

All Party Parliamentary Beer Group

‘Let me start by saying that to me pubs are everything – they are the heart and soul of the community, be that in towns, cities, or the smallest hamlet. They are integral to this wonderful country and for centuries have been the hub of everything we hold dear.

In 2019 I presented a programme on the BBC entitled “Saving Britain’s Pubs” - as it transpired, filming started before the pandemic hit and the premise was how are all those amazing pubs managing amidst a multitude of difficulties? Not well at all. They were closing at an alarming rate. And then Covid became our new norm. And these ailing Inns pivoted and did the most amazing things to help their communities – became shops, made and delivered food.... became a place of warmth and support like I have never seen before.

Now more than ever we need to give pubs a fighting chance to come back after Covid. Laden with debt, a less than perfect business rate relief scheme and an impending VAT increase do not make for a pretty set of accounts for any of us regardless of business size.

Business rates should be there to support not penalise pubs. Back in October the Chancellor announced the introduction of a new business rates relief scheme for retail, hospitality, and leisure properties worth almost £1.7 billion. It is to provide eligible, occupied, retail, hospitality, and leisure properties with a 50% relief, up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business. This cap though for me is too low as a significant number of pubs will not benefit from the relief at all. Ideally, I would be asking for a full year of business rate cancellation. The business rates for pubs needs a root and branch review in my humble opinion, that is reflective of today but also has forward planning to better anticipate what the workings of a pub will probably look like in five and ten years hence with a reduction in the multiplier for pubs/community and high street businesses, rebalancing that by taking more money from the digital giants who pay no town centre rates at all.

In terms of VAT we have to, and I mean **have to**, keep it at the current reduced rate of 12.5% instead of increasing to 20% in April. I would go so far as to say that it should be reduced back to 5% for the remainder of 2022 to give pubs and the hospitality sector at large some desperately-needed breathing space. We have two years of business to recoup.

In addition to the massive financial losses incurred, the mental health deterioration suffered by so many in this sector cannot be underestimated. I am messaged literally every day by despairing publicans, at a loss to know what to do next. How to deal with rents that are overdue, problems in recruiting staff, rising costs in all areas from energy to food, loan repayments, VAT increase, waiting for grants to be paid months down the line after they’ve been promised, all overlaid by a distinctly smaller pool of customers. The fear coming through those messages is palpable and whilst I can’t help them other than to offer support and limited advice, I will use my platform and voice as best I can to draw attention to this vital sector that needs help like at no other time in history.

We have much to be thankful for, life returning to normal, a Platinum Jubilee celebration in June giving the country a momentous occasion to come together – let’s make sure our pubs are at the very heart of it and feel the love and support of the nation. More importantly the

Government needs to urgently offer more tangible support and less platitudes in my opinion and those in the sector who can demonstrate some humanity in terms of flexibility and support should step up now while we still have those pubs. When they're gone they're gone.'

Tom Kerridge