

Government risk being left behind by public if they deny outdoor service – LVA

Outdoor socialising expected to rise significantly over coming weeks Government choice is whether to permit controlled or uncontrolled outdoor socialising

Most pubs will begin offering takeaway service to meet growing demand

Opening outdoor hospitality service will increase access to toilets with 1,500 likely to be available across Dublin

The Government risk being left behind by the public if they deny outdoor hospitality service resuming next month, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA). The vintners expect the levels of outdoor socialising to grow significantly in the coming weeks as the public health situation improves and the country begins to experience better weather.

The LVA believes the Government's choice comes down to whether they want controlled outdoor socialising in managed settings with clear social distancing and other public health protocols followed, or uncontrolled socialising on streets and other public locations across the country.

All pubs and licensed premises are legally permitted to offer takeaway service and LVA members are already reporting "overwhelming" demand for this service from the public. Based on industry feedback, the LVA believes that most pubs will begin providing takeaway to meet that demand if they are not allowed to reopen for outdoor service by the end of May.

Opening outdoor hospitality service will also provide the public with access to thousands of additional toilet facilities. The LVA estimates that once outdoor hospitality service is permitted a further 1,500 toilets would be available across Dublin.

Last Tuesday, traditional pubs in Dublin marked 400 consecutive days of closure. The LVA is seeking outdoor hospitality for all venues to reopen from 24th May, in line with the opening of indoor service in Northern Ireland. This should be the first step in reopening the hospitality sector with the LVA also pressing for indoor service to resume for all pubs and restaurants in June, in line with the expected reopening of hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs.

"The Government risks being left behind by the public if they do not permit outdoor service to resume for all hospitality next month," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "The levels of outdoor socialising are going to rise either way in the coming weeks as the weather gets milder and the public health situation improves. Really the choice is whether to have increased levels of outdoor socialising take place in the controlled settings provided by hospitality or leave it unfettered and uncontrolled in public spaces, without any facilities.

"Pubs and restaurants can offer managed outdoor spaces with social distancing and other public health protocols implemented. Access to public toilet facilities has become an area of concern in recent weeks, especially in Dublin. Permitting outdoor hospitality service enables the public to access a vastly increased number of toilets provided by pubs and restaurants. We estimate that decision alone will increase the number of toilets available by approximately 1,500 across Dublin.

"It is widely acknowledged that outdoor activities are relatively safe and given the expected progress of the vaccine rollout we believe the end of May would represent a reasonable timeframe to permit this activity. That should be followed by indoor service resuming in June as more of the population is vaccinated and is in line with the reopening of hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs. The risk profile for indoor

service is the same in all hospitality settings and we will not accept any move to prioritise the reopening of certain sections of hospitality over others.

"The number of licensed premises providing takeaway service is growing week to week and we fully expect that trend to further grow throughout May. This is not something we have sought, but it is legally permitted and has been throughout the last year. Our members are already reporting overwhelming demand from the public who are asking them to provide this service. Based on that feedback we expect that if outdoor service isn't permitted then more and more pubs will begin offering takeaway service in the near future," Mr. O'Keefe concluded.