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Background

DU100 Throughout history, psychoactive substances have been used by all societies and are likely to continue to be used in one form or another. The extent to which people use drugs depends not only on the availability of such substances but also on social, economic and environmental factors.

DU101 Drug use - whether experimental, recreational or dependent - can have a damaging effect not only on the user but also on the user's family and friends. The illegal drugs market is also having an increasingly harmful effect on society at large, mainly because of two problems: crime and HIV. Powerful criminal organisations are involved in the drugs market and a significant proportion of acquisitive crime is committed by dependent drug users to fund drug use. Shared drug use by injection is currently a significant transmission route for HIV, a major threat to public health.

DU102 In recent years, the 'drugs problem' has been largely equated with the use of illegal drugs. This has had the effect of diverting attention away from the dire social and health consequences of legal drugs, principally alcohol, tobacco and inappropriately prescribed tranquillisers. Between them, these cause the loss of thousands of lives every year and

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much pain and disability for both users and non-users of these drugs.

DU103 The legal drugs, principally tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs, are widely promoted through advertising, sponsorship and corporate pressure. As a result their use is generally accepted by society and efforts to control usage largely rely on a mixture of taxation, education, restriction of sale and use to adults or certain places, and voluntary restraint.

DU104 Under prohibition, illegal drugs are made not only more attractive to some, but also tend to be more poisonous and expensive. Consequently users become unhealthier and more likely to steal and deal. The cost of enforcing prohibition is becoming increasingly untenable.

DU105 Raves / pay-parties / free-festivals and the like have proved an enduring setting in which various drugs are consumed by many tens of thousands of young people across the country. Unlicensed and unregulated events, kept underground by prohibition, are held regularly in overcrowded venues or inappropriate sites that fail to meet health and fire regulations, at which ventilation and provision for refreshments are inadequate and to which the emergency services would be unable to gain access if needed. The popularity of these events and their proliferation in spite of attempts to suppress them makes

the adoption of a more liberal approach coupled with a system of regulation a matter of highest urgency.

DU106 Small scale farmers in the underdeveloped South often rely heavily on the hard currency they can receive from drug crop harvests. Strategies by rich, drug-importing nations to eradicate drug crops, such as cash compensation, have proved woefully inadequate and are usually jeopardised by corrupt bureaucracies. Crop substitution has repeatedly failed because of depressed commodity prices for the underdeveloped world's exports.

Principles

DU200 Government responses to the issue of drug use are inconsistent: neither the legal status of different substances nor the targeting of government expenditure on the information / education is commensurate with the harm different drugs do to the individual or society.

DU201 Prohibition does not prevent drug use by adults or children and leads to the creation of an illicit market, an increase in consumption due to pyramid selling and the criminalisation and marginalisation of those who use drugs. Prohibition is counter-productive; it is more damaging to the drug user, the community and society than the drug use it seeks to eliminate.

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DU202 Social custom, convention and ritual play a vital part in the moderate and responsible use of all drugs. The development and perpetuation of these customs are inhibited and eroded by prohibition and to some extent, by all interventions by government or state agencies.

DU203 The Green Party therefore seeks to open up the whole issue of drug use to the public and regards the supply of adequate, clear, free and accessible information as vital to the process of both reducing drug-use and minimising harm from drug use.

DU204 Interventions by importing nations, such as support for international drug-crop eradication and crop substitution programmes are both economically unfeasible and ecologically damaging. Measures such as increased military aid for repressive regimes against drug cultivation, as well as being morally indefensible, run the risk of fuelling political destabilisation.

DU205 In addition to instances of direct complicity in international drug traffic by agencies of importing nations, there is also an element of hypocrisy in the fact that whilst campaigns against drugs are being waged, rich nations are simultaneously trying to swamp many poorer countries' markets with the products of their own tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceutical industries.

Objectives

DU300 In keeping with the Green Party's health promotion policies, the Green Party would aim to minimise the misuse of drugs.

DU301 At the same time, we recognise that drug use will never be entirely eliminated. Our policies would aim therefore to minimise the social, psychological and physical harm to those who use drugs and to society at large.

DU302 Green policies on drugs will be directed towards accepting the reality of drug use and will strive to minimise harm, both to the user and to society at large. This will require a more pragmatic approach to the issue of recreational and cultural use and should highlight the broader socio-economic forces which drive people towards escapist use.

Policy

DU400 Tobacco smoking is the principal cause of premature death in the United Kingdom. In view of the considerable dangers to the health of both smoker and non-smoker, the Green Party supports legislation prohibiting smoking in all enclosed premises to which the public has access.

DU401 The Green Party would also introduce a complete ban on the promotion of tobacco and alcohol products, including sponsorship, advertising (direct or indirect) and product placement on remuneration or reward. This ban would also apply to any currently illegal drugs when a policy of decriminalisation or legalisation comes into effect.

DU402 The effect on consumption of taxation on the sale of tobacco and alcohol would be subject to continued review and, where appropriate, these legal drugs would be taxed at a higher rate than at present. In addition, both the net profits of tobacco

companies and companies producing alcohol for consumption, and the dividends paid to shareholders of these companies would attract a significantly higher rate of taxation than at present. The tax levied on alcohol products would be in proportion to the amount of alcohol in the finished product.

DU403 To facilitate the responsible drinking of alcohol by both adults and young people, the Green Party would encourage the option of serving alcohol in smaller measures and require suppliers to provide accurate information about the unit alcohol content.

DU404 Penalties for driving whilst under the influence of alcohol or other drugs likely to adversely affect the ability to drive would be increased and the permitted alcohol to blood ratio of drivers would be reduced. (see TR302)

DU405 Cannabis would be removed from the 1971 Misuse of drugs act. The possession, trade and cultivation of cannabis would be immediately decriminalised, roughly following the Dutch model. The trade in Cannabis would be the subject of a Royal Commission (see below), with a view to establishing a fully legalised, controlled and regulated trade. Small-scale possession of drugs for personal use would be decriminalised. The starting point would be advice to policing authorities to caution rather than prosecute for offences of drug possession for personal use and to refer offenders to the health-care services (see DU411). Subsequently, regulations would be brought forward removing criminal sanctions for simple posses-

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sion of controlled drugs for personal use. The recommended sentences for small-scale supply would be non-custodial options. The possession of pipes made for the use in connection with smoking of opium would no longer be a criminal offence. A Royal Commission or similar body would be established to review currently controlled drug classifications, within a legalised environment of drug use. This commission would, after wide consultation, consider and recommend frameworks of social, economic and health conditions for drug use and supply.

DU406 With the exception of cannabis, Policing Authorities would be encouraged to focus detection resources on major drug trafficking operations. Unauthorised production, importation and marketing of all drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) would remain criminal offences. Fines, confiscation of assets and prison sentences would continue to be imposed for serious drugs trafficking offences.

DU407 A proportion of the fines and assets of convicted drug traffickers would be used to fund research into drug use and reducing drug related harm, to supplement the additional health services budget referred to below in 410-413 and resource the substitution of water-based glues, etc. in place of solvent-based products currently on the market.

DU408 The Green Party would seek to establish independent committees to oversee the structure of regulation for raves / pay parties / free festivals. These committees would ideally be made up of representatives of the promoters and attendees them-

selves, the local authority, the Police Authority and the Local Health Authority (LHA). The local authority would be responsible for ensuring that such events meet the necessary regulations and for issuing licenses. The Police Authority would have the responsibility for ensuring adequate coverage by emergency services and for training and regulation of 'bouncers' or others policing the event. The Local Health Authority would provide unbiased information and guidance on health and drug use in connection with such events. The Green party calls for the repeal of the Public Entertainment (drugs misuse) Act (The "Barry Legg act"), which is making outreach harm reduction measures impossible.

DU409 The Green Party would facilitate the establishment of a licensed non-statutory service providing analysis of any drug regardless of source. The service would be available for a small fee both to organisations and to members of the public and would be confidential, although statistical information from results would be published periodically.

DU410 General information and health education relating to all drugs, both legal and illegal, would be improved with separate approaches to three target groups: young people, those who use drugs and the general public. The Green Party would encourage counselling and advice on drugs to be available to everyone and especially to children and young people by the provision of non-statutory services in schools, youth projects, and via street outreach. These services would be free and confidential. (see H308)

DU411 The Green Party would provide an additional health service budget to fund an increase in the range and number of facilities, both residential and non-residential, for people with drug-related problems. Such facilities would be available on the NHS to all who needed them. Local government support for individually-inspired enterprises such as self-help groups would be encouraged.

DU412 In particular, each Local Health Authority would be provided with sufficient resources to establish appropriate drug-use clinics and needle exchange schemes and to ensure the provision of needle sterilisation facilities for use by prisoners. Related health programmes would also be resourced.

DU413 Resources, including greater support and training, would be made available to LHAs for certain medical practitioners to provide long-term (maintenance) prescriptions of drugs to people, including those in prison, who are unable or unwilling to stop, with the aim of reducing harmful consequences - including health and social problems (especially the spread of HIV and other blood-borne infections), pyramid selling and acquisitive crime. For this purpose, regulations would be brought forward ending, where appropriate, the prohibition on the prescribing and dispensing of certain drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Evaluation would be a built-in component of this harm-minimisation strategy.

DU420 The Green Party would publicise the fact that as long as there are wide differences in living standards between the nations

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of the world, there will always be an incentive for the poorer countries to produce drug crops if a ready market exists for them in richer countries.

DU421 Support for international drug-crop eradication and substitution programmes would be ended.

DU422 Poor countries for whose economic survival the cultivation of drug crops (legal or illegal) is critical will be identified. The Green Party would launch a series of initiatives which would offer realistic alternative trading arrangements in more ecologically and socially benign commodities with the communities that are directly involved. Such 'Trade Substitution Initiatives' would be small-scale in nature, with the minimal bureaucratic intervention and would aim to provide genuine opportunities for the individual farming communities to move away from drug-centred economic activities.