



Submission to Northern Ireland Modernisation of Liquor Licensing Legislation

Pub is The Hub is a not-for-profit organisation covering England, Wales and Scotland offering independent specialist advice on rural services diversification, so they can provide viable local services at the heart of the community.

Pub is The Hub is an independent voluntary organisation, having 13 experienced advisors across England, Scotland and Wales, but not currently in Northern Ireland.

Since 2013, the organisation has been able to offer small grants through its Community Services Fund. As the organisation enters its 20th year we have helped and advised nationally on over 500 projects and have also just achieved our 150th completion which has been supported by small grants from our own Community Services Fund.

Many of these projects are in challenging rural areas such as Northumberland, Lincolnshire, Cornwall, Dorset and Devon to Hertfordshire, Staffordshire and Norfolk.

These are areas that have lost local services such as post offices and village stores and the pubs have stepped into help support the local area. These also provide hubs for local people to meet, combat loneliness and enhance well-being.

There are now 34 types of services or activities, being provided by over 200 pub schemes completed or under consideration with the Pub is The Hub Community Services Fund. These can include anything from community cafes, post offices, village stores, IT hubs, cinemas, craft sheds, allotments, farm shops, farmers markets, libraries, to bakeries.

We believe there is a great opportunity for rural and community pubs in Northern Ireland to diversify their business model to provide enhanced community services.

To survive and thrive pubs need to be so much more than places to socialise and eat and drink. They need to meet the needs of people of all ages in their local area, including work, social and community services needs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance and value of pubs to local communities and the surrounding area, with many publicans in England, Wales and Scotland being the ones to provide vital

services, resources and support to local people during lockdowns and beyond.

Many pubs have diversified with initiatives such as meals-on-wheels and takeaways. There has also been an increase in pubs opening up village shops and pop-up grocery stores to help offer store essentials. This serves to help the community, support local suppliers and farmers, and make the pub more viable as a business.

While the Northern Ireland sector operates differently to pubs across the rest of the UK we believe there is an opportunity to diversify services to help the needs of local areas.

We also believe that pubs across the whole of the UK can have an important role in combating isolation and loneliness. As part of this we have launched a campaign called Join Inn – Last Orders for Loneliness, where we are helping pubs to help combat isolation in their communities.

Loneliness has become a major issue for society that has been exacerbated further by the Covid-19 pandemic, a crisis that has highlighted the importance of meaningful connections. As part of the campaign we are urging publicans to be connected with their surrounding community to make a big difference to local people who may be experiencing feelings of loneliness. It is an issue that affects people of any age and for many different reasons, so we are inviting publicans to 'Join Inn' and think about what more they can possibly initiate or continue to do to help.

<https://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/join-inn-last-orders-for-loneliness>

Conclusion:

Pub is The Hub believes that the role of the pub in the future is probably going to change. We predict that pubs are going to be about providing activities and playing a more pivotal role within the local community.

Pub is the Hub would welcome and support any change in Northern Ireland licensing legislation that will inspire pubs to help deliver a range of additional services or activities to their communities.

We would happy to help or advise on how Pub is The Hub could help set up such an initiative in Northern Ireland.

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Case Studies:

The Rose & Crown, Longburton, Dorset



The Rose & Crown in Longburton, Dorset, rallied to help local residents when the country went into lockdown. The family team of Becky Gibbons, husband John and son Kai, who took over the running of the pub four years ago, helped vulnerable and shielding customers by delivering takeaways and supplies.

The pub has recently opened a village shop called The Larder, in the pub's car park, in a renovated shipping container. It offers a range of essentials such as bread, meat, organic milk, fresh fruit, vegetables as well as takeaway coffee. The shop project became increasingly important during the pandemic, as it is three miles to the nearest town. The town also has an ageing population and young families who struggled to travel for supplies. The pub already helps the local community as it has an outreach Post Office on site.

The Star Inn, Harbottle



Licensees Karen and Phil Wilkinson of The Star Inn in Harbottle, Northumberland stepped in to help local residents with food and groceries as well as helping other small businesses by sourcing supplies locally when the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

The pub had already opened a village shop at the beginning of the year with the help of Pub is The Hub, and a grant from the Community Services Fund. The village of Harbottle is 10 miles away from the nearest supermarket and as customers in the village struggled to get grocery deliveries and many could not travel due to shielding, age or inability to drive, the pub stepped in. It quickly expanded its range of produce and set up an email ordering system, which allowed customers to place orders for delivery or collection. The licensees would put together food boxes, which could be picked up from the pub, while the licensees delivered to more vulnerable residents.

The Polgooth Inn, Polgooth, Cornwall



The Polgooth Inn is a classic sixteenth century Cornish village pub run by Alex and Tanya Williams. The couple were the British Institute of Innkeeping's Licensees of the Year 2018 and they have been at the helm since 2010.

During the Covid-19 shut down in the spring, Alex and Tanya decided to create a digital hub in the pub to provide access for local people who don't have the facilities at home.

They have situated the digital hub at an underused end of the bar. They have improved the WiFi, and added laptops, a smart TV and a printer on some new tables, all expertly installed.

The intention is to be able to offer these new facilities to local groups, for village meetings, for training courses and in due course for courses to improve digital skills.