



Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

The Rt. Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Secretary of State
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
3 Whitehall Place
London
SW1A 2AW

11th January 2020

Dear Kwasi,

Urgent – please stop discrimination against pubs regarding takeaway

First of all, may we welcome you to your new role, a hugely important one in this desperately challenging time for so many businesses, including pubs. We hope you will be a champion for our nation's world famous pubs and we also hope you will engage with pubs and publicans, not just with pub-owning companies and their representatives.

We are writing to you, on behalf of our members and pubs and publicans, to urge you to reverse the unfair and discriminatory decision to ban pubs from selling takeaway alcohol during this latest lockdown in England.

During the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, the option for pubs to sell food and alcohol on a takeaway basis was permitted by the Government. For those licensees who did so, it provided a welcome lifeline to enable them to just about keep their heads above water and maintain their profiles within the communities they served. It also enabled small brewers to continue to brew and sell draught beer, without which we would have seen more brewery closures than those that sadly did close.

With the advent of the second lockdown and tier system in November 2020, the Government initially informed the industry the sale of alcohol was banned, although thankfully this ruling changed quickly and the sale of alcohol by takeaway means was again an option, providing a lifeline, especially to wet led venues.

Throughout the previous two lockdowns, pubs went to huge lengths and spent huge amounts of money to make their pubs as safe as possible and play to their part in the nation's efforts to reduce the spread of the virus, through measures to encourage and enforce social distancing, signage, one-way systems, encouraging the use of hand-sanitiser etc. When it came to takeaway and click and collect, pubs and brewery taphouses were selling packaged products – bottles and cans (as supermarkets and off-licenses do) but especially were selling draught products, which was vital for many pubs (and breweries).

Yet now the Government has made the arbitrary and unjustified decision to ban this and allow only delivery (which for many pubs will simply not be economically viable and for others is impossible due to lack of staff) is devastating as well as unfair.

To make this even worse, many pubs have a considerable amount of draught beer in their cellar that they had purchased as they had been allowed to open, only to be closed at very short notice just before Christmas or just before New Year, when in both cases they had had to order draught beer (and cider) in advance for these key times. This Government's eleventh-hour decision making has been disastrous for pubs and restaurants and decisions could and should have been taken much earlier to order closures, before stock had had to be ordered.

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

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The fact that many pubs have hundreds and in many cases thousands of pounds of draught beer (and cider) in their cellar that they cannot use is a direct result of the Government failing to give proper notice in these circumstances.

So for the Government to then ban pubs from being able to sell this perishable product, at all, is absolutely disgraceful and again shows the profound lack of understanding or empathy for publicans from this Government.

The claimed justification for this is the view that people may congregate outside premises while waiting for their takeaways and that people may drink alcohol outside the premises or nearby. Yet these arguments simply don't hold water and show (yet more) clear discrimination against pubs, something that is becoming all too common through this crisis. Despite the devastating and perilous position pubs and bars are in, it is only pubs and bars that are singled out. Meanwhile, coffee shops and takeaway food outlets remain open. We don't wish to see these restricted, but the fact is that there is more chance of people drinking hot drinks, before they go cold, immediately outside coffee shops than there is of people drinking alcohol purchases. Similarly, with groups eating fast food outside fast-food outlets (with such multinational chains benefiting hugely from the ill-targeted Eat Out to Help Out scheme, whilst wet-led pubs had no such support).

Meanwhile, of course, supermarkets continue to be open and able to sell alcohol without any restriction and continue to make huge profits throughout this crisis as pubs (and other small businesses) are losing money and going out of business. All the way through the first lockdown, there were groups drinking supermarket bought cans and bottles in parks, riverbanks and beaches. Yet the Government has taken no action to limit supermarket sales of alcohol or properly tackle people drinking supermarket inappropriately in groups, whilst unfairly banning pub off-licence sales. So however the Government and advisers try to justify the pub takeaway ban, it is another decision made without the evidence to justify it and that is clearly prejudiced and discriminating, as well as being disastrous for the nation's pubs and small brewers.

Once again, just like the way the crass decision to introduce the 10pm curfew actually led to huge crowds and private parties, this decision will harm pubs whilst doing nothing to stop people breaking the rules including through illegally gathering to socialise, drinking cans from the supermarket, with no social distancing in place and no supervision. Once again, the decision has clearly been made to look tough rather than actually, sensibly, tackle the spread of Covid whilst also being the last straw for some pubs.

Instead of this latest attack on pubs and publicans, many of whom are on their knees due to the huge losses and ever-increasing costs, the Government should simply clamp down on anyone breaking the rules by congregating and drinking or eating anything anywhere, outside fast-food outlets, outside coffee shops – and penalising any business of any kind that is allowing this.

Pubs should be allowed to sell alcohol, including draught beer, following simple guidelines of only doing so in sealed containers and with clear instructions to customers that they must not open and drink them outside the pub or anywhere else other than at home. Publicans are quite prepared to operate under these sensible conditions – and indeed to warn any individuals who break this by trying to consume the products outside, with the threat of calling the police. This approach is the one that takeaways and coffee shops should also abide with. It is fair and would deal with the minority of people who break the rules outside any such venue, rather than unfairly singling out pubs and without imposing a draconian, unjustified and damaging ban only on pub takeaways.

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If you do not do this, then perhaps we could suggest that all publicans who ordered cask beer that will now perish and have to be poured away should send your Department the bill for the stock that has been wasted.

So we urge the Government to think again, and we ask you, as the Secretary of State for business, to take up this issue with the Prime Minister and to allow pubs to offer a straightforward takeaway service or at the very least a click and collect service, on the basis outlined here.

As ever, publicans are prepared work with the Government and the authorities and play our part in dealing with this crisis and can do so if you work with us and treat us fairly.

We also ask that you will engage with publicans and with the Campaign for Pubs and the British Pub Confederation, as it is vital that the real voice of pubs is heard, as well as that of giant pubcos and the corporate side of the sector.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Crossman
Chair, Campaign for Pubs



Dawn Hopkins
Vice-Chair, Campaign for Pubs