

# The Alcohol Industry's Stakeholders and Drug Policy in the UK

## 1. Ownership of Alcohol Companies by UK Elites

**Wealthy Individuals and Families:** The UK alcoholic beverages sector is intertwined with some of the country's wealthiest dynasties and individuals. For example, **Charlene de Carvalho-Heineken** (Dutch-born but UK-resident) and her husband **Michel de Carvalho** hold roughly a 25% stake in the global Heineken beer empire, giving them a combined net worth around £13.1 billion <sup>1</sup>. Similarly, the **Glenn Gordon (Grant) family**, owners of Scotch whisky distiller William Grant & Sons (producer of Glenfiddich, Balvenie, etc.), have a fortune estimated at £6.39 billion <sup>2</sup>. These figures regularly appear in the Sunday Times Rich List as among Britain's richest people, underscoring how lucrative major alcohol stakes can be.

Other prominent UK-based alcohol fortunes include the **Halewood family** (owners of Halewood Artisanal Spirits, known for brands like Whitley Neill gin) and the founders of craft beer firms like **BrewDog**. While their wealth is more modest by comparison, they still represent influential stakeholders. The **Guinness family**, historically associated with the Guinness brewery (now part of Diageo), also retain prominence in British society, though Diageo itself is a publicly traded company with global institutional ownership. Major pub conglomerates are another avenue: for instance, billionaire **Joe Lewis** (resident abroad but a key figure in UK business) has been a leading shareholder of pub chain Mitchells & Butlers, and Hong Kong's **Li Ka-shing** (via his family trust) acquired the Greene King pubs/brewing company in 2019 – reflecting foreign wealthy investors' interest in UK alcohol assets.

**Politicians with Alcohol Stakes or Ties:** A number of British political figures have direct or indirect interests in the alcohol industry. In the House of Lords, **Karan Bilimoria (Lord Bilimoria)** is a high-profile example – he is the founder of Cobra Beer and continues to serve as chairman of the company while sitting as a peer. In the Commons, it is not uncommon for MPs to declare small shareholdings or past employment in alcohol companies. According to a 2023 investigation, at least 41 MPs held shares in publicly listed firms (across all industries) <sup>3</sup> – this list included some alcohol-related holdings, though often below the threshold requiring public disclosure <sup>4</sup>. Moreover, many MPs represent constituencies with major breweries, distilleries, or pub industries, effectively aligning their political interests with the health of the alcohol sector. For instance, the **MP for Burton upon Trent** (a brewing center) typically champions beer industry causes in Parliament. This convergence of economic interest and representation means some lawmakers have a personal or constituency stake in the success of alcohol businesses.

It's important to note that such ties are usually transparently declared, and having an interest in alcohol doesn't automatically make a politician anti-reform on other drugs. However, it does underscore how embedded the alcohol sector is within the UK's economic and political establishment. The prevalence of wealthy elite ownership – from aristocratic whiskey dynasties to billionaire investors – creates a class of powerful stakeholders whose business interests lie in maintaining alcohol's dominant, privileged position among recreational substances.

## 2. Industry Influence: Lobbying and Opposition to Drug Legalisation

**Lobbying by Alcohol Interests:** The alcohol industry in the UK is both highly organized and politically active. Large producers and industry groups engage professional lobbyists and maintain regular contact with policymakers, typically to shape tax, trade, and regulatory policy on alcohol. For instance, the **All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group** – which with over 200 MPs and peers is the largest APPG in Parliament <sup>5</sup> – is sponsored by major brewers. In 2024, companies like AB InBev, Carlsberg, and Diageo each contributed around £4,300 to fund the Beer Group's activities <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>. Such groups openly promote the “significant contribution of brewing and pubs to the UK economy and society” <sup>8</sup>, and they cultivate goodwill among legislators through events (often involving free drinks, brewery tours, or receptions at party conferences). While this kind of lobbying is focused on alcohol policy (tax rates, licensing laws, etc.), it also implicitly reinforces alcohol's cultural and legal primacy. A parliament that is continually lobbied to favour brewers and pubs may be less receptive to legalizing alternative intoxicants that could disrupt the status quo.

**Opposition to Cannabis and Psychedelics:** Direct, registered lobbying by alcohol companies against cannabis or psychedelic legalization in the UK is not always done overtly, but evidence suggests it occurs behind the scenes or in allied campaigns. The alcohol industry has strong economic incentives to resist the liberalization of other controlled substances that might compete for consumers' leisure spending. In other countries, this dynamic has been explicit. In the US, alcohol and pharmaceutical corporations “**have been quietly bankrolling the opposition to legal marijuana**”, funding anti-legalization ads and political campaigns out of fear that cannabis will eat into their market share <sup>9</sup>. In the UK, where recreational cannabis remains illegal, the alcohol lobby's influence shows up in more subtle ways – for example, in the *absence* of industry voices in favor of reform, and occasionally in the rhetoric of trade associations. The **Portman Group** (the UK alcohol industry's social responsibility body) has discouraged any marketing that might “glamorise illicit drugs,” even cracking down on products with cannabis-related branding <sup>10</sup>. And while the Portman Group doesn't directly lobby on drug policy, its emphasis on keeping a clear demarcation between alcohol and “illicit drugs” in branding reflects a broader industry interest in not normalizing cannabis in society.

There have also been cases of political donations and alliances that hint at alcohol interests aligning against drug reform. Some prominent donors to UK political parties have alcohol industry ties, and they typically support candidates with “tough on drugs” stances. However, such linkages are often opaque. A notable case involved the former Drugs Minister **Victoria Atkins**, who vocally opposed cannabis legalization – it later emerged that she had recused herself from cannabis policy discussions because her husband was managing director of British Sugar, a firm licensed to grow medical cannabis <sup>11</sup>. Critics called it “**hypocrisy on a grand scale**” that a minister arguing against cannabis reform had a family member profiting from (medical) cannabis <sup>11</sup>. This example, while related to a pharmaceutical application of cannabis, underscores how entangled financial interests can influence a politician's stance. It also reflects a broader trend: those benefiting from the current regulatory regime (whether via alcohol or other legal substances) often have a vested interest in opposing changes that introduce new competitors like marijuana.

**Think-Tanks and Advocacy Groups:** The influence of alcohol industry money can sometimes be seen in the think-tank world and “grassroots” campaigns as well. Free-market think tanks in the UK – occasionally funded in part by alcohol or tobacco corporations – have taken positions on drug policy. Interestingly, some have *supported* cannabis legalization on libertarian grounds, but others emphasize the public health downsides of drug use. On the other side, public-health-oriented NGOs have pointed out that alcohol industry actors prefer a strict prohibitionist stance toward other drugs to keep

themselves as the only socially accepted intoxicant <sup>9</sup>. For example, the Institute of Alcohol Studies notes that any move toward cannabis regulation in Britain must **“ensure that the power of commercial entities is sufficiently limited”** by robust rules <sup>12</sup> – a caution drawn from how alcohol companies wield power over marketing and policy. Implicit in that warning is the recognition that the alcohol lobby is a powerful force that could otherwise seek to dominate a future cannabis market or stifle its emergence.

In summary, while you won't often see a whiskey CEO testifying in Parliament explicitly against cannabis law reform, the **political apparatus is suffused with alcohol industry influence** – from donations and sociopolitical cachet, to MPs eagerly chairing beer and wine clubs. This creates a climate in which proposals to legalize marijuana or psychedelics face an uphill battle. The voices opposing such reforms (often on public safety grounds) find a sympathetic ear in a Parliament where many members, consciously or not, have been courted by the alcohol trade and may instinctively defend the current alcohol-centric legal framework.

### 3. Influence on Policy and Parliamentary Debates

**Parliamentary Records and Debates:** The alignment of economic interests can be observed in parliamentary debates on drugs and alcohol. The All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group's chairman proudly noted in 2022 that it was *“the largest APPG in Parliament”*, with a mission to champion British brewing and pubs <sup>5</sup>. In that same debate on alcohol taxation, he highlighted that beer and pubs contribute **£23 billion** to UK GDP and about **£13 billion** to the Exchequer annually <sup>13</sup>. He also cited the **~900,000 jobs** supported by the beer/pub industry across the country <sup>14</sup>. These figures were used to argue for favorable alcohol tax policies – but they also illustrate why lawmakers might be cautious about policies that could threaten this economic juggernaut. When MPs recognize alcohol as a source of treasury revenue, rural employment, and even national heritage, they may view the prospect of legal cannabis or psychedelics through a lens of competition or risk to those benefits.

Indeed, in House of Commons debates on cannabis reform, it's common for opponents to draw contrasts with alcohol – sometimes acknowledging alcohol's harms but arguing that adding another legal drug would only worsen public health. For example, during a 2018 debate on cannabis legalization, some MPs argued that society was already dealing with alcohol-related problems and violence, implying that legalizing cannabis could compound social harms <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>. This stance – effectively *“we have one legal vice (alcohol), we don't need another”* – conveniently aligns with the interests of alcohol producers by keeping potential alternatives illegal. It echoes the talking points historically promoted (quietly) by alcohol lobbyists: that cannabis legalization might increase substance abuse issues or pose public safety problems, an argument that serves to uphold alcohol's monopoly as the socially permissible intoxicant.

**Policy Outcomes:** The UK's drug policy has remained comparatively strict – recreational cannabis is still illegal (Class B drug), and psychedelics like psilocybin or LSD are Class A. Calls to reschedule psychedelics for medical research, or to legalize cannabis as Canada and many US states have done, have so far been met with governmental resistance. While many factors explain this (cultural attitudes, law enforcement views, media influence), it is widely believed that industry influence plays a role. The alcohol sector's entrenched position means any policy change that might reduce alcohol consumption faces skepticism. Government commissions and advisory councils (such as the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs) have occasionally seen political interference when their recommendations clash with political-economic interests. A notorious example was the sacking of drug advisor **Prof. David Nutt** in 2009 after he publicly stated that **cannabis and ecstasy were less harmful than alcohol** <sup>17</sup>. The swift

political rebuke he received sent a clear message that challenging the primacy of alcohol (and tobacco) in Britain's legal drug landscape was unwelcome in policy circles.

Furthermore, **think-tank affiliations** reveal subtle ties: some research institutes advocating against drug liberalization have received funding from industries with a stake in the status quo. Conversely, the government's own reports often emphasize the tax revenue from alcohol and the lack of "compelling evidence" to legalize cannabis – positions that conveniently maintain existing revenue streams and business models. Parliamentarians frequently quote statistics about alcohol-related crime or health costs to argue that adding cannabis to the mix would not be prudent. Absent from these debates, however, is acknowledgment of the alcohol lobby. The influence is exerted indirectly – through sponsored research, political donations, and constant reminders of alcohol's economic importance – rather than explicit testimony.

**Regulatory Capture and Think-Tanks:** Some observers describe the UK alcohol industry as having achieved a degree of "regulatory capture," whereby its interests are deeply ingrained in policymaking. The **Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)** and similar think tanks have historically received funding from alcohol or tobacco companies, and while the IEA has occasionally argued for a free-market approach to cannabis (i.e. favoring legalization), it simultaneously downplays policies that would significantly curtail alcohol marketing or sales. This suggests that if cannabis were to be legalized, powerful alcohol actors might push for a model that limits cannabis availability or keeps strict advertising bans – effectively protecting alcohol's market share. On the other hand, public health charities (free from industry money) often support drug law reform precisely because of alcohol's societal toll, arguing that a regulated cannabis market could be managed without repeating the mistakes made with alcohol (such as aggressive marketing). These conflicting viewpoints often clash in parliamentary committee hearings and reports. For instance, a recent report by the Health and Social Care Committee took evidence on the health impacts of alcohol versus cannabis – with public health experts noting the inconsistency that the more harmful substance (alcohol) is legal and widely advertised, while cannabis is outlawed. Behind the scenes, one can surmise that industry-connected witnesses or MPs ensured the final recommendations remained cautious about cannabis liberalization.

In summary, **UK policy debates reveal an implicit bias favoring alcohol's continued special status**, born from decades of lobbying and integration of the industry with the political class. Alcohol's economic weight (hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in tax revenue) is frequently invoked in policy discussions <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>, whereas the potential economic upside of a legal cannabis market is downplayed. This imbalance in discourse suggests that the alcohol industry's influence has at least partly succeeded in keeping competing substances at bay.

## 4. Economic Motives to Resist Cannabis/Psychedelic Legalization

From a business perspective, **legalizing cannabis (or other currently illicit drugs)** in the UK could pose a competitive threat to the alcohol sector. Multiple studies and market analyses indicate that people may substitute cannabis for alcohol when given the legal choice. This has been observed in jurisdictions abroad: after Canada legalized recreational marijuana, **alcohol sales in at least one province fell slightly (~2.2%) and remained below pre-legalization levels** <sup>18</sup>. The data showed consumers substituting cannabis for alcohol, leading the researcher to conclude that **"after cannabis became legal to use, consumers substituted it for alcohol"** to some extent <sup>19</sup>. Supporting this, Statistics Canada reported a significant decline in alcohol purchases in 2023/24 alongside a 12% jump in cannabis sales <sup>20</sup>. Surveys found that about **60% of cannabis users consciously cut back on alcohol** when able to use cannabis legally <sup>21</sup>.

Although these are overseas examples, they are highly relevant to UK companies like Diageo, Heineken, and others operating globally. Such firms have openly acknowledged to investors that cannabis poses a **“real competition... to the entire alcohol category”** <sup>22</sup>. One industry analysis in 2025 noted **“grounds to believe cannabis might become a serious threat to the alcohol industry... as young people increasingly shun booze”**, turning to cannabis products for intoxication without the downsides of alcohol <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup>. In light of this, some alcohol multinationals have hedged their bets by investing in cannabis-related ventures abroad – for example, beer giant AB InBev formed a joint venture with cannabis producer Tilray to develop THC-infused drinks <sup>25</sup>. These companies are preparing for a possible future where cannabis is legal, but until that happens, their priority is to **preserve their UK market share in drinks**.

For domestic British brewers, distillers, and pub operators (who may not have the capital to invest in cannabis startups), the safer economic strategy is to lobby against legalization. Their revenue streams depend on UK consumers spending disposable income on pints, wine, and cocktails – not on cannabis or psychedelic experiences. If recreational marijuana were legal and widely available, it's plausible that some portion of the public would consume fewer alcoholic beverages, whether for health reasons or simply as a new alternative. The **Institute of Alcohol Studies** and other researchers point out that a drop in alcohol consumption can indeed hurt alcohol industry profits (at least unless they diversify) <sup>26</sup>. An **Oxford Economics** study estimated that a 10% decrease in alcohol sales could cost tens of thousands of industry jobs (though it also noted those losses could be offset by growth in other sectors if spending shifts) <sup>26</sup>. This highlights why industry stakeholders perceive cannabis not just as a social issue but as an economic one.

In the political realm, these economic motivations manifest as behind-the-scenes arguments. Industry representatives may quietly remind ministers of the robust tax revenues from alcohol (about **£12–13 billion per year in excise duty alone** in recent years <sup>27</sup>, *not including* VAT or corporate taxes) and warn that cannabis legalization could jeopardize this. The UK Treasury certainly banks on alcohol: alcohol duties made up roughly **1.1% of all tax receipts in 2023/24** <sup>28</sup>. A legal cannabis market could itself be taxed, but from the perspective of alcohol companies, that's money that might bypass their tills.

Likewise, powerful alcohol families and companies often have extensive investments in related sectors – hospitality, entertainment, agriculture – which could also be affected. For example, if nightlife patrons start favoring cannabis cafés or Amsterdam-style coffee shops over pubs, businesses built around pub real estate or beer supply could suffer. And unlike alcohol, which companies can market through sports sponsorships and glossy ads (albeit with some restrictions), cannabis and psychedelics would likely face tight advertising rules, meaning the incumbents couldn't easily dominate the new market with branding. In short, there's a **fear of the unknown economic landscape** that legalization would bring.

Quantitatively, one analysis by a cannabis industry group suggested the UK cannabis market could be worth on the order of £1–2 billion annually within a few years of legalization <sup>29</sup>. That money has to come from somewhere – most likely from existing expenditures on alcohol, tobacco, or illicit cannabis. It is telling that, to date, the major alcohol players in Britain have *not* been at the forefront of pushing for regulated cannabis sales, even as some pharmaceutical companies and patient groups have advocated for medical cannabis access. Their relative silence can be interpreted as a strategy to stall or prevent a policy change that offers Britons an alternative to the pint or gin and tonic.

In the case of **psychedelics**, the threat is more indirect – classic psychedelics (LSD, psilocybin, etc.) are not used as day-to-day substitutes for alcohol in the way cannabis might be. However, the *political* arguments against liberalizing psychedelics often cite social order and health concerns that mirror those used for cannabis. Alcohol interest groups benefit from a general anti-drug climate that keeps all

“recreational drugs” apart from alcohol criminalized or highly restricted. There is also a nascent industry around therapeutic use of psychedelics (for treating depression, PTSD and so on), but that tends to fall more under pharmaceutical interests than alcohol. Still, one can imagine alcohol lobbyists having reservations about any policy that symbolically breaks the taboo on currently illegal drugs – a slippery slope from their perspective that could eventually normalize cannabis use and further erode alcohol's market share.

## 5. Evidence of Influence on Drug Policy Decisions

**Policy Decisions and Industry Positions:** The cumulative effect of the above factors is evident in UK drug policy's slow pace of reform. Despite rising public support for cannabis legalization and mounting evidence from other countries, UK governments (Conservative and Labour alike) have long maintained a hard line. We see occasional hints of alcohol industry influence in these decisions. For example, when a cross-party group of MPs returned from studying Canada's cannabis regime and predicted Britain would legalize within 5–10 years <sup>30</sup>, there was swift pushback from ministers and certain media outlets. Some of those resistant voices had ties to alcohol: whether through constituency brewing interests or personal connections. No minister ever publicly said “we're keeping cannabis illegal to protect the drinks industry,” of course. But the **absence** of the alcohol industry as an opponent in public discourse is itself telling; by contrast, police associations, social conservatives, and parts of the press vocally oppose drug reform. One reason the alcohol lobby may not campaign overtly is that it doesn't need to – the policy status quo (pro-alcohol, anti-cannabis) already benefits them, and others (police, tabloids, etc.) do the job of arguing against drugs on moral and public health grounds. The alcohol industry can stay in the background and avoid drawing attention or public ire, while quietly bolstering those maintaining prohibition.

Nonetheless, investigative reporting and transparency data provide **concrete examples** of influence:

- **Political Donations:** Electoral Commission records show donations from alcohol-linked companies and individuals to major political parties. For instance, executives and owners of breweries have historically donated to the Conservative Party in particular. Such contributions buy access – for example, attendance at high-level party fundraising dinners where policy is informally discussed <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup>. While the donations are usually explained in terms of supporting business-friendly policies (like lower beer duty or favorable pub regulations), keeping cannabis illegal aligns with the donors' business interests and is often an unspoken expectation.
- **All-Party Groups & Events:** The hospitality tents at party conferences often include those sponsored by alcohol producers (whisky tasting sessions, wine receptions, etc.). MPs and journalists mingle at these events, subtly reinforcing a convivial bond over legal drinks. It's in these social settings that an MP might hear from an industry rep something like, “Legal weed? – careful what you wish for, it could close pubs.” Such off-record conversations, while anecdotal, can plant seeds of doubt about drug reform. The fact that Parliament has a Beer Group, a Wine and Spirits Group, and even an APPG for Scotch Whisky – but no official group advocating for cannabis users or psychedelic research (apart from a nascent medical cannabis APPG) – demonstrates the imbalance of organized influence.
- **Selective Use of Evidence:** In committee hearings on drug policy, alcohol's role is sometimes curiously downplayed. A parliamentary committee might emphasize the mental health risks of cannabis, citing studies of psychosis, while glossing over the well-documented harms of alcohol (violence, liver disease, addiction) that equal or exceed those of cannabis. This skew can reflect the inputs they receive – for instance, if briefs or expert testimonies come from organizations

quietly funded by alcohol industry grants, those might stress cannabis dangers while staying mute on alcohol's toll. Meanwhile, independent drug policy charities like Transform or Release, which highlight the hypocrisy of alcohol vs. cannabis laws, often struggle for political traction against a decades-old narrative that has benefited alcohol interests.

**Case Study – the 2018/19 Medical Cannabis Debate:** One revealing episode was the UK's decision in 2018 to legalize *medical* cannabis prescriptions for limited cases. This came after high-profile campaigns (e.g. for epileptic children to access cannabis-based medicine). Even that modest reform met resistance within government. It later emerged that the husband of the Drugs Minister (Victoria Atkins) was running a large cannabis cultivation operation under license <sup>11</sup>, and that the Prime Minister at the time (Theresa May) was married to a fund manager whose firm had a significant stake in a pharmaceutical company making cannabis-based medicine <sup>33</sup>. These conflicts of interest were highlighted in the media, suggesting that those in power were not opposed to *profiting* from cannabis so long as it was through corporate or medical channels – but remained opposed to *personal recreational legalization*. By contrast, no equivalent insider connections exist pushing in the other direction (e.g. no minister's spouse owns a chain of head shops or psychedelic therapy clinics). The entrenched connections are predominantly between policymakers and the established legal drug industries (alcohol and also tobacco).

**Economic Analyses:** When proposals for drug liberalization are floated, Treasury and Home Office officials conduct impact assessments. While these are not public, one can surmise they weigh potential cannabis tax revenues against possible losses in alcohol duty. Independent analyses by drug policy economists have estimated that a regulated cannabis market could yield **£1–2 billion per year in tax** and savings for the UK <sup>29</sup>. However, these gains might come partly at the expense of the £13 billion alcohol duty income. As a result, unless convinced otherwise, a risk-averse government influenced by alcohol lobby input might see cannabis reform as *fiscally* neutral at best, and politically not worth the fight. Similarly, on psychedelics, while researchers argue that medical use could revolutionize mental health treatment, there's little commercial incentive for alcohol interests to support that – it doesn't drive their profits and might even reduce self-medication via drinking if people had better mental health therapies.

In conclusion, **the UK alcohol industry's stakeholders – wealthy families, big corporations, and their political allies – have both the means and motive to shape drug policy.** They own vast assets in the alcohol trade and reap huge profits from Britain's drinking culture. Through lobbying, donations, and social influence they ensure that legislators appreciate alcohol's economic importance while casting doubt on the wisdom of legalizing other substances. This is not to say that all opposition to cannabis or psychedelics stems from cynical economic motives – public health, moral values, and international treaties also play roles. But the **consistent outcome** (a slow, hesitant approach to reform, even as evidence of benefits mounts) aligns neatly with what one would expect if the alcohol industry were quietly steering the conversation. As one commentator put it, “*How dare people who use killer alcohol tell other folks they can't use cannabis?*” <sup>15</sup> – a pointed question highlighting the double standard. The answer lies in the power structures at play: those who profit from “killer alcohol” have considerable sway in Britain, and they have not been shy to use it to defend their turf when challenged by new rivals, be it marijuana or magic mushrooms.

## Sources

- Institute of Alcohol Studies – “**The alcohol industry: an overview.**” Contains data on the economic contribution of alcohol (770,000+ jobs, ~2.5% of employment) <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> and discussion of industry structure and lobbying.

- Hansard (UK Parliament) – **Debate on Alcohol Taxation, 7 July 2022**. Quotes from MPs noting that the All-Party Beer Group is the largest APPG and citing alcohol's £23bn GDP contribution and £13bn tax revenue <sup>5</sup> <sup>13</sup> , as well as ~900,000 jobs in beer and pubs <sup>14</sup> .
- Sunday Times Rich List 2025 (via BBC and City A.M. summaries). Lists major alcohol fortunes:
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- The Guardian – **“Inside big pharma’s fight to block recreational marijuana”** (2016). Describes how pharma and **alcohol companies quietly funded anti-legalization campaigns** in the US <sup>9</sup> , revealing market-share motivations applicable to UK context.
- NORML / Int. Journal of Drug Policy – **Study on alcohol sales post-cannabis legalization (Canada)**. Found a **2.2% drop in alcohol sales** after cannabis was legalized, with sales staying ~1.2% below prior levels and consumers substituting cannabis for alcohol <sup>18</sup> . Also notes 60% of surveyed cannabis users reduced alcohol intake <sup>21</sup> – evidence of the substitution effect the alcohol industry fears.
- OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility) – data on UK alcohol duty receipts (forecast ~£13.0bn in 2025-26, ~1.1% of total tax revenue) <sup>27</sup> . Illustrates the government’s fiscal reliance on alcohol consumption.
- All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group Register – showing industry funding from AB InBev, Carlsberg, Diageo, etc. to the APPG <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> . Demonstrates direct financial links between alcohol companies and parliamentary activities.
- The Independent – **“Drugs minister accused of hypocrisy... over husband’s cannabis farm”** (2018). Highlights conflict of interest in drug policy decision-making and the **Atkins/British Sugar case** <sup>11</sup> , reflecting how personal ties to (medical) cannabis didn’t translate into support for wider reform.
- Hansard – **Cannabis Legalisation debate, 11 Dec 2018** (Norman Lamb’s bill). Shows parliamentary attitudes, e.g., references to alcohol’s own harms in arguments (implying “we already have alcohol, we don’t need cannabis legal too”). *[Specific citations from this debate can be added if needed for direct quotes.]*
- IAS – **“Cannabis liberalisation: Lessons for alcohol policy”** (2023). Concludes that future cannabis regulation in the UK must heed lessons from alcohol, particularly limiting the power of commercial interests in shaping the market <sup>12</sup> – an implicit critique of how alcohol lobby influence has been handled in public policy.

These sources collectively document the ownership of alcohol by the UK elite and illustrate the channels – from APPGs and donations to economic arguments – through which their interests may have influenced opposition to legalizing cannabis and psychedelics. Each citation is provided in the text via the notation format **[source#lines]** for verification.

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<sup>1</sup> Rich list: Richard Branson, Rishi Sunak, Ed Sheeran and Adele - who are the wealthiest Brits?  
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<sup>2</sup> Barclay absent for second year as Gordon family tops rich list  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93yl49q13ko>

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> Which UK MPs own shares in publicly listed companies? | Politics | The Guardian  
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<sup>5</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> Alcohol Taxation - Hansard - UK Parliament  
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<sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> House of Commons - Register Of All-Party Parliamentary Groups as at 2 January 2025: Beer  
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