

Pub closures leaves consumers concerned about local economies

Over half of local pubs across Ireland are either temporarily or permanently closed as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on local businesses and communities across Ireland over the last six months, with no signs of the virus going away anytime soon.

According to new research from the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (DIGI), almost two thirds of Irish consumers are concerned about the impact of prolonged pub closures on the local economy.

The research revealed that over half of Irish pubs (56pc) are either temporarily or permanently closed as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

Broken down further, six in ten people living in rural areas reported a local pub closure, which is 10pc higher than people living in urban areas.

These prolonged pub closures have raised a number of concerns for those within local communities, with over 60pc of people concerned about the knock-on effects of the restrictions on the local economy.

Among the biggest concerns raised were loss of jobs within the local community, isolation and loneliness of elderly people living in the community, and a lack of support for musicians and artists who have no place to showcase their talents.

Community impact

In addition to the economic concerns, people have also noticed significant changes to their local communities as a direct result of pub closures.

According to the research, 59pc of respondents visited their local pub at least once a month before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since the government implemented restrictions on the opening of pubs, 53pc feel that the vibrancy of the community has dampened, with half of people also noting a decrease in the level of community spirit and morale among the community.

Nearly three quarters of the Irish population now believe that the government needs to intervene to provide support measures to save the drinks and hospitality industry.

“The prolonged closure of pubs in Ireland is not only having a negative effect on those who are directly involved in the industry: it is having widespread impact on local communities,” said Rosemary Garth, chair of DIGI and director of communications and corporate affairs at Irish Distillers.

“This is truly devastating to see. According to our research, the vast majority of people in Ireland have noticed significant change to their local community, with a particular decline in community spirits and morale.

“The role of the pub in local communities has never been more prominent. It is only now, as many pubs remain shut or have closed permanently as a result of the lockdown, that people are recognising how important the industry is for local wellbeing, job creation, and the broader economy.

“To ensure that pubs in local communities can not only reopen, but reopen with a fighting chance of recovery, the Government must not delay any longer. We must look to reopen the pubs immediately, putting meaningful supports in place to allow them to recover from the damage of the past six months,” she added.

More than half the population believe that local publicans will act responsibly and ensure public health measures and guidelines are enforced correctly, while the vast majority (90pc) say that they are also taking personal responsibility for their health and safety by adhering to public health advice, suggesting that most will be compliant with all pub reopening requirements.

Ms Garth continued; “To help facilitate (pubs reopening), the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland is calling on the government to introduce a 15pc reduction in excise tax in Ireland, which currently poses a threat to both the short and long-term viability of the drinks and hospitality sector.

“Without a reduction in excise tax levels for the sector, pubs, already indebted and at reduced capacity, will reopen with the second highest rates in the EU. This will put them on an immediate backfoot and threaten more permanent closures,” she finished.

Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, more than 90,000 were working in the Irish drinks industry.

By Stephen Larkin

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