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The great British community pub, so central to our national identity, is on its knees. The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) estimates that 18 pubs a week are calling time for the last time, resulting in a significant loss of jobs.

The easy and widespread availability of super-cheap supermarket alcohol is a key culprit. In fact, a recent survey shows that eight in ten north east publicans say supermarket alcohol price promotions have damaged trade over the last five years.

Cheap alcohol is encouraging people to 'pre-load' at home, beyond the watchful eye of a responsible landlord unwilling to serve to intoxication. Pre-loaders venture out later according to seven in ten publicans surveyed. Almost half say these customers are already drunk. There is little doubt that this contributes to alcohol related violence on our streets.

We therefore welcome the Government's commitment to introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol. Seven in ten north east publicans surveyed support the measure. It's targeted and research shows it will significantly reduce consumption among young and harmful drinkers.

However, we must ensure that it is set at an appropriate level, regularly monitored so beneficial impacts are not eroded over time, to help protect those most vulnerable by pricing cheap, strong alcohol out of their hands.

To this end, we are calling upon Government to set a minimum unit price of at least 50p. Research indicates that after ten years, it will annually save 3,393 lives and reduce hospital admissions by 97,900.

Importantly, the introduction of a minimum unit price of at least 50p will reduce the price gap that exists between the on and off trade, as it will have no impact on the price of a pint in a community pub. We believe this will encourage people back through the doors, sustaining the Great British pub. Seven in ten publicans who support minimum unit price believe it will be good for business turnover and profit.

To realise these benefits, moderate drinkers need only pay an extra 28p per week for their alcohol. We think that this is a small price to pay to save lives, improve health and support small business. We hope you feel the same.

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