

Beer sales suffer as pandemic sees people opting for stronger drinks at home

Almost 1.5 billion fewer pints were sold in British pubs in 2021 than in 2019, according to the British Beer and Pub Association.

The BBPA said pub beer sales were down 38% in 2021, with an on-trade loss of £5.7bn from beer sales alone.

In 2020, trading was down 55% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Speaking to Sky News, BBPA chief executive Emma McClarkin said: "Beer is the most popular drink that is sold in our pubs.

"But when people are drinking at home, they seem to be choosing higher strength products.

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"That is a concern and a worry – not only for the survival of our trade and our pubs but, of course, in terms of health and helping people moderate their consumption.

"So we want to see the government moving to suit continued support (for) lower-strength products like beer."

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She added: "Every unsold pint is a stark reminder of the dislocating effect COVID restrictions had on our sector and the communities our pubs sit at the heart of."

'We've really had to work to get bodies in'

The pandemic has battered margins at the Crown And Kettle in Manchester, with director of operations Sam Foster telling Sky News: "The beer sales have really gone up and down this last year.

"At some points it has felt like we've really had to work to get bodies in and make sure the pub is full – 2021 was particularly difficult because of the amount of rule changes and regulations we were constantly having to adapt.

“So it’s no surprise that beer sales in pubs are massively down.”

Manchester Brewing Company has seen a dramatic reduction in orders for casks of beer across the country.

The company’s director Paul Mellor said the figures were not surprising but are disheartening.

“We’re a tiny brewery and we had to throw £25,000 worth of stock away over the last two years, which has a massive impact on us.

“Effectively with the pandemic over the last year, because we’ve had to take on so much more debt, it has put us back as a business to basically square one.”

‘People have got used to drinking at home and being at home’

Mr Mellor was slightly optimistic about people’s attitudes towards drinking in pubs, telling Sky News: “At the moment I think people have got used to drinking at home and being at home.

“But I think slowly over the course of the year, you’re going to see the confidence come back and you’ll see people going out in greater numbers, and you’ll see the number of pints being sold over the bar increase. I hope so anyway.”