

## MEETING IN PUBS

Pubs are far from ideal as a place in which to hold meetings, but for a small group they may be all that is available. The following advice is intended to reduce the risks inherent in such meetings, as well as to inform those unfamiliar with pub etiquette.

### Choosing a location

Choose somewhere that is unlikely to be crowded or overly busy, but not so quiet as to make your presence stand out. It should not be so small that you have to sit next to other customers, and ideally should not have seating that will mean that others are likely to sit next to you. Avoid small rooms where your conversation may be easily overheard, ideally there should be music to provide cover. Don't use pubs where you are known or where you are likely to bump into people who know you. City centre pubs have the advantage of accessibility, and more importantly that strangers do not stand out so much, but they are more likely to have CCTV cameras. Choose pubs away from police stations or football grounds, and definitely avoid ones with a reputation for violence and/or drug-dealing, or where the opposition have been sighted drinking in the past.

### Cafes

For a small group a cafe may provide a better alternative, and much of the advice given applies to them equally.

### Private rooms

If you are able to find one, a private room in a pub is a much better option than holding your meeting in one of the open areas. Relatively few pubs have private rooms now, and many of those that do charge a rate beyond that affordable to a small group meeting regularly. A few will provide a private room free of charge for groups beyond a certain size on the basis that everyone buys a couple of drinks. You may have to negotiate a little, and ensure you have a good cover story regarding your group (see below.) If you are lucky enough to find somewhere ensure that everyone is on their best behaviour, tidy up after yourselves, and no matter how good it is never over-use the pub.

### Cubicles or snugs

Some pubs, particular older ones, may have rooms that are partitioned into smaller seating areas. These may provide more privacy, but be aware that someone sitting on the other side of the partition may be able to hear everything you are saying.

### Sharing rooms

Sometimes pubs may have a quiet back room for meetings, which they may ask you to share with another group. No matter how big the room is, avoid this at all costs. The other group will inevitably take more of an interest in you than would other customers in one of the pub's main areas, and may resent your presence. Furthermore, you do not know who this group are; you could be sitting next to the opposition! If you are offered this option, make excuses (e.g. that you'll have to check with the others, etc) and go elsewhere.

### Beer gardens

In warmer weather a private beer garden may be a better option than sitting in a shared area inside the pub. However, don't sit outside pubs where you can be seen by people walking or driving past. Also, since the smoking ban, they have been a place where people will stand for a few minutes, and sometimes alone, with no other purpose, but having a cigarette. If there are only one or two tables in the beer garden this may mean that they are able to stand very close to you, it may also mean that they interrupt your meeting by engaging you in friendly conversation. Therefore, only choose larger beer gardens.

### Cover stories

Whether you are using a private room or one of the main areas of the pub you should have a collective cover story in case you are asked what your meeting is about and what your group does. If you are booking a private room this will come up at an early stage, whereas if you are elsewhere it will hopefully not come up at all. You need to discuss this in advance as a group, and take into account your knowledge and interests, your style of dress, age, sex, etc. There is no point saying you are a football club if most of you know nothing about football for example. Keep it as vague and simple as possible, and avoid anything that many people are likely to find of interest. Also avoid things in which people might think they could easily get involved, there needs to be a reason as to why the meeting is closed, for example that you are a committee or collective of some kind.

### Phones

The location of the meeting should never under any circumstances be given out or passed on over the phone (nor by e-mail.) Nor should you discuss it subsequently over the phone. Ideally, leave your phone switched on at home when you leave for the meeting. Failing that, turn it off and take out the battery long before you arrive. Wrap it in clothing and put it in the bottom of your bag, or use a special foil-lined pouch or box. Beware though of establishing a pattern whereby you have your phone switched off at a specific time and at the same time as other group members.

### Getting there

Since you may be under surveillance, either by the police or by the opposition, try not to take a direct route to the meeting. Walking will most easily allow you to monitor if you are being followed, particularly by the opposition (or by journalists) so aim to walk for some distance before you arrive at your ultimate destination. Vary your pace and take a roundabout route, perhaps doubling back on yourself, stopping occasionally, turning a series of corners in quick succession, etc. All the time be on the look out for people who might be watching or following you. Don't overdo it though, as your anti-surveillance techniques could have precisely the opposite effect to what is intended, and actually draw attention to you, particularly if you are being watched on CCTV. Of course, evading CCTV is harder, but you should still aim to avoid being followed. Cycling can be good in terms of avoiding surveillance, but don't lock up your bike outside the pub where it can be spotted, instead leave it some distance away. If you travel to the meeting by bus, get off a few stops early, and never go directly by taxi or car. If you are followed obviously don't go to the meeting and aim to let people know by secure methods of communication what has occurred.

### Upon Arrival

Always arrive in good time. Assuming that you arrive at the pub without being followed, don't greet any members who may arrive at the same time until you are inside, and certainly don't stand outside chatting. If the pub has more than one entrance make use of the one at the rear or side of the pub. When you enter, be on the look out for people's reactions, but try not to be paranoid. It may be perfectly normal for people to look in the direction of someone who has just entered, particularly if it is cold or raining outside. Indeed it might be more suspicious for them to avoid looking. Try not to look furtive or out of place, and greet any smiles or welcoming comments in kind. If you have to pass people be friendly and polite. You should be able to behave in this way while still scanning the pub for hostile faces, for anyone that may by chance know you, or for anyone that seems 'wrong' or out of place. Listen to your instincts, but don't be stupidly paranoid and waste time reporting irrelevancies. However, if you are the first to arrive and there is something very obviously 'wrong', the presence of members of the opposition for example, you should leave discreetly and aim to intercept others as they arrive, perhaps changing places with the next person to arrive (leap-frogging) and moving to another location.

### Blend in

If your visit to the pub is not to become a talking point, or even the subject of resentment, you need to blend in as much as possible both in terms of your dress and your behaviour. Try to dress in a way that does not stand out, you should aim to be dressed as much like the other customers in the pub as possible. In particular, avoid dress that gives your politics away, also anything particularly unusual or distinctive that people are likely to remember, be the 'Grey Man' or woman.

### Drinks?

Since people go to pubs to drink, it will look decidedly odd if you do not. At the very least it will make you stand out, at worst it will cause you, and possibly others, to be asked to leave. Drunkenness in meetings is unacceptable, but it will appear strange if all of you drink soft drinks. In these circumstances it is acceptable to have a pint or two. Again, try to blend in, and don't order unusual drinks or anything that has to be brought over to you subsequently. If a drink you order is temporarily unavailable, for example if a barrel of beer is being changed, order something else. If the person behind the bar really insists on bringing something over to your table warn the others first. Since you are holding a meeting rather than socialising, drink any alcoholic drinks slowly, but don't sit with an empty glass. When it is timely, arrange to have a break to go to the bar and for people to use the toilet. Take any empty glasses back to the bar with you, this will be appreciated by the bar-staff, and also lessen the likelihood of your meeting being disturbed.

### Getting seated

Assuming that you have not been able to get a private room, you should aim to find a relatively quiet corner of a large room in the pub, where the likelihood of someone sitting next to you is reduced, and where you have sight of the door

### Cameras

Few pubs are without CCTV cameras these days, and some colour cameras can produce images of surprisingly good quality. These cameras may also have microphones. If at all possible choose a room without cameras, and failing that try to sit in a blind spot or as far away from the camera as possible. If you have to use a room with a camera be extra careful about having minutes, the agenda, or any other papers, photographs, or literature on the table.

### Be discreet

Be as discreet as possible about your meeting. Talk quietly and try to avoid having paperwork on display, particularly if it contains distinct images. Both minutes and agendas should in any case be discreetly written and coded where possible. It is worth checking just how far away you can be heard. Occasionally, someone may begin to talk more loudly than they should, in which case others should draw their attention to the fact. If bar staff approach your table, talk about something else for a few minutes rather than simply going silent. Be careful not to continue discussions at the bar or toilet. When interacting with bar staff and with other customers, be friendly and polite, but try not to be drawn into conversation or give anything away about yourself.

### Be aware

During the meeting try to be aware of those around you, are they paying you undue attention for example. Be aware of newcomers coming in and looking at you more than they should. Be on the look out for anything out of place, and for the entrance of people you know, or even members of the opposition. Watch out for people who don't fit in, for people who aren't drinking while sitting with a pint in front of them, and for couples who aren't conversing. Don't waste time with paranoia, but if you become aware of any of the above draw the attention of the others to it.

### Drunks

In just the same way as any other customer you may occasionally arouse the interest of lonely drunks who may want to come and sit with you and/or engage you in conversation. Unless they are being violent or aggressive, try not to be aggressive with them. Quiet firm assertiveness may work, but equally it may not, and rather than have the meeting disrupted for an extended period it may be better to move on.

### Moving on

You may also have to move to a different venue, or at the very least to another part of the pub, if the area around you becomes crowded or someone sits too close to you. Other unexpected occurrences may also cause a move, such as a pub quiz or disco starting up, someone coming into the pub who knows one of you, or the presence of a loud group

such as those attending a 'hen' or 'stag' night. If you do have to move, consider your options carefully in terms of where you will go. If you are a large group it is better to move in smaller numbers, even as individuals or pairs, so as not to attract attention in the street.

### Winding up

Sometimes meetings can go on for a while, but it is important that everyone continues to both concentrate and participate. Your level of awareness concerning those around you should be as strong as when you first entered the pub. Beware of rushing, or of being rushed by one or more individuals who are eager to leave. Don't start packing away your things or putting on your coat before the meeting has been properly concluded. Rather than shuffling papers and putting them away for example, you should try to continue to behave as if you are just a group of friends out for a drink. Before the meeting is concluded you should have decided on your next meeting place, as well as the date and time. If minutes have been taken, it may be helpful if the person who has taken them reminds everyone of what has been agreed and what individual responsibilities people have taken on. Carefully pack away your things and ensure that nothing is left behind, look carefully on the floor and under your seats to ensure that there are no stray papers. You may then wish to have another drink; this is particularly the case if you have a private room when the extra custom may be appreciated and help to ensure a repeat booking in future.

### Leaving

Leaving the pub is a potentially dangerous time and you should take basic security precautions. Do not let people rush off individually. Rather leave in small groups, or leave together and split up into smaller groups soon after. Be aware when you leave of people observing you or of individuals suddenly using their phones. When you exit the pub, look out for people lurking about or sitting in stationary cars, particularly if they are on the phone. As when going to the pub, beware of people following you. If you have your phone with you do not switch it on until you are at least well out of the area and avoid turning it on at the same time as others turn on theirs.

### Protection

You may only be attending a meeting, but do not treat it casually in terms of your personal security and that of the group. You should always be prepared to defend yourself and others and have at hand the means to do so.

### Rotation

No matter how good a pub venue may seem, as with all other meeting venues, it should not be used repeatedly. Ideally, you should have at least half a dozen venues, and preferably twice that, which you can rotate to on a random basis without establishing any form of pattern.

### RVs/Re-direction points/Muster points/Sitting-off

In addition to meetings, pubs are often used for all of the above in connection to activity elsewhere. Generally an outside location will be used for RV and Re-directions, though not always. Muster-points after or during an action are also best located in a rear beer garden. Pubs were traditionally used for sitting-off in the days before mobile phones made it easier to use a number of separate locations. This still occurs sometimes, and if used properly can still be a good option. The main drawback is a tendency by undisciplined elements to drink too much.

### Avoid paranoia, avoid complacency

As with all activities, you need to ensure that in your quest for security you do not fall into foolish paranoia, which wastes time, is annoying, and if allowed to reign will totally nullify the activities of the group. Similarly, you should avoid becoming complacent about meetings and activities, and always think of security, whether or not there is an apparent threat to it. Mistakes can be costly, and it is better to learn from other peoples than from your own. Agree upon the security protocols that are relevant to your level of activity and stick to them.