

# Working with Weed



Dope's reclassification is on its way to Britain in January, but what does this mean for the student toker? **Dan Phillips** asks York Police Operations Commander Alison Higgins, how far can you go?

The British conservative classes are in uproar, it's what they do best. They have found themselves in a rear guard battle against their most favourite of institutions, not marriage but the Constabulary. The Association of Police Commanders, has issued guidelines for the local bobby across the nation on ganja, and it violates the logic of a generation, go for the dealers, not the casual smoker, target heroin addicts with rehab referrals in their bail conditions. Denial is no longer possible in British society.

This need for denial at the centre of public morality is a curious demand, one of a short term concern to be seen to do the right thing, rather than solve the problem of drug related crime, Higgins sees this as the main issue for York, "people that come through the door need help", and so referral to organizations that can help the addict has become one of the

main priorities allied to new drugs policy in Britain. The problem is, that on the local scale it works a little too well, there has been a "significant reduction on offences and victims in York", Higgins commented. But at what price? Hasn't something been lost, the binding principles of this green and pleasant land, the battle against those smelly hippies, come the cries of hallowed mythical Middle England, wherever that may be.

But this is no longer an issue of lentil chewers at Glastonbury. In short, as the private school lovelies of the Home Counties pass the bong in dorms, the demand for munchies echoes throughout the British youth, as well as in the halls of York. Reclassification to Class C, is not an open invitation to have a public joint with your pint on a Sunday afternoon, Higgins suggests the outcome will rather be to "allow people to possess it, but appropriately". In targeting dealers, this new policy is not the liberal sop portrayed, but in fact "policing of the drug won't necessarily change that much".

Suburbia can sit back comfortably in their favourite armchair once more, Titchmarsh won't be recommending how to grow your very own batch, and nor will there be skunk gardening competitions alongside oversized leeks and marrows, just a few students attempting to turn their economy room

into a walk in bong.

Will the University keep in step with these new times? Higgins admits that the Police have little contact with the University on this issue, for it isn't a mas-

sive one on campus, she does recommend that "all organisations will have to update their strategy". And York appears to be a bastion of liberalism, or at least a minor fort of discretion, Hilary Layton, our dear communications officer remarked to nouse "the University takes disciplinary action in the light

of any police actions". So the Uni won't be outraged from Tunbridge Wells, bothering police over the actions of a sociology student, because a little resin will, after January 29th carry the penalty of confiscation, not arrest, and there have been few unequivocal cases in recent years, "every year the Provosts deal informally with suspected ie. not proven, cannabis use by speaking to those concerned and putting out warning notices".

The scaremongering that a change in policy will "only cause further confusion for the police and the public", as Oliver Letwin screamed at the announcement by the government, may be the death throes of denial in the British consciousness, as Higgins appeared to be fairly unconfused as to the reality. Problematic drug use is the cause of crime, and only with the help of the community can policing of pushers be most effectively engaged in society, "policing with consent" are the buzz words of North Yorkshire Police. This is more than merely curtain twitching and gossiping at the garden gate, community liason is part of the new policing,

local campaigns on the new laws as well as contacts within the areas most blighted by crack and heroin in York are being coordinated if this policy is to work, hence why Higgins admits that contacts with the campus community are "a little bit sketchy" but intended to be improved as the confusion that Letwin predicts is cleared up.

Is York in a state of denial? Does it demand the upholding of archaism and the uncoordinated use of police time in the name of the right thing? Higgins reveals that York, in the very heart of Middle England is a conscientious place, "People are very proud of their city". The roots of this pride are as much in the possibly not so altruistic concerns for business and tourism, as well as for the protection of the city's community, a recreational token doesn't damage this, heroin fuelled mugging does.

The Police may now "allow people to possess it, but appropriately"

# Why Weed Won't Work

Peter Hitchens tells James Redgrave why he will never support relaxed drug laws in Britain

Will the declassification of cannabis enable the police to channel more resources into the combat of harder drugs and the prosecution more serious crimes? Peter Hitchens would like to believe this but feels it is, "always the excuse of the police". He maintains that the more it is frowned upon by society the more this "creates an iron clad reason" (specifically for those who feel under "peer pressure" to do it, despite acknowledging the risks) for people not to use a drug he believes has never been more of a threat.

"There is more and more evidence that

cannabis is more dangerous now than in the 'Sgt Pepper era' due to genetic modifications and the introduction of the skunk variety" For this reason, he argues, it is "amazing" that the government is choosing to make its use relatively risk free.

Of course, in chemical terms, cannabis is relatively risk free - incomparable to heroin, cocaine or even ecstasy pills where health considerations are concerned - and in fact less medically unsound than alcohol. But Hitchens claims that this is, "no excuse for introducing yet another dangerous poison into society". In fact he believes that, "if it

[alcohol] was as rare as marijuana then there would be a powerful argument for banning it as well, but as it is it's part of our culture".

So does cannabis necessarily lead to harder drugs? "No. It doesn't necessarily but anyone who seeks self stupefication lowers an important moral barrier nonetheless." His point being that the ethical implications connected to drug use is not proportionate to the harm that any specific drugs can cause. By shifting the focus of the cannabis debate to the moral, from the purely empirical he does bring a new facet to the argument, and furthermore it is one that cannot be disputed by the medical evidence which is frequently cited in favour of legalisation, unless you consider the potential damage a drug is capable of to impact on its moral status.

Part of the new legislation regarding weed involves a change in emphasis from the punitive measures for possession, which are to be relaxed, to concentrate on preventing suppliers. Peter dismisses this logic as "silly", pointing out, "there would be no dealers without users, no supply without demand".

His firm belief is that deterring people from consumption of pot, with stricter punishments for carriage and use, is the only

means of preventing its use and distribution. "Society needs to send its message that it looks down on drugs."

