It suggested that the ONTE could be improved through such things as improved lighting, art work, and events (WLBC TC draft strategy). Hadfield (2014) argues that the governance of the NTE is multi disciplinary and can be mediated by four modes: type 1: law, statute and urban design; type 2: police governance; type 3: the private governance of affect; and type 4: informal governance. The academic literature and media are full of initiatives that public, private and voluntary agencies have implemented and the researchers found many used in Ormskirk.

Whilst serious night time violence is relatively rare in Ormskirk there is a persistent problem of lower level behavior that disturbs local residents. Previous attempts have been made to tackle these issues, however they prove difficult to eradicate completely and appear to need renewed attention. Some participants we spoke to desired robust action, utilizing such powers as the Early Morning Restriction Order (EMRO). However whilst these and other powers are available the difficulties associated with their implementation should not be underestimated. Home Office guidance classifies such action as being of 'last resort' (Home Office, 2014). Further at the time of this study there were no EMROs in place and only four local authorities had adopted a Late Night Levy (LNL), applied to premises that sold alcohol between 00.01 and 6am (Hadfield, 2015). As such attempts to regulate the NTE need to show proportionality in their response.

This scoping study has shown that polarized views are present in relation to the night time economy. WLBC have set out some ideas in terms of how this experience can be improved, although they highlight this should not be at the expense of local residents, (WLBC, 2015: 30). However balancing the diverse needs of different groups affected by the night time economy will continue to be a significant challenge for WLBC and its partners.

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