

The Bishop of St Albans, Rt Rev Dr Alan Smith, has issued a statement on behalf of the Church of England following the publication of the Government's response to the consultation on extending Sunday trading.

Dr Smith said: "In its response to the Sunday Trading consultation Government has failed to provide any new evidence or arguments in favour of extending shop opening hours on Sundays. The response makes no compelling case for improved economic or social benefits and will do nothing to dissuade those who are concerned that the policy will damage family and community life.

It is unsurprising that, according to the Government's own response, those with the most to gain - medium and large businesses and their representative groups - were the strongest supporters of the proposals, whilst groups and individuals representing small businesses and civil society organisations were most against. In not publishing all the responses to the consultation and in choosing to press ahead regardless, Government has chosen to side with the interests of big business, over small retailers and communities.

While the promise of extra protections for Sunday workers is welcome, past experience shows that such guarantees are difficult to enforce, with those who don't choose to work on a Sunday feeling pressured to do so. Working mothers are disproportionately affected by Sunday Trading, and nothing in the current proposals would be likely to change this.

Many claims are made without offering any evidence. The rise of online shopping is driven by many factors and no suggestion is made about how longer Sunday shopping hours would affect it at all. The only substantiated suggestion in the response is that liberalisation might help London's tourist economy, yet the risk is that this would be bought at the expense of a more negative impact on small traders and local businesses in other parts of the UK.

Most fundamentally the consultation response neglects to recognise the social value of a shared day for community and family life. In a world of increasing commodification, the space for shared time and activities, central to human flourishing is becoming ever more rare. Increased Sunday opening hours will only exacerbate this trend. I hope the Government will reflect and think again."

The Church of England's submission to the consultation can be read [here](#). The Government response to the consultation can be read in full [here](#)

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