

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS: LIGHT | AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Opening time too late to save us

BY **GRAHAM HISCOTT**, Head of Business,
and **MATTHEW YOUNG**

MANY pubs, cafes and restaurants will struggle to survive the wait until indoor venues can reopen, industry chiefs have warned.

Trade body UKHospitality said firms in its sector are burning through £500million a month while closed.

Its chief executive Kate Nicholls said businesses are “obviously devastated” the reopening is so far off.

She added: “From the start of November, the sector will have been closed for nearly 200 days, with just a couple of weeks of heavily restricted trading in December.

“A major package of financial support is imperative if hospitality is to survive.”

The Government has announced the reopening of venues could begin on April 12 – but only outdoors at first.

It will be May 17 at the earliest that

punters will be allowed indoors at pubs, cafes and restaurants.

The British Beer and Pub Association has warned that three in five pubs will probably not open in April, either because it will not be financially viable or they do not have outdoor areas.

Chief executive Emma McClarkin said: “It will cost our sector £1.5billion.”

Meanwhile, the British Retail Consortium said it is “encouraged” by the plan for non-essential shops to reopen from April 12 but “the heavy impact of the pandemic means some may never be able to”. It added lockdown has cost non-food stores more than £22bn.

The British Independent Retailers Association is “very disappointed non-essential shops will miss Easter”.

Here, we ask traders’ for their views on the roadmap out of lockdown...

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HEADTEACHER

Hard to open at this short notice

Clare Harding is the headteacher of Asquith Primary School in Mansfield, Notts.

She said: "The impact of prolonged absences from school has become increasingly noticeable.

"Schools want nothing more than to have all children back in class, learning and socialising. But when schools returned in September, they had the summer holidays to prepare. Now we have just a couple of weeks.

"For staff in school to go from no children or a small bubble to full classes within a couple of weeks will not be easy.

"Social distancing, particularly in primary schools, does not happen, yet we are all told that this is vital - but clearly not in schools, where even basic PPE is not mandatory.

"Schools want children to be back with their friends but while the onus is on the concept of 'catch-up', which damages children's self-esteem, they will struggle to balance the demands of Government against kids' needs."



PUB LANDLORD



EXCITED Lysa & Rick can't wait to reopen garden

No growing back for beer business

DELIGHTED pub landlord Rick Robinson is wasting no time getting the garden ready to reopen on April 12 - he was already cutting the grass yesterday.

He said: "I'm chomping at the bit. It's great news. I'm that excited I've come straight outside to mow the lawn and get the garden sorted for April."

Rick, who runs the Willoughby Arms in Kingston, South West London, with wife Lysa, added: "It's great we finally have a date. It's been terrible not knowing when we'll re-start or if we can hang on.

"It's a shame we can't get the Easter weekend in, but hopefully the weather will be good in April."

PSYCHOLOGIST

We will go back to the fun times

Natasha Tiwari, is founder of The Veda Group mental health company for children and their families. She said: "The country, as a collective, is really in a state of mental suffering.

"From mild stress caused by uncertainty, through to hopelessness, exhaustion, burn-out, loneliness, anxiety and depression, everyone has been touched by the mental devastation of the pandemic.

"Be kind to yourself, be kind to those you love, and try to spend time doing things that make you feel happy.

"We will eventually go back to having fun times. With some effort, we can elevate into mental wellness."

Dr Adrian James, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said: "Psychiatrists have seen an increase in both emergency and urgent presentations compared to last year.

"We need both adequate funding and an increase in the mental health workforce."



WEDDING PLANNER



IN BUSINESS
Battling Victoria

Aisle be relieved when June's here

Victoria Abrahams-Walker normally organises 40 weddings a year but she did just one in 2020.

The 41-year-old, who also runs a stationery business in Leeds, had mixed feelings after yesterday's announcement.

There is a phased resumption of very small receptions from next month with the full lifting of limits on guests not coming until mid-June.

Victoria, founder of Linda Abrahams & Co, said: "At least the industry has been acknowledged.

"It means we can plan, though it is subject to so many potential changes."

GYM COACH

Boxing club left on the ropes by its bills



Niki Wiley, head coach of Redcar Amateur Boxing Club, says his business deserves and needs help.

He said: "The boxing gym has had no government funding. All our memberships have been frozen but there are still bills to pay, so it's been incredibly tough.

"We want to see help from the Government because even when we re-open, with restrictions due to be in place for those in the gym, we don't know if it's going to be worth us opening. That's the case for a lot of gyms."

Nick, 34, added: "There are a lot of people that come to our club, of all ages, and we desperately want to get back up and running - but there should be something in place to help us."

HAIRDRESSER

Tearing my hair out over delays.. my firm is safe



Lindsey Belcher is frustrated her business The Hair Salon and Beauty Room can't open yet.

The owner of the firm in Tankerton, Kent, said: "I don't know why it can't be a bit sooner.

"My salon is safer than going to the supermarket.

"We have plastic aprons, masks, visors, rubber gloves if needed, one stylist per customer. I don't know why they've done what they have with hairdressers.

"I'm hoping we get help from the Government."

RESTAURANT BOSS



Matt Snell, boss of Gusto, a chain of 12 Italian restaurants, said the delay in allowing eateries to fully reopen will be the "final straw" for some in his sector.

His firm is losing £100,000 a month - half of that from paying the pension contributions and National Insurance for furloughed staff. But it managed to cut its rent bill through a restructuring last year.

"I'm incredibly frustrated," said Matt.

"I thought the reopening indoors might be May 1 so this is even worse. We will make it through this but it will be the final straw for some."

FESTIVAL ORGANISER

Almost music to my ears but still clarity needed



Ella Nosworthy, organiser of Nozstock, a music festival in Herefordshire, said she was "cautiously optimistic" about yesterday's announcement.

But she added: "There are still some urgent issues that need clarity."

Ella said some festivals could still be cancelled because of a lack of insurance, with organisers having to take a gamble on something like a new Covid variant not scuppering their plans.

"What we need is a Government-backed insurance scheme," she said.

NON-ESSENTIAL SHOP



Hoping to build up after difficult year

Dorothy Robinson's womenswear shop Dotique is reeling from a year of heavy restrictions. A big part of her business in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, is formalwear, including mother-of-the-bride outfits, special occasions and outfits for cruises. Dorothy said: "It's been a case of treading water. "We are optimistic that when things reopen, business will come back again, but it will take time. "We're lucky in that as we own the shop we don't have to pay rent."

NIGHTCLUB OWNER



We may be floored without new grant

IOAN Roberts, co-owner of Liverpool nightclub 24 Kitchen Street, said it was touch and go whether the business would survive. The city centre venue has been hit hard by a year of restrictions and changed to operating as a bar with social distancing to try to make ends meet. Ioan says an Arts Council grant saved the club, but is now waiting to hear if it gets a second tranche. "I am unsure whether we can make it without a significant amount of support," he said.



Dire warning from pubs & restaurants