A PROMINENT Aberystwyth church leader is fronting a campaign to get pub late licences in the town scrapped.

Reverend Stuart Bell, Rector of St Michael's Church, claims the town is 'under siege' from late drinking, loud music, and anti-social behaviour.

And his call for Ceredigion County Council's licensing panel to review late licences is backed by Aberystwyth mayor Cllr Lorrae Jones-Southgate.

Rev Bell said: "I get many complaints from residents. It's as though the town is 'under siege' at times.

"A bad situation has deteriorated greatly since late licences were granted to premises, including the 24-hour licence at the Inn on the Pier.

"Newsagents see people drunk at 8am some mornings. And on a Sunday as I walked about 300 yards, I came across four piles of vomit.

There is more vandalism, presumably by individuals drinking too much alcohol. I wouldn't like to think people would do such things when sober.

"Noise levels, loud music and disorderly behaviour are unacceptable. Visitors to hotels and guest houses can't sleep, and residents can't even hear their televisions.

"Ceredigion County Council should consider the quality of life of residents - but the council is only concerned that people spend their money in Aberystwyth.

"Residents don't see any point in objecting to licence applications as they would not be listened to. Late licences were supposed to be a panacea, but they have increased the problems."

Cllr Jones-Southgate said: "I have great sympathy with Rev Bell, as I too have grave reservations about late licences. I would like to meet, and work with, the Licensed Victuallers Association, and Ceredigion's licensing panel, to see what can be done."

But Aberystwyth town councillor Mark Strong believes a greater emphasis should be placed on 'responsible drinking'.

He said: "In reality, anti-social behaviour was a problem before drinking laws were reformed.

"Many ills caused by alcohol-related anti-social behaviour lie at the door of central government, local authorities, and individuals. Our community needs to adjust the way in which we perceive the consumption of alcohol, and what are acceptable levels for people to drink."

Alcohol-related crime in Ceredigion between March and September 2007 is down by 16 per cent (from 658 down to 550 crimes) compared to the same period last year. And Aberystwyth figures show the same trend.

There has been a 14 per cent reduction (48 crimes) in violence against the person, and a 20 per cent reduction in criminal damage.

Inspector Alun Samuel said: "If Rev Bell, and local residents, have issues relating to alcohol-related anti-social behaviour, I am prepared to meet them and discuss things. But we need the support of people prepared to provide evidence for Ceredigion's licensing panel.

"In the case of the licence granted to the Inn on the Pier, the police could only object on crime and disorder grounds, which we did - nobody else opposed the licence."

A spokesperson for the county council said: "Establishments operate within the benefit of a specific premises licence, and the impact that each venue has on the locality has to be considered on an individual basis.

"There is a process allowing formal reviews. But reviews must be supported by robust evidence. The management of the late-night economy in Aberystwyth is a matter of concern, and is being addressed by Ceredigion Community Safety Partnership."

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