

**PENTRE FARM, PENTRE, BUCKNELL
SHROPSHIRE SY7 OBU**

TEL home 01547 520332 office 01547 520724

e-mail parlybeergroup@btconnect.com

Submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group Inquiry

From – Robert Humphreys

The Department of Health & Social Care consultation on childhood obesity

The DHSC conducted a consultation on this topic last autumn which closed in December. The Department proposes introducing an obligation on restaurants to show the calorie content on menus.

In my submission I argued that the proposed measure would be likely to have the reverse effect to that intended, leading to an increase, rather than a decrease in obesity. The reason for that is that the task of accurately calculating and publishing calorific content would fall disproportionately hard on small, independent catering businesses, such as pubs, who specialised in serving fresh, locally sourced food, prepared and cooked by staff on the premises.

I argued that the imposition of such an obligation would significantly alter the economic balance against the use of fresh ingredients prepared on the premises and in favour of pre-prepared processed dishes from major manufacturers, dishes likely to be significantly higher in calories and less healthy than fresh food.

This would lead to a reduction in the provision of fresh food and of the employment of skilled cooks in small catering businesses, and an increase in mass manufactured pre-packed food factory prepared and delivered by road, which would be calamitous for the achievement of the stated objective of the policy, and by the way also for local employment and the environment into the bargain.

I suggested that an alternative approach which might actually reduce childhood (and other) obesity would be to impose an obligation to provide calorie information on menus only where pre-prepared food was used but to exempt fresh food prepared on the premises. This would have the reverse effect, drawing attention to the use of factory-prepared dishes, discouraging their use and especially the consumption of those dishes highest in calories, and at the same time promoting fresh and local ingredients.

In passing it may also be noted that the consultation suggested that menus might also be required to show the calorie content of “a portion” of a dish as a proportion of the recommended daily calorie intake, using the figure for women as the base, even though the recommended intake for men is greater. Such proposals seem so obviously farcical they scarcely justify comment. The work entailed for hard pressed cooks trying to run a profitable business would be massive, the information would be misleading, and the information would demand sufficiently complicated calculations as to render the whole exercise worthless. Given that the intended target is reducing childhood obesity, it could also lead to complacency in any parent bothering to try to interpret the provided data.

Robert Humphreys

