



INFORMATION | July 2008

Social impact of public smoking ban

Smoking was banned in all enclosed “public” places, including every pub, club and bar, in England on July 1st, 2007. One year on, how has the ban affected people? Many smokers, it is true, have adapted to the ban, but that doesn’t mean it is popular or that smokers have accepted the ban. Many still feel enormous anger, resentment and frustration at the extent of the legislation. Here are some examples of the many comments that have been posted on blogs, message boards and websites in 2008:

A very bad dream

“I am 40 years old and run a transport business employing 60+ people. I used to enjoy going to pubs and was a regular bi-weekly visitor. I don’t bother any more. It just isn’t relaxing any more. In fact, it is quite the opposite. What a sad country we now live in thanks to the policies of the past few years. Me? I’m just marking time till I can sell my company and retire to somewhere sane like Spain. If all goes well, I’ll be out of here in the next five years and this will all just be a very bad dream.”

Martin Cullip, Taking Liberties blog, 24/06/08

Who needs the pub?

“I am a 37-year-old engineering consultant. Prior to the ban I was a regular pub goer and member of a local pub pool team. All of that has ended. I now visit the pub around once or twice a month at best. Prior to the ban I only ever drank alcohol in the pub. Now we buy in a couple of boxes every time we visit the supermarket and have even invested in a drinks cooler. With the summer months upon us we’ll be hosting a number of barbecues. Who needs the pub?”

RTS, Taking Liberties blog, 24/06/08

I feel unwelcome so I go out much less

“I’m 43 and perform in a semi-pro pub-duo, singing and playing Irish standards etc. As such, I am someone who is ‘protected’ by the smoking ban. Well, it’s certainly protecting me against earning a living from music and it has utterly RUINED the pub-going experience, not just in the winter but, for landlocked city pubs, at any time. No smoking inside, no drinking outside. Result: near-empty, atmosphere-free pubs. Personally, I feel pretty unwelcome in any public space, so I go out much less. I don’t travel by train any more. Booking hotel rooms has also become fraught, as I refuse to stay anywhere that won’t accommodate my preference.”

Adrian Brown, Taking Liberties blog, 24/06/08

No more coffee breaks – or bingo

"I am a housewife. I used to go into town for a coffee with friends once a week. I no longer do that since the ban was introduced. I used to play bingo once a week but I refuse to have to go outside to have a cigarette, so I don't go any more. I will only holiday in a place like Majorca that allows me to have a choice. I have always voted Labour but I will never vote Labour again in my lifetime."

Pat, Taking Liberties blog, 24/06/08

This ban has been devastating – we feel isolated

"The heavy-handed smoking ban merely confirms a view I have held for some time. We have become a miserabilist society with a vindictive and puritanical streak. Witness how the all embracing legislation has persecuted the elderly in care homes and the mentally ill in hospitals. Those who invoked this law, presumably on our behalf, may not care that they have destroyed many local meeting places, but they should hang their heads in shame at forcing wheel-chaired octogenarians and others to leave their home or club for a gentle puff of nicotine."

Grumpybutterfly, Taking Liberties blog, 23/06/08

This ban has been devastating – we feel isolated

"As a mental health sufferer this ban has been devastating. One of the most important things for people like me is getting out and not stagnating at home, however, with this vicious ban there is nowhere for us to go out to and relax. Ergo, we don't go! By not going out we are not meeting new people, who possibly have the same or similar problems and with whom discussion can be very beneficial to both sides. Effectively we feel isolated, have an increased feeling of unworthiness, and an even blacker outlook on the future. Cigarettes have been my lifeline for nearly 40 years and, if anything, I smoke more now than I did prior to the ban. However, I am determined not to line this government's pockets so I buy my cigarettes abroad where there is a more tolerant attitude to smokers and we are still treated as human beings."

Lyn Ladds, Taking Liberties blog, 23/06/2008

Little daily ritual ceased

"For years I used to frequent my local pub every afternoon, for a quiet pint, sitting smoking roll-ups, and gazing meditatively into space, occasionally engaging in conversation with anyone who cared to talk. It was a little daily ritual, a tranquil refuge in an otherwise busy day. It was a way of keeping in touch with village news and gossip. I was well known, and cheerily greeted by name. All that ended with the smoking ban. My little daily ritual ceased. And anyway I now felt that smokers like me were unwelcome. The 'No Smoking' signs plastered everywhere may as well have said 'No Smokers'. I lingered on outside in the pub's large garden through the autumn, until it got too cold, when I ceased to go at all. And through it all I felt a terrible rage that this was being done to me, and to millions of smokers all around the country."

Idlex, Taking Liberties blog, 22/06/2008

Labour has lost my vote

"I've been a Labour Party activist for more than 30 years. My party has lost the support of its core vote, as everyone knows, and the one issue which has caused more anger and feelings of betrayal amongst lifelong Labour voters than any other is the smoking ban - specifically, the breaking of the manifesto pledge to introduce a partial instead of total ban."

Mat Coward, Taking Liberties blog, 21/06/2008

Ban has hit the most vulnerable the hardest

"I am currently practicing as a mental health social worker. Before that I was a social scientist and a professional musician. The ban has hit the most vulnerable in society the hardest – those in rural areas with few pubs losing what venues they could socialise in: landlocked locals, estate pubs,

working men's clubs, bingo halls, shisha bars. All these venues supplied a crucial social and cultural function. They created and sustained communities where people from all backgrounds met and socialised. This is no longer the case. The ban is creating social exclusion, loneliness, unemployment etc. Many of these people are lifelong Labour supporters. Like me, many of these voters will not forget what Labour has done to their private lives."

Colm, Taking Liberties blog, 21/06/08

Old people forced out into the rain

"Is it really right that old people should be forced out into the rain and inclement wintry weather or mentally-ill patients denied the one thing that acts as a coping strategy? If passive smoking is really that bad (and any intelligent person knows that the claims of ill-health are a fairytale), they should have the courage to ban all tobacco products - period."

Bill C, Taking Liberties blog, 21/06/2008

Angry and depressed

"I feel devalued, discriminated against, depressed, angry, and rejected from society because I smoke. From patients in hospitals to airline travellers, life is barbaric. I no longer have much of a social life as going out is not much of a pleasure. I was a civilised smoker. I understood I was in a minority and I understood not smoking in many public areas. I don't understand being made to stand on the street in the cold and often rain – usually without my drink. I still feel bewildered that it is considered acceptable to treat a section of society in such a callous fashion."

Amanda, Taking Liberties blog, 21/06/08

Discriminating against the elderly

"I am 67 years old and have been allowed to smoke in a pub or club for nearly fifty years. Since retirement a pub and club has been the centre of my social life and now I only go to a pub once a week, just to stay in contact with friends. I feel that my social life has been taken away from me and feel that the smoking ban is discrimination against the elderly, because they have been stopped from doing something that they have legally been allowed to do for nearly all their lives."

Chas, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

Some people stand to lose everything

"I am 41 and a manager in a leading insolvency practice. I have seen at first hand the devastation caused by this ban due to the massive increase in clients who have earned their living in the hospitality business. It is not just pub owners. Singers, DJs, comedians, karaoke acts etc are all struggling, and their income is dropping dramatically. Many have said that they originally thought the ban would be a good idea, but now that they stand to lose everything, would be more than happy to perform in premises where smoking was allowed."

Michael Peoples, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

Outcast from "decent" society

"I'm a 52-year-old estate planning consultant. My anger at the introduction of the ban has not abated. If anything, it has increased. I'm angry at the injustice of it. I'm angry at the disproportionality of it. Now I hardly socialise at all because any event is marred by having to leave to smoke and being forced to smoke 'on display', like some superannuated hooker. I am one of the 'hard-working' law-abiding, so beloved of Gordon Brown when he's trying to sound voter-friendly, yet I feel like an outcast and enemy of 'decent society'."

Joyce Stewart, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

We go out less and we holiday abroad

"I am married to a lifelong never smoker. We have been out three times since the ban. (It used to be once or twice weekly.) We gave up our club membership after 25 years of being loyal to them. We go on more holidays (short haul flights only) but only to countries that are tolerant and are happy with 'smokers' money'."

Mandy, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

Finger of guilt

"You speak outside with the smokers and everybody is angry – very angry. You speak inside with the non-smokers, and they are angry – very angry. The ban has wreaked havoc amongst the hospitality industry, and the people I go out with know exactly who to blame. The finger of guilt is being pointed directly at this current government who are funding and encouraging the junk being spread about smokers and smoking."

Helen, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

I want my liberty back

"I'm just a typical citizen who feels completely sidelined by this selfish ban that has caused so much ill feeling between people that once socialised happily together ... I want my liberty back and my freedom to choose how to live my life."

Sue, Taking Liberties blog, 20/06/2008

Better when there were designated areas for smokers

"I hate having to run the gauntlet of workers, strewn across the pavement outside pubs, restaurants and offices, spewing clouds of smoke over you, and think that it was a whole lot better, and tidier, when there were designated areas for smokers."

Steve Court, Bournemouth Echo, 17/06/2008

Reduced to socially inferior, low-level, potential criminals

"One of the most common British social interactions was traditionally a pint and a cigarette and friendly chat/banter with the locals and your mates. The total smoking ban has all but destroyed all that typically British social interaction. We are reduced to oscillating in and out of our local between the front and back doors like some sort of misfit, socially inferior, low-level, potential criminals."

Malcolm Andrew McLeod, Lancashire Telegraph, 08/06/2008

Ashamed to be British

"When I see people who are addicted to smoking - a legal pastime - sitting in the cold and rain outside a working men's club or in a shed stuck in a pub car park, I feel ashamed to be British."

J H Brooks, Leicester Mercury, 27/05/2008

Give us back our community

"People should tell their MPs that THEY are destroying our communities. Pubs, clubs and post offices are all disappearing. Tell your MPs what effect the smoking ban is having on your community and tell them to give you back YOUR community."

Charles, Brighton & Hove Argus, 01/05/2008

Pubs and restaurants have lost my business

"The pubs, clubs and restaurants have already lost my business because, being a long-term smoker, I choose my right to smoke. Do you know what? I don't miss those places in any form. As a matter of fact, I've saved a fortune by not going out (and in the case of restaurants, home-cooked does taste better and I can even have a cigarette between courses)."

Alan Lightbown-Whalley, Lancashire Telegraph, 27/04/2008

New market for harder drugs?

"I have noticed some of the crowd that stands outside the clubs and bars where I live are smoking dope. Kids who would not be allowed into such places are standing with them. I wonder how long it will take for the dealers to take advantage of this new market and sell even harder drugs."

Marge, Taking Liberties blog, 10/03/2008

I refuse to holiday in the UK now

"Since the ban I haven't smoked one packet of UK cigs. Now I buy abroad for my use. I have also stopped going out as much. I refuse to holiday in the UK now and choose to go abroad, to countries where I can smoke in pubs and clubs also stock up on cheap smokes. The £25 a week I save against UK tax is now put to holidays abroad."

Mark, Taking Liberties blog, 09/03/2008

Mental health patients feel they are being punished

"Some mental health inpatients already feel that they are being punished because, for various reasons, they have been admitted to hospital either voluntarily or sectioned. If their cigarettes are taken off them as well they are going to feel victimised even more. A wee corner should be found somewhere for smoking patients to be able to have a puff."

Andrea Brown, BBC News 27/02/2008

Another unintended consequence of the smoking ban

"A number of commentators in this forum have remarked on how they now drink, and presumably smoke, at home now. Where these people have children, surely this makes matters worse and achieves the opposite of the intended outcome and indeed puts those most vulnerable at higher risk!"

Phil from Basingstoke, BBC News, 09/01/2008

It's difficult when we go out

"My husband is a smoker and we find it difficult when we go out for a meal or drink. It means leaving me alone at the table or both of us going outside. I'm not old fashioned but I feel odd sitting alone in a pub or restaurant. Many a time people have stared at me, you can imagine what they think."

Joyce Furber, BBC News, 09/01/2008

Our local is now almost empty

"The smoking ban has caused enormous social upheaval. My wife and I used to enjoy going to the local for a couple of beers to catch up with each other and friends with a cosy chat, and smoking was part of that. Our local is now mostly empty; it's like a ghost town. I wouldn't mind if that now smoking is banned all the non-smokers who have been campaigning, and others, were now filling the bars, but no. All this has done is remove yet another part of local community life."

Russ from Poole, BBC News, 09/01/2008