

**SAAGAR DATTANI**Account Manager at
The Whitehouse Consultancy**LEGISLATION TALK**

SUNDAY TRADING LAWS

We may yet see changes this winter

In June, it was reported that the government was looking to temporarily lift Sunday trading laws through the prospective Economic Recovery Bill, in a bid to stimulate the post-pandemic economic recovery.

Existing Sunday trading laws, which came into force under the Sunday Trading Act 1994, restrict stores with a retail space of more than 280 square metres to a maximum of six hours' opening from any time between 10am and 6pm. Changes to the legislation would allow supermarkets and other retailers to open for longer periods.

However, the government's idea ultimately hit a brick wall following these initial reports, with unions, opposition MPs and backbench Tory MPs arguing that the proposal would do little to stimulate the economy.

Unions and MPs argued that this change would put retail employees – many of whom have worked at the front line throughout the pandemic – at further risk, due to prolonged working hours and exposure to the general public. At least 50 Conservative MPs wrote to the Prime Minister Boris Johnson in June arguing against the move.

The government will need to consider the short- and long-term impact

relaxing Sunday trading laws would have on thousands of smaller community and health stores across the country. While relaxing this law might boost supermarket sales in the short term, it is likely that any change to legislation will add further competing pressures to small convenience and health stores that operate on Sundays.

During the pandemic, smaller stores expressed concerns about not receiving the typical quantities of goods they need from suppliers, due to supply being prioritised and directed towards larger supermarkets. Smaller independent stores and chains will now also undoubtedly have concerns about whether the relaxing of the legislation would displace trade from these local shops on weekends.

Some retailers have argued that temporarily lifting these restrictions during the pandemic could be a necessary step to ease queues in larger supermarkets and give key workers more flexibility in shopping times. However, others have stated that any relaxation should only be seen as a short-term response, as opposed to a first step towards permanent change.

Both larger supermarkets and smaller shops have been instrumental in keeping communities going during the lockdown, so any decision the government makes

Any relaxation should only be seen as a short-term response

on Sunday trading laws will need to be carefully considered. The initial backlash from unions and parliamentarians means these proposals might not be considered for the prospective Economic Recovery Bill when it is introduced.

However, with the Prime Minister stating that his government will keep “measures such as extending Sunday trading hours under review” and the government briefing the public that another wave of the virus could hit the UK this winter, it is likely that smaller stores and larger supermarkets can expect to hear more about this in the coming months.

The Whitehouse Consultancy is a public affairs and communications agency with over 20 years of experience in the specialist food sector, helping clients shape regulations and change public and policy makers' perceptions. Visit whitehouseconsulting.co.uk

RetailingBetterOnline

Free business advice to help independent health food retailers find new post-pandemic sales opportunities

www.betterretailingmagazine.co.uk



SHOPPING HAS CHANGED, HAVE YOU?

Online shopping became so prevalent in the UK during lockdown that a quarter of Brits admit to being “practically addicted” to it.

Independent natural health and organic retailers have been, until now, slow to embrace e-commerce due to a traditionally loyal and local physical customer base.

But most now recognise that failure to sell online or up their website and social media game could eventually lead to closure.

Retailing Better Online fills that knowledge gap by offering guidance on the basics of website design and build, how to set up an online shop, where to find cost-effective solutions, how to improve customer experience and how to promote and expand your business online.

Combining a physical store with a vibrant online presence, if done properly, will reap the rewards every health store is seeking through and beyond the pandemic, which has changed the way almost everyone shops.

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