

LETTERS

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Commissioner is just the job

ANNE Barnes, chairwoman of the Kent Police Authority, is quite wrong when she claims the Government's proposals for elected police commissioners are driven "purely by dogma".

On the contrary, this policy is evidence-driven – and part of the copious evidence is my own experience of this feeble organisation.

The KPA is hopeless at effective public consultation.

Just like Kent County Council, Thanet District Council and Kent Police themselves (the so-called 'community safety partners') they seem to think that a lot of glossy leaflets, press photo-opportunities and time-wasting meetings constitute effective public engagement.

It is hopeless at holding the police to account at virtually every level: policing of the Kingsnorth demonstrations; the their poor record in keeping to Freedom of Information legislation; the rudeness of senior officers to members of the public; the persistent misrepresentation by the police of crime statistics; or the previous chief constable's expensive travel to work arrangements.

Moreover, we should not get too excited by their cumbersome process of selecting a new chief constable and Mrs Barnes' expressions of confidence in the man they eventually chose, Mr Ian Learmonth.

A quick check of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary's assessments of his current force, Norfolk, shows that it performs exactly as Kent Police have performed in every category that is assessed. So he is no better and no worse than the last chap.

I wish Mr Learmonth well in his new post, but it would make his task easier if he were subject to effective, constructive challenge from a high-powered elected commissioner rather than a bunch of well-meaning retired brigadiers, county councillors and magistrates.

Paul Twyman, Minnis Bay

Police changes need thought

I wish to point out that the comments attributed to me (KoS, May 30) from the Association of Police Authorities' (APA) letter to The Observer newspaper, were in my capacity as deputy chair of the APA. The views expressed in that letter were APA views.

The Kent Police Authority has not yet formed a collective view about directly elected commissioners, and in any event there are legal restrictions that may well prevent individual police authorities campaigning on this issue.

I believe passionately in our current system of police governance. It has served this country and local communities well for 15 years now.

Any changes to it must, and should, be properly thought through. The British model of policing is the envy of the world and that has been by design not accident.

Ann Barnes, Chairwoman, Kent Police Authority

OPINION: ALTERING THE MINDSET

Medical anthropology student **DAVE KING** argues that psychedelic drugs have medical benefits and deserve more than the stigma they are currently attracting

LAST month I flew to California for a medical conference, hosted by the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS).

The event saw around 1,200 participants from 18 countries gather for more than 90 presentations.

Substantial media coverage contributed to a growing awareness that psychedelic drugs deserve more than the stigma they currently attract.

The conference revealed a wealth of government-approved scientific studies showing psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin (magic mushrooms) and LSD to be extremely beneficial in psychotherapeutic settings. This is perhaps not so surprising – these drugs were utilised within psychotherapy on a huge scale before they escaped from the laboratory to the cultural revolution of the 60s.

It is also common knowledge that other 'illicit' drugs have medicinal value; heroin is used as a painkiller under the name 'diamorphine', methamphetamine is given to children with ADHD, and ketamine is used as an alternative anaesthetic when blood pressure must be kept stable.

So, why is this big news? The more that we see psychedelics through a scientific lens the more one must start to accept these substances are not quite what we have been led to believe. If one stops thinking of psychedelic drugs as simply 'illicit', and instead thinks of them as 'medicinal', one must naturally begin to look at the results of medical trials and scientific examinations.

These trials do not really support the prevalent image of psychedelics as valueless generators of delusion, or as simple 'madness-makers'.

As for the physiological dangers, the classical psychedelics do not appear to cause any damage to the human body. They are not toxic to any vital physiological or metabolic process and so one cannot overdose on them. They are also not addictive; their use is not accompanied by either cravings or withdrawal symptoms on cessation of use.

Indeed, one of their most useful tendencies in psychotherapy is to diminish the addictive hold of com-

monly-abused drugs such as heroin and alcohol.

Many researchers have found psychedelics such as ayahuasca and ibogaine to be of invaluable assistance to psychotherapeutic processes, including the treatment of depression, OCD and anxiety.

What about 'bad trips'? LSD is currently being used in Switzerland to alleviate anxiety in patients with terminal illness.

I asked Dr Peter Gasser, the researcher behind this study, whether the anxiety had ever led to any negative reactions under LSD. He replied that yes, some patients had experienced difficult trips, but that they all came back without much hesitation to take part in a second session.

Sometimes the difficult trips are ultimately the most valuable, even if they aren't the most fun.

As with all things, I believe the best policy should be based on assistance, education and honesty. Our schools should certainly not be encouraging use of psychedelic drugs, but neither should they be propagating partial truths (which are no truths at all).

There will be people who are going to choose to use these drugs, outside of medical settings, and the best way to minimise negative repercussions is to be honest and open about their effects.

Rather than ignoring the fact that many young people will experiment with drugs during their lives we should perhaps be teaching teenagers how to help somebody through a difficult psychedelic experience.

A trip can be an extraordinarily powerful, life-changing experience – and psychedelics are not toys to be played with – but people will play with them and we must offer honest, holistic and practical education if we are to expect young people to make their decisions wisely.

The University of Kent has a Psychedelics Society www.ukcpsychedelics.co.uk that offers advice, information, and weekly open-lectures by a diverse selection of experts.

I think it is important that we all try to take a step back from presupposition, misinformation and stigma and begin to look at these drugs in a new context.

• *Dave King is a medical anthropology student at the University of Kent with a research interest in psychedelics.*



Crowd should have been told

The well publicised return of the Little Ships from Dunkirk to Ramsgate drew many visitors to Ramsgate harbour on Bank Holiday Monday, and it was with an increasing sense of outrage that those of us who had been sitting for several hours on the harbour wall during the entire afternoon found out – around 4.30pm – the event had been cancelled early that morning.

No news was posted up at the entrance to the harbour for visitors to be aware of that.

I ended up phoning Dunkirk, only to be told the cancellation decision had been taken at 6am and communicated to Ramsgate.

If this is how Thanet treats its visitors it is unlikely to gain any credibility for its promotion of such events.

You can forget 'Dynamo Day' in future. People had travelled down from London and all over the South East, following information put out by local council websites

and local news follow-up stories.

One elderly lady in a wheelchair had travelled by train, then her carer had pushed her all the way from Ramsgate station to the harbour (a very long walk) to see the Little Ships come in.

It is no good simply publicising events and leaving them to run themselves. The cancellation should have been properly announced.

I suppose – having attracted a higher than usual number of visitors – Thanet council did not want the financial advantages to be lost by announcing there would be nothing to see? Disgraceful.

G Thomas, by email

Boris showing his ignorance

Thousands of protestors fought for a few years to stop another airport in the estuary area, it was proved to be fatal for all the villages, a destruction for wildlife, impossibility of causing no sound damage, but most important of all pollution.

Are we not supposed to be protecting the ozone layer as much as we

can for future races of mankind?

So why does Boris Johnson believe this ruling does not involve him. This is disgusting behaviour for someone who should be showing more thought and intelligence on such an important issue.

Shame on you, concentrate on the Olympic funding, you will ruin thousands of people's lives plus create health problems for many more, not to mention the damage to the environment.

C Russell, Ramsgate

Farm horrors for all to see

Animal Aid has released a shocking new factory farming film featuring grim scenes shot secretly in randomly-selected farms across the UK during the last three years.

Scenes include young pigs looking for sustenance in a trough filled with faeces, and a bin full of dead sheep and lambs.

These images support Animal Aid's argument that modern animal farming presents a significant threat to human health, as



Don't be stuck in jail for our victory

AFTER a month of election rivalry, unusual politics and more official talk of spending cuts, the World Cup could not come at a better time.

And after battling through one of the worst recessions in history since football fever last swept the nation in 2006, a welcome break is what we all need.

With less than a week to go, the excitement is bubbling over – even for some who never watch the sport – as we all put our hands together and hope 2010 could be the year for England.

The team has landed in South Africa, red and white flags adorn cars and windows, and World Cup wall charts have been put up in homes across the country.

No doubt the next four weeks will be full of highs, lows, and, hopefully not too many tears, along with singing, dancing and lots of beer. Which is where the police come in with their stark warning about drink and drug driving.

Although it seems heavy when most people are gearing up for one of the world's most exciting sporting events, it would be a much worse fate to be locked in a cell unable to celebrate with your friends. Or just imagine if you miss the moment England actually manage to win on penalties.

As much as the next month spells fun, alcohol causes lots of us to do dangerous things – so leave the car at home.

He'll soon look as old as the others

A YOUNG, fresh-faced David Cameron sits in an Ashford village hall hoping to break into the world of politics.

Turned down at the first hurdle, yet years later there he stands all grown up outside Downing Street with the weight of the country on his shoulders – the youngest Prime Minister in almost 200 years.

But remember Mr Cameron, age is just a number, give it time – and untold stress – and you'll soon be looking as old as the rest of the them.

well as an intolerable burden upon the animals themselves.

The film is supported by a new booklet called *Is Factory Farming Making You Sick?*, which was produced with the assistance of globally-recognised expert Dr Michael Greger, the Humane Society international's director of public health and animal agriculture.

It describes 12 major diseases that start in factory farm settings, but may go on to harm and even kill people.

They include salmonellosis, campylobacter infection, BSE, bird flu and swine flu.

Swine flu has killed more than 18,000 people around the world, while in the UK alone it is estimated that salmonella and campylobacter are responsible for around 450,000 cases each year.

To order a free copy of *Is Factory Farming Making You Sick?* or to view the film, contact Animal Aid on 01732 364546 or visit www.animallaid.org.uk.

Kelly Slade, campaigns officer
Animal Aid, Tonbridge