



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

15 November 2020

Dear Constituent,

Re: Save our pubs

Thank you for contacting me about supporting our local pubs.

I 100% agree with you! Pubs are essential, not just from a social perspective but also from an economic one. They are central to many of our villages from Worsthorne to Hapton, and are what bring people into the town centre. That's why I will continue to do everything in my power to support them through what will undoubtedly be a difficult month.

The decision to impose a new national lockdown is not one I wanted to take. When I got into politics it was to do much the opposite. I am a free-market Conservative. I believe that people should be able to live their lives as they want, businesses free to trade and compete with one another, and the state as unobtrusive as possible.

But as your MP I have a job to do. To look at the facts, speak to the experts, and make a decision, however difficult, which I think will balance the protection of the lives and livelihoods of everyone across Burnley and Padiham, and ensure we get through this period. That has been my focus.

I spent the last couple of weeks reviewing data from the first lockdown, speaking to Government, it's advisers, the local NHS, independent scientists and medical experts too.

What came across in all those conversations was that action, however unpleasant, is needed. The second wave is here and a decision on how to deal with it can't wait. If we did wait the local NHS position is clear. We risk unacceptable pressure on our 2 hospitals in East Lancashire which poses a significant threat to people's ability to gain treatment, not just for Covid-19 but other serious health problems. Doctors faced with a choice of who to care for when treatments are available, but beds are not. None of us want to see that situation. So as difficult as these restrictions will be, they should be seen as an essential opportunity to get the R rate back to 1, to get test and trace functioning as it needs to, and to give the best possible chance for the worst affected areas, like ours, to recover.

It isn't all gloom though and I'm pushing for a reopening of our lives, economy and society as early as possible. And we are now far closer to emerging on the other side than ever before. Our scientists continue to lead the global charge for a vaccine and whilst nothing is guaranteed we are starting to see positive stories about the outcome of the advanced trials that are taking place. The rollout of rapid testing is also well underway, including thousands being delivered to us in Lancashire, and these could also allow a much greater reopening of the economy, whether we get a vaccine or not. Rapid testing, with tracing, is a sustainable and long-term solution whilst a vaccine is developed and rolled-out.

But I do understand that this decision will have a severe impact on pubs. Landlords and landladies will be concerned about the weeks ahead and in response I've been clear we need to see significant support offered. Every pub will receive grants of up to £3,000 a month under the Local Restrictions Support Grant for the period they're closed, and further grants for the period they have been open but subject to restrictions which limited income (for example rules banning household mixing which meant they were much quieter). The furlough scheme also continues to run. This should mean all pubs get a cash grant to help tide them through this period and if any have not yet received that please do put them in touch with me and I will find out from the Council, who are administering these on behalf of Government, what the hold up is. We simply cannot delay getting this funding out.

As I explained to Ministers a few weeks ago though, many pubs invested in new stock ahead of November, taking up much needed cashflow, and this would go off before they can reopen. I was therefore delighted to see that after lobbying for the change, the selling of alcohol either through delivery or pre order collection is possible. It means pubs can package up a pint (I'm told a milk bottle is best) and make some extra money whilst closed. This also would not impact their ability to receive a closure grant.

I'll continue to do all I can to support our local pubs and look forward to the day when we can get back to visiting them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Higginbotham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Antony Higginbotham MP
Member of Parliament for Burnley