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Leigh's Night-Time Economy: Current Situation and Opportunities

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Leigh Means Business, in partnership with the University of Salford, commissioned a study of the night-time economy in the town of Leigh. This dissertation was completed by Oluwaseun Aderoju in 2023 during a 3 month internship as part of a Masters Degree course.

Leigh Means Business posed the initial question and facilitated discussions with stakeholders and businesses. The study was planned and carried out independently by Oluwaseun with the assistance of the university.

We have shared this study with the hope that it can be used to highlight not just the problems faced by the town, but also the tangible actions that can be taken to resolve them and create a reinvigorated night-time economy that generates further investment.



Executive Summary

- The scale and value of Leigh's night-time economy has declined - over time and in relation to neighbouring towns - with reduced footfall and fewer visitors to the town in the evening hours.
- Several factors contribute to this decline, including a lack of variety in the offering of evening activities, negative perceptions regarding safety, and a lack of investment in the town's infrastructure and public spaces.
- A comprehensive integrated approach is required to address the multi-dimensional challenges facing Leigh's night-time economy.
- Improving Leigh's night-time economy is crucial for the overall economic development and revitalization of the town.
- Improving Leigh's night-time economy will necessarily involve the collaboration of key stakeholders including local authorities, businesses, community groups and nearby residents.
- Among the priority actions needed to improve Leigh's night-time economy include:
 1. Engaging with all stakeholders to create a shared vision for the future of Leigh's night-time economy.
 2. Encouraging, planning, and developing a diverse range of permanent evening activities and regular events to attract visitors and increase footfall
 3. Improving the town's infrastructure, including lighting, signage, and amenity of existing public spaces
 4. Visibly addressing safety concerns to create a welcoming environment that is also secure for visitors
 5. Based on evidence of previous actions, to encourage wider inward investment in the town centre to provide a range of food, drink, and entertainment options



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What is the Night-Time Economy

- The night-time economy is a major industry in the UK, accounting for 6% of total yearly revenues.
- The night-time economy refers to the commercial, recreational, cultural and social activities and experiences that occur after 6 p.m.
- The importance of the night-time economy is growing due to increasingly dense urbanization, small residential accommodation, the rise in homeworking as well as working from home and the shift away from traditional 9-5 working patterns.
- The night-time economy provides significant economic benefits, including job creation and new wealth generation.
- The night-time economy provides social and cultural benefits including the promotion of face-to-face social connection, introducing new experiences, and opportunities for cultural and artistic interactions.
- Place-making and urban renewal are wider benefits that can be introduced by a re-activated night-time economy, with initiatives such as installing gateway signs, innovative and aspirational lighting fixtures, and the rebranding of communities make them more appealing to existing and prospective residents and tourists.



Madrid Street at Night: Image by Francisco Leão from Pixabay



Key Stakeholders

An integrated approach to re-invigorating Leigh's night-time economy require recognition of the key stakeholders (and an identification of what benefits this change might bring to them).

- **Local authorities:** The local authorities (Town council, Borough council as well as the local MP) and relevant agencies all play a crucial role in supporting the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at improving the night-time economy.
- **Businesses and venue owners:** Businesses and venue owners (including the owners of prospective venues and the prospective owners of Leigh-based properties) will need to make investment to improve the quality and safety of their establishments and play a role in how they promote Leigh's night-time offerings to potential customers (unified and consistent messaging that supports an overall agreed vision).
- **Community groups and residents:** The views and opinions of local residents and community groups should be taken into account when developing initiatives aimed at improving the night-time economy, as they are likely to have a significant impact on the area.
- **Law enforcement:** The police and other law enforcement agencies help to maintain public safety in the area, and their work with local authorities and businesses to address any issues related to crime or antisocial behaviour is essential.
- **Transportation providers:** Providers of transportation services, such as taxi and ride-sharing companies, can play a role in improving access to Leigh's night-time offerings and ensuring that people can get home safely.
- **Marketing and promotion agencies:** Marketing and promotion agencies can help to raise awareness of Leigh's night-time offerings, and they can also play a role in attracting new visitors and businesses to the area.
- **Cultural and entertainment organisations:** Cultural and entertainment organisations - within Leigh and beyond - can help to provide a diverse range of night-time offerings in Leigh, and they can also work with other stakeholders to create a vibrant and appealing night-time atmosphere.



Evidence of other towns

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from Manchester, Luton, Stockport, and Altrincham.

In **Luton**, the local council has taken steps to revitalize the town centre and improve the night-time economy. This includes *the creation of a new cultural quarter*, which provides a venue for events and performances, and the development of new retail and leisure spaces, including bars and clubs.

In **Altrincham**, the local council has made efforts to improve the night-time economy by *supporting the growth of independent businesses*, such as bars and restaurants. This has been achieved by providing grants and other forms of support to help these businesses thrive, and by encouraging a vibrant and diverse cultural scene in the town.

In **Manchester**, the local council has taken a proactive approach to improving the night-time economy, with a focus on creating a safe and enjoyable environment for visitors. This has included initiatives such as *increased street lighting and increased police presence*.

In **Stockport**, the local council has taken steps to improve the night-time economy by supporting the growth of independent businesses, such as bars, restaurants, and music venues. This has been achieved through initiatives such as the *Stockport Business Improvement District (BID)*, which provides support to local businesses, and the creation of new cultural and entertainment spaces.

A range of actions can be incorporated into an integrated plan for Leigh's night-time economy.

- Diversification of the night-time economy offerings: a wider range of entertainment options, such as live music, cultural events, and entertainment venues, will attract a wider range of visitors.
 - Immersive experiences: Offering a range of immersive experiences, such as virtual reality games, interactive art installations, or themed events creates a unique and memorable experience for visitors.
 - Night-time pop-up food markets: Food markets that are open late into the night can be a popular destination for foodies and nightlife enthusiasts alike. These could feature local street food vendors and pop-up restaurants, as well as live music and entertainment (Manchester Oxford Rd's Hatch).
 - Night-time cultural events: Leigh could host a range of cultural events in the evening, such as music concerts or film screenings in unusual or unused locations. This can provide a way for visitors to engage with the town and enhances the reputation as a cultural destination (Manchester Oxford Rd's Canvas).
 - Outdoor and open-air venues: Outdoor venues, such as street concerts or open-air cinemas, offers unique and enjoyable experience for visitors.



- Night-time tours: Offer guided tours of the town that mixes visits to popular bars and independent outlets with historical landmarks (or ghost story trails).
- Night-time pop-up sports events: drawing on Leigh sporting tradition to host more unusual sports events that can attract a different demographic of visitors and enhance the existing reputation as a sports destination.
- Art Installations and Murals: eye-catching public art installations or murals that are only partially visible during the day can promote the local night-time economy, while also bringing aesthetic benefits to the area.
- Mobile Apps and Gaming: mobile apps or games can encourage people to explore and engage with the night-time economy, such as scavenger hunts or location-based challenges (e.g. Skipton's DogsDales - dogsdales.com).
- Interactive Light Shows: interactive light shows that transform public spaces into immersive experiences.
- Promotion of the night-time economy: promoting the night-time economy through a variety of channels such as social media, locally based (and not so local) social media influencers, local media, and local events to raise awareness and attract new visitors.
- Partnership building: encouraging partnerships between local businesses, organisations and community groups to collaborate, promote and diversify the night-time economy and organise new events.
- Improving public safety: implementing measures that improve public safety, such as increased street lighting, to create a safer and more welcoming environment for visitors. The goal is to design out the possibility for anti-social behaviours within the town's centre.
- Encouraging sustainable transport options: encouraging the use of sustainable transport options, such as public transport, to reduce the impact and risks of car use while also making the town centre safer for night-time pedestrians.
- Supporting local businesses: supporting local businesses, such as independent venues and restaurants, through joint or shared promotions that encourage visitors to engage in a variety of activities at multiple venues and support return visits.
- Encouraging responsible consumption: Leigh could consider implementing initiatives to encourage responsible drinking, such as providing water stations and promoting drink-driving awareness, to reduce alcohol-related harm and create a safer environment for all.



*Trader's Tiki Bar – Goose Green,
Altrincham*



Evidence of benefits from other towns

- **Economic growth:** A thriving night-time economy can lead to increased revenue for local businesses and contribute to the overall economic growth of the town.
- **Job creation:** Improved night-time offerings can lead to the creation of new jobs in the hospitality and entertainment sectors, helping to boost employment.
- **Attracting visitors:** A vibrant night-life can help to attract more visitors to the town, increasing tourism and boosting the local economy.
- **Increased safety:** With a higher presence of people and increased footfall in the town centre, there is often a greater ability to maintain public safety, which can help to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- **Community development:** A thriving night-time economy can bring people together, foster a sense of community, create new partnerships, and contribute to the overall liveability of the town.
- **Increased property values:** The improved offerings in the night-time economy can make the town more attractive to potential residents and investors, helping to drive up property values.
- **Overall,** a successful and improved night-time economy can play a key role in the revitalization and development of a town, making it a more attractive and enjoyable place to live, work and visit.



The Value of Purple Flag Accreditation

The Purple Flag scheme is an accreditation program from the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) that recognizes towns and cities with a vibrant and well-managed night-time economy. The benefits of being a Purple Flag town include:

- **Improved safety:** Achieving Purple Flag status demonstrates a commitment to providing a safe and secure environment for both residents and visitors. This can help to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour and make the night-time economy more attractive to potential customers.
- **Enhanced reputation:** Being a Purple Flag town can help to improve the reputation of the area, attracting more visitors and helping to boost the local economy. This is particularly important for towns that rely heavily on the night-time economy.
- **Increased investment:** Achieving Purple Flag status can increase investment in the area, as businesses and organizations see the benefits of operating in a well-managed and well-regarded town.
- **Improved coordination and collaboration:** The Purple Flag scheme encourages collaboration between local businesses, organizations, and local authorities, which can lead to improved coordination and better use of resources.
- **Benchmarking and continuous improvement:** The Purple Flag scheme provides a benchmark against which towns can measure their performance and identify areas for improvement. This can help to drive continuous improvement in the night-time economy and ensure that it remains vibrant and well-managed.





Risks and Mitigations

- **Safety concerns:** Ensuring the safety of visitors and residents is of utmost importance. As part of an integrated action plan local authorities must commit to implement measures to address safety concerns, such as increased policing and better lighting.
- **Competition from nearby towns:** Leigh faces competition from nearby towns that currently offer a vibrant nightlife option. This presence will stifle some initial investment. A planned and consciously distinctive offer that targets different demographics will counter some of this initial resistance.
- **Economic downturns:** Economic downturns lead to a reduction in spending by consumers, that negatively impacts the night-time economy. Value for money coupled with genuine and different experiences must form a core of the planned offer.
- **Lack of investment:** There is a risk that insufficient investment in the development of Leigh's night-time economy could limit its growth and potential. The development of a detailed action plan with SMART objectives that evidences committed support from all stakeholders helps to mitigate this risk. The endorsement of prominent Leythers would further support the case.
- **Resistance from local residents:** Some local residents may object to the development of a night-time economy, due to concerns about noise, crime, and other potential impacts on their quality of life. Clear short- and long-term benefits for local residents must be defined early in the process of change.
- **Changes in consumer behavior:** Changes in consumer behavior, such as a shift towards online activities, could negatively impact the night-time economy. The shift to online activities in other aspects of life (work, shopping) can also become an opportunity to promote other reasons to get out of the house or flat.
- **Regulatory challenges:** There may be regulatory challenges that arise in the development of Leigh's night-time economy, such as obtaining the necessary licenses and permits, and complying with health and safety regulations. Clear and simple regulatory processes must be made clear to potential investors and operators in the night-time economy.



Key Recommendations

1. The creation of a well-defined integrated plan with a clear vision for Leigh's night-time economy that is developed with the involvement of key stakeholders.
2. Encouragement and support for the diversification of night-time products and services, including dining, art, games, shopping, and entertainment.
3. Encouragement (and incentives) for investment in Leigh's night-time economy.
4. A favourable legal and regulatory framework, as well as public infrastructure for the night economy that address safety and aesthetic concerns
5. Extension of public transportation services at night.
6. Control and minimisation of negative impacts such as anti-social conduct and crime through proactive measures.
7. Partnership based approach to the planning and delivery of a night-time economy experience



Available Actions

1. Increase safety and security measures: This includes improving street lighting, increasing police presence, and providing better facilities for taxi and other forms of transport services.
2. Diversify the night-time offering: To attract a wider range of customers, it is important to offer a diverse range of activities and events, such as live music, cultural events, and sports events.
3. Set out early to obtain Purple Flag accreditation.
4. Promote Leigh as a destination: To attract more visitors to Leigh, it is important to promote the town as a destination for a night out, highlighting its strengths and offering incentives for people to visit.
5. Support the local business community: Providing support to local businesses, such as training and development opportunities, can help them to succeed and contribute to the growth of the night-time economy.
6. Develop a coordinated approach: A coordinated approach between local businesses, local authorities, the police, and other stakeholders can help to improve the night-time economy and ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals. For example, encourage twilight community festivals rather than day-time events.
7. Encourage private sector investment: Encouraging private sector investment in Leigh's night-time economy can help to provide the funding needed to implement the other recommendations and drive growth.
8. Foster collaboration between local businesses and the council to create a cohesive and well-coordinated approach to developing the night-time economy.
9. Enhance and extend public spaces and streetscapes to make them attractive and welcoming after dark such as temporary pedestrianisation of certain streets after 9pm.
10. Design out crime: remove the opportunities for criminality and anti-social behaviours at the point of creation.
11. Encourage businesses to stay open later (possibly changing purpose or focus after 5pm) to create a vibrant and bustling atmosphere in the town. Creating a twilight economy enables transition from the day-time to night-time economy.
12. Foster a positive and inclusive culture for visitors, employees and residents, promoting the night-time economy as a welcoming and accessible place for everyone.



Conclusion

Based on the research, there are several challenges affecting the development of Leigh's night-time economy. These challenges include limitations in locational clustering, diversification, infrastructure, and safety. Current night services in Leigh are still small-scale, fragmented, and asynchronous. The space planning policy is also insufficient and lacks long-term initiatives for the night-time economy. Current regulatory policies continue to stifle the growth of night-time economic activity. The infrastructure for night-time economic activity is weak, with inadequate public transportation, poor amenities, and inappropriate lighting. Finally, there is a residential concern about the potential negative effects of further night-time services on pollution, anti-social behaviour, and noise.

These concerns highlight the importance of making the town centre safer, more visually attractive, and innovative in the offering of events and locations to attract a diverse range of visitors. The role of licensing is pivotal in encourage night-time business creation. The use of organic communication and other social media activities is key to successfully market events. Some of these suggested actions can be facilitated by businesses and other stakeholders in the night-time economy working together to host events to creating a vibrant atmosphere. However, an integrated approach that incorporates other stakeholders is needed to address the current shortcomings in the public realm and the business regulatory environment.