

1: The impact of COVID-19

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 crisis has the potential to devastate pubs across the UK. In response to this, CAMRA will be producing a series of newsletters which will cover the ways in which Local Authorities can protect pubs, and why we think pubs are so important.

Prior to lockdown in March, the sector was showing signs of reversing a decades long decline in pub numbers. The recovery period is just beginning, and CAMRA's hope is that new businesses will emerge to take the place of any crisis casualties.

But for pubs to recover it will be vital for suitable premises to be kept intact, so that new owners have an easily accessible route into the trade. CAMRA is concerned that some owners and developers will regard this situation as an opportunity to seek planning permission to change the use of pubs for short-term financial gain.

It is no secret that many existing pubs would be worth significantly more if converted to other uses, particularly residential. A chance to maximise assets is likely to be grasped in some quarters.

Applicants will no doubt claim that the pubs concerned were struggling before lockdown, but are now no longer viable as businesses. We would stress that if a pub has been viable in the past, there is every chance that it could be so again in the future. CAMRA has produced a [Public House Viability Test](#) which aims to assist in evaluating whether a pub could be run successfully by the right management.

Our appeal to Local Planning Authorities is, please, stand firm and adhere closely to the national and local policies that protect community facilities like pubs. The recent changes to permitted development rights and use classes, and the protections retained by these facilities, demonstrate just how valuable they are. Regarding the new use classes, we have checked with MHCLG who confirm that planning permission continues to be necessary for any change of use or demolition of a pub.

The CAMRA website contains a number of pub protection resources aimed at local authorities, that you and your colleagues might find useful in this context. These are available for download at: www.camra.org.uk/resource_type/local-councils/

If we can provide any assistance, or you have any questions about our resources, please get in touch – paul.ainsworth@camra.org.uk

