

## **Submission to the APPBG Enquiry into Cask Ale, from Hogs Back Brewery Ltd**

Hogs Back Brewery was founded in 1992 with the express intention of brewing Traditional English Ale at a time when the market had seen three decades of steadily declining sales for that style of beer. Cask Ale represented 85% of all our volume for the first 20 years of our business, and before the Covid pandemic it still represented over 60% of our sales - almost all that has been lost in the last year. A significant proportion of that is unlikely to be recovered unless we, and the whole sector, comes up with new initiatives.

Cask Ale is an internationally unique beer style, a quintessential part of the British pub and broader cultural tradition. It is also particularly relevant to today's positive consumer trends - it is distinctively *local*, it is carefully *crafted*, it has *no disposable packaging*, it is the only style of *authentically fresh* beer. Cask Ale has a low environmental footprint, a huge cultural imprint, and potentially an important economic and job impact - we should not let it wither away.

What needs to be done to save it? The main effort must come from the Industry itself, and from drinkers. Pubs and brewers lost a lot of money when the lockdowns were announced without sufficient time to run down stocks and a lot of cask ale was written off – there is now understandable wariness in stocking beer with such a short shelf life, and consumers seem happy to accept kegged craft beers as an alternative, even if they are not quite as fresh. We do need a concerted effort to celebrate cask ale and make it a central part of the local offer of all pubs, and to treat it as a premium, natural fresh drink that justifies a premium retail price.

We also need to see a renewed effort to ensure cask ale is always served to the highest quality standards and the Cask Marque scheme needs further support from all Trade bodies to set new, higher national standards of dispense and training. Brewers need to be investing more to ensure dispense equipment is of the highest quality and that suppliers do not lock out small local brewers from the dispense systems, as some do at present.

All of this costs money at a time when small local brewers of cask ale have been hit hardest by the pandemic and had to bear the costs of all the stock write offs. We welcome the announced reform of Small Brewers Relief which will over time help the long term sustainability of small brewers. We would additionally like to see the Government introduce a short term specific boost for pubs along the lines of the 'Eat out to Help out' scheme, but with this help focussed not on a VAT cut but on a duty cut. The duty cut should apply to all draught beer, but with an additional rebate for cask ale to recognise the short shelf life, higher wastage and additional work and skill involved in dispensing it at the right quality standards.

The objective of this intervention would be to give pub owners a good reason to take the risk of restocking and promoting cask ale whilst the brewers would be able to use the duty saving to reinvest to improve dispense and reposition cask ale in consumers perceptions as a fresh, local product, deserving to be given hero status as a key differentiator for pubs focussing on quality local food and drink.

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