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Busier U.K. pubs sold 2.5% less draught beer and cider in October

Occupancy reached 66.2%, with average dwell time at 154 minutes and food spending up 4.3%

Tuesday, November 17, 2026



Pubs in the United Kingdom were busier in October, but higher attendance did not translate into stronger draught beer and cider sales.

Market Watch figures from The Oxford Partnership, reported Tuesday, November 17, by The Morning Advertiser, showed average pub occupancy rose 3.5 percentage points from a year earlier to 66.2% in October. At the same time, draught volumes sold fell 2.5% year over year, and the average rate of sale declined 0.4% from October 2025, reversing the return to growth seen in September.

The figures point to a trading pattern in which customers are still going out, but are not buying significantly more drinks. That matters for brewers, cider makers, distributors and pub operators because stronger foot traffic alone is not producing higher sales volumes across draught categories. If that pattern continues, growth in visits may not be enough on its own to lift beverage sales.

The Oxford Partnership said unsettled weather and two storms contributed to difficult trading conditions during the month. Rural pubs saw the steepest drop in rate of sale, down 2.7%, followed by suburban venues, where the rate fell 0.9%.

Even so, people stayed longer once they arrived. Average customer dwell time increased by 12 minutes to 154 minutes. Average consumer spending also rose 2.8% from a year earlier to £26.80, but the increase was driven mainly by food rather than drinks.

Food spending rose 4.3% to £32.35, compared with a 0.5% increase in drinks spending to £20.89. Alison Jordan, chief executive of The Oxford Partnership, said the October figures suggest that consumers have not stopped visiting pubs, but that more of their spending is going toward food. She said the data may reflect a shift in how people use pubs, with alcohol no longer the main reason for every visit.

The category breakdown showed a mixed picture. On a moving annual total basis, cider was the strongest-performing draught segment, with rate of sale up 6.5%. Stout followed with 5.4% growth, world lager rose 4.9%, premium lager increased 2.4%, and craft beer was up 1.6%.

More traditional categories remained under pressure. Core lager fell 3.7% and ale declined 3.6%, suggesting demand remains uneven even as some premium and specialty segments continue to expand.

Despite the weaker October reading, longer-term figures were still slightly positive. Year to date, rate of sale remained 0.6% ahead of 2025, while the total market’s moving annual total rate of sale was up 0.5%.

Jordan said the Christmas trading period could give operators a chance to encourage customers to buy drinks alongside meals and other social occasions. For the drinks trade, the October data suggests that fuller pubs are not automatically generating more draught sales, a sign that product mix and the balance between food-led and drink-led visits may become more important in the months ahead.