**Planning Applications – Monitoring and Commenting**

**Introduction**
Since June 2017, any change of use of a pub has required planning permission from the local Council, as has demolition of a pub. This followed the removal of the previous permitted development rights which allowed many changes of use and demolitions to go ahead without the need for Council consent.

**Monitoring Applications**
Councils must publicise all planning applications they receive so that anyone who wishes can comment on them. The planners must then take those comments into account when considering the application and deciding whether or not to approve it.

CAMRA Branches should try to monitor regularly all planning applications to check whether any of them affect pubs and, if yes, whether what the applicant intends should be resisted (or, indeed, supported). The earlier you get to know about an application, the better – especially as there will only be a short period (usually 21 days) in which you can submit comments.

The best place to find out about new applications is Council websites. If you google “XXX Council Planning Applications” you should reach the relevant part of the website. There’ll generally be a link to something like New Applications Registered, Planning Application Search or View Planning Applications. Councils also produce weekly and monthly lists of received applications so if you add “Weekly Lists” or “Monthly Lists” to your search, you should land directly in the right place.

Generally, you will not only be able to see a list of the applications but be able to click onto the application summary and access all the supporting documents – application form, plans, design and access statements and so forth. There will be a “comments” button to enable you to submit your comments.

You can also ask your Council(s) to place you on their consultees list and to notify you of any applications which affect pubs. Additionally, some Councils will email you the weekly list on request.

A word of warning. Although most applications concerning pubs will mention the name of the pub, some may not, restricting the address information to street name and number. The summary of the application should give the game away but, again, look out for things like ‘Change of use from A4 to A1’ - A4 being the Use Class which pubs sit in.

**Responding to Applications**
The first step, of course, is to work out what the applicant is seeking to do. It might be that the plans will have limited impact on the existing pub or even represent an improvement. On the other hand, what might appear uncontroversial could be the thin end of a wedge. A good example is building on pub car parks. Particularly since the drink-driving laws were tightened up, some pubs have car parks much bigger than they need – so selling a chunk off to build a house or two could be acceptable. However, a significant reduction might well impact adversely on the viability of the business, putting customers off from visiting. The regulars at the pub will generally be in a strong position to comment on such matters.

When it comes to composing your objection, there is detailed guidance in sections 5.4 and 5.5 of our document “Saving Your Local Pub” - www.camra.org.uk/saving-your-local-pub. Although this is aimed primarily at non-CAMRA campaigners, the section on objection-writing is equally appropriate to CAMRA Branches. A couple of key factors are worth stressing though:

**The Policy Angle:** When framing your reasons for objection, being able to quote supportive Local Plan policies is extremely useful. There is separate guidance for Branches on Local Plans at www.members.camra.org.uk/group/branch-pub-protection-officer/local-plans and, ideally, you should be fully aware of any local planning policies which help protect community facilities like pubs. And, of course, if such policies don't presently exist, pressing the Council to adopt them
would be a good idea. We have developed a model planning policy (see www.camra.org.uk/resources-for-camra-branches) which we would recommend Councils to adopt.

**The Viability Angle:** Applicants will invariably claim that a pub is no longer financially viable so ought to be put out of its misery. We all know, though, of so-called unviable pubs now thriving under capable and committed stewardship. Our chief weapon for contesting claims of non-viability is the Public House Viability Test – www.camra.org.uk/public-house-viability-test. Please ask the Council to ensure that any claims by the applicant are subjected to the Test so that decisions can be based on factual evidence rather than fanciful assertion.

Nowadays, most planning applications are decided by officers under delegated powers. However, the more contentious applications are likely to be considered by elected Councillors at a Planning Committee meeting. In most cases, objectors are given the opportunity to speak at these meetings and this is an opportunity well worth taking.

**Follow Up**
There is, again, a lot of material in “Saving Your Local Pub” about what can happen after the decision has been made. In particular, the fact that an application is refused doesn't always mean that all is well – the applicant can put in an appeal or just “sit” on a closed pub, hoping the Council will eventually give way.

**Further Help**
Both staff at HQ and volunteers from Planning Advisory Group are always more than happy to assist with any planning issues and queries. If your questions are about Local Plans, please contact Ellie Hudspith at HQ – ellen.hudspith@camra.org.uk. For other planning matters, in the first instance please contact Paul Ainsworth on 01226 217195 or paul.ainsworth@camra.org.uk
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