

## What BISL did next

Following the interview with Brigid Simmons in the April issue of *The Leisure Review*, we were contacted by Business in Sport and Leisure and reminded that, as Mark Twain so very nearly said, “The reports of BISL’s death have been much exaggerated.” Invited to prove it, new executive director Andy Sutch offers a quick run through of BISL’s activities in the lobbies of sport and leisure.

Business In Sport and Leisure (BISL), now 25 years old, is a not-for-profit company with both an established brand and a reputation for successful lobbying on behalf of the sport and leisure industry. It is an industry that has expanded and changed out of all recognition in those 25 years and one that today ranges from beer and bingo to retail and rackets, early morning jogging to the late evening nightclub sector but where the commercial sector plays a significant role in the engagement and entertainment of the community.

BISL has a small staff, led by its new executive chairman, David Teasdale, and executive director Andy Sutch but around the table in its working groups are key industry figures and some of the best professional advisers from gambling, licensing, property, employment, sport and tourism. This mix of front-line operators and national governing bodies of sport with professionals such as lawyers, accountants, surveyors and management consultants provides an ideal forum to deal with the issues of the day, some very specific to the sector, such as regulation and taxation, others much wider, from the visitor economy to Olympic and Paralympic legacy.

BISL has two key strengths: a unique assembly of talent and expertise in the individual sectors; and the breadth of its membership across all the sectors. These strengths mean it is the only such organisation that can claim to represent that industry defined as “sport and leisure”. BISL is an established brand. For the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), our sponsor government department, we are an “essential consultee” and we were described recently by the Gambling Commission as “the voice of reason”. Government ministers and their officials need to be able to talk and listen to an organisation about the private sector in sport and leisure and perhaps never more so than in the immediate post-election period. BISL is a membership organisation but engages regularly with operators and organisations outside its membership where there is a common agenda.

What is the aim? The aim is clear: BISL seeks to create a better commercial, political and economic environment in which the private sector can flourish and deliver its full contribution to both the industry and the nation. BISL wants to “grow and sustain the leisure market”, a strap line that emerged from its sport group in 2008 and one which resonated with operators that wanted to get more “bums off seats and into their leisure centres” and also with government in its attempt to get a million more people playing sport by 2012/13, 100,000 of which – at least – are going to have to come from the commercial sector. But whether that is more people playing sport or more people taking part in the legitimate leisure activities, from gambling to sports retailing – and probably enjoying a drink as part of the experience, whether in a sports club bar or a pub in the high street – BISL wants to see an industry which operates under a regulatory regime that meets the objectives of the Licensing and Gambling Acts, but which also allows for enterprise from the provider and sufficient choice and enjoyment for the consumer.

At its annual conference in 2009 BISL launched its manifesto for the leisure industry in front of the key politicians from all three main parties with the DCMS brief and over 200 representatives from industry. That conference began to tackle some aspects of the important public narrative about our industry. Responsible gambling and drinking are legitimate leisure pursuits alongside sport and physical activity. BISL wants “leisure” to be understood and properly represented within society as a key component of any balanced quality of life,



Gerry Sutcliffe: pulling strings for sport at BISL conference

**“BISL were described recently by the Gambling Commission as ‘the voice of reason’... Government ministers and their officials need to be able to talk and listen to an organisation about the private sector in sport and leisure”**



David Teasdale

alongside work, family and the community. Sport and leisure are not luxuries but form an essential part of physical and mental well-being, from the physical benefits of exercise to the acknowledged social and community benefits for older people of leisure activities such as bingo. However, the prevailing popular narrative of problem gambling and alcohol-related social disorder often masks the responsible enjoyment by the majority of the activities. 64% of adults enjoy some form of gambling – perhaps even more on Grand National day – but only 0.6 % register a problem. The industry acknowledges that there are negative aspects of abuse to deal with and BISL was a key player in the introduction of the voluntary levy that funds the research, education and treatment for problem gamblers and supports the voluntary code on advertising.

The Leisure Review is supported by:



The actions of operators within the industry are part of the solution to negative behaviour but often these operators are penalised by ill-conceived legislation. Most recently BISL strongly opposed the introduction in the Crime and Security Bill of powers to impose blanket bans on the sale of alcohol from 3am to 6am in entire streets or city centres, a proposal which goes against the very underlying principles of the Licensing Act 2003. The act provided for premises closing at a variety of different times to ensure that people leave venues gradually over a longer period and so reduce pre-closing binge drinking and the public order problems arising from large numbers of people arriving on the streets simultaneously. This is but one of 20 such issues that BISL believes bedevils the current licensing legislation and imposes a financial and administrative burden on the industry. BISL welcomes and fully supports the emphasis that the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) has recently placed on the role of the pub as a social venue and an incubator for live music, while also being a safe, well-regulated environment to enjoy a drink. This is precisely the public narrative the sector needs.

The Leisure Review is written,  
designed and published by:



BISL is seeking some big things from a new government and in particular a regulatory approach and a joined-up tax regime that will encourage the commercial entrepreneur to provide, and the user to enjoy, the leisure sector product. While the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 have been major drivers in the past ten years, the decade of sport which starts with the London Olympic Games in 2012 will undoubtedly be a driver for the next few years – well beyond the Games themselves. BISL has been a supporter of the London 2012 bid from the beginning and provided pro bono support to community engagement. BISL has pressed for better direction and co-ordination of both the hard and soft legacy agenda for several years and welcomes the recent establishment of the Olympic Park Legacy Company. The emerging leadership and co-ordination of the soft participation and coaching legacy among national governing bodies and local government, particularly those Beacon Councils that have led the way to the recent guidance from the Local Government Association and ISPAL, to which BISL is a signatory.

BISL has long striven for some fiscal relaxation of the constraints around the provision of commercial leisure facilities, whether the corporate tax liability of opening up in-house health and fitness provision to the community or to remove the tax liability on the individual who is supported by an employer that recognises the health and productivity benefits from an employee who wants take part in physical activity out in the community.

Local government has long been a key provider of community sports opportunities but BISL believes that the commercial operator can also bring expertise to the table and there are now some excellent examples from Elmbridge to Rotherham of new facilities, operating at arm's length and at no cost to the local authority, where the authority can anticipate a sustainable facility over the next 25 years. BISL has pressed hard to raise standards of procurement and commissioning but recognises that the private sector is not alone in delivering the product and welcomes the work done by SPORTA and the IDeA to improve the quality of strategic planning and commissioning in the sport and leisure sector.

BISL already works in a close alliance with both the BBPA and the British Hospitality Association, while the Local Government Association and the main sports non-departmental public bodies are members of its sports caucus, and existing and new members cover a wide range of sectors within the sport and leisure industry. It is with this broad mandate that BISL seeks to inform the context in which a new government will develop its sport and leisure policy.

### ***The Leisure Review, May 2010***

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated.

[www.theleisurereview.co.uk](http://www.theleisurereview.co.uk)

Page 2 of 3

Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.