

Entrant company name: **British Beer and Pub Association**

Entry title: **The nation's pubs; the Government's U-Turn**

Category: **Change Communications Campaign**

In advance of the Budget, the BBPA identified a critical threat to the pub sector: the proposed changes to business rates risked being catastrophic. Pubs - already under pressure and closing at the rate of one a day - faced a tipping point that could lead to further closures, job losses and the erosion of a vital community infrastructure. Given their unique economic, social and cultural role, this was not simply a sector issue, but a national one.

Our challenge was to intervene at pace to reshape the narrative, influence decision-makers, and secure meaningful support. We set out to achieve pub-specific business rates relief; reposition pubs as central to Government priorities including jobs, growth and communities; establish leadership within a fragmented sector; and mobilise political, industry and public support.

Working within a highly constrained budget - delivered almost entirely in-house and through existing contracts, with just £11,000 in additional spend on social media (primarily post-Budget) - we maximised earned media, stakeholder engagement and data-led communications.

Crucially, we made a fundamental strategic shift. While others pursued a broad, joint hospitality approach, we took the bold decision to pivot to a pubs-first strategy, recognising that a tightly defined, evidence-led case would be more compelling and politically deliverable. This marked a step-change in approach: from collective sector advocacy to a highly targeted campaign rooted in public affairs, ministerial engagement and parliamentary influence, amplified by a relentless wall of media coverage.

This approach was underpinned by robust evidence. We commissioned an independent report projecting closures and regional impact if reforms were not delivered. Alongside this, we created a business rates calculator showing the projected economic impact on every pub in England. This was applied at regional and parliamentary constituency level, ensuring relevance to MPs. By combining national modelling with hyper-local insights, we built a compelling case for change.

We identified three key audience levers: the Government's desire - and need - for growth and jobs; MPs' sensitivity to the local impact of pub closures and the public's emotional connection to their local. Our messaging was tailored to all three, ensuring resonance across audiences. The campaign was built on orchestration - ensuring each strand of messaging reinforced the others - and applied sustained pressure. We maintained strict message discipline: one problem and one solution: pub-specific business rates relief. This clarity enabled uniformity and ensured that all stakeholders - from national media to individual pub staff - were always reading from the same script.

We prioritised sustained visibility, generating continuous coverage to keep the issue live and unavoidable. Over 62 days, we created a wall of media noise, delivering more than 4,200 media hits and achieving daily coverage that kept pubs at the forefront of the national conversation. This drumbeat of attention galvanised public support and made the issue politically impossible to ignore.

At the same time, we translated complex policy into tangible local impact, turning an abstract issue into something directly affecting communities and MPs. By framing pubs as central to Government priorities, we showed that inaction would undermine their objectives.

Creatively, the campaign combined policy expertise with accessible storytelling. Complex issues were simplified through clear briefings, including "Business Rates 101" materials. Data became a storytelling tool, illustrating real-world consequences for pubs and communities. We consistently positioned pubs as essential social infrastructure at the heart of British life, reinforcing both their economic contribution and their role in tackling loneliness, supporting local identity and being the high streets' lifeline.

The rates calculator enabled granular insight at individual pub level, scaled to regional and constituency data. This supported targeted political engagement and media narratives, making localisation a defining strength. It also enabled rapid rebuttal and responsiveness, allowing us to react in real time to policy developments and media debate with credible, evidence-led interventions.

Delivery was rapid and sustained over 62 days. We secured over 4,200 media hits, maintaining daily coverage. Editorial backing reinforced the credibility of our case, while additional campaigns amplified our message. This drumbeat of coverage ensured the issue could not be ignored and created a sense of inevitability around the need for Government action.

We took a leadership role, convening an emergency summit to unify members and signal urgency. Consistent briefings ensured message discipline and the BBPA remained united behind a single policy ask which also strengthened our sector

influence. This coordination avoided fragmentation and ensured policymakers were hearing one clear, unified voice.

We briefed MPs across parties, equipping them with constituency-level data to make the issue directly relevant. We maintained parliamentary pressure and kept talking to HM Treasury right through to the final negotiations. Crucially, this engagement was continuous, building momentum and reinforcing the campaign at key political moments.

We activated consumer advocacy, equipping publicans and the public with the tools they needed to contact MPs. The mobilisation by the people successfully demonstrated the extent of the anger and disquiet in the country. In just two months, just shy of 20,000 letters were sent to MPs, leaving them in little doubt about the strength of feeling and the clear potential electoral impact if no action was taken.

Alongside communications, we developed a credible, costed policy solution within two weeks of the Budget. This showed that pub-specific relief would deliver impact while remaining fiscally realistic, strengthening the case for targeted intervention and demonstrating that Government could act without compromising broader fiscal constraints.

Throughout, we navigated a sensitive environment, maintaining an apolitical, solutions-focused approach to preserve credibility and relationships. This ensured continued access and influence at the highest levels of decision-making.

In addition to the media noise we created, editorial comments and op eds amplified our message and validated the campaign's central arguments.

Politically, the campaign drove sustained engagement and cross-party concern, and MPs, equipped with local evidence, ensured the issue remained prominent within Westminster throughout the Budget cycle.

Combined, this helped secure a highly successful Government U-turn - a rare achievement, particularly outside of a formal fiscal event. The scale and coordination of pressure we generated proved irresistible: Government responded directly to our targeted lobbying for pubs, adopting a sector-specific approach aligned with our recommendations.

Notably, while other parts of hospitality and adjacent sectors also made their case, they did not achieve the same outcome. Our decision to focus on pubs, combined with precise political targeting and sustained media pressure, ensured our voice cut through where others did not.

This campaign did more than communicate change it propelled change. We transformed perceptions of the pub from being one part of the hospitality sector to an

essential community infrastructure. We reframed the policy debate and turned stakeholders into engaged and active advocates united behind a shared goal.