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Britain Lets Pubs Stay Open Later for World Cup Knockout Matches

Police leaders warn that the extended drinking hours could strain forces and raise the risk of disorder.

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The British government said pubs in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be allowed to stay open until 2 a.m. if any of the home nations reach the knockout rounds of the men’s World Cup next year, a move that could lift sales for bars and

restaurants but has drawn concern from the country’s top football policing official.

Chief Constable Mark Roberts, the national police lead for football in Britain, said he was unhappy with the decision and warned that longer drinking hours could increase crime and put extra pressure on police forces already stretched by major events. He said a system that lets individual pubs apply for temporary license extensions under existing rules would have been a more controlled approach.

The government’s decision means alcohol licensing hours will be relaxed for the round of 32 and round of 16 for the first time in a decade. The change is aimed at helping fans watch late matches in pubs without forcing venues to close early, a policy that hospitality groups say could bring a meaningful boost to trade.

The British Beer and Pub Association said an England run to the final could generate an additional £275m in sales across the sector. Pub operators have argued that major tournaments often drive higher foot traffic, stronger beer sales and more spending on food and spirits, especially when matches fall outside normal evening hours.

Police officials, however, have raised concerns about what they see as the practical costs of the policy. Longer opening hours can mean more intoxicated customers leaving venues later at night, more demand on transport and street policing, and greater risk of disorder around pubs showing matches. Roberts said those issues should be weighed against the commercial benefits before broad national changes are made.

The announcement comes as businesses across the on-trade prepare for what could be one of the biggest sporting events of 2026. For pub owners, the extended hours may offer a chance to capture late-night crowds during knockout games. For police, it raises questions about staffing, public safety and how best to manage large gatherings tied to football.

The government has not said it plans similar blanket changes beyond the World Cup period, but the decision signals a willingness to ease licensing rules when major national teams are involved and demand from fans is expected to be high.