

Public houses

4.52 Public houses (pubs) play an important role in the community. As places where members of the community meet, they support social well-being and strengthen community cohesion. They sometimes provide important community meeting space and host local meetings, events and entertainment. Some pubs also support Camden's social diversity by providing a valuable support function for minority groups. In some areas, the community pub continues to provide the main public space for socialising with friends, exchanging ideas, celebrating important occasions and staging large gatherings including live music, theatre and comedy nights.

4.53 Many pubs are central to local culture and heritage, the evolution of neighbourhoods and add to local identity and distinctiveness. Many of Camden's pubs are architecturally distinguished, located within Conservation Areas or benefit from protection through national listing or inclusion on Camden's Local List.

4.54 Pubs also have an important economic function in contributing to the vibrancy and vitality of commercial areas, supporting active street frontages and neighbourhood centres. Many pubs are a draw for tourists attracted by their iconic status in British culture. They support local employment, provide valuable work experience for young people and support jobs in the wider economy through the pub supply chain.

4.55 However, pubs across London and nationally are under immense pressure from higher value uses, especially housing development, the availability of cheap alcohol in supermarkets and increasing operating costs. In the London region between 2008-2012 around 100 pubs closed every year (net). Rising house prices sustains this pressure, although some pubs have been lost through permitted development rights to other Class A uses such a retail. There is a very uneven distribution of pubs in Camden. Holborn and Covent Garden has the highest number of pubs due to being located where there are considerable numbers of visitors and tourists. Camden Town is also a focus for pubs linked to the vibrant music scene and its popularity as a destination for young people. Across the Central Activities Zone, there is a mix of provision with pubs serving local communities and office trade. In some areas, there are high concentrations of pubs. There are far fewer pubs in the majority of wards north of Euston Road and some of these pubs are the last remaining in the local community.

4.56 National planning policy recognises that public houses, along with other community facilities, enhance the sustainability of local communities and should be safeguarded and retained for the benefit of the community while allowing them to develop and modernise in a sustainable way.

4.57 This policy is intended to give the Council greater control over the demolition and conversion of pubs where a planning application is required. This will help prevent the loss of pubs to uses which offer little or no community value. We are also reviewing our approach to permitted development rights affecting pubs. These allow the change of use of a pub (Use Class A4) to certain other uses, including restaurants and shops.

Policy C3 Public houses

The Council will seek to protect public houses of social, economic, cultural and historic value to the local community and the borough.

Applications for the change of use, redevelopment and/or demolition of a public house must demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that:

- a. the proposal does not result in a deficit of provision in the local area;
- b. the facility is no longer economically viable;
- c. a marketing exercise has been undertaken in order to confirm that there is no interest in the continued use of the property or site as a public house.

We may not seek to apply these tests in areas with a recognised over concentration of pubs, including Special Policy Areas for licensing.

Where a public house is converted to an alternative use, the historic fabric and features should be retained wherever possible.

Applications for the change of use of the facilities ancillary to the operation of the public house will be permitted where the loss of the ancillary use will not adversely affect the operation of the public house.

Where change of use is justified the Council's preferred alternative use will be housing (C3).

We will support the provision of new public houses in appropriate sites in growth areas, other highly accessible locations and town centres, subject to other policies in the Plan.

4.58 Policy C3 seeks to provide protection to public houses that are important for their social, economic, cultural and historic value while ensuring that redevelopment or change of use is possible where this is not the case. This reflects paragraph 70 of the NPPF which urges Local Planning authorities to plan positively for the provision and use of public houses and guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities. The policy allows flexibility by supporting development where it would not be contrary to the interests of the economy or community. The overall aim is to ensure that the Council is able to protect all of its public houses which provide a significant benefit or value to the local community, including access to a range of facilities; that public houses of historic and cultural value are conserved and enhanced according to their significance and that the vibrancy and vitality of our centres and local economies are sustained.

4.59 In recognition of the important role public houses play, the Council will expect the criteria in the policy to be met in order to justify a change of use or redevelopment.

4.60 Pubs embody many generations of local culture and history. As already stated, the provision of pubs varies significantly across Camden. There are parts of the borough where there is a negative cumulative impact from a particularly high concentration of licensed premises leading the Council to designate 'Special Policy Areas' using its licensing controls (Camden Town and Seven Dials). The designation of these areas is intended to avoid further negative impact. The Council will take into account evidence of where there is an overconcentration of pubs in determining whether to request a marketing and viability assessment.

4.61 The intention of this policy is to sustain a balanced, vibrant and diverse evening economy in Camden of which public houses form a vital part, giving particular attention to the retention of 'community pubs'. A 'community pub' predominantly serves a local residential community and is a unique community amenity providing space for social interaction. Outside the Central Activities Zone, there

is far less opportunity to access a pub within walking distance. Ultimately, the particular role and value of a public house has to be determined on a case by case basis.

4.62 It is important that the local community have a say in whether these facilities should be maintained. We may require the applicant to fund a survey of local residents and businesses to establish the community's views on the loss of the public house prior to the submission of a planning application. The methodology and content of the survey would need to be agreed in writing by the Council and be funded by the applicant. This should be supported by evidence setting out the alternative public house provision in the local area/community including the location, size, range and quality of facilities and taking account of any unimplemented planning permissions relating to the addition and/or loss of public houses. In assessing a reasonable level of accessibility for alternative provision, the Council will use a benchmark of 800 metres or a 10 minute walking distance.

4.63 Applicants should demonstrate that it would not be economically viable to retain the public house in its existing use. We will require at least three trading years of audited accounts and evidence of the efforts made to preserve the public house, improve its profitability and attract new customers, including the introduction of complementary functions and diversification options. This should include consideration of whether a different business model and/or a different owner/operator might result in the public house becoming economically viable. Any changes to the pub that may have affected its trading performance should also be identified (e.g. refurbishments, changes to opening hours). Written statements by staff and customers and provision of invoices must be supplied as evidence of any physical or operational changes.

4.64 A marketing exercise should be undertaken to show that all reasonable attempts have been made to retain the public house in its existing use. This must be undertaken for a period of not less than 12 months at a realistic price which should be pre-agreed in writing by the Council following independent valuation (by a professional RICS valuer with expertise in the licensed leisure sector) at the applicant's expense. Both freehold and leasehold options should be made available without a 'tie' requiring the purchase of drinks through the vendor and without restrictive covenants preventing other pub operators, breweries, local businesses or community groups from taking over the pub. The range of marketing methods should be agreed in advance with the Council.

4.65 Many pubs are valued for their historic fabric and contribution to the character of the area including their distinctive windows, signage and fittings. Many pubs include historic fabric and features which are important to the character of the local area. Where the conversion of a public house is considered acceptable, we wish to see these historic features maintained. Some of Camden's pubs are listed buildings and are therefore afforded protection under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

4.66 Outdoor amenity spaces, gardens and parking areas attached to pubs can also be subject to similar pressures for residential development. Proposals may also involve the part conversion of a pub leading to the loss of function rooms or trading space. The loss or change of use of these areas will not be permitted where it is considered that this may prejudice the economic viability or future operation of the public house. The Council may seek appropriate independent advice on this matter which would need to be funded at the applicant's expense.

4.67 Subject to the impact of the development on nearby residential uses and amenity and policies in the Plan seeking to protect the function and character of centres, the Council will support the provision of new public houses where this positively enhances the range of community facilities serving growth areas, highly accessible locations and town centres identified by this Plan and on other major sites where appropriate. Pubs can potentially play a crucial social role in promoting community interaction and activities in these areas, helping to build and maintain sustainable neighbourhoods.

4.68 As stated in paragraph 4.51 above, community groups can nominate buildings and land, including pubs, as "Assets of Community Value". If and when the owner decides to sell an asset of community value, a local group can trigger a six month moratorium on the sale giving them time to raise the funds to purchase it. The Council, when determining planning applications involving the loss of pubs, will have regard to any Assets of Community Value designation.