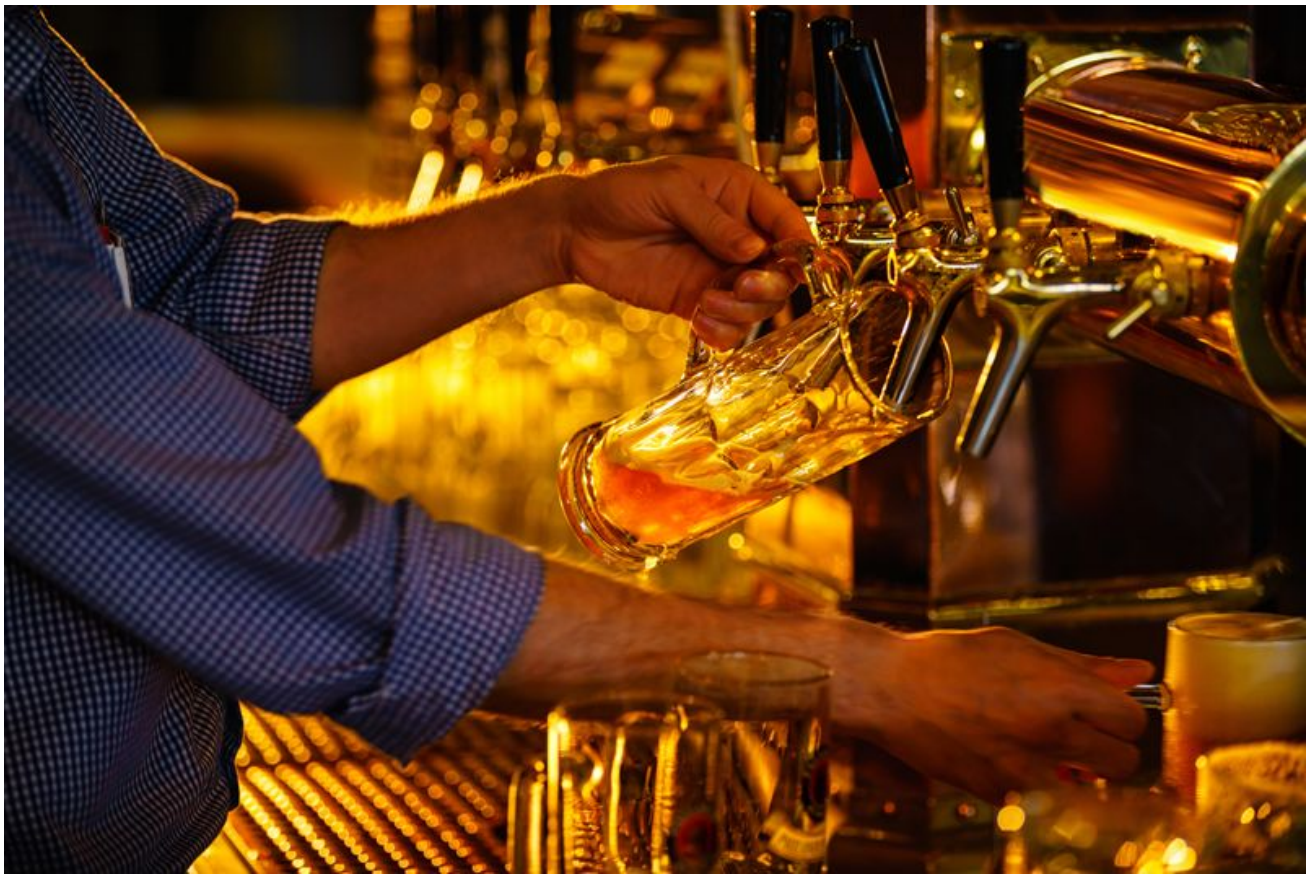
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Britain opens consultation on extending alcohol licensing hours for major events through 2029

The Home Office is seeking responses by Dec. 17 on a plan to let authorities extend trading hours for nationally significant sporting and cultural events

Friday, November 20, 2026



The British government has opened a consultation on whether to keep and update powers that allow longer alcohol licensing hours at major national events, a move that could affect pubs, bars and restaurants through 2029.

The Home Office said on Thursday, November 19, that it is seeking views, alongside the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on proposals to continue allowing national authorities to relax licensing hours for the sale of alcohol during events judged to have national cultural or sporting importance. Responses are due by December 17.

The consultation is aimed at events that draw large crowds and often lead to celebrations beyond normal closing times. The government said it wants to support major events and night-time economies while also protecting public safety and encouraging responsible drinking.

Under the current system, alcohol sales in England and Wales are generally limited by national licensing hours, with the retail sale of alcohol usually restricted between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., according to the consultation document. While local licensing decisions and temporary event notices can create exceptions, officials said there is no standing national provision that automatically extends hours for large national occasions.

The government is now considering a framework that would let the Home Secretary designate an event as being of national significance. Once an event is designated, licensing authorities could permit longer opening hours for premises involved in the event or located nearby. The consultation says objective criteria and safeguards would be used so that any extension is “appropriate and responsible,” with applicants expected to show how they would manage public safety risks and possible public nuisance.

The Home Office said the broader power to relax licensing hours for major events in England, Scotland and Wales has existed for limited periods and is due to expire in 2026. The new consultation asks whether that power should be extended to 2029. The government said the measure is intended to help support future major events and festivals.

Officials said the policy is meant to bring more consistency across areas that host nationally significant occasions. They also said it could help the hospitality and cultural sectors by allowing businesses to serve customers later when large public celebrations run past standard trading hours.

That makes the proposal closely watched by the drinks trade. For pubs, bars, restaurants and other licensed venues that sell beer, wine and spirits, longer hours at high-profile events could create more predictable trading conditions and potential extra sales, especially when businesses are trying to plan staffing, stock and security for periods of unusually high demand. Any benefit, however, would depend on how often the power is used and what conditions local authorities attach to approvals.

The consultation also asks for evidence on the possible effects of the policy on public health, community impact and policing. Officials are seeking views on the principle of relaxing national licensing hours, the criteria for deciding which events qualify, the process licensing authorities would follow, and the safeguards needed to limit harm.

The government’s stated rationale is that some celebrations of national importance now outgrow the current licensing framework. In the consultation paper, officials said big commemorations, major sporting occasions and national cultural events can create pressure for later trading, but that the law does not always give authorities a clear and consistent route to respond.

The consultation document cites categories of events such as national commemorations, significant sporting events, and cultural and entertainment festivals. It also refers more generally to “major events, celebrations, and commemorations of national importance.” The government said any changes would be designed to improve the visitor experience without weakening oversight.

If the proposals move forward, local authorities would still have a role in deciding whether extended hours should be granted in practice. The consultation says decisions would need to reflect the specifics of the event and local conditions, including the likely effect on residents and the resources available to manage crowds and safety. The government said it would provide guidance and oversight to support a more consistent approach.

The review comes at a time when officials are trying to balance support for hospitality businesses with concerns about disorder, noise and alcohol-related harm. Extending drinking hours during major events can be popular with customers and operators, but it can also increase pressure on transport, policing and emergency services if controls are weak.

The Home Office said all responses will be reviewed before any legislative or policy decisions are made. No final change has been announced, and the consultation does not guarantee that the power will be extended or widened. For now, the government is asking businesses, local authorities, health groups, police and members of the public to submit evidence before December 17 on whether national licensing hours should be relaxed more easily for major events and, if so, under what limits.