

PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP SERIES / AUGUST 2026

Escaping the Pub Death Spiral

How smarter ingredient spend, simpler menus and better preparation grow revenue, margin and loyalty

A practical playbook for spending where guests can taste the difference, creating a wide menu from fewer better ingredients, and reducing kitchen complexity without becoming generic.

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Prepared by i-curate | Practical insight for leaders and operators

This paper provides general commercial and operational guidance. It is not legal, tax, financial or regulatory advice. Outcomes depend on context, execution and validation of assumptions.

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Executive summary

The pub “death spiral” is often accelerated by the wrong kind of economy: buying every ingredient down, adding more dishes to chase demand, and asking an overstretched kitchen to create variety through complexity. Recovery begins by putting money into the ingredients guests can see, taste and remember; building apparent choice from a disciplined set of shared ingredients and preparations; and making service simple enough to execute brilliantly every time.

The central idea

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Spend by role, not evenly: keep commodity foundations keenly priced; pay more for the distinctive “show-off” vegetables and components that signal quality; and put the biggest investment into the hero ingredient — often the protein, or whatever ingredient defines the dish. Better ingredients need less disguise, support stronger pricing and repeat custom, and let an independent pub compete on distinctiveness rather than scale.

What operators should do differently

- Do not buy every ingredient at the same quality level. Spend according to what the guest can taste, see, remember and value.
- Use fewer, better ingredients. A disciplined pantry reduces waste, stock, supplier fragmentation and the number of ways service can fail.
- Engineer a seemingly wide menu from shared preparations and cross-utilised ingredients rather than a unique shopping list for every dish.
- Move safe, repeatable preparation out of the service window so the kitchen can focus on final cooking, seasoning, texture, plating and speed.
- Use ingredient quality and a distinctive food identity to create pricing power, retention and a reason to choose the pub over scaled competition — including venues that feel independent but are backed by a larger group.
- Run the reset through a staged 13-week plan that measures dish contribution, SKU count, prep time, service complexity, waste, customer response and cash.

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ingredient spend tiers

Cost-efficient foundations, distinctive show-off ingredients and the defining hero component.

FEWER

SKUs, wider apparent choice

Cross-utilised ingredients and shared prep create breadth without kitchen clutter.

13

weeks to reset the model

A controlled sequence for menu, procurement, preparation, service and cash.

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01

The pressure is real — but the market still rewards execution

Pubs are operating in a high-cost, low-margin environment. The picture is not uniformly negative: major events and strong propositions can still produce growth, but topline gains must outrun inflation and convert into cash.

The British Beer and Pub Association reported that 161 pubs closed across Britain in the first three months of 2026 — almost two per day and 26% more than the same quarter of 2025. ^[1] A July 2026 survey led by UKHospitality found 23% of respondents operating at a loss and 16% at risk of failure within 12 months. ^[2]

There are also signs of opportunity. Managed pub groups recorded 1.9% year-on-year like-for-like sales growth in June 2026, helped by football and warm weather. Yet hospitality-wide growth was only 0.2%, and sector growth had remained below CPI inflation for 14 consecutive months. ^[3] The lesson is not that demand has disappeared; it is that profitable demand is harder won and weak execution is punished quickly.

1.9% managed pub like-for-like growth June 2026, the best month of the year at that point.	0.2% hospitality sector sales growth June 2026 — effectively flat and below inflation.	1,839 hospitality outlet closures in Q2 High churn was nearly offset by 1,794 openings.
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NIQ recorded 98,564 licensed premises at the end of June 2026, almost unchanged quarter on quarter, but the flat total concealed rapid churn: 1,839 closures and 1,794 openings in Q2. ^[6] A stable market count therefore does not mean stable individual businesses.

The operator's challenge

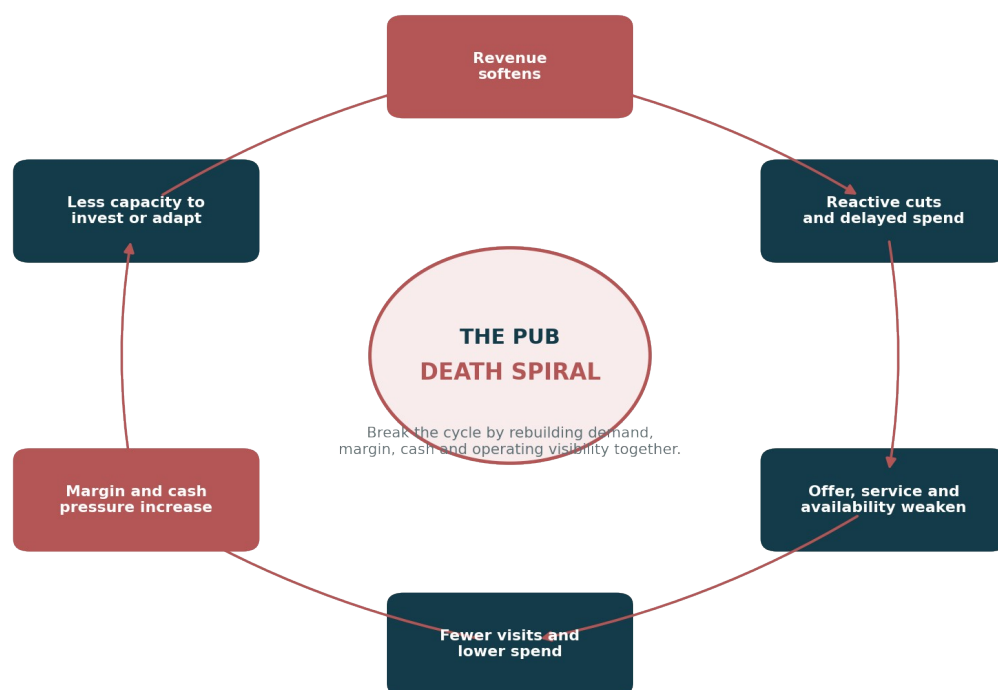
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The external environment cannot be ignored, but the controllable question is sharper: how does the pub convert its location, capacity, team, offer, data and purchasing power into more frequent, higher-quality and more profitable customer occasions?

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The pub death spiral

Pressure becomes dangerous when short-term actions damage the very proposition that produces revenue. The cycle can begin with a modest decline and become self-reinforcing.



The pub death spiral: a self-reinforcing cycle of weaker demand, margin and cash.

Early warning signs

Area	Warning signs
Demand	Fewer visits; empty dayparts; events that do not repeat; declining bookings; reduced frequency among regulars.
Experience	Long queues; unavailable products; inconsistent food; slower service; maintenance issues; poor recovery when something goes wrong.
Commercial	Increasing discount dependence; falling spend per head; weak product mix; price changes without customer logic; missed upsell opportunities.
Operations	Emergency buying; rota changes without demand data; stock-outs beside slow stock; unclaimed credits; duplicate admin; delayed invoices.
Cash	Supplier stretching; uncontrolled credit; reactive transfers; no forward cash view; profit reported without understanding working capital.
Management	Different numbers in EPOS, accounts and spreadsheets; issues discovered after month-end; too many metrics but no named actions.

What not to do

- Do not cut opening hours purely from weekly averages; understand daypart demand, contribution, local events and the customer habit you may break.
- Do not discount the whole offer to solve a relevance problem. Discounting can increase volume while reducing cash and training customers to wait.
- Do not remove labour from the exact service moments that drive second rounds, food attachment, table turns and customer recovery.
- Do not reduce range without protecting the products and occasions customers specifically choose the pub for.
- Do not use credit to postpone a decision about an unprofitable trading model. Credit should support a controlled plan, not conceal structural loss.
- Do not cut ingredient quality evenly. The guest does not value every input equally; saving on the defining ingredient while overcomplicating the rest weakens both the dish and the economics.
- Do not confuse a longer menu with more choice. Excess SKUs, single-use ingredients and last-minute touches reduce availability, consistency, speed and cash.

Break the cycle at more than one point



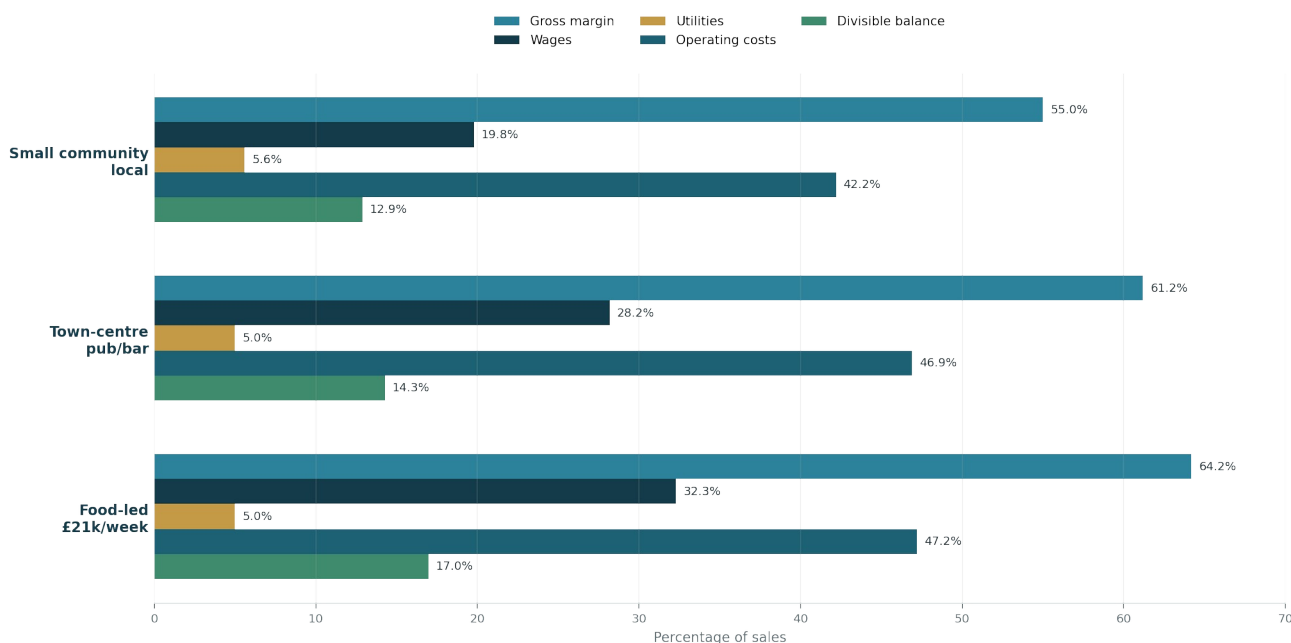
A recovery plan should create demand while protecting the service, availability and margin required to convert that demand into cash. Solving only one part of the cycle usually moves the pressure elsewhere.

03

Know the economics before changing the operation

A pub is a high-throughput, low-tolerance operating model. Small movements in gross margin, labour, conversion or dish mix can materially change the divisible balance. So can the hidden economics of menu complexity: unique ingredients, preparation minutes, equipment conflicts, waste risk and service touches.

The BBPA's Running a Pub 2026 report, based on cost data from more than 4,800 pubs, shows how cost structure changes by format. Its model costs exclude managers' salaries and quote figures exclusive of VAT, so they should be treated as sector benchmarks rather than a site budget. ^[4]



Illustrative weighted averages from BBPA Running a Pub 2026. Divisible balance is profit before rent; the report excludes managers' salaries.

What the benchmarks show

- A small community local at roughly £5,100 weekly sales had a 55.0% gross margin, wages of 19.8%, utilities of 5.6%, total operating costs of 42.2% and a 12.9% divisible balance before rent.
- A town-centre pub/bar at roughly £12,100 weekly sales had a 61.2% gross margin, wages of 28.2%, utilities of 5.0%, total operating costs of 46.9% and a 14.3% divisible balance.
- A food-led pub at roughly £21,300 weekly sales had a 64.2% gross margin, wages of 32.3%, utilities of 5.0%, total operating costs of 47.2% and a 17.0% divisible balance.

One percentage point matters

1%

At £12,000 of weekly sales, one percentage point equals £120 per week. Two percentage points of sustained gross-margin improvement equal £12,480 a year before any volume change — but the same arithmetic works in reverse when waste, poor mix or buying leakage goes unseen.

Build a site-specific profit bridge

Begin with last year and the latest 13 weeks. Reconcile EPOS sales to the accounts; separate price, volume and mix; identify cost of goods by category; isolate labour by daypart; quantify waste, voids, discounts, credits and stock variance; and build a weekly cash bridge. The objective is to identify the few movements that explain the result, not produce another dense report.

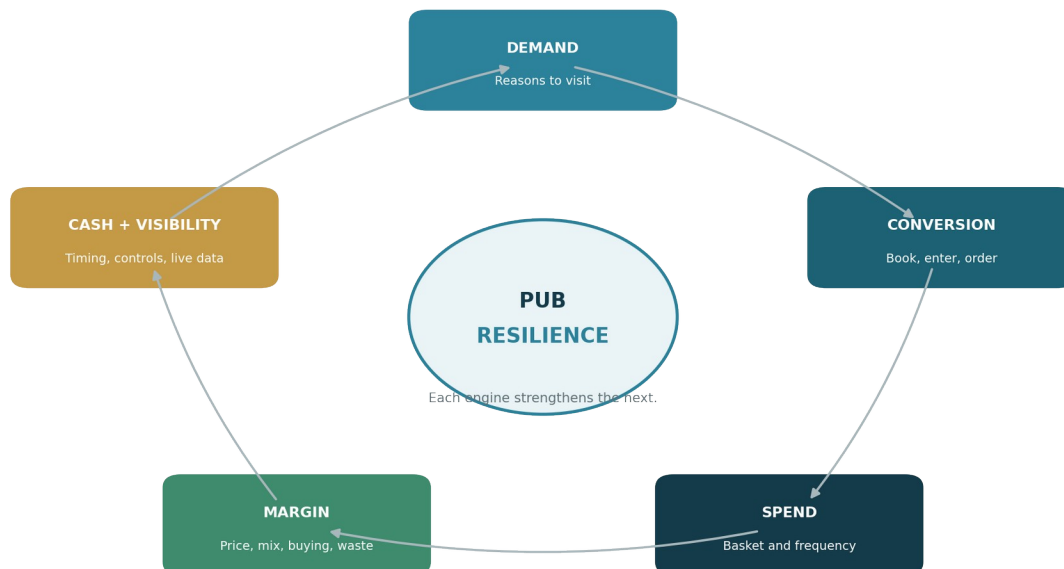
Bridge component	Question
Visits and frequency	How many customer occasions were gained or lost, by daypart and reason to visit?
Conversion and capacity	How much demand was lost to no booking route, queues, table allocation, stock-outs or slow service?

Bridge component	Question
Spend and mix	Did customers buy fewer rounds, less food, lower-margin products or fewer premium/no-low choices?
Dish economics and perceived value	Which ingredients carry the flavour, texture and story? Is spend concentrated where guests notice it, and can price reflect the experience?
Menu and kitchen complexity	How many unique SKUs, prep steps, service touches and pieces of equipment does each dish require? Which dishes create avoidable friction?
Gross margin	What changed in price, supplier cost, portion, waste, yield, discounts, credits and stock variance?
Labour and operating cost	What was productive, what was avoidable, and where did cuts reduce revenue, food quality or consistency?
Cash	Which profit movements converted to cash, and which were absorbed by stock, debtor, creditor or timing changes?

04

The pub resilience flywheel

Sustainable recovery comes from five connected engines. For food-led pubs, ingredient quality and kitchen simplicity influence every one: they create demand, support spend, protect margin, improve conversion during service and release cash from stock and waste.



The pub resilience flywheel: demand, conversion, spend, margin, and cash plus visibility.

Engine	Core question	Typical levers
Demand	Give people a specific reason to choose this pub, at this time, with this group.	Occasions, community, live sport, events, memorable food, music, games, rooms, workday, family, local partnerships.
Conversion	Turn interest and capacity into completed visits and orders.	Discoverability, booking, table allocation, queue design, availability, a simple kitchen, fast ordering, clear offer, service recovery.
Spend	Increase the value and frequency of relevant visits without eroding trust.	Hero dishes, premium ingredients, bundles, food attachment, second rounds, pre-order, loyalty and return prompts.
Margin	Keep more of each pound through smart spend placement, price, mix and control.	Ingredient hierarchy, SKU compression, shared prep, procurement, supplier terms, portions, yield, waste, stock, credits, discounts and voids.
Cash + visibility	See issues early and align cash timing with controlled commitments.	Daily flash, menu and SKU data, 13-week cash, purchase-to-pay control, supplier terms, credit limits, exception alerts and one source of truth.

The growth equation

Revenue = relevant visits × conversion × spend per visit × frequency

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The formula is deliberately simple. It forces every activity to state which variable it should move, for which customer and daypart, at what cost and with what margin. “Do more marketing” is not a plan; “fill 20 additional Sunday lunch covers through pre-booked family packages at target contribution” is.

05

Create a reason to visit — and make the food worth remembering

Demand generation works best when it is built around occasions and the full customer journey. For a food-led pub, one of the most defensible reasons to return is a dish that tastes materially better than the convenient alternatives.

Build an occasion portfolio

Occasion type	Purpose	Examples
Core habit	The dependable reason regular customers return.	After-work drink, community local, lunch, Sunday, match day, quiz, live music, family meal.
Growth occasion	A specific underused daypart or customer group worth developing.	Midweek food, early evening, women's sport, remote workers, celebrations, clubs, local business events.

Occasion type	Purpose	Examples
Peak event	A high-demand moment that needs capacity, booking and spend planning.	Major sport, bank holiday, festival, Christmas, local event, ticketed entertainment.
Recovery occasion	A targeted response to a weak daypart with clear economics.	Fixed menu, community partnership, tasting, games league, local supplier night — tested, not permanently discounted.

Compete on distinctiveness, not the big brands' scale

An independent pub cannot outspend a national group on marketing, systems or buying scale. Some scaled operators present individual venues through local-feeling concepts, so the sign over the door may not reveal the size of the organisation behind it. Trying to win with the same broad menu, the same promotions and the lowest price puts the independent into a fight it cannot control.

The defensible advantage is authenticity and the freedom to make sharper choices: a smaller set of excellent ingredients, a dish with memorable flavour and texture, flexible local or specialist sourcing, and hospitality that feels personal. When guests can taste the difference, price is judged against the experience rather than only against the nearest chain.

The independent advantage

Guests do not return because a pub stocked the most ingredients. They return because something tasted, felt or sounded like that pub and nowhere else.

Restaurant research has associated perceived food quality with customer satisfaction and revisit intention. [9] This does not guarantee that a more expensive ingredient will pay back; it makes food quality a commercial hypothesis to test through price, contribution, feedback and repeat behaviour.

Remove conversion friction

In Zonal and NIQ research involving 5,000 British consumers around the World Cup, 32% said table booking increased their likelihood of visiting, prior data showed an average 15% basket uplift among guests who pre-ordered, and 31% said at-table ordering would draw them in. [6] These are event-specific findings, not universal guarantees, but they demonstrate how convenience can secure demand, improve capacity planning and create additional ordering opportunities.

- Make the pub easy to find and understand online: opening hours, menus, accessibility, live events, booking route, family/dog policy and transport information must be current.
- Allow customers to reserve the scarce thing: a table, screen view, event place, food package, private area or room.
- Design arrival and queue flow for the occasion. The busiest five minutes can determine whether guests stay, order again or leave.
- Use pre-order or at-table ordering where it genuinely removes friction; retain human hospitality and a clear fallback when technology fails.
- Protect product and food availability. Marketing a reason to visit that the operation cannot fulfil damages repeat demand.

Increase spend without becoming salesy

Moment	Practical levers
Before the visit	Pre-booked food/drink packages; deposits; celebration extras; ticketed events; group pre-orders; a visible hero dish worth travelling for.
At first order	Clear bundles; meal attachment; premium hero and no/low alternatives; size choice; confident menu descriptions and simple staff prompts.
During the visit	Fast second rounds; snack and sharing prompts; table service where useful; event-linked offers; consistent food timing and quality.
After the visit	Loyalty, relevant return invitation, next event, feedback recovery, group organiser follow-up and a reason to reorder the memorable dish.
Across frequency	Recognise regulars; build repeatable weekly/monthly occasions; rotate specials from shared prep; reward behaviour rather than indiscriminate discounting.

Guardrail



Every revenue initiative needs a contribution target, capacity plan and stop rule. A busy event that creates excessive labour, waste, complaints or discount leakage may produce less cash than a smaller, well-designed occasion.

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Spend where guests can taste it

The goal is not the lowest food cost. It is the best return on ingredient spend: cheap where the guest cannot tell, generous where they can, and simple enough for the kitchen to execute consistently.

The three-tier ingredient spend hierarchy

Ingredient role	Buying principle	Examples and purpose
Foundation	Buy fit-for-purpose, consistent and keenly. Do not pay prestige prices for an ingredient that disappears into the base of the dish.	Generic onions, potatoes, commodity carrots, flour, stock basics and cooking oil — where they perform a supporting role.
“Show-off” ingredient	Spend more where colour, seasonality, shape, bite, provenance or presentation is visible to the guest.	Speciality carrots, asparagus, heritage tomatoes, mushrooms, leaves, cheeses, pickles and distinctive garnishes.
Hero	Put the biggest share of spend into the ingredient the guest names, tastes and remembers.	Usually the protein, or the defining plant-based ingredient, cheese or mushroom. Quality, cut, provenance and cooking carry the dish.

The hierarchy follows the dish, not a fixed category. A standard potato may be a foundation in a stew; a carefully selected potato may be the hero in exceptional chips. Spend follows what the guest notices.

The spend rule



Buy the cheapest acceptable ingredient where function matters; buy the best affordable ingredient where the guest's senses and memory are concentrated. Cheap must mean fit-for-purpose — never poor, unsafe or inconsistent.

Better ingredients need fewer supporting ingredients

A strong hero ingredient, properly seasoned vegetables, good fat, acidity and deliberate texture can make a dish sing without a long shopping list. A weak defining ingredient is often disguised with more sauces, garnishes and components, increasing SKUs and labour while still failing to create a memorable plate.

Better ingredients can support a higher price, stronger retention and less discount dependence, but only when portion, cooking and service are consistent. The operator should test whether the extra spend produces higher contribution, better reviews, more repeat orders and a clearer reason to choose the pub.

Fewer SKUs, not fewer choices

WRAP's Guardians of Grub menu-planning guidance notes that a higher number of SKUs means more ingredients to purchase, store and potentially waste. [8] Menu width should therefore come from recombining a disciplined pantry, not from buying a unique set of ingredients for every dish.

Every SKU must earn its place	Test
Customer value	Does the guest see, taste or understand why this ingredient is here?
Cross-utilisation	Does it appear in more than one high-selling dish, daypart or preparation?
Hero exception	If it is single-use, is it distinctive and profitable enough to justify the space and risk?
Yield and shelf life	Can the pack size, trim, storage life and forecast be converted into saleable portions?
Operational fit	Does it require separate storage, equipment, allergen control or skill that adds disproportionate complexity?
Supplier fit	Can the pub obtain the required quality, pack size, availability and price reliably?

One preparation, many dishes

Menu engineering should begin with shared preparations: a stock, braise, roasted vegetable base, purée, pickle, sauce, crumb, garnish, dough or dessert component that can be finished differently across the menu. The customer sees breadth; the kitchen sees a smaller number of reliable building blocks.

Shared preparation	How it creates apparent choice	Operating benefit
Roasted or charred seasonal vegetables	Side dish, salad, garnish, tart or flatbread component, depending on the concept.	One prep list; better yield; fewer single-use vegetables; flexible specials.
Slow-cooked hero protein	Pie, sandwich, loaded dish, sharing plate or special with different finishing.	Batch control; consistent tenderness; use across dayparts; easier service.
One strong stock, sauce or gravy base	Braise, pie sauce, gravy, soup or glaze with different final seasoning.	Less duplicate prep; better flavour; easier training and consistency.
Pickle, chutney, slaw or dressed garnish	Texture and acidity across burgers, sandwiches, sharing dishes and sides.	Longer useful life; fast plating; a recognisable house signature.

Prepare early; finish brilliantly at service

Every task that can be completed safely and without harming quality before the rush should be moved out of the service window: weighing, trimming, braising, roasting, sauce production, pickling, portioning, labelling and station setup. During service, the kitchen should concentrate on the steps guests are paying for — final cooking, safe reheating where appropriate, crisping, seasoning, plating and dispatch.

Advance preparation is not indiscriminate batch cooking. It requires demand-led prep lists, shelf-life rules, allergen controls, traceability and validated methods for cooking, chilling, storing and reheating. The Food Standards Agency's Safer Food, Better Business guidance provides the relevant safety framework. [10]

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The service-complexity rule

A dish should earn every last-minute touch. When two dishes can share the same underlying prep but finish differently, the guest gets choice and the kitchen gets speed, consistency and lower cost.

Seven menu-engineering tests

Test	Operating question
1. Customer pull	Would anyone choose the pub — or return — because of this dish? Is the reason clear on the menu?
2. Spend placement	Is ingredient cost concentrated in what guests can taste, see and remember, rather than hidden complexity?
3. Contribution	Does price cover the live ingredient cost, realistic waste, labour, discounts and service burden?
4. SKU burden	How many unique ingredients does the dish introduce, and how well are they cross-utilised?
5. Prep burden	Can the preparation be batched, shared or completed before service without harming quality?

Test	Operating question
6. Service burden	How many last-minute touches, stations and pieces of equipment compete during the rush?
7. Reliability	Can the pub deliver the dish consistently through supplier variation, staff mix, allergens, demand peaks and availability?

Supplier choice and control can coexist

The objective is not a national-only supply base. Commodity foundations may benefit from scale and disciplined benchmarking; hero proteins and show-off ingredients may justify local, specialist or regional supply. Control comes from seeing spend, price, volume, quality, service, credits and margin in one process, then choosing deliberately rather than buying reactively.

The Power of 1

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One order, one invoice and one payment can reduce fragmented administration and reconnect purchasing, receiving, credits, invoicing and cash. The commercial value comes from the behaviour and visibility this enables, not from consolidation as an end in itself.

Labour: simplify the kitchen before cutting the rota

Labour is often the largest controllable operating cost, but the cheapest rota is not necessarily the most profitable. Before removing people, remove unnecessary work: single-use prep, duplicate ingredients, poor station design, fragmented ordering and dishes with too many last-minute touches. Track sales, covers, ticket time, customer feedback and task load by daypart so labour protects the moments that create revenue.

- Set a demand forecast by 30-minute or hourly trading block and translate it into a prep forecast by shared component.
- Identify the service bottleneck: grill, fryer, pass, plating, bar, table clearing, payment, stock retrieval or management decision.
- Move prep and admin away from peaks; batch safe preparations; portion and label clearly; automate or consolidate back-office work.
- Use a simple post-shift review: demand, ticket time, food quality, stock, labour, waste, customer issues and one action for the next comparable shift.
- Build the service menu around a manageable number of finishing actions, and train the team to execute those actions consistently under pressure.

Restore cash control and live visibility

Profit and cash are not the same. A pub can show accounting profit while cash is trapped in stock, lost through leakage or consumed by the timing of supplier payments and capital commitments.

The minimum operating cockpit

Control	Minimum content
Daily flash	Sales by daypart/channel; covers or transactions; spend per head; labour hours/cost; major stock-outs; cash position; material incidents.

Control	Minimum content
Menu and kitchen control	Dish mix and contribution; SKU count; ingredient cross-utilisation; prep hours; ticket time; availability; production, spoilage and plate waste.
Weekly trading review	Visits, booking and conversion; sales and mix; gross margin bridge; labour productivity; food quality and reviews; waste, voids and discounts; actions.
Purchase-to-pay control	Committed orders; goods received; missing deliveries; price variance; credits; invoice exceptions; supplier payments; overdue disputes.
13-week cash view	Opening cash; receipts; payroll; tax; rent; utilities; suppliers; debt/credit; capex; contingency; closing headroom.
Exception alerts	Off-process buying, price variance, single-use SKU, stock-out, high waste, missed credit, aged invoice, unusual void/discount, cash threshold or supplier hold.

Use credit as a controlled operating tool

Credit can support stock, planned events, seasonal peaks or a timed recovery initiative. It becomes dangerous when the operator cannot see which orders used it, the cost and repayment path, or whether the underlying trade is generating enough cash. Limits, eligible suppliers, approved categories, repayment rules and stop triggers should be visible and enforced.



Cash rule

No growth initiative is complete until the operator can show when the revenue arrives, when the cost leaves, how much stock or labour is committed, and the downside if demand underperforms.

One source of truth

EPOS, booking, procurement, stock, payments and accounts may remain separate systems, but the management view must reconcile them. Multiple spreadsheets with different definitions create delayed arguments rather than early action. Agree the definitions, owners, refresh frequency and exception thresholds for the small number of metrics that run the pub.

07

A 13-week pub recovery plan

The plan below is designed to create control quickly, identify where ingredient spend produces customer value, simplify the menu and kitchen, activate a focused proposition and embed a repeatable trading rhythm.



The first objective is control. The second is repeatable growth. The third is resilience.

An illustrative 13-week recovery sequence. Urgent safety, licensing, employment, tax or solvency issues require appropriate professional advice.

Phase actions

Phase	Core actions
Weeks 1–2: Stabilise	Establish daily cash and supplier visibility; protect critical stock and service; map all food SKUs and current ingredient spend; identify hero dishes and urgent quality failures; stop low-confidence purchases and needless menu additions.
Weeks 3–4: Diagnose	Build the profit and cash bridge; analyse dish popularity and contribution; classify foundation, show-off and hero ingredients; map cross-utilisation, prep time, service touches, waste, ticket time, supplier quality and customer feedback.
Weeks 5–8: Activate	Pilot a tighter menu with better hero ingredients, clearer pricing and descriptions, shared preparations and demand-led prep lists; train service stories and kitchen finishing; test with contribution, quality and repeat-intent targets.
Weeks 9–13: Embed	Standardise recipes, prep modules, pars, supplier routes and the weekly review; refine rotas and stock; rotate specials from the same disciplined pantry; document playbooks; decide what to scale, stop or redesign.

The 13-week scorecard

Lens	Measures
Demand	Visits/transactions; bookings; walk-in conversion; event occupancy; repeat rate; food-led reasons for visit.
Spend	Spend per head/transaction; food attachment; hero-dish mix; premium/no-low mix; package uptake; realised average price.
Menu and kitchen	SKU count; ingredient cross-utilisation; prep hours; service touches; ticket time; availability; dish consistency; recipe compliance.

Lens	Measures
Margin	Dish contribution; gross margin by category; purchase price variance; yield; production, spoilage and plate waste; credits; discounts and voids.
Labour and service	Labour cost and hours by daypart; sales per labour hour; wait time; table turn; complaints; review sentiment.
Cash	Daily cash; supplier exposure; stock days; payment timing; credit utilisation; 13-week headroom.
Execution	Actions closed; exception age; system/process compliance; tests run; decisions made and evidence captured.

Weekly decision rule



For every red metric, name one owner, one action, one due date and the evidence that will show whether it worked. Do not allow the same red exception to roll forward without an explicit decision.

08

How i-curate supports the operating model

i-curate is designed to connect the purchasing and financial workflow behind ingredient strategy, supplier choice, menu margin, administration and cash control.

The public i-curate proposition brings multiple suppliers into one purchase-to-pay environment with consolidated ordering, invoices, payments, automated credit requests and real-time spend reporting. [7] For a pub, the objective is not simply fewer invoices; it is to see whether money is going into commodity foundations, distinctive show-off ingredients or the hero products that drive customer value — and to connect that decision to margin and cash.

Capability	Operating value
One buying route	Commodity, brewer-agreed, local, independent, regional, specialist and national suppliers can sit within one controlled workflow, subject to the agreed commercial model.
One connected record	Orders, receipts, credits, invoices and payments remain linked, reducing gaps that create missed credits, disputes and manual reconciliation.
Ingredient and SKU visibility	Spend can be analysed by site, supplier, category and product, helping operators distinguish foundation cost, hero investment, price variance and single-use complexity.
Cash and payment control	Payment timing, supplier terms and any approved credit mechanism can be managed within explicit rules and limits.
Time back for hospitality	Reducing fragmented ordering and back-office administration gives operators and teams more capacity for menu design, preparation discipline, guests and the trading plan.

Live-pilot principle

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i-curate is applying this architecture in a live pub pilot that connects procurement, supplier access, payments, controlled credit and EPOS/till data. The purpose is to validate operational impact before any wider rollout; this paper does not assume a performance result.

Pub Revenue & Margin Diagnostic

A focused diagnostic can produce a reconciled economic baseline, death-spiral risk map, ingredient spend hierarchy, SKU compression map, dish contribution review, shared-prep architecture, kitchen service-complexity score, supplier and purchase-to-pay leakage review, 13-week cash and recovery plan, and a practical scorecard. It should identify the few actions that can create evidence quickly while protecting customers, food safety, compliance and cash.

Closing thought

A pub does not become distinctive by buying more ingredients. It becomes distinctive by spending on the ingredients guests can taste, using them across a cleverly engineered menu, and executing every plate with less complexity and more confidence.

To discuss a Pub Revenue & Margin Diagnostic, contact i-curate at hello@i-curate.co.uk or visit i-curate.co.uk.

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Sources and methodology

The evidence base combines primary research, current sector data, food-safety guidance and i-curate operating experience. Sources were accessed on 25 August 2026.

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Methodological note

Percentages and benchmarks in this paper are directional. They should be compared with a specific organisation's own baseline, trading pattern, contracts and operating model before decisions are made. Where i-curate capabilities are described, the paper states the intended operating architecture rather than guaranteeing a particular financial outcome.