

SOS BUS PLAN TO HELP CLUBBERS

A BUS could soon be pulling up in Newmarket High Street to help deal with potentially serious situations involving young night clubbers and pub goers.

Representatives from Newmarket's Community Partnership, Racing Welfare, Forest Heath Council and Suffolk-based drink and drug abuse agencies have got together to raise the £50,000 plus funding they would need to put an SOS Bus on the town's High Street.

It could also be used at Newmarket's July racecourse after the popular Newmarket Nights summer evening meetings.

The SOS Bus concept was pioneered by Norwich City Council six years ago in response to two tragic incidents in the city – two teenagers were drowned in a river after a night out and another young person was found dead in the toilets of a city nightclub due to alcohol-related problems.

Supported by donations from statutory or-

by Alison Hayes

alison.hayes@
newmarketjournal.co.uk

ganisations and the community, including nightclubs, local businesses, churches and the public, a bus was bought, converted and equipped and located in the city centre providing a safe haven and a range of support services to anyone who needed them between 9pm and 3am.

Manned by trained volunteers, the services offered included first aid, arranging transport home, counselling and chill-out facilities.

The idea behind the Newmarket project is to make the High Street, which at weekends regularly attracts between 4,000 and 5,000 club and pubgoers, and up to 10,000 on race nights, a safer place.

Today, a representative of the group is set to attend a conference in Norwich about the work of the SOS Buses.

Since the Norwich pilot they have been introduced in a number of towns and cities across the country, which have experienced

late-night problems with alcohol or drug-fuelled disorder, including Torbay, Colchester, Southend, Newquay and Belfast.

Pc Colin Lang, the bus project development manager in Norwich said: "I can't prove on paper that we've saved lives but I know as a team we have just by the type of people we have dealt with.

If the project went ahead in Newmarket its bus would be manned by trained staff including youth workers and would be designed to help anyone in distress including young people who have drunk too much and are vulnerable, young women who may have been separated from friends and can't get home and anyone who is ill or injured or in emotional distress.

Sue McAllister of the Newmarket Community Partnership said: "Newmarket does have a very vibrant night life but that can have its drawbacks and we feel that an SOS Bus would certainly make the town centre a safer place at weekends."

● **What do you think? Email your views to alison.hayes@newmarketjournal.co.uk.**