

On **Wild West** Street



Phil Mellows

It suits Brighton & Hove's status as an official city that 39% of its population avoid certain parts of it. Every proper city has its no-go areas. Anywhere I go in the world I seem to inadvertently wander into them. From Belfast's Shankill Road to the notorious dogcatchers'

ghetto of Kathmandu I've taken a wrong turn, finished up there and got out quick.

Most recently, in Buenos Aires, I led a group of innocent people into the dodgy back-doubles of the La Boca docklands. Exactly the place the guidebooks told us not to go. Nothing happened but everyone was happy to get out onto the main road.

And yes, I've been on West Street on a Friday night. It was deliberate this time. I was there with the police to report on how the various authorities are reducing alcohol-related disorder. It was an interesting experience but not something I'd do for pleasure, being of a more mature disposition than might be appropriate. Or, if you prefer, I'm too bloody old.

Caroline Lucas, West Street's MP, expressed shock at that 39% figure, drawn from the city's Big Alcohol Debate survey, during a Commons debate on the drink problem. I'm frankly amazed that 61% of Brightonians would go onto West Street on a Friday or Saturday night but that's Brightonians for you. It's well below zero out there at the moment and I've just walked past a chap waiting for a bus in his shorts!

Anyway, getting back to West Street, why would you want to go there anyway? Brighton boasts plenty of other places where we over-24s can have a nice night out.

We're also quite good at managing the more riotous quarters. As I reported, by all measures the city centre is a safer, less violent, less drunken place than it was. There's more we can do, of course. The most advanced thinking would develop the West Streets of the world, those concentrations of vertical drinking, into areas of more mixed attractions.

Then we'd all be mingling with the young people. And I bet they're more scared of us than we are of them.

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