



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Licensing Bill.
Return to committee.socialdevelopment@niassembly.gov.uk by Thursday 31 December.

Name: Clare Delargy

Organisation Ravenhill Steering Group

Date: Jan 18 2016

1. Thank you for inviting us here today. We are grateful to have this opportunity to address you on the issue of the Licensing Bill. Our comments reflect the views of the newly formed Ravenhill Steering Group made up of residents who have concerns about the impact of the Stadium on the local neighbourhood. While I don't want to be too distracted by comments made by others about our initiative, in the course of my presentation I want to address some remarks made by Judith Cochrane to the Committee on January 7.
2. As residents of the Ravenhill area, our chief concern is over the Kingspan Stadium but I believe our suggestions would offer protection to residents living around the other stadia affected by the Licensing Bill, namely Windsor Park and Casement Park.

3. As I understand it the Licensing Bill, if passed, would allow Ulster Rugby to apply for a full licence instead of relying on a separate company to seek occasional licences on its behalf. If a full licence were granted, again as I understand it, Ulster Rugby would not automatically have the right to sell alcohol between 11 pm and 1 am but would rather be eligible to apply for the right to sell drink during those hours.
4. While I understand that the occasional licences, which the Kingspan Stadium currently uses, already allow for the sale of drink up until 1 am and that this bill would not extend those hours, we want to see new restrictions added to the Bill. That's because the current situation regarding the sale of drink, in our view, is unsatisfactory and the Bill in its present form would only perpetuate existing problems.
5. The vast majority of Kingspan fans are well behaved but a number fuelled by drink engage in anti-social behaviour. Purely by accident, members of my household have witnessed two separate occasions on match days during which a total of five individuals have urinated either on the street or in neighbours' property. These incidents were notified to the PSNI at the time and they have kept a record of them. I make that point because Judith Cochrane indicated to you that while claims have been made that on a couple of occasions people had urinated in gardens, the police had no record of these incidents. I don't know what events Judith is talking about but it is the case the PSNI have received and recorded reports about at least two urination incidents in relation to the Kingspan Stadium. In their presentation last week Ulster Rugby also suggested there was scant evidence of fans urinating outside the Stadium. But the fact is these incidents do occur even if most of them are not reported
- 6/ We have also seen evidence which is strongly suggestive of some fans being able to carry drink in plastic glasses out of the ground. I have submitted photos of glasses, embossed with the name of drink brands, lying outside the Kingspan. Judith Cochrane herself appears to acknowledge that one or two fans may deposit glasses in residents' gardens. But she appears to miss the full significance of this. It is not just about litter. This practice is also indicative of drink being taken out of the stadium. Put it like this. Why would fans carry empty glasses out of the ground? Is it not more likely they drain their glasses on the street and then toss them into gardens?
7. Given the behaviour described above, our group believes there is a case for curbing the hours during which alcohol can be

bought. In our view there should be no sale of drink beyond 10 pm. This would still allow fans to have a quick celebratory glass before going home and allowing the area to return to normal. If they want to drink on, well there are bars only too anxious to welcome them.

8. In relation to the issue of extended hours, as I understand it, they could only be sought in regard to functions held in a specified section of each stadium. These events might only involve up to a couple of hundred guests. That might have just a limited impact on residents. But what are these events? Conferences? Weddings? And whatever they are what has any of it got to do with sport? I thought the aim of this bill was facilitating the enjoyment of rugby or football or GAA games.
9. While it may be beyond the scope of the Bill, our group recommends there should be tighter controls to prevent anyone leaving the ground carrying drink. There should also be patrols along those streets which fan out from the ground to ensure there is no anti social behaviour of the type I have described.
10. In our view all three stadia should each set up a body on the lines of the Aviva Stadium Community Committee at Lansdowne Road in Dublin on which sit two local councillors and one local resident.
11. Finally one last point about Judith Cochrane's presentation to you on the seventh of January. I was disappointed that Judith did not fully explain how we had engaged with her. She was in fact consulted about a key circular before it was issued to residents in the run-up to the New Year. As a result of her response two significant changes were made to the document. You can judge for yourselves but I would argue that this approach demonstrates how we have pursued our case in a mature and reasonable way. I attach the circular in question.

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Ravenhill Steering Group

Some of you may be aware of a plan by an Alliance MLA to reform the licensing arrangements for the three major stadia here: Kingspan, Windsor Park and Casement Park. Naturally, as local residents, our main interest will be focused on Kingspan which arguably has most to gain from the proposed changes.

Currently when Ulster Rugby wants to sell drink at a game or other event at Ravenhill, it has to get someone else, typically it's a catering company, to apply for what's known as an occasional licence. That's because an outdoor stadium, unlike an indoor venue such as the SSE Arena, is not eligible to apply for its own full licence. While Ulster Rugby has never been denied an occasional licence, a change in arrangements would allow it to sort out some issues including the vexed question of selling drink in the presence of children after nine pm.

The Alliance representative behind the initiative, Judith Cochrane, is bringing about reform through the introduction of a Private Members Bill at Stormont. If passed, the Licensing Bill would enable Kingspan and the other two stadia to apply for their own full licences. Some progress has been made with the Bill having already received its second reading at the Assembly.

On the face of it, the proposed change in legislation seems largely technical, which is maybe why it has not attracted much attention. Even if Ulster Rugby were to secure a full licence, it could only sell drink, as in the case now, at sporting and other occasions. There would be no scope for instance for a seven days a week pub style operation.

If the residents were all happy with the current arrangements there might not be too much to get bothered about. But the consumption of alcohol by hundreds if not thousands of fans late into the evening has consequences in a residential area. There have been some instances of inappropriate drink-related behaviour. The full extent is hard to assess but residents may feel it is sufficient to warrant curbs on the sale of alcohol at the ground. And this is the key point. The passage of the Licensing Bill through Stormont offers you a chance to influence what happens in your neighbourhood.

Residents might for instance seek to impose a clause in the Bill which would effectively outlaw the sale of drink at the Kingspan or other two stadia after say 10.30. Residents might also seek better controls to ensure no one ever leaves the rugby ground carrying drink. On a broader front, we might urge that the residents of Ravenhill have a representative sitting on a Stadium monitoring committee as happens at the Aviva in Dublin.

The practicalities are that the Social Development Committee at Stormont says any written submissions residents or others might want to present regarding the Licensing Bill must be with them by 12 pm on Monday January 4. On the basis of the evidence submitted, which must relate specifically to the content of the bill, the Committee may call witnesses to present their testimony orally. The Social Development Committee website has a guide on how to submit evidence. You may also wish to copy your thoughts directly to Judith Cochrane. She says she is happy to receive comments at judith.cochrane@mla.niassembly.gov.uk

Can you afford to do nothing on the assumption that concerns have already been voiced by others? Perhaps not. As it stands, the 276 responses from Judith Cochrane's own consultation indicate a 95% approval for her Licensing Bill. Any MLA, on seeing that, might conclude that few residents have worries about the existing or proposed licensing arrangements at Ravenhill and vote accordingly.

A new residents' body is being set up to take these issues forward. If you would like to offer support or just to be informed, contact the Ravenhill Steering Group by email: ravenhillsg@btopenworld.com

Thank you for your time and consideration