



Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

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

11th August 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Covid-19 and pubs

We are writing as a matter of urgency, due to the huge anxiety being caused by increasingly speculation that pubs will once again be forced to close as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak.

As you will know, many pubs and publicans are already struggling with reduced trade as it is, so other than localised measures, any mass closure of pubs without significant further targeted support would lead to widespread hardship, the failure of many pub businesses and the closure and inevitable loss of many more pubs.

The Campaign for Pubs believes that the majority of pubs, publicans and pub-goers are socially responsible and are compliant with social distancing and other Covid-19 safety measures.

We consider that recent generic criticism of how the pub industry is operating does not reflect the majority position. The vast majority of pubs and publicans are operating according to the current rules and guidelines, as laid down by the Government.

On behalf of pubs and publicans up and down the country, we urge the Government to be clear on its strategy for dealing with Covid and its approach to pubs as the situation continues to develop. If there is compelling evidence that necessitates the closure of all pubs, or indeed any other sector of the economy, then the Government should share that evidence and be specific on the end point or scenario to return to normal operation.

Any decision to again close pubs or any other business must only be made on the basis that it has been scientifically proven that well-run pubs are causing more of a problem than other businesses and gatherings. Otherwise, the focus must be to better monitor compliance with the current rules and guidelines.

We welcome effective enforcement, across all business sectors, to ensure that those not complying with Government Guidance are dealt with through a fair and evidenced-based process. It would be unfair, as well as damaging, to close thousands of pubs simply because a small minority may have failed to adhere the rules and guidelines.

The sudden closure of pubs in March caused a huge problem for pubs and breweries. The short notice prevented proper planning, so that an enormous amount of beer and other stock had to be thrown away. The reality of closing pubs and the effect on these businesses and those who run them (and on brewers and suppliers) must be properly understood and factored into decision-making. Any decision to close pubs for a second time would mean more stock disposals and a repeat of the problems of re-stocking and reopening. Pubs and brewers (and other suppliers) need adequate notice of any closure and of any reopening.

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There are those who are calling for pubs to be closed, without scientific evidence, and who are linking the closure of pubs to the opening of schools. Some of these calls appear to be based on a lack of understanding of the importance of pubs to local communities and economies, as well as the national economy and tourism, not to mention the fact that those pubs represent the livelihoods of several million people, including the children of those who actually run or work in pubs.

It is of course vital for all of us to change our behaviour to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19, as the vast majority of pubs and publicans are doing, but any decision to actually close pubs must take into account the devastating impact this would have on many lives and many communities. In well-run pubs, social distancing measures are now better implemented and supervised than in many other situations or environments (including many other sectors of the economy not being singled out for criticism). Pubs fully understand that they are now operating in this 'new normal' and accept doing so, despite the challenges.

As it is, pubs struggling with reduced demand and reduced capacity already need more support, especially those that were excluded from the previous round of grants and other packages. The VAT reduction and Eat Out to Help Out scheme are both helpful to pubs that serve food, but neither of these support packages helps the thousands of community pubs that serve drinks only. These pubs generally operate at the very heart of their local community and are the very pubs now most in need of support and, reportedly, now most under threat of a second enforced closure.

Sadly there are still many such wet-led pubs that have yet to find a way to reopen in the first place, due to issues arising from their generally smaller size and often more "characterful" layout. The current rumours regarding another impending closure are now making it even more difficult for their operators to plan any kind of reopening while this new uncertainty continues.

So any decision to close pubs again, for any period, must involve a comprehensive support package to help publicans, their employees and related businesses to recover from the huge impact of this crisis and any future closures. That must be part of the consideration of decision making and we hope to hear from Ministers that this is understood and that without such a support package, the impact of announcing any further closure of pubs would be devastating for hundreds of thousands of publicans, staff, suppliers and their families.

Furthermore, if pubs are closed again the Government will need a robust strategy for dealing with non-compliant, unsupervised gatherings at other venues, including public parks, beaches and private houses and gardens.

As someone who has previously expressed support for pubs and our unique pub culture, we hope you will consider this in any decision-making. We urge you to provide clarity over the current speculation as a matter of great urgency, and we of course remain happy to discuss the situation with Government Ministers.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



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Licensee



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Vice-Chair, Campaign for Pubs
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Phil Saltonstall
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Brewer