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The Pub is an integral part of our society and like many industries is badly in need of assistance.

People who run and work in pubs been impacted by the pandemic to varying degrees depending on which category they fall into. Staff are usually low paid and as such will feel the financial hit badly. They also meet lots of people and suddenly they cannot, which must be a psychological shock, affecting their mental health and general wellbeing.

People who run pubs can be split into other factions. You have outright owners who run free houses, you have people on long term commercial leases, you have the traditional Pubco tenancy and you have managers. Most managers if they are any good will have been furloughed but breweries may well have taken advantage of the situation to let go ones performing less well. Tenants will normally have had some business support and rent waivers but face the same sense of isolation as their staff would. Leaseholders and freeholders will have had some support and many will have taken advantage to carry out repairs and redecoration or even substantial alterations.

The biggest impact of the closure of pubs has been a community one. The obvious one is the lack of the social centre they provide but many pubs especially rural ones offer many more services. Most food pubs provide meals for pensioners at prices they could not match at home and in several small villages I know of pubs providing a meals on wheels service to them. Some act as village shops as well, a few as post offices and many provide a meeting place for local groups.

Many small villages have lost their post office, lost their primary school, have no bank nor even a cash machine, have church services once a month and the only place people meet is the pub. Many pubs also give cash back the only means in the village of getting hold of cash.

There will be casualties. Many pubs were struggling before COVID and many landlords seemed unable to change with the times. It was too easy to blame the smoking ban and put their heads in sand. The ban had a short term affect but smokers learned to cope and many new customers were enticed in with the cleaner environment. If some town pubs go under it is a shame for the individuals involved but communities will still have options but if the only pub in a village goes then the village will slowly die.

The industry itself has lot to answer for. Pubco are run by accountants by and large not entrepreneurs and they have very little real understanding of the trade – They are just property companies and if they don't get the required return on capita they put the rent up. They seem to have no grasp of the laws of diminishing returns. If a market trader cannot sell his goods he drops the price. Their get out of jail card is that the pub and its car park are valuable assets to sell into other usages. Within 3 miles of my house two pub sites are now mini housing estates, one is a Tesco Express, one serviced offices and one a carvery, all were previously ordinary community pubs.

When the breweries owned large pub estates they were more inclined to support struggling pubs as their loss also reduced the sale of beers and made breweries themselves less profitable.

Lets look at the health issue in more detail. Much has been made about alcohol being one of the biggest health issues we face today and as such some might be inclined to feel a loss of pubs is a god thing. Like most things it is about scale and moderation. Stress is a major killer and probably accounts for more premature deaths than anything else. Problems at home and in the workplace are frequently causes of stress, but it is not easy to change jobs and even less so, wives.

Fortunately there are remedies. Pills from the doctor are short term and masking the problem but some lifestyle changes should sort it out. Gentle exercise is known to work and walking is easy and cheap. Going outside into green spaces also helps. You can see wide skies which uplifts the spirit and it is now known that plants give off chemicals which are positively helpful in calming us. Relaxing in good company and having lengthy conversations is also known to help and so does drinking in moderation. Many professionals describe alcohol as a depressant because short term highs are followed by deep lows. This can certainly be the case with spirits, especially gin, but to my mind you would need a lot of beers or ciders for that to be the case and probably wines as well. Drinking at home is probably more dangerous than drinking in company though. The answer? Walk to the pub and weather permitting drink in the beer garden! Drinking red wine also boosts the intake of antioxidants. Seriously though, too much alcohol will kill you! As a saying this is undoubtedly true but equally alcohol is a preservative. The clue is in the first two words, 'too much'. Firstly how much is too much and secondly 'too much' of almost anything is bad for you and possibly ultimately fatal. Exercise is good for you but you can 'run yourself into the ground'.

How much effect and harm alcohol does, has been discussed since it was first discovered, when primitive man ate rotting fruit, and the truth is nobody really knows. Both short term and long term it treats everybody differently. We all know people who get drunk on a wine gum and others who down teens of pints without noticeable effect. It depends on untold numbers of different factors; there are different types of alcoholic drinks with different absorption rates and those rates depend on the size, fitness and metabolism of the individual. It also changes depending on when you last fed and indeed what you had to eat. We are offered scientific advice but that advice varies widely country to country so how scientific is it?

The social consequences of no pubs is causing more damage than pubs ever caused and the pub was where young adults learned to drink sensibly with older generations rather than banging shots back in clubs or drinking in parks with supermarket products.

Another aspect in country areas is that travellers can get respite and sustenance.

So what could be done to help?

Licensed premises not to be de-licensed without 12 months notice to allow communities to explore options to keep it open

Pubs buildings and grounds sold for development to be classed as windfall and taxed full capital gains tax without any offset.

Remove the brewery tie as a restraint of trade.

Limit brewery loans to only being able to insist on sale of one of their beers.

On the premises consumption of food and drink to be free of VAT

Minimum charge per unit for off sales and shops to prevent loss leading

Give grants to assist with setting up secondary services (Shop, P.O, Library) The Princes trust was doing this on a small way.

Encourage micro and small local breweries by excise relief. It encourages entrepreneurs, reduced carbon footprint in delivery and provides competition.

To qualify for these reliefs a pub MUST open some core hours so that travellers can rely on them being open. There used to be such rules and I would suggest they must open 12.00 to 2.00 and 6.00 to 9.00 six days a week with pubs in commercial centres being able to get an exemption for Sundays but other areas opening as in the week.

There used to be a distinction between an Inn, a Bar, a Public House and a Hotel and perhaps names and licenses should again reflect the different type of establishment so that people know what they can expect. During core hours an inn or hotel must allow families in but all establishments must have some or at least one over13s only area

I trust you will find these comments helpful.