# PR agency picketed as Chick‑fil‑A expansion reignites LGBT+ rights row



The Peter Tatchell Foundation staged a demonstration outside a London communications agency this week to protest plans for the U.S. fast‑food chain Chick‑fil‑A’s expansion into the United Kingdom. According to PRWeek, activists picketed the consultancy’s offices to highlight what they described as the company’s contested record on LGBT+ rights and its historic charitable giving to organisations perceived as hostile to equality.

The foundation framed the action as targeting the advisers rather than only the brand itself. The group told reporters it wanted to make explicit the role that agencies can play in facilitating corporate entry into new markets, and to warn that supporting a controversial client can carry reputational costs. PRWeek reported that campaigners argued the consultancy’s association with Chick‑fil‑A risked linking it to positions many in the UK regard as incompatible with inclusive workplace and consumer values.

Industry observers say such protests underline a growing tension for consultancies weighing commercial opportunities against stakeholder expectations. PRWeek noted that agencies increasingly find themselves scrutinised not just for the messages they craft but for the clients they accept, with potential consequences for staff morale, client relationships and public credibility.

The protests are rooted in an earlier chapter of the company’s UK story. In October 2019, around sixty campaigners demonstrated outside a temporary Chick‑fil‑A site at The Oracle shopping centre in Reading, and the mall subsequently confirmed it would not extend the six‑month trial. BBC reporting at the time set that decision in the context of local opposition and wider concern among LGBT+ groups about the chain’s philanthropic links.

Faced with sustained criticism, Chick‑fil‑A adjusted its charitable giving profile. The BBC reported that the company said it would refocus donations on education, homelessness and hunger, and that two previously criticised beneficiaries were omitted from its 2020 list. The Guardian covered the same shift, noting that while some civil‑society figures cautiously welcomed the change, they urged clearer assurances and continued vigilance.

The controversy resurfaced when Chick‑fil‑A announced plans to open multiple restaurants in the UK. CNN reported that the company framed the expansion as an investment that would create jobs and economic activity, and that corporate leaders had taken steps in recent years — including changes to philanthropic priorities and the appointment of diversity personnel — intended to address concerns. Nevertheless, CNN and campaign groups warned that unease among activists remained and that renewed demonstrations were likely if the brand pursued a broader UK rollout.

The Peter Tatchell Foundation has also been vocal about related partnerships and engagements, publishing an open letter that demanded clarity from UK organisations considering ties with Chick‑fil‑A. The foundation’s statement reiterated long‑standing objections to the firm’s past giving and called on the company to cease support for groups it says are hostile to LGBT+ equality.

For consultancies, shopping‑centre operators and local authorities the episode is a reminder that commercial decisions intersect with public values. While Chick‑fil‑A has said it does not seek to advance a social or political agenda and has pointed to changes in its philanthropic approach, campaigners and some community leaders say past actions continue to shape perceptions and will inform responses to any new expansion. PRWeek and media coverage of the protests suggest that, in the UK context, reputational risk — not just market opportunity — will factor heavily into how advisers and venues choose to engage with the brand.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a), [[2]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a), [[2]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a), [[7]](https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/peter-tatchell-questions-stonewalls-reported-partnership-with-chick-fil-a/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a), [[2]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-50108255)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50466038), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/nov/18/chick-fil-a-funding-christian-organisations-lgbt)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/15/business/chick-fil-a-opening-uk-stores-gay-rights-backlash)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/peter-tatchell-questions-stonewalls-reported-partnership-with-chick-fil-a/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50466038), [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-50108255), [[5]](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/15/business/chick-fil-a-opening-uk-stores-gay-rights-backlash)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.prweek.com/article/1928713/protests-greet-uk-pr-agency-chick-fil-a> - PRWeek reported that the Peter Tatchell Foundation staged a demonstration outside a London communications agency believed to be advising Chick‑fil‑A over its proposed expansion into the UK. The article explained activists picketed the agency’s offices to draw attention to the fast‑food chain’s contested record on LGBT+ issues and its historic charitable giving to groups perceived as hostile to equality. PRWeek described comments from campaigners, the rationale for targeting the agency rather than only the brand, and the potential reputational consequences for the consultancy. The piece set that protest alongside earlier UK incidents when Chick‑fil‑A’s pop‑ups provoked local opposition.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-50108255> - A British Broadcasting Corporation report covered a peaceful demonstration by LGBT+ activists outside The Oracle shopping centre in Reading after Chick‑fil‑A opened a temporary site there in October 2019. The story described around sixty campaigners attending to protest the company’s past financial support for organisations regarded as hostile to LGBT+ rights, and quoted local campaign representatives who called for a boycott and argued the chain’s values clashed with the community. The BBC noted the mall subsequently stated the initial six‑month trial would not be extended, placing the Reading pop‑up in the context of wider public reaction to the brand.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50466038> - The British Broadcasting Corporation reported in late 2019 that Chick‑fil‑A had changed its charitable giving approach after criticism from LGBT+ activists. The article explained the company would focus donations on education, homelessness and hunger, and that two previously contentious beneficiaries were omitted from its 2020 list. The BBC outlined the controversy’s origins in 2012 when comments by company leadership prompted a backlash, and it summarised subsequent protests, local authority and shopping‑centre responses, plus Chick‑fil‑A’s statements that it did not seek to advance a social or political agenda and aimed to clarify its philanthropic priorities.
5. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/15/business/chick-fil-a-opening-uk-stores-gay-rights-backlash> - CNN reported on Chick‑fil‑A’s announced plans to open multiple restaurants in the United Kingdom following earlier controversy when a 2019 trial store attracted protest and did not remain open long term. The article explained the company’s stated investment and job‑creation ambitions, and it recounted the history of protests by LGBT+ activists over donations and comments linked to the Cathy family, which founded the business. CNN also covered Chick‑fil‑A’s more recent corporate adjustments, including changes to charitable giving and the appointment of diversity personnel, while flagging continuing unease among campaigners and the possibility of renewed demonstrations in the UK.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/nov/18/chick-fil-a-funding-christian-organisations-lgbt> - The Guardian reported that Chick‑fil‑A said it would not list two previously criticised recipients among its 2020 donations as the company sought to address protests and reputational damage. The piece traced the roots of the dispute to earlier donations made by the founders’ philanthropic vehicles to Christian organisations viewed by activists as opposing LGBT+ rights, and it quoted civil society figures who cautiously welcomed the change while urging more concrete assurances. The Guardian analysed reactions from campaigners and commentators, described the Reading lease situation and explored tensions between corporate philanthropy, religious conviction and public expectations on equality.
7. <https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/peter-tatchell-questions-stonewalls-reported-partnership-with-chick-fil-a/> - The Peter Tatchell Foundation published an open letter and statement raising concerns about any engagement between a prominent UK LGBT charity and Chick‑fil‑A, given the chain’s history of funding groups that campaign against LGBT+ rights. The foundation’s piece demanded clarity and urged Chick‑fil‑A to cease support for organisations considered hostile to LGBT+ equality, reiterating longstanding campaigners’ objections to the firm’s past giving and public pronouncements. The statement situates the action within the foundation’s broader human‑rights campaigning work and demonstrates the continuing vigilance of advocacy groups over corporate behaviour and partnerships in the UK context.