



Paul Hegarty  
Secretary of the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group

Wednesday 21 April 2021

## **CAMRA evidence to the Beer Group Inquiry on the future of cask beer**

Dear Paul,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Beer Group Inquiry on the future of cask beer. Cask beer is at the heart of CAMRA's campaigning – both for the brewers that make it, and the best place to drink it – the pub. Despite the downturn in production and consumption during the pandemic, we believe that cask beer has a bright future in the UK as a local, quality drink that is both steeped in tradition but also a drink of choice for many younger discerning drinkers.

I am writing to summarise CAMRA's key position points on what the UK Government can do to support producers and consumers of cask beer, and pubs, as the wider hospitality industry emerges from the pandemic:

### 1. A new draught beer duty rate

The Government's Alcohol Duty Review is an excellent opportunity to consider how we can transform our duty system to support UK producers and encourage consumption of alcohol in regulated community settings now that we are not constrained by EU Duty Directives.

Seven out of ten drinks sold in pubs are beer – so a new, lower, draught beer duty rate will encourage consumption back into pubs from the off-trade, bringing the benefits of local job creation and support for property based, high street and village businesses which had already suffered before the Coronavirus pandemic.

### 2. Support for brewers

Since the earliest days of the pandemic, brewers have not had access to the same level of financial support as the wider hospitality sector – not benefitting from the business rates holiday, and in most cases denied access to hospitality grant schemes. The business rates holiday should apply to brewery premises as well as taprooms, and proposals to increase the level of tax that some of the smallest brewers pay should be abandoned.

The Government should consider investigating the acute access to market issues that small brewers still experience – selling most of their product into local freehold pubs, with other routes to market foreclosed due to supply ties and the dominance of national and global brands in supply chains.

### 3. Sticking to the reopening roadmap for England

Pubs matter. They are a force for good in society – they are vital to communities, prevent loneliness and social isolation and boost local economies. Along with the brewers that craft the beer that we drink in them, they will be part of the social and economic recovery from the pandemic, but only if they are supported through reopening to thrive again.

The Government must stick to reopening plans for England, allowing inside opening on schedule, and rule out a return to any unfair measures such as alcohol bans, curfews or substantial meal requirements.

Alongside this, in recognition that social distancing requirements have an impact of trading capacity, the Government should extend the full business rates holiday and extend the VAT cut to include alcohol sales to ensure that pubs can thrive again post pandemic.

### 4. A campaign to boost consumer confidence in pub going

Licensees have invested thousands of pounds making their venues COVID secure, and already work in adherence with a vast array of rules and regulations around hygiene, food standards and licensing issues. Pubs are the best place to enjoy alcohol responsibly, and the best place to socialise safely.

However, negative and misleading portrayals of pubs and drinkers in the media, and previous draconian, unevidenced restrictions imposed by the Government have dented consumer confidence in pub going – which the Government has failed to counter despite no compelling evidence being presented that pubs are a major source of virus transmissions.

The Government must seek to counter this, as they did when fears about the safety of supermarkets were raised. The Government should consider running an awareness campaign that encourages consumers back to the pub and highlights the benefits of socialising safely within the hospitality sector, rather than gathering in private residences.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak to the Beer Group Inquiry. We look forward to seeing the resulting report and recommendations to Government.

Best wishes,

Ellie Hudspith

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