

Urban light pollution to be outlawed

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Urban light pollution to be outlawed

By Tom Anderson

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To the Australian aborigines, they represented ancestral beings watching protectively over humanity. To the ancient Aztecs, the stars were gods waging a perpetual battle to destroy the sun.

For millions of Britons the stars that inspired our ancestors have been lost in an impenetrable fug of light pollution, invisible behind the orange glow of neon and sodium lighting.

Not for much longer. From April the first UK law criminalising light pollution will come into force, the result of a decades-long fight by astronomers.

The legislation will force local authorities granting planning permission to ensure that outdoor lighting does not add to light pollution. Lighting for new shopping centres, sports facilities, housing estates and offices will have to point downwards, rather than spilling sideways and upwards.

Campaigners are vowing to use the new law to pursue high-profile targets such as Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square and the Liver Building in Liverpool. Both are floodlit from ground level and blot out the surrounding city sky. Modern lighting techniques such as higher, smaller lights would eliminate light haemorrhaging into the night sky.

Previously the victims of environmental disturbances such as loud music, smoke and dust could apply for abatement orders, but those whose homes and gardens were flooded with light had no right of redress. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 will now fill that gap, making "exterior light emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance" a criminal offence.

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The law is a personal triumph for the astronomer Sir Patrick Moore, who has spearheaded the British Astronomical Association's campaign for dark skies. According to Sir Patrick, the situation in England has become impossible for astronomers. He said yesterday: "Until now, law and order had broken down with light pollution. I'm over 80 – I can remember when the sky used to be dark. There's a truly horrible glow over the cities now. A whole generation has grown up with no view of the night sky."

BRITAIN'S WORST OFFENDERS

Nelson's Column

Smaller lights placed higher up the monument could eliminate light spilling into the night sky. Light shields could be placed at strategic points.

Great Malvern Priory, Worcestershire

Campaigners cite the medieval priory as a good example of a historic building that is massively overlit, completely obscuring the starscape over the Malvern Hills. Modern lighting would benefit both the priory and the environment.

The new Terminal 5 building at Heathrow airport

Some lights here are from temporary works but, according to dark skies activists, the terminal is "lit up like a Christmas tree", covering the sky for miles.

The Liver Building in Liverpool

The famous bird sculptures are lit from ground level, wasting energy and light while blotting out the sky above the city.

Croydon town centre

Typical of many towns and cities, Croydon has been criticised by light campaigners for wasteful use of light at night.

• *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ **Re: Urban light pollution to be outlawed**
◇ From: Rich
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◇ From: MikeA
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◇ *From: Pierre*

◆ ***Re: Urban light pollution to be outlawed***

◇ *From: Robin Leadbeater*

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