

Neighbourhoods blighted by drink treble in a decade: Record 215 hotspots are now classed as having problem pubs and bars

- **The misery inflicted by Labour's 24-hour drinking laws has been laid bare**
- **Neighbourhoods plagued by problems soared by 200 per cent in a decade**
- **Home Office report reveals that disorder sparked by alcohol has spiralled**

The shocking extent of the misery inflicted by Labour's 24-hour drinking laws has been laid bare.

The number of town centres and neighbourhoods plagued by alcohol-fuelled problems has soared by 200 per cent in a decade, Home Office figures reveal.

There are a record 215 hotspots classed as being overrun with problem pubs or bars – up from 71 in March 2007, when licensing laws had been relaxed for just over a year.



This rise in so-called 'cumulative impact zones' – the official term for districts suffering alcohol-driven chaos – has occurred over the decade since Tony Blair's overhaul of drinking legislation in 2005.

Labour talked of bringing in a Continental-style cafe culture when it introduced round-the-clock opening despite opposition from police, judges, ambulance staff and GPs, as well as a Daily Mail campaign.

But the Home Office's annual report on alcohol and late night refreshment licensing, published yesterday, showed that disorder sparked by alcohol has

The report encourages authorities to identify cumulative impact zones where the number of pubs and bars is 'giving rise to specific problems that could

Trouble in these areas ranges from street robbery and fighting to drug dealing, theft and litter.

Also known as 'saturation zones', they allow town halls to control the number of bars, clubs and pubs in a bid to cut crime or anti-social behaviour. Councils can refuse to grant licences to bars in the zones, even if they satisfy normal planning rules.

Large cities have identified the most trouble hotspots, with eight in Sutton in south London, seven in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, six in Islington in north London, and five each in Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and Plymouth.

But many are in smaller, previously quiet places that used to have few alcohol-related crimes, including Aylesbury, Lichfield, Canterbury, Melton Mowbray and York.

Home Office figures show 106 councils in England and Wales accounted for the 215 areas.

Drink-fuelled crime is estimated to cost the economy £11 billion a year.

Last night Rachel Kearton, the alcohol licensing spokesman for the National Police Chiefs' Council, said: 'Officers around the country would prefer to be in their communities fighting crime and protecting vulnerable people rather than dealing with alcohol-related problems on the weekends.'

Chief constables have previously declared 24-hour drinking a failed 'experiment'. Officers say round-the-clock opening causes 'significant problems' from 3am to 6am.

Joanna Simons, chief executive of Alcohol Concern, said: 'While we welcome the rise in the number of licence refusals in high-impact areas, alcohol harm continues to have a huge impact.

'It's not just at the hospital or doctor's. It ranges from health to crime and disorder, affects older people as well as youngsters, it impacts on families and social services as well as the look and feel of the high street. This is why we need the licensing laws to change.'

To the anger of medical experts, there are now a record number of premises licensed to sell alcohol – 210,000, up 5,500 on March 2014.

The number of supermarkets, petrol stations and convenience stores selling booze around the clock is also at a record high of 2,500, an increase of nearly 50 per cent on March 2010.

Since coming to power, Tory ministers have given town halls powers to impose a blanket ban on pubs opening in the early hours of the morning in problem areas, and to make late-opening bars and clubs pay for extra policing.

But both have proved a huge flop. By the end of March this year, only seven so-called late-night levies had been introduced and there was not a single order to restrict early morning alcohol sales.

Councils demanded change in 2014, labelling the current powers 'unwieldy, bureaucratic, extremely costly and time-consuming'.

A Government spokesman said: 'Cumulative impact policies give local authorities the tools to help control the availability of alcohol, and reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder in their communities, where a need is identified.

'The Government is working with industry, police, local authorities and other partners to ensure we have safe streets and responsible local businesses that thrive.'