

LPA Lighting's Liz Peck examines the Daylight Saving Bill

Not for the first time are we debating the thorny issue of Daylight Saving Time, extending GMT+1 through the winter rears its head every few years. This time, the 'Light Later' campaign has assisted in momentum being gained and a Bill presented before parliament.

The second reading of the bill provoked an interesting debate which can be read online. And it's easy to see both sides of the debate. Here are just a few of the more intriguing discussions:

- It will enable children to play outside for longer and will reduce childhood obesity. Does the prevalence of children's activity levels (and reduced obesity?) in the summer months bear this out?
- It will increase tourism. Will more people really visit London / Birmingham / Edinburgh because it gets dark an hour later?
- It will reduce road accidents. Quite possibly, particularly among children. But the trials in the US led to a significant increase in fatal road accidents in the mornings too.

So will the benefits of a winter BST outweigh the drawbacks? The challenge will lie in assessing the **real** impact of a permanent change; much of the research conducted by Cambridge University is based upon trials in the USA and Mexico. Not only is the climate very different but also the daylight availability in winter months. Trials in Portugal were quickly abandoned.

The stark truth is that for some months of the year, parts of the UK enjoy less than seven hours daylight in a day. And if most people work an eight hour day, it's inevitably going to be dark at one end of the day or the other, sometimes both with travel time.

We know that our circadian rhythm is controlled by light and we rely on light to kick start our cortisol hormones in the mornings into an alert state. If we delay the onset of daylight in the winter months, how might this affect us? I know from personal experience that I find driving in dark mornings more demanding than when it's lighter. And getting up in the dark every morning can be draining, physically and mentally. Whilst I'd welcome the idea of an extra hour of daylight in the evening, as someone who usually works until 6pm, it will actually make no difference to me. Sure, my office light would come on a bit later, but the same light will have been on for an hour longer that morning too so no energy saved in this office. The prospect of a sunrise at 9am is not one I cherish. And I live in Brighton. For the folks in Scotland, the sun won't rise until nearly 10am.

It's a question of balance. Without question, there are benefits to be drawn. But we need to be careful. If we can put aside the potential benefits of tourism, energy etc to one side for a moment, what's the best thing to do for **people**?

Maybe what we should do is adopt a more flexible approach to our days and take an example from a Scottish sheep farmer when he was asked about the debate: "I go to work when it gets light, I come home when it gets dark. I don't wear a watch".

Liz Peck MSc MSLL Director, LPA Lighting

