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Pub closures accelerate towards 30 per week

Pubs have been closing at the rate of 27 a week - nearly four every day - over the past year, according to the latest figures released by the British Beer & Pub Association. The current closure rate is seven times faster than in 2006 and 14 times faster than in 2005.

1,409 pubs closed during 2007. This is a sharp acceleration on previous years. Pub numbers were down 216 in 2006 - four a week - following a fall of 102 in 2005 - two a week.

Rob Hayward, Chief Executive of the BBPA, said: "Britain's pubs are grappling with spiralling costs, sinking sales, fragile consumer confidence and the impact of the smoking ban. These figures show the stark reality of the pub trade today, in contrast to the hype surrounding the myth of "24-hour drinking" and extended pub opening hours. Pub closures at this rate are threatening an important hub of our social fabric and community history. What we need to stop the decline is support from Government and the general public."

Urban pubs have been hardest hit, with two per cent of all urban pubs closing in the last six months. Pubs without the room to provide an attractive outside area for smokers, and those that are not heavily focused on food sales, have faced particular difficulties.

At this rate of closure, many villages across Britain face a pub-less future in the next few years.

Beer sales in pubs - the backbone of the trade - are now at their lowest level since the Great Depression of the 1930s. This is all the more reason to freeze the duty on beer in this year's Budget, says the BBPA. Today's pubs are selling 14 million fewer pints a day than they did when sales were at their peak in 1979. In addition, rising costs in brewing, food and energy, have hit the trade hard.

Total alcohol sales in pubs have fallen by around 6 per cent in the last 12 months. While there has been a surge in food sales, profit margins are being squeezed because of the additional costs associated with selling food.

"Some commentators would have us believe that the pub trade has faced a bonanza following the introduction of the Licensing Act in 2005," said Mr Hayward. "Nothing could be further from the truth. The industry is facing very difficult trading conditions, which is resulting in the closure of hundred of pubs across the country. This is no time to place further regulatory or tax pressures on a

great national and community asset. A vital part of the British economy and social life is under the most severe strain it has faced for decades. Increasing these pressure and costs will only result in the loss of more of Britain's much loved community pubs."

Ends

Note to editors:

The figures were compiled by CGA Strategy for the British Beer & Pub Association.

The British Beer and Pub Association is the UK's leading organisation representing the brewing and pub sector. Its members account for 98% of the beer brewed in the UK and own nearly two thirds of Britain's 58,000 pubs.

For further information please contact:

Mark Hastings, Director of Communications, Tel: 020 7627 9151 / 07884 181 794

Neil Williams, Communications Manager Tel: 020 7627 9156 / 07974 249 779