



Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

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Dear Dr. Leek,

A new and very serious threat to pubs through proposed changes to the NPPF

Thank you for publishing your important and ground-breaking recent analysis of factors impacting pub closures, *'Britain Lost 14,000 Third Places. They Were Called Pubs. Is Your Local Next?'*.

We congratulate you on such an important and timely piece of work. The Campaign for Pubs is a grassroots campaign group and you can read our own mission statement [here](#).

Your analysis shows what those of us that enjoy pubs instinctively know - a healthy urban pub culture works best with a cluster of pubs providing for a diverse customer base.

We wanted to write to you to make sure you aware of a potential change to planning legislation in England, that would go against that conclusion and make it harder for communities to protect viable and wanted pubs – *and much easier for owners/developers to close and redevelop them*.

The current planning system is weak, ineffectual and a postcode lottery

First of all, the planning system in England fails to protect many viable and wanted pubs and yet rather than seeking to address this, extraordinarily the current UK Government is intending to make it easier for developers to close and redevelop pubs.

The current planning system is weak, confused, ineffectual and a postcode lottery when it comes to stopping the unnecessary loss of pubs, despite the clear guidance in the NPPF that local authorities should seek to prevent this. Instead, whilst there are some local authorities with strong Local Plans that include the importance of pubs and some have supplementary planning documents to support pub retention, many authorities routinely approve applications for pub conversions, often simply giving in on the basis that a pub must be 'unviable' because the applicant says so.

Pubs are excluded from permitted development rights in England's planning system, though is important to note that this has only been the case since 2017 (and is something that some of our leading campaigners led the campaign for). Prior to that, absurdly a pub could be converted, without any permission, to several other uses – including most notably a shop – which led to many pubs being bought by supermarket chains and converted to small supermarkets. These pubs were lost not by being non-viable, but due to this loophole in the law and the ease with which supermarkets could buy and convert them.

As a result of that change, currently, in planning law, an owner of a pub needs planning consent before demolishing a pub or converting it into any another use. It is then down to local authorities as to whether they wish to include the importance of pubs in the Local Plans and have additional local supplementary

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planning guidance, to make it easier to stop conversion/demolition. Many Local Plans do recognise pubs as valued community facilities and many apply additional conditions, such as the need to provide evidence that the pub is no longer viable, that it has been marketed at an appropriate price as a pub without any interest, and that the community no longer wish to use it. Sadly, this requirement to provide evidence in support of an application is patchy at best and some communities continue to lose their cherished pubs, when they have been entirely viable and in some cases, where there has been a prospective purchaser of the pub as a pub.

The Asset of Community Value (ACV) system, which is often quoted as being the way communities can 'save pubs', is in fact weak, flawed, and can actually make it harder to save a pub, as it only focuses on community ownership and does nothing to ensure that other purchasers as a pub can buy it at the value as a pub. In addition, Councils can decide whether to treat an ACV listing as a material matter in the planning process. Many do not.

The price at which pub freeholds are sold is fundamental to the possibility of a pub continuing as a pub. All too often, an owner with the intention of converting a pub to residential use and/or redeveloping it/the site will advertise a pub at the development value of the site, which is inevitably much higher than the value of the pub as a pub (and does not taken into account the need for repairs as part of that). This effectively makes it impossible for any operator to buy a pub even when they wish to, even when the pub is entirely viable, and even when it is cherished and wanted by the community.

This is why we want to see a stipulation in all Local Plans that a pub cannot be converted or demolished until and unless it has been properly marketed at the independently assessed value as a pub. However, we are also campaigning for a simple but essential change to planning law that would enshrine this in legislation, so that all historic pubs (pubs that are at least 50 years old) cannot be converted or demolished until and unless it has been properly marketed at the independently assessed value as a pub. This would also have the huge advantage that no community would need to go through the time and trouble (and cost to the local authority) of an application for ACV status until the pub had been marketed commercially and had not sold. It is then, not before, that community ownership could become the best (and only) way to save a pub, if the community wants to and can do so.

The new threat to pubs – the revised draft NPPF

Yet rather than addressing and improving the clear flaws in the current weak system, the UK Government is intending to make changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) posing a new and catastrophic risk to thousands of pubs, that could become much easier targets for predatory purchasing and redevelopment. This is a very serious threat to the future of many historic pubs in England and frankly, a charter for even more cynical owners and developers to close and redevelop wanted and viable pubs.

The Government has published a new draft National Planning Policy Framework¹. Policy HC6 relates to the retention of pubs and shops (see the next page).

The government has now stipulated some of the evidence required before a pub development proposal is permitted, i.e. *“that reasonable steps have been taken to market the property for its existing use without success, for a period of at least twelve months”*, or that there is insufficient community support. Campaign for Pubs welcomes this clarification; however in reality, this is insufficient as it completely ignores the fundamental point, raised above, which is that owners will simply demand an inflated and unattainable price as a pub. This therefore will do nothing to stop the deliberate closure and redevelopment of pubs, that we are seeing all over the country. Unless the NPPF includes a reference to the pub, this stipulation will be meaningless. The clause in the NPPF therefore needs to be *“that reasonable steps have been taken to market the property for its existing use **at the independently assessed value as a pub** without success, for a period of at least twelve months”*. The key essential phrase being in red.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697b71c52ff8d10a830d5d4a/Draft_NPPF_December_2025.pdf.

That would make the 12 month clause meaningful. Without it, owners can simply price pubs at a level that no-one could possibly buy them as a pub. This must be tackled or many historic pubs will continue to be lost, entirely unnecessarily, even when there is a purchaser/operator who can and wants to buy and run the pub. This applies also to the Government's proposed Community Right to Buy. This too would be meaningless in many cases, if an owner can simply demand far more than the pub is worth. For our historic pubs – pubs 50 years old or more – the planning system must dictate that where there is a buyer as a pub, at the independently priced value as a pub, it must be sold on that basis, to allow the pub to continue as a pub, serving that community.

However a further stipulation threatens thousands of pubs in England, and that is the condition that the draft NPPF applies to the new policy: that protection measures will only apply to a pub that is **“the last of its type in the area concerned”**. The context is here:

HC6: Retention of key community facilities and public service infrastructure

1. Development proposals should not result in the loss of key community facilities and public service infrastructure serving a local area unless:
 - a. It can be demonstrated that there is no reasonable prospect of the facility being retained, due to there being insufficient community support for the service it provides, or it no longer being viable (in the case of shops and public houses where viability is an issue, evidence should be provided that reasonable steps have been taken to market the property for its existing use without success, for a period of at least twelve months); or
 - b. The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision, in a location which offers comparable or improved accessibility for the community it serves.
2. For the purpose of this policy, key community facilities and public service infrastructure means established services that are used on a frequent basis in a local area such as local shops, public houses, places of worship, local health facilities and community halls. The policy applies only where the facility would be the last of its type in the area concerned.

HC6: Retention of key community facilities and public service infrastructure. Draft NPPF p.75

This vague condition pays no heed to the reality that town and city pubs thrive when they are part of an interconnected and geographically proximal cluster. Pubs all have their own character and are more than simply transactional places to buy alcohol. People visit pubs to socialize, meet friends, play games, relax and so much more.

Policy HC6 seems to imply that the needs of a community will be adequately met, as long as there is **one** pub left standing in an area. Campaign for Pubs knows that this is not the case.

If this policy as it stands is adopted in its present form, it will inevitably have a devastating impact on our pub culture within England's towns, cities and larger villages.

We therefore are asking all those who care about the future of pubs to support the following two things:

- That the National Planning Policy Framework must stipulate that **“no pub that is 50 years old or more can be considered for (or any application made for) change of use, redevelopment or**

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demolition until and unless it has been openly and properly marketed as a pub at the independently assessed value as a pub for a period of at least twelve months”.

- That in recognition of the fact that in many cases, historic pubs in one area/cluster are reliant on each other, that the sentence *“The Policy applies only where the facility would be the last of its type in the area concerned”* is removed.

We hope you can support this, and would be happy to discuss this further with you. Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can provide any more information or explanation.

We also note and welcome your recognition of the huge damage done by some of the large pub companies and the impact this has had on pub closures. So many pub closures have been those that had belonged to (or previously belonged to) the large pub companies, whose reckless behaviour has been a disaster for pubs and the communities as well as causing significant losses to local economies and the UK economy as a whole.

We would also be very happy to discuss this further with you. Thank you again for your important work regarding pubs and the sad and unnecessary erosion of our important pub culture.

Yours sincerely,



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