

05.09.2018

BBC Radio Guernsey

Duration: 24 minutes and 15 seconds

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

This is BBC Radio Guernsey asking you if it's time we banned smoking at all outdoor public communities. Apparently designated smoking areas at Guernsey's Harbour and Airport could be removed if the States change legislation to stop people puffing on government property. We've already heard from licensee of a pub Peter Lee and now we are joined on the line by Simon Clarke who's the director of Forest.

Simon a warm welcome to the show.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Hello Jenny.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

So what are your thoughts on smoking being banned on government property?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, I think it would be excessive and also rather hypocritical because governments benefit massively from the taxation from tobacco. I mean the taxation that's raised from tobacco far outweighs the cost of treating smoking related diseases for example. Now I understand the government, like hospitals, don't want to be seen to encourage people to smoke but I do think they have got to be a bit more pragmatic about this and stop treating smokers not just as second class citizens but really as third class citizens. Tobacco is a perfectly legal product. It is not an illegal drug. People are allowed to buy it and as I say the state benefits massively in terms of finance. We've already got a ban on smoking in all enclosed public places and when that was brought in it was brought in we were told to protect the health of bar workers. There was no mention at the time that some years later the smoking ban was going to be extended to outdoor public places as well and if we talk about smoking outdoors there's absolutely no threat to the health of any non-smoker so there really is no justifiable reason to ban it, whether on government property or any other outdoor public place.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Can you go through the evidence please that there is no risk to third parties from smoking in outdoor public places because many people have been subject to or have gone through cancer because of passive smoking and worst has happened to many others in some cases?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well it's like proving a negative. The fact of the matter is there is no research that has been carried out that says that smoking in the open-air poses any risk to any non-smoker. You would have to be in very close proximity to a smoker and be a very serious asthmatic for that to have any effect whatsoever and asthma is rather an interesting one because over the last 30, 40 years while smoking

rates have more than halved cases of asthma have actually tripled. So clearly there is something else going on there but in terms of cancer there is not a shred of evidence that exposure to somebody smoking outdoors is going to have any impact on you whatsoever. I don't want to go over old arguments but even passive smoking indoors, there's been a lot of research over many many years and even there the evidence of long-term harm is pretty insubstantial.

I do accept that smoking indoors can be unpleasant for a lot of people and I totally accept that smoking should be restricted in indoor public places. I would still argue very strongly that there should be indoor public smoking rooms in pubs. You were speaking to Peter Lee [a Guernsey publican]. I remember seeing Peter many years ago and I don't see there is any reason why we shouldn't have smoking rooms indoors. And of course this is one of the problems. Because smoking is now banned everywhere indoors it has forced people go outside and so you get people complaining [about] people hanging around outside pubs and clubs or somebody who wants to smoke outside the airport or outside the harbour and it does seem rather petty to ban smoking in designated smoking areas outside the harbour or even outside the airport. We know that flying for example can be quite stressful for a lot of people. I have only been to Guernsey airport once. Obviously it is quite a small airport so you are probably not there for hours on end that you might be at larger airports like Heathrow and so on, but to say you can't smoke even in the designated smoking area just takes the whole war on tobacco, I think it takes it too far. It's nothing to do with public health because if you smoke it's a private health matter, it's not a public health matter if you're smoking outdoors and I just think that politicians and anti-smoking campaigners need to get a grip. There are far more important things in life than banning people from smoking in the open-air.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Well, actually I must take issue with that because smoking is a public matter when it comes to the long-term health issues that smokers might have and taxpayers having to foot the bill for medical costs and things like that. So, indirectly .....

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Again I would disagree because I have said already that smokers make a huge contribution to government through tobacco taxation, money that far out ways the alleged cost of treating smoking related diseases and smoking to the smoker is a private health matter. With public health, as we all used to understand it, was things like eradicating tuberculosis and improving the water systems where everybody was potentially at risk, but if you're a smoker and you've grown up and you had all the education about smoking, you are smoking in full knowledge that there are serious health risks associated with smoking but it's your choice, it's your private choice and it is not a public health issue unless you're putting other people at risk and, as I said, particularly smoking in the open air, you're not putting anybody else at risk whatsoever.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

I'm going to go one step further. Don't shout at me or cross me off your Christmas card list Simon but in the early days of cola drinks they used to put cocaine in. You wouldn't dream of that nowadays. Has the time come now for the tobacco to be made illegal do you think?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well I think there are two things here, one is pragmatic and one is to do with the pleasure of smoking and in purely pragmatic terms we know that prohibition doesn't work. We all know what

happened in the United States in the 20's and 30's when they tried to ban alcohol. All that happens is you drive the product underground and the people who benefit financially are the criminal gangs and exactly the same thing would happen with tobacco. You wouldn't stub it out. People would continue to smoke. I mean we see [what's happening] where smoking is largely banned in prisons in England, for example, and what's happening is that prisoners are turning to illegal drugs such as spice, which I am told is cheaper than tobacco, but people will always get around prohibition and quite often you will move people on to products that are potentially even more dangerous, but what basically happens is that you lose control of the market. So you are never going to stub it out completely.

Also, there is a fundamental thing here which a lot of people think is almost taboo to talk about these days. Yes, there are people who wish to quit smoking, yes there are people who wish they had never started smoking, but there are still a considerable number of people who take great pleasure from smoking, they enjoy it. They know the health risks, they know that they are potentially putting their health at risk, particularly in the long term, but they get so much pleasure out of smoking that they are prepared to put that to one side and I think we have to respect people's choices and if people choose to smoke a legal product then I think they have every right to do that as long as they are considerate to those people around them, and I think you will find these days that smokers are increasingly considerate to people around them. They have to be because they know if they are not considerate to other people then we are going to get more and more people demanding a complete ban on smoking in public places.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Simon ....

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Most smokers for example wouldn't dream of smoking around small children. Most smokers these days don't even smoke in their own homes. They go out in the garden and if you're in the street it's really not that difficult to avoid a smoker who is puffing away quietly in the street.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

You stand accused Simon Clark of being the director of the smokers' rights group Forest. Do you smoke yourself?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

I don't, no. I had the odd cigarette when I was about 16 or 17 but I grew up in the seventies when a lot of my friends smoked. I never took up smoking but I feel very strongly about this not just because I think smokers are under so much attack. I think it's quite wrong and unfair. I think it's completely right that government educates people about the potential risks of smoking. The government clearly has a role to play but when it comes to forcing, coercing people to give up through a whole raft of means, whether it's a comprehensive smoking ban, whether it's punitive taxation, I think that's absolutely wrong. And what my real interest in this is, I do think governments these days want to interfere in people's lives in a way that they wouldn't have dreamt of doing 30 or 40 years ago and it's not just about smoking. It's now alcohol, it's now food and all the rest of it and in a civilised society we can't infantilise adults the way we are doing at the moment. People have to be allowed to make informed choices and if they choose to smoke that is a matter for them, it's not a matter for government.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

I am fascinated to know why you are director of Forest when you're a non-smoker.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, Forest has been going for almost 40 years and we have only had 4 directors in that time. And actually two of my predecessors were non-smokers as well and I think it comes back to this issue that we are basically against excessive regulation, we are against excessive intrusion in people's lives.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Nanny stateism?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Sorry?

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Nanny stateism.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Yes, I mean I am reluctant to use that term these days because it's been overused. I personally would use the term bully state because I think we've gone beyond nannyism. Nannyism is quite benign. It's trying to help people make the right choices but the point is in recent years, particularly with tobacco and smoking, we have had the bully state because it is no longer now nudging people to change their habits, it's about forcing them to quit smoking and I think often that's quite counterproductive because I think a lot of people don't like being told how to behave and what you're seeing increasingly now is some smokers reaching for their fags in defiance because we are now down to, if you like, the core smokers which is about 15 to 16 per cent of the population, and I think it's going to be very difficult without bringing in very authoritarian practices to actually push the smoking rates down into single figures because there are, as I said before, a considerable number of people who smoke because they enjoy it. They may admit that they're addicted to it [but] we've done research which shows that of what we call confirmed smokers over half will say, yes I'm addicted to smoking but I don't care because the pleasure outweighs the thought that they are addicted, and I say we have to respect people who choose to consume a legal product. If you want to go down the line of banning the product like alcohol in United States, well that's a different matter, but as I say that won't work. You will simply drive it underground and people will continue to smoke.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

We have heard from Andre. He says great and valid point about income derived from smoking. He says I'm no advocate to smoking cannabis yet there are no name deaths from this yet the government could be accused of affectively sponsoring death or disease by permitting smoking on Island.

A few thoughts running through there but you can get the gist of many of my listeners thinking that there might be a bit of hypocrisy going on which you have already alluded to. There's also the perception of smoking which I find fascinating. You imagine Fag Ash Lil, for want of a better clichéd. In fact we had a wonderful story yesterday from Cynthia Cormack who talked about meeting Picasso in London in those days and her friend was Elizabeth Davey, the well-known chef who was cooking that night for Picasso and she smoked like a trouper. She had some fag ash dangling off the end of her cigarette when she was making béchamel sauce. You guessed it, it fell in, they mixed it with béchamel sauce and served it to Picasso anyway.

So, imagine Fag Ash Lil, that's one image and then you've got the cigar smokers and the pipe smokers in London clubs. Very posh people. There is a huge divide between the two and yet the cigars and pipes seem more acceptable than cigarettes. Do you see where I am going with this?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Yes. I am not going to make any health claims one way or the other but I think a lot of people perceive cigar smoking to be less harmful than cigarette smoking because generally speaking if you smoke a cigar you are not drawing the smoke into your lungs and also because cigars are expensive. I don't know anybody who's ever smoked 30 or 40 cigars a day. So it's on a different level, a different scale if you like, but clearly there are still serious health risks associated with whether it's cigar smoking, pipe smoking or cigarette smoking. The thing is there is a lot of snobbery I have to say around smoking. We get it all the time from cigar smokers. We defend people's right to smoke cigars, smoke pipes, smoke cigarettes, we defend people's right to vape, if that's what they want to do. It all comes down to choice but there is a huge amount of snobbery around smoking and you often find that cigar smokers will distance themselves from cigarette smokers and say 'Oh no we are a cut above them', but I do think there is a lot of middle class snobbery here. We know that generally speaking cigarette smokers tend to come from the C and D socio-economic categories. And [the] majority of middle-class people have given up smoking and it tends to be people from perhaps poorer backgrounds who continue smoking. They are the majority of smokers these days. I think there is a huge amount of middle class snobbery that looks down their noses at people who smoke and I think it is quite outrageous actually.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Another thing I find curious is that vaping is banned in aircraft and in some outdoor places. What do you make of that?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, there is absolutely no call for it. I mean I do understand why vaping might be banned on airlines. I think the problem with vaping, and what people have to understand, is that there are two different types of vaping. A lot of people can what they call stealth vape. You wouldn't even be aware of it. You might be very close to them but you would have no idea because they are just gently puffing away on a vape pen or something but the pictures we see in the media tend to show people vaping these huge clouds of vapour. Now that is not the norm. Very few vapers do that and if they do that in public places with a lot of people around them, frankly they are idiots and they are causing vaping to be banned in public places. In pure health terms there is absolutely no reason to ban vaping in public places whatsoever. In fact if you're in the public health lobby or in government you would be absolutely mad to support a ban on vaping in public places because clearly at the moment vaping has been quite successful, it has been quite popular in the last few years. Smokers are switching to vaping. At the moment in the UK as a whole about there about 3 million vapers,

about half of those are what we call dual users. So they are both vaping and smoking and but half have given up smoking completely. The evidence at the moment suggests that vaping is massively less harmful, potentially less harmful, than smoking. So if you are in public health or government you really want to encourage people to switch from smoking to vaping. There's absolutely no need, I mean it's just ludicrous, to ban vaping in public places. If anything government should be encouraging smokers to switch and to vape instead.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

I don't know the answer to this so I'm wondering if a dear listener could phone in please. Is it illegal or is it discouraged to vape on government properties? So, I am thinking in fact the Political Commentator from the Guernsey Press Horris has just posted a picture he has just done on Twitter or provided on Twitter, people outside the hospitals with drips and smoking outside the building and I'm just wondering to stop that sort of thing if people were tipped to be encouraged to vape in hospitals it would be a good idea, some would argue. However I don't know is it, are you told you can't vape in hospital buildings, in the ports and I know you couldn't vape in the airport, could you let me know someone please listening in today at 0808100993? Perhaps recently you have been in hospital and you can let me know because you're right it, a lot of mixed messages coming through to us which we as the public find very difficult to decipher.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, vaping is an interesting one because in England there has been talk of vaping even being allowed in hospital wards. I can't see that ever happening myself because I think that there will be other people who will object to it but certainly there is absolutely no reason to ban vaping on hospital grounds. But actually hospital grounds is a very interesting one because you might think that [there is] no justifiable reason to allow people to smoke on hospital grounds but I think it's interesting that the tobacco control lobby has become so intemperate and they are actually quite cruel that they will try and stop people smoking on hospital grounds, and again I understand the hospitals don't want to be seen to encourage it but the reality is that people get comfort from smoking and if you are in hospital, particularly if you are elderly, you have gone to in the hospital for a completely non-smoking related reason, you might be having a hip replacement for example, you might be in hospital for 6, 7, 8 weeks. If you're told you can't go out and have a smoke then I think that's actually quite cruel. We've seen situations where hospitals ban smoking on hospital grounds and elderly people, people who might be attached to a drip, [are] wheeled off-site perhaps a quarter of a mile away where they sit or stand on a busy main road with all these diesel buses and cars going past them. I mean this is absolutely inhumane. So while I understand why hospitals don't want to be seen to encourage smoking I think it's a question again of being pragmatic and actually, you know, showing a bit of humanity to people who are in a stressful situation.

We even had examples of where staff, because there are still members of staff who work in the NHS who smoke, and they are being threatened with disciplinary action, a) if they're caught smoking in their uniform even though they might be off the premises, or b) if they had the temerity to help a patient who wants to smoke, if they have the temerity to help a patient off site so they can light up, they are being threatened with disciplinary action. Those people might have worked for the NHS for 20, 30 years looking after people, caring for people, and they have been threatened with disciplinary action and potentially the sack for doing that and I think that's utterly outrageous.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Well, I think before we are quick to criticise we must talk about humanity being shown in certain areas by the State of Guernsey representatives. We invited Colin Ray, the General Manager of Guernsey Ports. He works for the States Simon, just to fill you in and we invited Colin to speak to us as part of this discussion but he declined instead he sent us the following statement. What do you make of this Simon? You are ready?

Statement:

“We're aware that users of both ports, (that's the airport and the harbour) are faced with delays from time to time and for many people travelling can be a little stressful. Recognising that limited smoking is permitted in open areas at a number of UK ports already, we are seeking a number of exemptions from the ban on smoking at States sites. The approval process for these exemptions is underway and it would be premature for us to predict the outcome. Once the process is complete then we will advise the public if or where limited smoking within the ports would still be permitted once the ban is introduced early next year.”

What do you make of that?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, that sounds utterly reasonable I have to say. They are looking for exemptions and if they are allowed designated smoking areas then good on them. I think that's a reasonable approach and I think it's pragmatic approach and will be welcomed, should be welcomed, by I think most people.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Well, thank you for that.

'H' has tweeted to say vaping is allowed in Guernsey's prison.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Indeed. I know that in England the Prison Officers Association is actively trying to encourage smokers to switch from cigarettes to vaping. So I imagine more prisons will try and do that.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

And just before we say farewell to you, it's been fascinating talking to you. Thank you ever so much.

What about other jurisdictions who are getting it right, who are getting it right as far as our health is concerned, not too much bully bully statism going on as you put it, your phrase not mine and actually getting the balance just right, compromise? You know other jurisdictions that we could learn from?

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Well, in Europe sadly certainly the UK and Ireland are leading the way in cracking down not just on smoking but on other issues like alcohol as well. I think Germany is actually quite a good example of a nation, possibly for historical reasons, that does not want to appear to be too oppressive in it's a lifestyle regulations, and in Germany of course they actually have in airports you will find smoking lounges where you can go in, they are well ventilated, they are not smoky because they've got the latest state of the art ventilation and that seems to be a very good compromise. It accepts the fact

that there are people who choose to smoke and who will always find somewhere where they can. So if you ban smoking completely a smoker, particularly somebody who really is desperate for a smoke, will always find somewhere where they can smoke. So if you provide a smoking lounge that seems to me a reasonable compromise.

Also in Germany, not in every state but in some states, and Berlin for example, you'll still find some bars where you're allowed to smoke and again that seems to me a reasonable compromise. We are not asking for people to be able to light up whenever or wherever they want. Those days are gone and we wouldn't expect a return to that, but we don't see why you should not be allowed to have smoking rooms in bars if the owner decided that it was a good thing for his business. What you will actually find is that very few bars and restaurants would allow smoking but at least there will be some element of choice. At the moment I think Germany is quite a good example of a country that gets the balance right.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

Simon, thank you very much indeed for talking to us and keep in touch if there's any, if there are any, developments from the UK mainland that we should be aware of.

**Simon Clark: Director, Forest**

Thanks for having me on.

**Jenny Kendall-Tobias: Presenter, BBC Radio Guernsey**

That's a pleasure.

Simon Clark there, the incredibly informative Director of Forest. That's the organisation that actually, I wouldn't say champions smoking, but he is Director of the Smokers' Rights Group, that's probably the best way of putting it.

This is BBC Radio Guernsey. Well, we will put that question to bed for the moment. If you would like to add your two pennies worth feel free on Facebook or you can give us a call if you've got any strong views that you would like to air perhaps later on in the week, if you're free.

- ENDS -