



Article from The Daily Telegraph – Monday 29 March

Tim Martin warns vaccine passports would be 'last straw' for pubs

In Wetherspoon's 41 years in business there have been seven Prime Ministers, three major recessions, floods, wars and health catastrophes, including SARS and HIV. Contrary to propaganda, several years have had higher all-cause mortality rates than 2020/21.

Yet at no time have government actions seemed so arbitrary and capricious as today, and at no time has real debate been so ruthlessly curtailed - facilitated by extensive use of emergency powers.

The differentiating factor is the current autocratic predilection for media control and PR initiatives, with no merit in science or common sense- which has brought entire industries to their knees.

Suggestions for vaccination passports follow September's moonshots and pub curfews, October's baffling tier systems, November's circuit-breaker, December's "substantial meals" with a pint, and January's winter lockdown.

There have been numerous random acts of destruction, none more symbolic than the shuttering of golf clubs - short of kissing your caddy, eschewed even by Tiger Woods, transmission of the virus is vanishingly unlikely on the fairway.

The latest brainwave, announced a few days ago, is that you can drink inside marquees, outside pubs, but not inside pubs themselves. Just imagine the expense and difficulties of implementation - and the impossibility of rational explanation to customers.

The idea of vaccination passports is surely fanciful and disproportionate. After the first lockdown, pubs successfully introduced an array of social distancing and hygiene practices, supervised by licensing and health authorities.

Wetherspoon, for example, recorded over 50 million customer visits from July to December, without a single reported case of a virus outbreak, as defined by the health authorities, among customers - nor was there any evidence of transmission of the virus from customers to staff, or vice versa.

The real source of transmission, as most people now know, has been hospitals, care homes and households.

As regards the latter, Councillor Ian Ward, leader of Birmingham City Council, said in September: "The data we have shows that the infection rate has risen, mainly due to social interactions, particularly private household gatherings. In shops and hospitality venues there are strict measures in place to ensure they are Covid-free, whereas it is easier to pass on the virus in someone's house."

Greg Fell, Director of Public Health, Sheffield and Dr Richard Harling of Stafford Council told Parliament's Science and Technology Committee in January that the "bulk of transmission has always been in people's households".



For many pubs, hanging on for dear life and devastated by G-force changes of direction, a complex and controversial passport scheme would be the last straw.

It would inevitably put pub staff in the frontline of a bitter civil liberties war, with some customers unwilling, or unable for medical reasons, to be vaccinated.

All in all, there is no justification for a passport system. Even before the rapid vaccine rollout, transmission rates in pubs were low. Now that the vulnerable are protected, yet another unworkable and vexatious government initiative will only add to imminent economic chaos, further devastating employment prospects.