A submission to the Inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on pubs, landlords, and communities. Undertaken by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Pubs (Pubs APPG), May 2021.

The Pubs APPG is cross-party group of MPs who aim to promote and campaign for the interests of pubs, landlords, and the communities around these pubs, both in Westminster and beyond.

The Website indicates that ...

There are three main areas to the inquiry:

a. **The impact on pubs:** How have people who run and work in pubs been impacted? Have pub closures affected their mental health and wellbeing?

b. **The community impact:** How has the need to close pubs impacted communities at a local level? What services do pubs usually provide, and what is the impact of their loss? How do you envisage the future of pubs and the communities around them?

c. **The national context**: What are your views of the impact of the pandemic on the pub trade as a whole? Are there key systemic pressures currently faced by all pubs? How could the sector best be supported to make a strong recovery?

Submission relating to Area b

The community impact:

1. ***How has the need to close pubs impacted communities at a local level?***

2. ***What services do pubs usually provide, and***

3. ***what is the impact of their loss?***

4. ***How do you envisage the future of pubs and the communities around them?***

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[1] Draft Notes compiled as a contribution to the APPG Inquiry in the form of a short written submission. It focuses on the Community impact.

Community Impact

How has the need to close pubs impacted communities at a local level?

With the changes in behaviour being unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic and the implications for the economy which led to the Government, in March 2020, forcing the closure of Public Houses and Restaurants in the UK, perhaps it is time for reflection on the nature of traditional pubs, breweries and the impacts on serving the local community this could have on future generations of pub goers.

An aspect, worthy of special attention, is the isolation caused by closing public houses and the effect this has had on some individuals mental health. It is easy to underestimate how much support and interaction a good pub provides for someone living alone, particularly in a remote village. The benefits provided become almost a 'holistic' therapy centre for some.

Similarly for younger age groups starting work in an office, the after hours opportunities to create networks through meeting up after work in a city centre are removed, when pubs and hospitality venues are closed. Isolation is therefore a feature affecting all groups that are working or not working and across all age groups. This being specifically so when the opportunities are limited for social activities and interaction to take place in different locations due to lockdown restrictions.[2]

It is also worth reflecting how the more senior members of society, who are also the ones often in need of the social interface of a public house, will cope with the closing of a pub, will they simply be put off and sadly not visit when reopened? A missed visit to a local public house, for whatever reason, is not only a cost to the individual and also a loss to the regular customer base of the public house and its supplying brewery.

What services do pubs usually provide, and

The sad fact of the matter is that during many months, since late March 2020 until mid April/May 2021, we could no longer go to 'the local' ourselves (whether pubs located in a place near to where one: usually resides, normally works or frequently visits). Neither could anybody else, to enjoy a hoppy[3] pint and a packet of crisps, peanuts or even some pork scratchings!

The term public house is used narrowly in this context, to cover a particular grouping of premises, which are often smaller, specifically the history and heritage aspects featured in Licensed to Sell[4] which forms the background to the following discussion. This is to differentiate and focus upon this specific sub group rather than the wider range of pub types, often but not always of a larger scale, from country inns to craft bars and corner locals, outlined in The Pub.[5] While an even wider perspective is set out in Beer,[6] which identifies selected breweries, bars and beer museums worldwide. Each of the different types of premises will have a set of challenges to overcome when attempting to finally reopen after the exit from lockdown. Turning now to the public houses role in social gathering and sensible drinking.

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[2] Letter on 'working in the office' to the Financial Times, 10 March 2021, page 22.

[3] Pub closures threaten hops industry, FT Weekend 20 June/21 June, 2020, page 2.

[4] Geoff Brandwood, Andrew Davison and Michael Slaughter, 2011, *Licensed to Sell, The History and Heritage of the Public House*, English Heritage in association with CAMRA, Second Edition. First published 2004. St Albans.

[5] Pete Brown, 2016, *The Pub, A Cultural Institution – from Country Inns to Craft Bars and Corner Locals*, Jacqui Small. London.

[6] Justin Kennedy, 2019, *The Bucket List Beer, 1000 Adventures - Pubs - Breweries -Festivals*, Quarto Publishing, London.

Serving and Entertaining the Customers

The public house has been used over the years for a whole variety of activities: from legal proceedings, inquests, church vestry meetings, dances, business meetings, and exhibitions to accommodation. However, now the main activities for any public house are: dispensing drinks, especially beer,[7] the provision of food and recreations and entertainment. While brewpubs are now widespread when CAMRA was founded in 1971, there were only four, including the Blue Anchor, which is still brewing, in Helston, Cornwall.[8] The event and the story[9] of the campaign's 50 years, were marked by celebrations on 17 March 2021, however, not in the pub or pub garden, as they were closed due to lockdown restrictions.

Serving the beer

While the breweries have replaced traditional wooden barrels by metal casks as the means of storage of beer, there are some enterprising public houses now investing in their own set of small wooden barrels to be refilled by local breweries and placed near the bar to serve on gravity.

The seasons play a critical part in the management of storage conditions so as to serve a good pint at the correct temperature. Climate change and other impacts that now seem to result in extended warmer summers will generate issues for: managing, stocking the cellar and the final delivery of the tapped "product".

The dispense of the beer from the cellar is also something that has changed over the years, with gravity by pouring directly from the barrel, or even by cask pumps, in the cellar being replaced by pulling through hand or electric pumps to the bar counter direct from the cellar. The bar servery and the back bar are a feature in many Victorian bars. Table service is a rarity in UK pubs and might only be provided to certain customers as a superior service.

Food in the public house

Once a minimum offering in a traditional beer house, the range of food can vary depending on the licensee. Pub grub can comprise basic snacks from crisps, to warmed pies and pasties at one extreme to fine dining, at a gastropub towards the other extreme. For example, The Eagle[10] which opened in January 1991 in Farringdon London. Although, their manifesto was one line 'Never forget it's a pub'.

Food availability may depend on the business and may be served throughout the day or at certain periods. Seating is usually provided at tables for the consumption of meals, occasionally licensees who generally do not serve food will allow customers to bring their own food in to have with their drinks purchased from the bar.

Recreation and entertainment

Games, sports and other entertainments have long been linked with the public house sometimes not being permitted on Sundays.

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[7] Roger Protz and Adrian Tierney-Jones, 2014, *Britain's Beer Revolution, Behind the scenes with the people, breweries and beers inspiring a nation*, CAMRA, St Albans.

[8] CAMRA, 2021, England's historic brewpubs, Beer, Issue Fifty-One, Spring 2021, pages 12- 14.

[9] Laura Hadland, 2021, 50 years of CAMRA: Celebrating 50 years of the Campaign for Real Ale Camra Books, St Albans, England.

[10] Not your average Boozer, FT.Com/Magazine, 16 January/17 January 2021, pages 34 - 38.

Inside the public house: tradition pub games like darts, pool and euchre have mainly given way to televised sports on large screens and digital juke boxes while the quiz nights are popular features in certain pubs. There are public houses with specific rooms with full size snooker tables, or more likely small billiards tables. Skittle alleys were once a feature of rural pubs but were later often converted to a dining area. Live entertainment involving musicians are often a feature of public houses with large licensed separate rooms, which can also hold a wide range of social events and customer experiences. The custom packages including guided tours of the premises, may cover a range of unique options: for instance, christenings, special birthdays, weddings and/or receptions, celebrations & anniversaries and funeral wakes all with/or without specific catering. Outside the Public house: football teams were once a common feature of pub life whilst in certain areas of the country crown bowls are played on purpose built bowling greens, usually at the rear of the premises.

In essence its about the overall purpose of social spaces[11] whether pubs, clubs, music venues or libraries.

What is the impact of their loss?

British beer and pubs as Andy Slee[12] observes, "...support nearly a million jobs, contribute £22 billion per annum to the Exchequer, but are also the focal point of communities".

The scale of the problem of the impact of a prolonged lockdown on breweries and public houses is emerging, as is also the issue of reopening under current social distancing measures. The Chief Executive of UK Hospitality[13] has told the Treasury Select Committee[14] "some landlords were facing legal action over not being able to pay their rent" Kate Nicholls also said "a third of the sector would be put at risk if lockdown measures lasted until Christmas". She called for government intervention "as a matter of urgency".

The Cabinet Office Minister confirmed on the weekend of the 18/19 April 2020 that pubs would be amongst the last businesses to re-open when measures are reduced. Ms Nicholls indicated that a large number of pubs and restaurants had faced statutory demands over missed rent and were seeing the first threats of winding up petitions being waved around.

How do you envisage the future of pubs and the communities around them?

Given the current situation and likely future events[15] a lot will change after the experience of the closure of public houses during lockdown. This leads to speculating how, after exiting lockdown, can the traditional public house continue to function and be run in the short-term as a viable business relying on having a beer garden/large car park? And in the medium to longer term what else might be possible in terms of innovation that might also be desirable, for the smartphone generation?

Will the future visit lie in looking at books with pictures of Pub Interiors of Outstanding Historical Significant Historical Interest[16] with a bottle of real ale, a glass of gin or wine with

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[11] Full pubs are a sign of communities that work. Let's toast their return, The Observer Comment & Analysis, 11 April 2021, page 27.

[12] Focus must be on the survival of pubs and breweries, What's Brewing, May 2020, page 12.

[13] Coronavirus: Pub sector faces 'bloodbath' over rents, BBC News website, 21 April 2020.

[14] https://committees.parliament.uk/event/828/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/

[15] Spread of Covid variant casts show over reopening of indoor hospitality, Financial Times, 18 May 2021, page 3.

[16] Geoff Brandwood, 2016, *Britain's Best Real Ale Heritage Pubs*, CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors, New Edition. First published 2013. St Albans.

some cheese and crackers without actually experiencing the ambience and atmosphere of the real pubs themselves? Or could it be that rather than going to the pub for the face-to-face experience, the pub comes to us online in our homes, accompanied by a delivery of good quality beer? Surely not - as it would mean also missing out on the off-line exploring[17] and travelling: on foot, bike, by bus, train or even in a car! And in the process as well as visiting existing favourites, finding other unvisited traditional pubs and maybe trying new styles and types of beer.

The events of early 2020 and beyond need to be viewed in the longer-term sustainability context involving: climate change/Cop26 UN Climate Change Conference[18] in Glasgow during November 2021 (improving air quality), lifestyle change (promoting healthy lifestyles), public health & social care change (health and wellbeing) also transport & travel change (low carbon transport) issues and opportunities. With an acceptance that we may have seen the end of the golden era of the pub: that pubs have changed due to the year of lockdown but not necessarily for the better, that the trend to working at home, online shopping, for more home based eating rather than going out to eat, home based entertainment and therefore the experience of visiting the pub in the digital age post lockdown will never quite be the same again.

To adapt from the post-Brexit and pre-Covid situation of early 2020 to the new normal will require unlocking the pubs' potential,[19] including change and management, through a well thought out strategy by publicans, breweries and their potential customers. Therefore, perhaps it is time for some thought on 'what will the post-pandemic city[20] look like'? In the process using thought experiments/armchair-travelling experiences through digital communication technology and the capabilities of smart phone virtual reality & augmented reality features.[21] Turning to the role of the public house in the local community and the wider significance.

As part of the local community the 'Pub is often the Hub' of activities with "locals" meeting up in the premises as part of a Club: whether as a folk group, a crafts club or an allotment club. The facilities available provide a venue, which attracts the members at a set day and at a set time. But rather than getting the members to go the pub if the public house was set up as an "interactive hub" where a speaker, i.e, meet the brewer, supported by the staff, where video-calling platforms linked to members at home using Zoom or Houseparty or Facebooks Messenger Rooms to view any talks and presentations but also could engage in a question session to which responses could be made at the end. This could be on online event, i.e. a quiz, with home participation without the need to take the car to the public house and take up space on the premises, if indeed a car park is available.

The interactive hub now becomes the pub at "home", becoming virtual music venues, although with some limitations. Apparently the video - conferencing apps mentioned, do not quite work for music as they overtly compress the music and adversely affects the resulting sound. However, music software combined with decent internet means it has been suggested that the "home" studio can be as good as a professional one.[22]

[17] Tim Webb and Stephen Beaumont, 2020, *World Atlas of Beer,* 3rd Edition, Elizabeth Beazley, London.

[18] Alok Sharma, 2021, *Time's running out, but we can get a grip on the climate crisis*, The Guardian Journal, 19 March 2021, page 2.

[19] All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group Inquiry, 2020, *Unlocking Pubs' Potential*, APPBGI February 2020. http://beergroupinquiry.com/index.html

[20] Michael Batty, 2020, *The Coronavirus crisis: What will the post-pandemic city look like?* (Editorial) EPB: Urban Analytics and City Science 2020, Vol. 47(4) 547–552.

[21] Where real and virtual worlds collide, Financial Times Arts, 3 May 2021, page 20.

[22] Coronavirus: What is the sound of music during a pandemic? BBC News Tech, 25 April 2020.

Experience is being gained elsewhere on operating such an arrangement, for example at the national level by the House of Commons[23] which is trailing Zoom, (with a limited number of members (up to 50) in the chamber with other MPs linked via digital communications in different locations (120 others from home), the House of Lords will look at moving to Zoom in the coming days. The Virtual Select Committees already take evident from witnesses located elsewhere.

When looking towards the current experiences of the next generation of possible pub customers an example might be students at Universities, which have been forced to think about remote learning and cut unnecessary travel at the same time. "We are teaching and working in different ways," says the former vice chancellor[24] at the University of Exeter, it has forced us to think more quickly and rigorously about (the value of) face-to-face (teaching) versus online". Universities have been investing in online teaching as, "it cements and enhances the sense of identity of a class, makes participants better connected and develops skills not easy to practice face-to-face". However, experience elsewhere suggests, "that to be done well, such formats must not be done on the cheap, and work best when "blended" with continued face-to-face teaching". Development of online teaching, which keeps students out of lecture halls, has become particularly urgent, as students have had to move off campus and even go home or stay in their Halls of Residence to continue their studies and then be assessed for the purposes of examination.

Learning through feedback from these events could provide pointers to opportunities at the local community level. The pub in this situation would have an enhanced role in local community affairs and become an advanced hub supported by the necessary digital infrastructure and staff skilled in its installation, maintenance and day-to-day operation.

As a social experience, however, a "virtual pub" gives rise to mixed feelings. In particular, it may not work for many, who choose to meet up in a public house "to get out of the house".[25] With increased use of home working, the public house now becomes, whilst working in the smart city, another rather special "third space" to be made use of, away from both work and home.

Responding to these trends impacting on public houses means the existing and new Health, Social Care and Safety issues regarding physical spacing, social distancing and building ventilation need to the brought to the fore and examined also learning relevant lessons[26] from the past experiments in pub design.[27] Those pubs remaining in business after the lockdowns can then fully reopen to members of the general public as well as specific groups of private function customers.

Furthermore, with the aid of selected initiatives aimed at innovative businesses, often using modern technology, breweries and public houses with appropriate support can survive and adapt to the new normal and continue to play their important role in the life and work of the community.

The challenge is to adapt to the new normal with a strategy that moves to a green future with appropriate support including: providing a unique experience, making it worthwhile to leave the home for regular customers and encouraging those folks who occasionally visit the hostelry from elsewhere to also purchase selected items from an on-line shop.

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[23] Sociably distanced on the green benches, Quentin Letts, The Times, April 22, 2020, pages 6-7.

[24] Online learning: A short-term fix or a threat to future fees? Financial Times, 22 April 2020, page 19.

[25] Save our pubs from their final last orders, The Times, 2 May 2020, page 25.

[26] Today's pubs owe a lot to Great War, The Times, 18 May 2021, page 17.

[27] Clare Howard, 2018, *Countering the 'deadliest of foes': public houses of the Central Control Board and the State Management Scheme, 1916-73*, Report number: 89/2018 Historic England.