

Pubs would make every effort to be ready for later trading this weekend if given green light – LVA

Dublin vintners want to see night time sector fully reopening and removal of all hospitality restrictions following shortly afterwards

Pubs throughout the country would make every effort to provide later trading this weekend if they were given the green light by Government, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA).

With NPHE expected to provide recommendations to Government on Thursday and indications the Government may make an announcement on Friday, the Dublin vintners are seeking the resumption of trading until midnight to return at the earliest possible opportunity and believe the sector will be able to adapt at short notice.

The LVA would also like to see the Government outline plans which allow for the reopening of late bars and nightclubs, as well as the removal of all other hospitality restrictions, follow very shortly afterwards. This would include allowing access to the bar counters once more which hasn't been permitted in pubs since before their original closure at the outset of the pandemic on 15th March 2020.

Nightclubs are due to reopen in Scotland on 24th January and in Wales on 28th January.

"Various public health experts and senior representatives of the Government are indicating that the country has entered a new stage of the pandemic, so we are hopeful there will be good news for the reopening of hospitality in the coming days," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "We would like to see the Government moving swiftly and allowing for the recovery of hospitality to begin as soon as possible.

"In light of the more positive outlook we would certainly support the return to opening until midnight from as early as this weekend. We know that is what pubs throughout the country would like to see and they would make every effort to be ready if they were given the green light by Government. Certainly the industry has had to shut down at very short notice on several occasions during the pandemic, so many would like the opportunity to adjust to good news in just as short a timeframe.

"We also hope the Government will be able to outline their expected plans for the removal of the other restrictions on the hospitality sector. If improvements in the public health environment are progressing as quickly as it seems, then we don't see why the reopening of late bars, nightclubs and live entertainment can't follow shortly afterwards, along with the removal of the other restrictions applied to the hospitality sector. Every pub in the country would like to permit access to their bar counter again for instance, which they haven't been able to do since the outset of the pandemic.

"It is now only 55 days until the 15th March, which will mark the two year anniversary of pubs closing their doors at the outset of the pandemic – the first sector to do so. The Government has also suggested that there will be a two day bank holiday on 17 and 18 March this year and our industry would certainly hope to be in a position to trade normally well in advance of those dates. From a tourist perspective, so long as the current public health progress continues, we need to be able to say the hospitality sector is fully open and welcoming of visitors well in advance of St Patrick's weekend," he said.

The LVA is also seeking in depth discussions with the Government about a long-term plan to keep our sector fully open, including the consideration of mitigation measures to prevent future lockdowns. This would involve the Government setting out a defined position on ventilation and air quality standards, as well as other mitigation measures that could be adopted by hospitality venues to help reduce the likelihood of further hospitality lockdowns.

"We think it is very important that the Government now begins earnest engagement with the whole hospitality sector around a long-term plan to keep our sector fully open, avoiding the threat of future

lockdowns. Given the impact the extended closures have had on the public coffers – both in terms of the cost of pandemic support payments and loss of tax revenue – and the devastating impact on the industry itself, surely there is a responsibility to look at how we can keep hospitality businesses fully open long-term? Now would seem the opportune time to really get to grips with this issue, to see what steps are needed to improve ventilation and to future proof our sector as best as possible against further restrictions and lockdowns," Mr. O'Keeffe concluded.