

THE BELHAVEN MANIFESTO:

# HOW THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CAN SUPPORT PUBS



BREWED IN DUNBAR, SCOTLAND  
— SINCE 1710 —

**BELHAVEN**  
BREWERY



# ABOUT BELHAVEN

## SCOTLAND'S OLDEST WORKING BREWERY



1,800

PEOPLE EMPLOYED ACROSS  
OUR PUB AND BREWERY TEAMS

FOUNDED IN

1719

225



PUBS OPERATED



28

COUNTRIES RECEIVED  
BEER EXPORTED BY  
BELHAVEN IN 2025



**BELHAVEN**  
BREWERY

£265K



FUNDRAISED FOR MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT IN 2025



BELHAVEN  
BREWERY: WINNER  
OF 2025 TRIPADVISOR  
TRAVELLERS' CHOICE  
AWARD



BREWS AWARD-  
WINNING BEERS INCLUDING  
BELHAVEN BEST AND  
BELHAVEN BLACK

£5 MILLION

INVESTED IN MORE THAN  
20 PUBS IN 2025

# WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT SCOTLAND'S PUBS

The next Scottish Government should consider the following policy reforms to support the nation's pubs:

- Reform non-domestic rates to reduce the disproportionate amount paid by pubs compared with other sectors
- Unlock investment by streamlining the planning system
- Modernise the licensing system, in particular with the UK Government recently announcing a new National Licensing Policy Framework in England
- Assess the impact of the Pubs Code



## WHY PUBS MATTER

**73%** of Scots think pubs play an important role in their community\*

**80%** of Scots believe pubs are important in bringing people together\*

**72%** of Scots believe pubs help combat loneliness and social isolation in their area\*

**65,000**

Pubs and brewing support over 65,000 jobs and contribute an average of £100,000 per pub to local economies annually\*

**£2.3 BN**

The industry contributes £2.3 billion to the Scottish economy and generates £1.2 billion in tax, meaning that growth of our sector will underpin economic growth\*

# HOW TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

## REFORM NON-DOMESTIC RATES

**Non-domestic rates are a significant financial burden for pubs across the UK.**

Last year's decision by the Government to introduce 40% rates relief for Scottish mainland pubs with a rateable value below £51,000 was a huge help for smaller venues, but over 2,500 larger pubs and multi-site operators were still excluded.

The UK Government has recently taken steps to reform non-domestic rates, including introducing new, permanently-lower multipliers for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses.

While the changes in Westminster ultimately do not go far enough to address the proportional disparity between rates charged to pubs versus other sectors, the introduction of transitional relief has helped avoid cliff-edge changes in April.

It is vital in Scotland the non-domestic rates burden is permanently addressed to keep pace with England but that relief is also continued for pubs impacted by significantly higher costs.

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***Pubs pay 2.1% of the entire UK non-domestic rates bill, yet make up just 0.4% of UK business turnover.***

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*We therefore urge the next Scottish Government to:*

- **Short term: Reduce the amount pubs have to pay by either introducing 40% rates relief to all pubs, regardless of size, or introduce a lower, dedicated poundage rate for pubs, recognising their unique economic and community role.**
  - **Long term: Ensure the non-domestic rates burden is permanently addressed in the forthcoming independent review for pubs.**
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## MODERNISE THE LICENSING SYSTEM

**Flexible and cooperative engagement with licensing boards is essential to allow pubs to make the best use of their space.**

However, as a national pub operator we deal with 32 separate licensing boards, each applying their own processes. This complexity creates added time, unnecessary confusion and undermines confidence.

In England there are over 300 licensing authorities, however a single national licensing framework delivers greater consistency, and recent reforms – such as removing licensing requirements for low-risk activities – will make it easier for pubs.

The next Scottish Government could use these reforms as a template, focusing on reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and supporting recovery in the pubs and hospitality sector.

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*This is why we're calling on the next Scottish Government to:*

- **Establish a Night-Time Economy Taskforce for Scotland to drive cross-sector coordination and targeted reform.**
  - **Create a national licensing policy framework, aligning procedures, fees and expectations across all 32 boards.**
  - **Streamline variation processes for low-risk operational changes, such as live music, access permissions, and seasonal use of space.**
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## UNLOCK INVESTMENT THROUGH PLANNING REFORM

Planning rules continue to present a significant barrier. Requirements such as building warrants and lengthy council delays making even minor improvements slow and costly.

Reforms in England will improve the system, with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill streamlining small-scale development and digitising the planning process to reduce waiting times, as well as the introduction of Class E giving building owners greater flexibility to adapt high-street premises.

*To address these challenges and support growth, we're calling on the next Scottish Government to:*

- **Mirror the ambitions of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, streamlining planning for small commercial developments and digitising the system.**
- **Remove the added bureaucracy of requiring planning permission and a separate building warrant when carrying out an investment, which adds further cost and delay into the planning process.**

- **Simplify permissions for minor changes, such as outdoor seating, signage, and modest refurbishment, including removing outdoor permit fees to remove unnecessary administrative burdens.**

## REVIEW THE PUBS CODE

**The Scottish Pubs Code, introduced in March 2025, requires pub-owning businesses to offer tied-pub tenants the option of a Market Rent Only (MRO) lease and the ability to stock an additional guest beer. While we comply fully with the code, we did not support its introduction, as we believe it risks undermining the traditional tied-pub model and adds complexity for operators.**

The first annual levy set by the Scottish Pubs Code Adjudicator is more than double the government's original estimate, placing further financial strain on the sector.

*In light of rising costs and a changing market, we support the Scottish Beer & Pub Association in calling for:*

- **The upcoming statutory review to reassess whether the Code remains proportionate, and to explore ways to reduce regulatory and financial burdens – especially the high levy – to help restore balance and encourage renewed investment in Scotland's tenanted pubs.**

# WHY THESE CHANGES ARE IMPORTANT

**Pubs have been at the heart of local communities for hundreds of years, not only providing places to eat and drink, but community hubs and a place for people to come together.**

Many also offer invaluable services to the community, particularly in more rural areas. A visit to the pub is a key part of Scottish life.

Here are examples of just two of our pubs that are making significant contributions to their communities:

## THE WILLIAM WALLACE, IN STIRLING

**Chris Kerr has run the William Wallace since May 2025 and it is a vibrant, welcoming space for families, students and locals of all ages.**

Originally a tenanted pub when Chris took it on, in 2025 Belhaven invested a six-figure sum in the pub and it became part of Belhaven's 'Nest' franchise.

Chris discovered his passion for hospitality at 18 after originally training as a stonemason. The William Wallace was the first pub he ever bought a pint in, and now he is proud to run the pub.

His commitment to community shines through with initiatives like the winter "warm hub," where anyone can enjoy free tea and coffee in a friendly, heated space. Because of rising costs and razor-thin margins, Chris works long hours to keep the pub open.

The William Wallace demonstrates pubs' roles as vital community assets and places that combat loneliness and foster connection.



CHRIS KERR OUTSIDE THE WILLIAM WALLACE, STIRLING

*We*  
are  
**OPEN**

## THE SMIDDY INN, IN CUMBERNAULD

The Smiddy Inn is Belhaven's top fundraising pub of 2025, having raised more than £13,000 in the year for Macmillan Cancer Support, which is Belhaven and Greene King's charity partner.

General Manager Julia Hutton has created a culture of fundraising at the pub and says she 'just wanted to help' after coming out of Covid-19 lockdown and seeing how much charities needed the support of the public. She and her team have now raised more than £13,000 a year for the past three years in a row.

She runs seniors afternoons for the community that regularly see more than 100 people attending, with money from ticket sales going to Macmillan. As well as fundraising raffles, live bands, summer parties and more, her team are often collecting with buckets in the pub and she describes the generosity of her customers, especially at a time when everyone's bills are going up, as 'amazing'.



JULIA HUTTON - (CENTRE) - WITH TWO OF HER TEAM

These reforms will help support Scotland's pub sector and mean that pubs like the William Wallace and Smiddy Inn can continue to be at the heart of their communities.

By unlocking investment that is currently tied up in meeting regulatory requirements, pubs can fulfil their roles as community hubs, job creators, and contributors to economic growth. We share the aim of the Scottish Parliament to support pubs and want to work together to enable this and ensure pubs can continue to provide spaces for people to meet, work and socialise within their communities as they have done for generations.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to find out more on these policy areas. We would be happy to discuss how we can work together with you and the industry to enable the pub sector to flourish.

For more information, contact:

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