

## #KEEPTHELIGHTSON – Pubs nationwide turning on their Christmas lights to highlight readiness for safe opening

**Pubs across Ireland will simultaneously switch on their Christmas lights this Friday November 20<sup>th</sup> at 5pm.**

**Consumers are being asked to show their support for a safe reopening by sharing #KEEPTHELIGHTSON with images of their local lit up on social media.**

The LVA, VFI and Hospitality Ulster have joined forces with Guinness Raising the Bar to launch #KEEPTHELIGHTSON – a campaign that will quite literally shine a light on our pubs, highlighting their readiness for a safe reopening. As part of the campaign, pubs across the island of Ireland, north and south, are coming together to simultaneously switch on their Christmas lights this Friday November 20<sup>th</sup> at 5pm.

Turning on their lights early ahead of the crucial Christmas period not only highlights the place of local pubs in the fabric of Irish society, but also the struggle that publicans, bar-staff and their families are facing in order to keep the lights on. In many villages and townlands across the country, the local pub may be the only beacon of light on dark winter nights. Their prolonged closure due to Covid-19 enforced lockdowns serves as a physical reminder of the impact that Covid-19 has had not just on the pub-trade and wider hospitality industry but also on communities up and down the country.

The financial impact of Covid-19 pub closures has been hugely significant, with one third of pubs in Dublin having been closed continuously for the last 8 months and 50% of pubs throughout Ireland allowed to open for only 2 out of the last 37 weeks after enduring at least four delays to reopening over the course of the summer, under the most severe hospitality lockdown in Europe.

Pubs across Ireland have put in place an extensive range of measures in order to reopen safely from implementing social distancing, to following the strictest sanitisation protocols, arranging extra staff training, the provision of physical infrastructure such as Perspex screens, increasing signage and using new systems, tools and technology to create safe socialising environments in their outlets.

**Liam Reid, Corporate Relations Director of Diageo Ireland** said: *"The Guinness Raising the Bar fund has already begun supporting pubs with a variety of measures to assist them with safe reopening. This includes over 3,000 outlets who have received reopening essentials kits, with upwards of 87,500 litres of hand sanitiser and 30,000 staff uniforms and 700 outlets who have received items to create safe, weather-proof, outdoor spaces. We have also launched the Raising the Bar Helpline to provide emotional support and financial information to publicans, bar-staff and their immediate families who we know are suffering disproportionately at this time, while they once again wait for the chance to reopen safely."*

As part of the campaign, 8 "beacon" pubs across the island of Ireland, from Donegal to Dublin and Mayo to Meath, have already been lit up with support from the Guinness Raising the Bar fund. Pubs like Grogan's on Dublin's South William Street, The Garrick in Belfast or J. O'Connell's in Skryne Co. Meath; the pub from the iconic Guinness Christmas TV ad; have been decked out in their festive finest for a film that captures the real human stories of publicans, their staff and families at each pub and the effort they have gone to in order to be ready to reopen and welcome customers back safely.

This film will premiere on Guinness, LVA, VFI and Hospitality Ulster channels this Thursday November 19<sup>th</sup> and the public will be encouraged to show their support for a safe reopening of their local by posting photos of their favourite pub lit up for Christmas alongside #KEEPTHELIGHTSON on their social media channels.

**Padraig Cribben, Chief Executive of the VFI** commented: *"Pubs around Ireland have invested heavily in ensuring their outlets are ready to reopen safely, with almost 50% of publicans having borrowed as much as €16,000 since March—one in five as much as €30,000. Whether it's physical infrastructure such as PPE, Perspex screens and hand sanitiser or training for staff we know that they have done what's necessary to ensure that pubs can reopen safely alongside other sectors such as retail. Now all that these locals around the country want is the chance to reopen safely on time for Christmas."*

**Donall O'Keeffe, CEO of the LVA** said: *"Before the Covid-19 pandemic, 6 out of 10 people typically visited their local pub at least once a month. As part of this joint campaign with the Guinness Raising the Bar fund we hope that the public will also show their support for a safe reopening of their local as we enter a Christmas period that will be decisive in keeping the lights on in pubs around Ireland."*

This campaign is being made possible by the €14M Guinness Raising the Bar fund, a two-year programme that has been available since June 2020 to assist pubs in safely reopening. Outlets can still register to receive supports by logging on to [www.mydiageo.com](http://www.mydiageo.com). Almost 5,000 outlets across Ireland have already registered and availed of supports from the Raising the Bar fund since its launch in June. Any pub that registers with the programme will receive a free reopening essentials kit, including 25L of Hand Sanitiser, Serving Trays, Uniforms & Take Away Cups and may also be eligible to receive free outdoor equipment such as parasols, windbreakers and awnings as well as support with staff training.