



Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

Rt. Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

19th February 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

Roadmap for Re-opening Pubs & Support for Pub now and ongoing – 9 Point Plan to Save Pubs

We are writing in advance of the announcement on Monday, 22nd February about the Government plans and 'roadmap' for reopening businesses, including our nation's important pubs, and the desperate need for proper support until such a time that pubs can reopen with minimal restrictions, indoors and with household mixing, and with no requirement to dine and no curfews. This is a very anxious time for the nation's pubs and publicans, already facing months with no trade and inadequate support for mounting costs and debts. In advance of the announcement there is inevitably speculation about when pubs may or may not be able to open, and how long further restrictions might last.

Many pubs have now been closed for months and all pubs have now been closed for a very large proportion of the past year. Despite Ministers saying that there has been "unprecedented support" for hospitality, the reality is that the Government has not provided anything more than a small proportion of income actually lost due to being forced to close or operate under restrictions. Whilst publicans are grateful for the modest but vital support received, it is really compensation rather than 'support' and as such it has provided merely a small amount to compensate for the huge amounts of lost trade. It does not even cover bills and ongoing costs, especially rent, and as a result does not actually provide any income support for publicans and their families, and certainly doesn't do anything to make up for lost trade. The reality for many publicans is rising levels of debt, running into tens of thousands of pounds for some, especially those still facing unpayable deferred rent bills. Even in the best-case scenarios, where publicans may be lucky enough to have savings and reserves to fall back on, they are now close to exhausting them. Publicans also now have the additional significant worries of looming bills for deferred VAT and approaching deadlines to start paying back Covid Bounce Back Loans, which at the moment, illogically and unrealistically, are due before it is being suggested pubs can even open again. Further deferments are essential until trade is normal again (as was originally envisaged).

As much as we understand and support the need to tackle Covid-19, we are also concerned that the Government is still failing to really understand the devastating impact that lockdowns and restrictions have had on Britain's publicans and their families, in terms of mental and physical health, as well as livelihoods.

There is speculation that pubs will initially be permitted to open outdoors only. This is not something we can support, as it is simply not viable for the vast majority of pubs, especially if it were to mean that they would lose necessary ongoing support. We must urge the Government to understand that outdoor opening only does not allow most pubs to trade viably (or at all, for the many thousands with little or not outdoor space) and so ongoing adequate support, at the same level as when pubs are closed, would be required.

We also are increasingly concerned at the way it is being repeatedly suggested, without evidence, that pubs must be the last places to open because they are "not safe", when the evidence simply doesn't justify that narrative. Indeed, the evidence has shown that well-run pubs are safer than other, less regulated environments. This narrative – which, it seems, is to justify the idea that pubs should open later than other businesses - is another clear example of scapegoating pubs, despite the reality of the evidence, something which is not only unfair but is unscientific. We urge the Government to make genuinely evidence-based decisions, and to publish any data that is being quoted to justify decisions regarding the planned reopening of pubs and the manner in which the Government might restrict this.

Last year, well-run pubs showed that they can operate at least as safely as non-essential retail and so we think that pubs should be allowed to open at the same time as shops and other businesses. Government must

Campaign for Pubs, The Volunteer Arms, 5 Watson Street, Holgate, York YO24 4BH

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make evidence-based decisions and not scapegoat pubs when they have not been identified as a major source of infection and must be clear that as long as it continues to make it illegal for pubs to trade viably, that it will adequately support them.

So what we now need is certainty over when pubs can reopen indoors with household mixing and no curfew or restriction on dining. This happened safely last summer without a vaccine, so the Government must also allow this once we get to a certain level of vaccinations and as soon as that is achieved. Publicans, as others, understood the reasons given for this third lockdown, to avoid a serious spike and a crisis for the NHS and we were told that this lockdown was needed until the vulnerable were vaccinated. You yourself said in the House of Commons on 27th January that "*Our goal now must be to buy the extra weeks we need to immunise the most vulnerable and get this virus under control, so that together we can defeat this most wretched disease and reclaim our lives, once and for all.*"

Publicans accepted that and now they hold you to that commitment. Yet what we seem to be hearing at the moment is that instead of intending to deliver that commitment, pubs will remain closed for much longer than other businesses, without evidence that demonstrates they are a greater risk than these other businesses (or a significant risk), even when the levels of vaccinations will mean that the vast majority of vulnerable groups will have been vaccinated. That does not, to us, sound like following the science; it certainly isn't sticking to the strategy behind this lockdown in the first place, and it certainly isn't showing any understanding of the disastrous impact on yet more months of closure on families, livelihoods and on mental and physical health, with evidence showing the significant deterioration of these, for many people, due to lockdown.

We urge the Government to understand and to address the looming mental health crisis in the sector, with many publicans, brewers and other suppliers that have already suffered financial loss now on the brink of the loss of their entire business, including many with businesses that they have run successfully for years. Some people are facing bankruptcy, and some are on the verge of breakdown. Furthermore, the ongoing closure of pubs has had an inevitable knock on throughout the supply chain which includes our brewing industry as well as a huge number of other suppliers. Many of these are small independent businesses with limited reserves and resilience, and are therefore currently facing the same fears as our tens of thousands of independent publicans and small pub-owning businesses.

So, as well as following data, including vaccination levels, the Government must also factor in the ongoing impact of the closure of pubs and other businesses on people. The longer that pubs are banned from opening, the more families will face serious hardship, and the more communities will see their local pubs closed. So if the Government decides to keep pubs closed, they must provide adequate support as part of any ongoing strategy for all pubs and for businesses relying on pubs. That must form part of any decision-making in assessing the costs (including to the exchequer) of keeping pubs closed.

You have always liked to give the impression that you value and like the Great British pub. We hope that is genuine. If it is, then we need, firstly, to see a real understanding of the situation facing pubs, publicans and their families, and secondly we need a strategy announced that reflects that – and one that will literally, save many pubs that without it, will simply not survive.

So if you and the Government do, genuinely, want to save our pubs and avoid unnecessary closures and hardship for many thousands of families, then this is the 9 point plan the Government needs to adopt:

1. **A clear 'roadmap' with dates of when pubs can reopen indoors**, with minimal restrictions, with household mixing, and with no requirement to dine and no curfews.
2. **Announce a proper ongoing package of support until then** including grants paid, on a monthly/weekly basis (until pubs are able to open indoors, with household mixing, no curfew and no requirement that customers must dine).
3. Announce that deferred VAT bills can be deferred for a further year and that Bounce Back Loan repayments will not start until trade is back to normal.

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4. **Pubs should be allowed to offer takeaway/click-and-collect beer and other alcoholic drinks**, as supermarkets and off-licenses continue to be allowed to do. This needs to happen immediately.
5. **To announce a statutory rent code including the statutory right to a rent review**, to stop unreasonable rents that don't reflect trading conditions and don't take into account loss of trade through closures and restrictions. We have raised this issue repeatedly, but alas so far, this is being ignored and indebted publicans and others are fobbed off with a voluntary Code of Practice for Covid rent that isn't worth the paper it is written on, as pub-owners and others are ignoring it with impunity.
6. **A continuation of the business rates holiday to 2021/22 for pubs.**
7. **VAT of 5% on all pub/hospitality sales, including on all drinks, to support ALL pubs.** This must *not* be on food/accommodation only, or it discriminates and disadvantages wet-led pubs, traditional community locals and micropubs and taprooms (and yet provides a huge amount of tax relief to multinational fast-food chains who do not need it).
8. **A tailored package of support, including business rates relief for small brewers & other suppliers**, whose businesses are threatened by pubs being closed.
9. **Cancellation of the damaging proposed changes to Small Brewers' Beer Duty Rate Relief (SBR)** that will damage and close small independent breweries. We already oppose these reforms in principle as being unfair, and the additional challenges posed by the pandemic now mean that the timing of their planned implementation simply could not be worse.

We urge you to listen and support and indeed save our nation's pubs and breweries, and to announce when we can see pubs reopening as pubs, and when our brewers can get Britain brewing again. It must be based on evidence, but the evidence must also include take into account the huge impact of lockdown and enforced business closure on livelihoods, mental and physical health and the wellbeing of those who rely on pubs. The strategy must therefore include adequate support while the Government restrictions make it impossible for pubs to trade viably.

We have copied this letter to the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for BEIS and BEIS Minister Paul Scully MP, whom we expect to hear from regarding engaging with individual pubs and publicans, as well as pub-owning companies. We have also copied it to the All-Party Parliamentary Pub Group.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Crossman
Chair, Campaign for Pubs



Dawn Hopkins
Vice-Chair, Campaign for Pubs



Greg Mulholland
Campaign Director

cc Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Rt. Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State for BEIS
Paul Scully MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets)
Charlotte Nichols MP, Chair, All Party Parliamentary Pub Group