

Local pubs deliver invaluable socio-economic value, ministers must act to save them – new report states

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Local pubs deliver invaluable socio-economic value, ministers must act to save them – new report states

Government must give pubs which serve as the beating hearts of their communities greater support with tax rebates to safeguard the nation's locals as vital social lifelines, a report from the think-tank Localis has urged today.

In a report issued today entitled '**Inn-Valuable: unlocking the socio-economic potential of our nation's pubs**', Localis also argued that a minister for pubs role be reinstated to join up help for the country's pubs sector – which cumulatively supports 936,000 jobs, generates £28bn in GVA to the economy and delivers £15bn in tax revenues to the Exchequer annually.

According to polling undertaken by YouGov for the report, **75 percent** of people felt the impact of pubs to community life to be positive. When asked if pubs are important in bringing people together, more than four-in-five (**81 percent**) of British adults agreed they are, with just 14 percent feeling that they are not.

Polling carried out for the report showed 68 percent of British adults felt that pubs help combat loneliness in their local area. Among pro-community activities supported by local pubs, nearly half (**44%**) of people were aware of pub events that bring the community together, **a quarter (25%)** knew of local pubs that supported charitable causes and **17 percent** knew of local pubs that supported vulnerable people in their area.

The research identified from case studies taken pubs across the country some dominant themes on how the sector supports local people and communities, namely by:

- combatting isolation
- supporting local causes
- reflecting local culture
- bringing local business together
- supporting community through generations.

Pollsters also found that among social uses of pubs in the last three months, more than half of the population (**51%**) had met a friend in one, while nearly two-in-five (**37%**) of people had visited the pub to meet up with family, a quarter (**25%**) had enjoyed Sunday lunch in one and **10%** of the public had attended a pub-held birthday party in that timespan. In addition, **six percent** of the public had used pubs for dating purposes and **13%** watched a sporting event.

A key recommendation of the report calls for the re-establishment of a Minister for Pubs post to co-ordinate a cross-government taskforce responsible for long-term strategy for the British pubs sector and to lead on help with tax and regulation, alongside an emergency fund for energy bill support.

The report authors also make the case for business rates rebates for those pubs which take on socially valuable roles such as foodbanks or in providing warm spaces for vulnerable people, with a call for a modest £4m cashpot to help 1,000 pubs to diversify at a cost of a mere £4,000 per pub.

Localis head of research, Joe Fyans, said: "Across Britain, pubs have consistently played a pivotal role in knitting communities together and promoting social cohesion.

"Pubs are the beating heart of many communities, playing multifaceted roles in local daily life. This is why the decline of pubs is cause for great concern. With each closure, both tangible and intangible voids are left behind.

"The lessons are clear: pubs, in all their forms and across all locations, remain integral to British social cohesion as hubs of activity, community, and social capital. This makes their presence all the more

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crucial as community safety nets and beacons of light, offering a lifeline hope for many people looking for a real sense of local belonging.”

Emma McClarkin, chief executive of the British Beer and Pub Association, said: ““The stories highlighted in this report truly are just a snapshot of the hugely positive impact pubs have in communities across the country every single day.

“There are few businesses that can say they add both social and economic value and pubs are delivering that value in neighbourhoods from Lanarkshire to Liskeard, and everywhere in between. Pubs provide solace to people in tough times and a place to celebrate in others and to lose them would have a serious impact on people’s lives.

“With closures continuing to rise and pubs under threat from further duty and business rates cost hikes we hope the Government will seriously consider the proposals put forward by this report so the foundations can be laid to help pubs continue to do this brilliant work in their communities long into the future.”

Becky Barnett who runs The Lamb Inn in Swadlincote, which features in the report, said: “We support our local community in a number of ways, including offering free food and drinks to people on Wednesday mornings. People can come into the pub, have a free hot meal, and in winter, sit by our log fire in comfy chairs, no questions asked.

“When times are tough, we want to be a place where people can come for help and local people have been incredibly grateful of us opening our doors at no cost. At the same time, we also face challenges with high energy bills and other rising costs so it’s a scary time for our business as well, we want to continue to provide a non-judgemental warm space for people but we’re facing our own difficulties as well.”

Pub is The Hub chief executive, John Longden, said: “Pubs and publicans are the heroes at the heart of community life that provide essential local services and activities that create social value.

“They are a lifeline for many rural areas providing vital local services and activities such as village stores, allotments and community cafes as well as offering a safe space to tackle the major societal issue of loneliness.

“Pub is The Hub now estimates 1,000 more pubs and local areas could benefit from services if they can be directly supported in the future to diversify.”

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Notes to Editors:

1. **An advance copy of the report is available for download here:**

https://www.localis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/InnValuable_Localis_WEBAWK.pdf

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1. About Localis

Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to politics, public service reform and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

<https://www.localis.org.uk/>

About British Beer and Pub Association

The British Beer & Pub Association is the leading body representing Britain's brewers and pub companies. The Association is more than a century old and was originally founded as the Brewers' Society in 1904. Our members account for some 90 per cent of beer brewed in Britain today, and own around 20,000 of the nation's pubs.

<https://beerandpub.com/>

1. Key report recommendations

2. A cross-government taskforce on the future of the British pub. A long-term strategy is needed to determine a sustainable tax and regulatory framework and measures that can help the sector thrive in the coming decades and ensure that its pivotal role in society is not lost.
3. Emergency fund for energy bill support. Government should establish a fund to provide energy bill support for pubs in deprived areas, in a manner similar to the 'social tariff' on household energy bills argued for by organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau. More broadly, government must ensure all pubs have access to fair and reasonable energy contracts.
4. Business rates rebates for diversifying pubs. Government should fund local authorities to provide partial business rebates for pubs which diversify to take on socially valuable roles, such as those providing 'warm spaces' or food banks. Pub is the Hub estimate that there is potential for 1,000 pubs to diversify over three years, with required funding as little as £4,000 per pub.
5. A new, revamped Minister for Pubs role with cross-departmental remit. The role of Minister for Pubs, last prominently occupied in 2017, should be reinstated and given a brief to work across departments to support the pub trade.

Recommendations

Policy prescriptions

Looking across the issues faced by publicans in 2023, policy prescriptions fall into three groups:

- Providing emergency support. In the immediate context of energy price surges and inflation across the economy, the first order for policy should be to establish a mechanism by which pubs are protected from the worst of the crisis, as a matter of preserving vital social infrastructure assets. There is also a need to recognise and encourage the social diversification of pubs through policy.
- Joining up thinking. Part of the problem with devising a policy mechanism to support pubs facing closure due to the economic environment is the multiplicity of policy areas which the sector touches upon. There is great potential value in placing a single, accountable figure within government to pull these threads together and give voice to the commonly held view that pubs are of great importance to our country and make a positive impact in their communities.
- Long-term planning. Given the social and economic importance of the sector, there is a clear need to move from a war footing to a more proactive attempt to shore up our nation's pubs. While short-term support is undoubtedly needed in the sector, what is called for in the long-term is a strategy for shoring up this vital social infrastructure against future shocks and continue to contribute to economic growth.

Case studies: value in action

Pubs provide value beyond their role as purveyors of food and drink throughout the UK. Section three highlights some examples of the activities supported by pubs and the value of pubs to local communities through the lens of seven pubs from across the country. Across the pubs interviewed, there was clearly an acute awareness of the impact of the current cost-of-living pressures both on members of their community and their own businesses. Anxieties over the long-term sustainability of the pub consistently dovetailed with concerns for the wider community among our case studies. All of our interviewees were in some way providing additional social value, from fundraising activities to the direct provision of help to the community in the form of food or emergency medical supplies. These activities bring with them a sense of mission, and there was a strong determination felt across the case studies that the current crisis must be ridden out to avoid the loss of a prized local institution.

Across our seven case studies, some prevailing themes were evident, which resonate with the overview of research on the sector laid out in section one. These were:

- **Combatting isolation.** It was repeatedly highlighted throughout the interviews that pubs provide

a place to socialise for local residents who otherwise might not have many interactions over the course of a day. This is particularly true for older people, especially older people who are single, who will visit the pub for a conversation as much as they will for a drink or meal.

- **Supporting local causes.** For all of our case study pubs, there was a feeling that, whether through fundraising or direct engagement, pubs have a responsibility to support causes that are important to the local area and to local residents. Sometimes these causes are general issues which affect everyone in society but are felt as a priority locally, sometimes they are direct responses to specific absences in local service provision or the area's cultural offering.
- **Reflecting local culture.** Part of the role of a successful local pub is to provide a reflection of the local area and its residents by putting on events such as mini-festivals or street carnivals. These events show how pubs can be catalysts for local culture, bringing residents together and showcasing pride of place.
- **Bringing local business together.** The case studies show how pubs can act as loci for action from a broad range of local businesses. When pubs organise fundraisers like public events, they often rely on the support of local traders who support the causes in question through quid-pro-quo arrangements or even free services. This type of activity can help bring a sense of pride in place to the business community in much the same way as the events themselves do for the community at large.
- **Intergenerational customers.** The pub as an intergenerational social adhesive was an idea that arose in several of our case study interviews – indeed, some of our interviewees recalled drinking as 18-year-olds in the pubs they now manage. Whether in the same space doing different things or united around a common cause, the pub as a physical space where groups across generations can coexist will only become more valuable as technological innovations and changing working practices lead to an increasingly atomised society.

Polling

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,049 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 17th August 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

SLL_Q1. The following questions are on the topic of local pubs. Even if you don't tend to visit pubs, we are still interested in your opinion...In general, to what extent do you feel pubs have a positive or negative effect in a community?

~~20%~~ Weighted base

~~Base~~ Base: All GB adults

~~34%~~ positive

~~51%~~ Slightly positive

~~12%~~ Neither positive nor negative

~~3%~~ Slightly negative

~~2%~~ Very negative

~~15%~~ Positive

~~6%~~ Negative

SLL_Q2. Still thinking about local pubs...How important, if at all, do you think pubs are in bringing people together?

~~10%~~ Weighted base

~~1%~~ Base: All GB adults

~~2%~~ Very important

~~8%~~ Important

~~1%~~ Very important

~~0%~~ at all important

~~0%~~ Don't know

~~0%~~ Important

~~0%~~ Not Important

SLL_Q4. Thinking about the last 3 months (i.e., since May 2023)...Which, if any, of the following activities have you done in a pub? (Please select all that apply)

~~0%~~ Weighted base

~~0%~~ Base: All GB adults who have visited a pub in L3M

~~0%~~ Attended a birthday party

~~2%~~ Attended a wedding reception

~~Been~~ to a charity event

~~Met~~ up as part of a community group or activity

~~Met~~ up with friends

~~Met~~ up with family

~~Watched~~ a sporting event

~~Had~~ Sunday lunch

~~Been~~ on a date

~~Watched~~ live music

~~Worked~~ remotely

0%er

0% Don't know

0% Not applicable - I have not been to a pub in the last 3 months

SLL_Q5. Which, if any, of the following activities apply to the pub(s) in your local area? (Please select all that apply)

0% Weighted base

0% Base: All GB adults

25% Pub that supports charitable causes

44% Pub that holds events that bring the community together

17% Pub that supports vulnerable groups in the area (e.g. older people, differently abled people, etc.)

0%er

~~02%~~ Don't know

~~6%~~ Not applicable – there are no pubs in my local area

SSL_Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Pubs help combat loneliness and isolation amongst people in my local area

~~0%~~ Weighted base

~~0%~~ Base: All GB adults

~~30%~~ Strongly agree

~~4%~~ Tend to agree

~~9%~~ Tend to disagree

~~3%~~ Strongly disagree

~~0%~~ Don't know

Not applicable – there are no pubs in my local area

Not Agree

Not Disagree

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Additional Assets:

Localis report: Inn-Valuable: unlocking the socio-economic potential of our nation's pubs
https://www.localis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/InnValuable_Localis_WEBAWK.pdf

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