

A Guide to Effective Lobbying – For CAMRA Branches



Summary

By lobbying local politicians, you can influence them and get them involved with your branch's campaigns. This guide provides advice on writing to politicians, making the most of meetings with them and persuading politicians to take supportive action.

Introduction

Lobbying is about persuading a politician to use their influence and position to support a particular campaign. The messages politicians receive from constituents, local groups, and the local media are incredibly important in determining which campaigns they support and which campaigns they oppose.

Each CAMRA branch is perfectly placed to run economical, locally focussed campaigns on pub closures, planning and tax issues. Local people such as yourself, your branch members and your community are potential voters and potential constituents so you will have an influence on MPs, Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) and other local politicians. Through local campaigning you can show MPs and PPCs that their potential electorate care about these issues.

Now is the time when PPCs in particular are most receptive and CAMRA's voice can best be heard. We particularly recommend that you begin to take action before the 6 week period after the election is called, after which strict limits will apply and all politicians will be busy campaigning.

Before you start

We recommend that you get in touch with politicians from mainstream parties that have a good chance of winning in your constituency. Find out about your local politicians at www.writetothem.com. Simply enter your postcode and the website will bring up

the names of your local MPs, MEPs and Councillors.

You can also find out who your local PPCs are. For the Conservatives, you can visit www.conservatives.com/People.aspx and type your postcode on the left hand side of the page. Once you know which constituency you fall into, you can browse Labour candidates at www.labour.org.uk/ppc/constituencies, and Liberal Democrat candidates at ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide/liberal-democrat-candidates.

You can write to MPs at:

[Their Name]
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

CAMRA branches can effectively lobby by:

- Appointing a Committee member to lobby as representative of the branch, ideally a dedicated branch Public Affairs Officer. Please ensure that you let the Policy and Public Affairs team at HQ know who has been appointed, so that they can keep in touch
- Encouraging members and the public to support petitions and postcard campaigns
- Encouraging members and the public to send individually written letters and emails to MPs and other local politicians

Tips on writing to a politician

Writing a letter is an excellent way to get your message across and begin to develop a good working relationship with politicians. For every voter who sends a letter politicians will assume there are many more who are likeminded. A letter will carry more weight than an email.

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Successful email or letter writing tips:

- Keep it short. One side of A4 is more than enough.
- Consider handwriting the letter to emphasise its individuality
- Add local examples and figures
- Explain why the issue matters to you
- Include your full name and address so they know you are their constituent
- Use bullet points to highlight your concerns
- Make it clear what you would like your MP to do
- Ask for a reply
- Send a copy of any reply to CAMRA HQ for our records

If you do not receive a reply, or the reply you receive does not sufficiently answer the points you make, you will need to write again. Often the second letter will be the more productive as the MP will be prompted to consider the issue in greater depth.

What not to do:

- Don't lobby on more than one issue in a single letter
- Don't criticise the person you are writing to or make threats
- Don't use a template letter or copy a letter sent by someone else as this reduces its impact and risks discrediting not only your letter but also letters sent by others

Further Resources

- www.camra.org.uk – for news on CAMRA's campaigns and national lobbying activity
- www.writetothem.com – for details of your local politicians
- www.localworks.org - for details on the Sustainable Communities Act
- www.parliament.uk - for MPs' speeches and Early Day Motion lists

Tips on politician meetings

Most politicians hold regular surgeries where you can meet them face to face to discuss your concerns. The meetings will usually last 10 – 15 minutes. It would be usual for an MP to meet a group of two or three people from a local organisation, so perhaps if any active members of your branch are members of the MP's party, you could take them along for added influence. Before your meeting, decide on the areas each person will speak on.

During your meeting:

- Provide local examples
- Seek to show public support for your issue
- Refer to briefing notes if you need to
- Indicate the positive consequences of them acting – including the positive media coverage that their involvement may receive
- Don't disagree with each other as this will give a poor impression
- Make it clear what action you would like them to take (see below for examples)

After the meeting send a letter thanking them for their time and briefly summarise any commitments they made to you.

Showing public support

Politicians are much more likely to respond to issues you raise with them if they perceive you to have wide local public support. Ways in which you can show this support are:

- Local petitions collected in the community, or postcard campaigns
- Letters to local newspapers
- Any local media coverage already secured
- Entries on local blogs (particularly politicians' blogs)
- Gaining support of other local groups
- Local press releases and photo opportunities

Get involved with your local paper whenever possible to highlight local issues. Your local politicians will be keen to raise and develop their

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profile locally, so ask them for a quote and arrange a photo opportunity – perhaps outside a threatened pub.

Asking them to take action

When meeting a politician, try to gauge their level of support for CAMRA's campaigns. If they are supportive, ask them to take action. Perhaps you could ask them to do one of the following:

- Contact the local authority, asking them to 'opt-in' to the Sustainable Communities Act at the next opportunity
- Sign up to support CAMRA's five key pledges, and ask them to indicate support for our General Election Charter. This may prove useful in holding them to their word if [re]elected
- Sign any relevant Early Day Motions (EDMs) in Parliament, which can help draw government attention to key issues
- Write to a minister asking for government action on one of our campaigns

We recommend that you also get in contact with your PPCs, particularly if your current MP is standing down at the upcoming General Election. Although a PPC is more limited in the action that they can take now, it is worth investing the time in them now in preparation for them potentially becoming MPs next year.

Actions you could ask your PPCs to take include:

- Spreading the word about CAMRA among their local party
- Influencing local industry and business owners
- Discuss issues with their party's representative for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Sign up to CAMRA's five key pledges and support our General Election Charter

Here are some issues which you might discuss with your MP/PPC:

- Protecting local pubs by ensuring planning permission is required before a pub is demolished or converted to another use

- Stopping supermarkets selling alcohol as a loss-leader
- Beer tax issues such as abolition of the beer duty escalator, removing excise duty on beer below 2.8% and a preferential duty rate on draught beer sold in pubs

Other ways to involve politicians

In addition to the above, perhaps you could consider asking your local politicians to:

- Attend a meeting of your local branch, to meet members and hear about the issues from a wide range of people
- Contribute to your branch newsletter
- Attend, or even open, CAMRA events in your area such as beer festivals (if they do so, remember to take photos of them on the day to use in publicity material and send to local media)

Contact

For further information please contact CAMRA's Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Jonathan Mail, jonathan.mail@camra.org.uk or 01727 798448.

Alternatively, you can get in touch with Emily Ryans, CAMRA's Campaigns Officer at emily.ryans@camra.org.uk or 01727 798447.