

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

Entry title: **Saving pubs: achieving a rare Government U-Turn**

Category: **Public Affairs Campaign**

The BBPA's campaign achieved a rare Government U-turn, securing pub-specific business rates relief and protecting a sector at risk of catastrophic closures. This victory was highly unusual outside formal fiscal events and demonstrated the power of targeted, evidence-led public affairs, combined with sustained political and public engagement.

In advance of the Budget, the BBPA identified an urgent threat to the pub sector: proposed changes to business rates risked triggering widespread closures. Pubs, already under pressure and closing at the rate of one a day, faced a tipping point that could devastate jobs, erode local economies, and dismantle vital community infrastructure. Given their unique economic, social, and cultural role, this was not simply a sector issue, but a national one.

The challenge was clear: act swiftly to reshape the narrative, influence decision-makers, and secure meaningful support. Objectives were to achieve pub-specific business rates relief, reposition pubs as central to Government priorities including jobs, growth, and community cohesion, establish leadership within a fragmented sector, and mobilise industry, political, and public support. Operating within a constrained budget, we maximised earned media, stakeholder engagement, and data-led communications to deliver high-impact lobbying and public affairs outcomes.

A fundamental strategic decision underpinned the campaign. While others pursued a broad hospitality approach, we pivoted to a pubs-first strategy. We recognised that a tightly defined, evidence-led case would be more compelling and politically deliverable. This step-change allowed us to focus on the sector most at risk, demonstrating that pubs were disproportionately affected and uniquely embedded within local communities.

We commissioned an independent report projecting closures and regional impact if reforms were not delivered, alongside a bespoke business rates calculator showing financial impact on every pub in England. Applied at regional and parliamentary constituency level, this made the issue directly relevant to MPs and ministers. By

combining national modelling with hyper-local insight, we created a credible and compelling evidence base for intervention.

Three key audience levers shaped our approach: Government priorities around jobs and growth; MPs' sensitivity to local impact; and the public's emotional connection to their local. Messaging was tailored to resonate across all three, creating conditions for political and public pressure. The campaign was orchestrated to reinforce a single, disciplined message: one problem, one solution - pub-specific business rates relief.

Visibility was central to the campaign. Over 62 days, we generated a wall of media coverage, delivering more than 4,200 hits and daily reporting that kept pubs at the forefront of national debate. Complex policy was translated into tangible local impact, showing that closures would undermine Government priorities and directly affect communities. Pubs were consistently positioned as essential social infrastructure, reinforcing economic, social, and cultural value.

Creativity and innovation were applied in both communications and engagement. The rates calculator enabled granular, constituency-level insight, supporting targeted political engagement and media narratives while allowing rapid, evidence-led responses to developments. Public mobilisation amplified the campaign: in just two months, approximately 19,000 letters from publicans and consumers were sent to MPs, demonstrating widespread concern and potential electoral consequences if no action was taken.

We convened an emergency summit to unify the sector and signal urgency, aligning behind a single policy ask. MPs across parties were briefed with constituency-level data, and sustained engagement with HM Treasury and relevant ministers continued through the final negotiations. A credible, costed solution was presented within two weeks of the Budget, showing that pub-specific relief could deliver meaningful impact while remaining fiscally realistic.

The campaign's success was evident. Editorial support reinforced credibility, while public and parliamentary pressure kept the issue prominent. Most importantly, the campaign achieved a vital Government U-turn, securing pub-specific business rates relief - a rare outcome. The scale, precision, and coordination of pressure proved irresistible. Government responded directly to our lobbying for pubs, adopting the sector-specific approach we recommended. While other hospitality sectors lobbied, they did not achieve the same outcome; our targeted strategy ensured our voice cut through where others did not.

The campaign did more than communicate change - it propelled it. It transformed perceptions of pubs from just being part of the hospitality sector to the beating heart of their communities, it reframed the policy debate and turned stakeholders into engaged, active advocates. By combining data, storytelling, political engagement, and public

mobilisation, we created the conditions for Government action. The campaign demonstrated how effective public affairs can influence both perception and policy, ensuring pubs were recognised, valued, and supported at the highest levels of decision-making.

Sustained parliamentary engagement was critical. MPs were equipped with localised evidence to highlight constituency-level risk, creating cross-party concern and maintaining momentum. This proactive approach ensured the issue remained high-profile inside Westminster, turning abstract fiscal changes into a tangible political concern.

The campaign also established the BBPA as a sector leader; by mobilising public support and coordinating media coverage, we strengthened collective advocacy and demonstrated the sector's strategic capability to influence Government decisions.

Ultimately, the Government U-turn was the triumphant, defining success. Securing a rare policy reversal outside a formal fiscal event validated the strategy, research, and delivery approach. It protected jobs, safeguarded high streets, and preserved social infrastructure, showing that targeted public affairs can deliver real-world outcomes.

This campaign illustrates how strategic, evidence-led and creatively executed public affairs can genuinely change the world. It is a clear example of how lobbying, when combined with data, media narrative, and mobilisation, can achieve meaningful change at the highest levels of government.