# The Bell Inn closure highlights crisis as UK pub numbers fall below 39,000



The closure of The Bell Inn in Lower Heyford has brought renewed attention to the ongoing crisis facing pubs across England and Wales. The beloved canal-side establishment, described as having a "cosy yet spacious interior spread across several rooms," is now shuttered following the death of its owner. According to Ollie Goldsworthy, the former manager, the owner's family chose not to continue the business due to its significant financial burdens. They struggled to keep the pub viable amidst high rent and a sharply declining winter trade, which made it increasingly difficult to operate sustainably.

Goldsworthy described the reality faced by The Bell Inn vividly: "Even when we shortened our hours in the winter months, we were losing money hand over fist." This sentiment resonates with broader industry trends, as nearly 300 pubs closed across the country in 2024 alone, highlighting a worrying pattern. The British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) has indicated that the number of pubs in both England and Wales has fallen below 39,000 for the first time in history, a worrying trend that underscores the precarious state of the sector.

Factors contributing to this decline are manifold. Rising operational costs, including inflated energy prices and increasing borrowing costs, have made it difficult for many pubs to navigate the challenges of a changing economy. Consumer spending has also become increasingly cautious, leading to diminished footfall and revenue streams for establishments like The Bell Inn. In 2024, over 400 pubs closed, with London registering the highest number of closures, amounting to 55. This trend is expected to have significant repercussions for local economies and employment, with estimates suggesting around 4,500 job losses across the industry.

The BBPA highlights the urgent need for government intervention to support this vital sector. Calls for reforms such as business rates modifications and tax relief on beer have intensified, as industry leaders emphasise that without significant policy changes, the number of closures will only increase. More than 50 pubs were reportedly closing each month at the beginning of 2024, a rate that paints a stark picture of an industry under siege.

As the community of Lower Heyford grapples with the loss of The Bell Inn, it reflects a larger narrative of decline in traditional pubs across the UK. While some venues adapt by diversifying offerings or enhancing their appeal to a changing demographic, many others, like The Bell, face insurmountable challenges. The fate of these establishments serves as a bellwether for the health of the pub sector overall, suggesting that unless substantial support is forthcoming, many more will face a similarly bleak future.

The ongoing discussion surrounding pub closures underscores a pivotal moment for the industry, making the case for urgent action not just a plea from operators but a necessary step for preserving a cherished aspect of British culture and community life.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25203439.canal-side-pub-oxfordshire-village-closes-doors/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/dec/30/number-of-pubs-in-england-and-wales-falls-below-39000-for-first-time), [[3]](https://beerandpub.com/news/six-pubs-a-week-shutting-their-doors-for-good/), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/almost-300-pubs-closed-last-year-ahead-of-cost-rises-b1211521.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/23/fifty-pubs-a-month-shut-in-first-half-of-year-in-england-and-wales-figures-show), [[6]](https://www.cityam.com/almost-300-pubs-closed-last-year-ahead-of-cost-rises/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/Article/2024/10/09/bbpa-warns-more-pubs-will-close-without-gov-support-in-budget)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25203439.canal-side-pub-oxfordshire-village-closes-doors/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/dec/30/number-of-pubs-in-england-and-wales-falls-below-39000-for-first-time> - In 2024, over 400 pubs in England and Wales closed, marking the first time the number of pubs fell below 39,000. The closures were attributed to rising costs and cautious consumer spending. London experienced the highest number of closures, with 55 pubs shutting down. The British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) expressed concern over the impact on the economy and employment, urging the government to implement business rate reforms to support the sector.
3. <https://beerandpub.com/news/six-pubs-a-week-shutting-their-doors-for-good/> - The British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) reported that nearly 300 pubs closed across England and Wales in 2024, averaging six closures per week. This resulted in over 4,500 job losses. The BBPA emphasized the need for urgent government action, including business rates reform and phased employment cost increases, to prevent further closures and support the sector's contribution to the economy.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/almost-300-pubs-closed-last-year-ahead-of-cost-rises-b1211521.html> - Figures from the British Beer and Pub Association revealed that 289 pubs closed in 2024, equating to approximately six closures per week and around 4,500 job losses. The closures were attributed to rising costs, including higher borrowing costs and energy bills, as well as a squeeze on household finances. The BBPA called for urgent government action to prevent further closures and support the sector.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/23/fifty-pubs-a-month-shut-in-first-half-of-year-in-england-and-wales-figures-show> - In the first half of 2024, 50 pubs a month closed in England and Wales, with 412 pubs demolished or converted for other uses during the year. The closures were linked to rising costs and cautious consumer spending. The British Beer and Pub Association highlighted the need for government intervention, including business rates reform, to support the sector and prevent further closures.
6. <https://www.cityam.com/almost-300-pubs-closed-last-year-ahead-of-cost-rises/> - Industry figures indicated that around six pubs closed their doors for good every week in 2024, resulting in approximately 4,500 job losses. The closures were attributed to pressures from higher borrowing costs, energy bills, and a squeeze on household finances. The British Beer and Pub Association warned that urgent government action is needed to prevent more closures and support the sector.
7. <https://www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/Article/2024/10/09/bbpa-warns-more-pubs-will-close-without-gov-support-in-budget> - The British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) warned that without cuts to beer duty and an extension of the 75% business rates relief, the sector faces more venue closures and job losses. In a letter signed by 80 senior figures from the pub and brewing sector, the BBPA called for urgent action from the government ahead of the fiscal address to support the industry and prevent further closures.