

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

Undoubtedly, pub businesses and activities have been significantly affected since March 2020. The support provided by the UK government could have helped in terms of furloughed staff, mostly full-time permanent staff, but nevertheless has failed to protect other categories of staff, such as part-timers, casual and seasonal workers who gravitated around the pub industry and constitute a significant portion of its workforce. The bulk of these workers are frequently made by students, lone parents or people on a regular low-income base. The vanishing of pub jobs is likely to have affected their economic situations, undermined their certainties and hindering their confidence; as a result, the level of health and wellbeing of many is going to be affected in a significant manner. While some of these positions will reappear alongside the gradual post-pandemic recovery, a return to pre-pandemic levels is unlikely to happen at least in the medium term. The decline in numbers of UK pubs was certified before the COVID-19 outbreak, and given that many pubs will not survive and/or reopen, the future outlook for pub jobs does not seem positive.

- **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?**

Pubs in the UK are an institution, particularly in suburban and rural landscapes, offering both a symbolic attachment to the past and a continuing space for communities to come together (Urry, 2001). Challenges associated with pandemic and post-pandemic downturn will affect communities in a significant manner. Take village pubs: not only economic matters make the re-launching of a village pub challenging but it can be even harder to rekindle the community value associated with that “third place” (Oldenburg 1989) even if a new pub opens. Watson and Watson (2012) state that pubs provide ideal settings for the origination and definition of societal orders, and this defines the framework of reality for individuals and groups; these relationships between individual and society are often regulated by other social ‘bodies’ such as community groups, friendship networks, voluntary groups etc. These social bodies are important in shaping relationships among individuals, and informal code of practices within society is even higher in the rural context than in urban areas. With pubs being at the centre of social life within many rural communities, then pubs represent the physical place where individuals and groups merge and clash together, defining informal frameworks and networks that may regulate many socio-economic aspects of communal life in rural areas. With an increasingly mobile population of rural entrepreneurs whose activities are heavily influenced by lifestyle choices (Akgun et al. 2011), the question of local embeddedness (Hess, 2004) associated with pubs gains greater currency: “the ‘local’ embeddedness of actors leads to an institutional thickness that is thought to be one crucial success factor for regions in a continuously globalizing economy” (Hess 2004, 116). Applying this to rural communities and pubs indicates a genuine potential for greater resilience where business owners are locally embedded (Bosworth, 2009). All these positive aspects are undermined in current times, and can be jeopardised or even erased by the disappearance of pubs from local communities.

- **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?**

A short bounce-back period for pub trade is expected during Summer 2021, with (hopefully) better weather and major sport events such as Euro2020 and the Olympic Games. However, risks for pubs come from the likely shortage of seasonal workers that could potentially hinder the businesses. The pandemic has made many individuals reconsidering their options in terms of employment; furloughed staff might have very little incentive to come back to previous jobs and Brexit has affected the influx of seasonal EU workers who filled many pub jobs, particularly in large metropolitan areas. These are key-systemic pressures which pose a combined threat to the UK pub industry and for which the UK Government should take action and provide solutions. Without strategic public support, aimed at increasing resilience in the sector, the future of pubs, especially of free houses and independently owned businesses, could be seriously in trouble.