

Social Isolation and Loneliness Consultation Equality Unit  
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Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

30th April 2018

**CAMRA response to the “A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections” consultation.**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. CAMRA is a UK consumer group with over 5,100 members in Scotland that acts as the independent voice for real ale drinkers and pub goers. Our vision is to have quality real ale and thriving pubs in every community.

In answer to question 1 of the consultation, we believe that keeping pubs open, supporting pubs in diversifying their services, and encouraging sociable pub-going would do a lot to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Pubs play an essential role in combating isolation and loneliness, bringing communities together and supporting personal wellbeing. With the closure of community spaces, pubs play an ever important role in providing a shared environment for people to socialise and for community groups to meet. They are a vital community resource where people can get to know their local community and mix with a greater diversity of social classes and cultures.<sup>1</sup>

The personal and social wellbeing benefits of pub-going are backed up by academic research. The ‘Friends on Tap’ Report was commissioned by CAMRA from Oxford University. The report found that people who identify as having a ‘local’ pub have more close friends and feel more engaged with their local community.<sup>2</sup> On average those who had a local pub had 7.2 close friends compared to 6.0 for those who did not have a local pub and didn’t regularly visit pubs. The number of social connections and close friends that people have has a large, positive impact on experiences of loneliness - and those in smaller, local pubs were likely to have longer, more engaged conversations.

CAMRA maintains that pubs are the best environment in which to drink alcohol, as both the sale and consumption of alcohol is controlled in a social setting. This is in stark contrast to alcohol bought in the off trade which is much more likely to be consumed alone at home. When surveyed, 59% of adults in Scotland stated that they considered drinking moderately in the company of others had a beneficial effect on personal wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.camra.org.uk/documents/10180/36197/Friends+on+Tap/2c68585b-e47d-42ca-bda6-5d6b3e4c0110>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.camra.org.uk/documents/10180/36197/Friends+on+Tap/2c68585b-e47d-42ca-bda6-5d6b3e4c0110>

<sup>3</sup> YouGov Omnibus Survey July 2017

The sense of community which pubs provide is vital in preventing social isolation. Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness found that 52% of over 65s surveyed stated that having someone to sit with helped to ease feelings of loneliness, while 35% said that eating with someone helped.<sup>4</sup>

CAMRA fully supports the aims of the consultation, and would like to see the Scottish Government recognise and promote the social benefits of pub-going in combating isolation and loneliness.

In answer to questions 2 and 3 we believe that at a local level, this would require planning policies that ensure pubs can stay open as well as funding to help them diversify and act as community hubs. This is particularly important in rural areas where pub closures can represent the loss of the last community meeting space and trading facility. Nationally, CAMRA would encourage the Scottish government to look at business rates relief and supporting the Community Advisory Act with an advisory service.

#### Case studies of pub initiatives to tackle loneliness and isolation across the UK

In response to question 6, we have identified a number of good practices both in and outside of Scotland which do this already. Many of these examples could also be seen to answer question 7 regarding good practice in building social connections.

Across the UK, there are numerous local pubs doing their part to tackle loneliness and establish themselves as community hubs. Much of this work has been supported by the organisation Pub is the Hub frequently in partnership with their local councils. One such example is the Swann Inn in Carleton in Craven, North Yorkshire which has recently set up a community hub. They converted the room at the front of the pub into a cafe and community hub. This is being used as an IT hub allowing all villagers and visitors to use laptops and the internet, it also hosts a book exchange, and in future they plan to use it for IT training, adult learning sessions, and community-led workshops on local history and ancestry. They are also looking to start a weekly over 60s coffee morning funded by the Carleton Community Umbrella, giving local residents access to sociable events in a safe and familiar environment at no or very low cost.

The Royal Oak in Suffolk has similarly established a community hub in their pub - after recognising that there was nowhere in the village to sit, relax, and have a chat with a cup of tea, the owner of the Royal Oak contacted Pub is the Hub and set about opening a tea room in the Royal Oak. Alongside this they also established a book exchange with free newspapers. This room is also used to offer IT training for the elderly and to run a Senior Citizens Luncheon Club. The project, together with the book exchange has encouraged many of the more elderly residents to come along and socialise; with several of them signing-up for 'IT' training and attending the Luncheon Club. The project has helped combat isolation and loneliness, providing a wholesome meal at an affordable price, along with the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/Article/2016/12/02/CAMRA-pubs-play-huge-role-in-preventing-socialisolation>

hidden benefit of knowing that members were OK each week – a ‘safety net’ for elderly residents.

Norfolk County Council, in partnership with Pub is the Hub, have set up an initiative to help pubs in Norfolk diversify. Jeremy, the owner of The Chequers in Feltwell, was mindful of community needs and noted the lack of facilities for both young and old people in the village. He planned to set up a community cinema, as well as a book exchange and running a Senior Citizens Luncheon Club. This was partially funded by Norfolk County Council - this has created a community space where people can view films for free. The book exchange is also hugely popular and has created a space where customers can sit and browse. Added to this the Senior Citizens Luncheon Club helps ensure that the more elderly residents have a tasty, nourishing meal at a price they can afford. All these facilities combine to help combat loneliness and social exclusion, making The Chequers the hub of the community.

Other pubs are doing their bit to help tackle loneliness by allowing community groups to meet for free or organising their own social events. The Alexandra, a Merton pub, has started hosting ‘Meet Up Mondays’ to support people who are lonely in the local community by offering free sandwiches, tea, and coffee, free raffles, and free bingo as well as offering somewhere for people to come along and meet new people. The Grey Horse Inn in Balerno has also opened its doors to offer a meeting space for older people in the community as part of the project, welcoming older people to meet for coffee and scones every two weeks. Whilst both of these examples run on a more regular basis, there are many pubs who run similar events around Christmas aimed at tackling loneliness over the festive period - a time when feelings of loneliness can be exacerbated.

Two pubs in the Vale of Leven looked to tackle loneliness at Christmas. Fenton’s Bar in Jamestown and Dempsey’s Bar in Alexandria handed out a free hot drink and a mince pie to spread some cheer on Christmas Day. Those with no one to spend the day with were invited along for some friendly festive company. Owner Craig McLaughlin said: “We believe that our pubs are the real social network and that’s why this Christmas we are making sure no one should be left to celebrate Christmas day alone.”

Heineken started a campaign called #BrewingGoodCheer which saw 50 pubs across the UK join up with local charities to provide free lunches to vulnerable and isolated people. As part of this, they joined up with the National Poetry Champion to create a bespoke poem based on people’s’ real life experiences of the role pubs play in creating togetherness in the community. This included pubs that were community owned, that provided essential services to rural communities, and acted as social hubs for people to meet. Some of the pubs that Heineken featured included the Elephant in Liverpool which provides a place for mothers to get together and chat over a cup of tea and biscuits - new mums are a group that can be particularly vulnerable to both loneliness and isolation, so this filled a void in the community.

### Additional Policy Considerations

In answer to question 26, we believe that the following issues are important to consider in the wider strategy of tackling loneliness and fostering community connections.

## **Community Empowerment Act**

Community pubs play an integral role in community life and are important meeting spaces for people. When a much-loved pub closes the community can be a powerful force in pulling together to take over its ownership. CAMRA believes that where pubs are struggling financially there should be Government support to help local people revitalise and run pubs on behalf of the wider community.

CAMRA are aware of groups in Scotland attempting to navigate through the process of community buyout, however compared to England there are few sources of funding or information for such groups seeking to take a valuable local facility into community ownership.

While a community group recently purchased the Swan Inn, Banton after successfully securing money from the Scottish Land Fund, there is little else in the way of funding available, and some groups have stalled during the process. A community group trying to re-open the Crook Inn at Tweedsmuir have successfully bought the building, but are now struggling to access funds to make repairs to the building and re-open, ten years after their campaign began.

As of March this year, only 7 requests had been received under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 or the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 in relation to the Community Rights to Buy Land in relation to public houses, two of which came from the Tweedsmuir group.

CAMRA would like to see the Community Empowerment Act supported by an advisory service, along with the provision of grants and loans to help people taking over their local pub to keep it at the heart of the community.

## **Business rate relief**

If we are to continue to see the benefits to social wellbeing, measures must be implemented to prevent the closure of pubs - the primary threat of which currently comes from the excessive and disproportionate tax burden placed upon the industry in contrast to the off-trade and other business types. CAMRA welcomed the extension of the business rates cap for hospitality businesses last year, however this must now be made permanent to ensure the long term viability of the Scottish pub sector, and ensure that pubs can continue to play their important role in combating isolation and loneliness.

## **Contact**

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