

23rd March 2021

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Communities
Room 430, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Committee Chair

Re: Reform of Liquor Licensing

As you might expect, I have been following the deliberations of the Committee as it has considered the proposed reform of Liquor Licensing.

An issue that has arisen on several occasions and one that concerns us as well is the sustainability of our rural pubs. Whilst many factors are at play, the biggest challenge they face are the change in consumer trends; trends that have seen a move to home drinking and less frequent visits to the pubs.

In relation to sustainability, it comes down to profitability and for more and more pubs profitability now depends on the ability to diversify. Over the years we have witnessed many expand their offering into food and events as a key footfall driver. However, this is not always feasible for rural pubs due to location and footfall.

I would therefore ask the Committee to support our call for pubs to be allowed to diversify and provide a range of community services, such as the farmers' produce shop, post office and community facilities, as seen under the UK *Pub is the Hub* model.

It is my understanding that allowing what is technically referred to as 'mixed trading' within the pub sector would only require a change to regulations and not legislation, and therefore should be achievable under the current review of liquor licensing.

Supporting this change would be a significant measure to support the sustainability of our rural pubs, and at the same time providing much needed local services to rural communities.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Colin Neill - CEO