



Coronavirus Wetherspoons calls rules 'baffling and confusing' Free 221224

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JD Wetherspoon has criticised "baffling and confusing" Covid-related restrictions for the pub industry after revealing a sharp fall in sales.

The firm said like-for-like sales for the 15 weeks to 8 November fell 27.6%.

Chairman Tim Martin said rule changes such as the 22:00 curfew, as well as different areas of the UK "moving from one tier to another", left the industry and customers perplexed.

"The entire regulatory situation is a complete muddle," he said.

Wetherspoons said sales in October "were significantly lower than the previous months, following the imposition of a number of new restrictions, including changes in the tier categories [and] a 10pm curfew".

Mr Martin also said there was a “particular anxiety” in the sector over how long the regulations would last, citing rules that were introduced in World War One which remained in place for more than 70 years.

“Veterans of the industry will recall that the afternoon closing of pubs between about 3pm and 6pm was imposed in the First World War, to encourage munitions workers to return to their factories,” he said. “But the requirement for afternoon closing was only abolished in 1986.”

Under current lockdown rules, Wetherspoons said 756 pubs in England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were closed and it expected to burn through £14m in cash during the period.

The company will not be selling takeaway alcohol from any of its premises.

Earlier this month, the government initially banned the sale of alcohol from pubs in England under the new rules for a second lockdown, but soon changed the restriction.

Sales were allowed during the first shutdown between March and July, but a spokesman for Wetherspoons said the company did not offer takeaways then and had no intention of selling them during this period.

It said 51 of its pubs were currently trading in Wales – where a lockdown has just ended, but pubs are subject to a 22:00 curfew, external – as well as 64 in Scotland.

But the company added: “The Scottish pubs, in particular, are subject to an extremely onerous tier system which, as has been widely reported, is having a serious effect on trade.”

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