

Message from Katie Lam MP

January can be a bit of a funny month. The decorations are packed away, the weather is doing its worst, and many of us are bravely attempting Dry January or some other New Year resolution that felt like a good idea at the time. When it's cold, dark and wet, it's tempting to retreat indoors and hibernate until Spring.

But we're so lucky to live in such a wonderful part of the country, and there are plenty of reasons to get outside, whether that's a walk through the Kentish countryside or a stroll down the high street. And there's one place many have long relied on as a refuge, whatever the weather and whatever the time of year: the local pub!

Back in December, I wrote for KentOnline about the importance of buying local. But *being* local matters just as much. Getting out, meeting your neighbours, and staying connected to your community matters all the more in rural areas. The word 'pub' is quite literally short for 'public house' – a place where people come together. But the sad fact is, if we don't keep using our pubs, we risk losing them.

Pubs have been hit especially hard recently with higher business rates and the hike in National Insurance contributions. Now more than ever, they need our help.

That doesn't mean ordering a pint every night, particularly if you're taking a break from alcohol. Our Wealden pubs offer far more than that. They're warm, welcoming places to get out of the house, see familiar faces, and enjoy yourself.

Across the Weald, pubs host regular quiz nights, chess clubs, pool competitions and charity events. They serve excellent local food, showcase local produce, and provide a space where generations mix in a way that's becoming increasingly rare. The other day, I was at the Albion Inn in Boughton Monchelsea where a patron was celebrating their 18th birthday, having also celebrated their christening under the same roof!

You might strike up a conversation you didn't expect, learn something new, or just enjoy the comfort of being around others. And let's not forget one of the great British pub's best perks: most of the time, you can bring your dog with you.

January doesn't have to be grim, and supporting pubs doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. It can be a coffee instead of a pint, lunch instead of dinner, or simply turning

up to a quiz night with friends. Sometimes, the best New Year resolution is just to step out of the house. Why not support a local business while you're at it?