Publicans' Lunch survey 2026: Growth ambitions meet operational reality

The UK pub sector continues to show remarkable resilience despite facing significant economic and operational pressures. In November 2026, at the 11th annual Publican's Lunch hosted by HaysMac, Heineken and Savills, we collected survey results from 97 pub operators, gaining insight into their outlook for the year ahead and the challenges shaping the sector. Findings from the survey reveal a market that remains optimistic about performance, while navigating rising cost pressures, changing consumer behaviour and ongoing economic uncertainty.

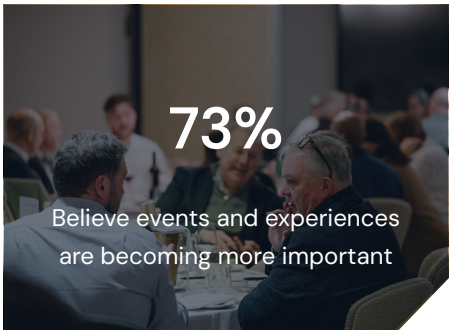
Headline figures from 97 respondents













We expect our pub business to perform better over the next 12 months than it has over the past 12 months.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

Passing on higher operating costs through menu and drinks prices without reducing customer demand is becoming increasingly difficult.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

Rising employment costs are putting significant pressure on the profitability of our business.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

The 20% reduction in business rates for pubs announced in the Autumn Budget will have a meaningful positive impact on the profitability of our business.

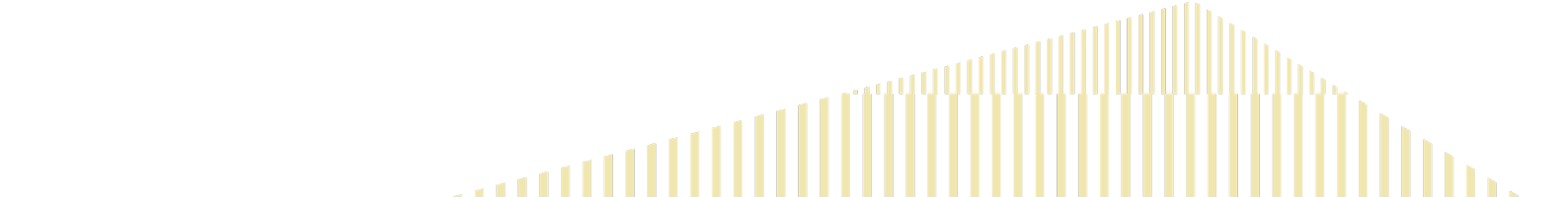
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

Events, entertainment and distinctive experiences are becoming increasingly important in driving pub visits and customer spend.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

Uncertainty about the economic outlook is causing us to delay investment in our pubs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1%	6.2%	18.6%	45.4%	26.8%

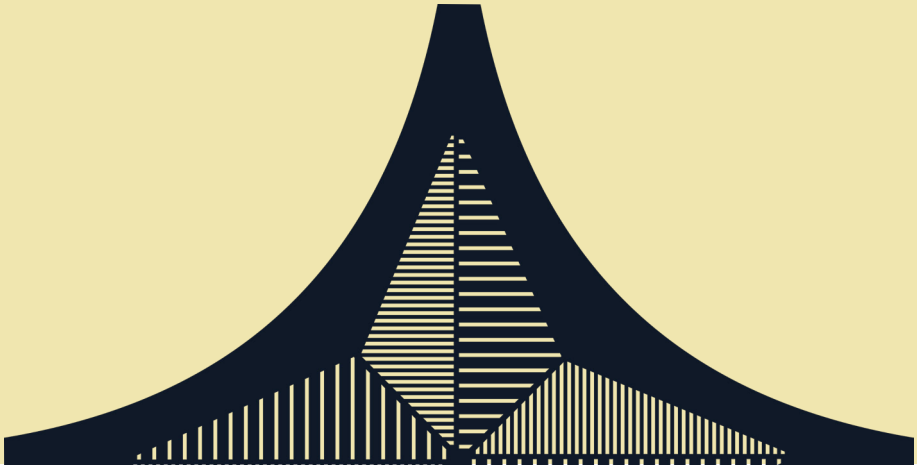


Looking ahead

This year's survey paints a picture of a pub sector that remains optimistic about its prospects but acutely aware of the pressures affecting profitability. Operators continue to demonstrate confidence in their ability to drive performance, yet many face the challenge of balancing rising employment and operating costs against a consumer environment that remains highly price-sensitive.

The findings also highlight the increasing importance of creating compelling customer experiences, with events and entertainment playing a growing role in attracting footfall and driving spend. At the same time, economic uncertainty continues to influence investment decisions, reflecting a sector focused on protecting cash flow while positioning for future growth.

For pub operators, investors and advisors alike, the message is clear: whilst challenges remain, confidence in the sector's ability to adapt and evolve endures. Those businesses that successfully manage costs, differentiate their offerings and maintain strong customer engagement are likely to be best placed to prosper over the coming years.



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