# Local tearoom faced with soaring business rates amid financial strain



The owners of Biscuit & Brew, a small tearoom located on Victoria Street in Nottingham, have expressed their astonishment following a significant increase in their business rates, which have soared by more than double compared to previous amounts. Darren and Dee Brookes now face a monthly bill of £850, which marks an increase of £500 from the previous charge of £350. The increase has been described as a blow to their business, which has been operating since February 2021.

Darren Brookes conveyed his concerns, stating, "For the last few years we've always paid a similar amount. Like council tax, it goes up every year, by a small percentage." However, he objected to the abruptness of the rise, calling it "not proportional and not reasonable." He expressed feelings of powerlessness in the face of such demands, stating, "I feel like I'm being bullied."

Initially, upon receiving the bill, the couple suspected it might be an error. Upon contacting Nottingham City Council, they learned that the increase was attributed to a reduction in the discount they were receiving on their rates, from 75 per cent down to 40 per cent. "I asked if anything could be done about it and the answer was no. They told me it’s a change in the relief you’re getting," Darren reported. "Practically speaking for people like me... it’s a massive increase".

Biscuit & Brew, which is known for its unique blends of loose-leaf teas, homemade cakes, and creative brunch offerings, began with just six tables in a smaller location on Hounds Gate before relocating to its current site, which allows for seating across two floors. The couple felt compelled to expand due to demand, taking on the larger premises in January 2022.

While acknowledging some initial support from the government during the startup phase of their business, Darren noted a perceived lack of ongoing support from authorities as businesses grow. "It’s like the government lose interest and the hurdles start to go up," he stated, adding that the sudden increase, which has nearly tripled since moving to Victoria Street, is particularly challenging to manage with short notice.

Balancing their financial obligations while ensuring the tearoom thrives, Darren described several strategies they are implementing to boost profits, including offering afternoon tea experiences and introducing seasonal items such as a mini Easter egg hot chocolate. Additionally, they are promoting their loose-leaf teas for customers to purchase to enjoy at home.

Despite grappling with the financial strain, Darren stated, "I don't feel like we're in a position where we're thinking we're going to be closing, but I can totally see how other places would be in that position now." He believes that local councils and the government should collaborate with small businesses like theirs to foster a thriving city centre. "We’ve put our life into this for the last five years," he added, reflecting on the emotional investment they have made in their venture.

Nottingham City Council has not provided a formal statement regarding the increase in business rates, noting that the council does not set these rates. A spokesperson from the government’s Treasury explained that the relief for business rates was reduced from 75 per cent to 40 per cent effective from 1 April and acknowledged it would be extended until the new permanent reduction takes effect in April 2026, although further details will be unveiled during the Autumn Budget for 2025.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)