

Dealing with planning applications

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January 2019



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Introduction

Planning permission is needed for almost all changes to pubs. It has always been required for some changes of use, notably to residential, but since May 2017, permission has also been needed to demolish a pub or to convert it to a restaurant, shop or office. Internal alterations do not need planning consent unless the pub occupies a Listed Building. Anyone can object to a planning application and the more people who do so, the stronger the case is likely to be against change of use.

This summary is intended to help you if you wish to object to an application which might adversely affect a pub. More detailed advice and guidance can be found in our document 'Saving Your Local Pub' – <https://pubs.camra.org.uk/savingyourlocalpub>

The planning process

Planning applications are dealt with by the planning department at your local District, Borough or Unitary Council. They ought to be processed within eight weeks of submission, but delays often occur.

If the area is covered by a Town, Parish or Community Council, they will be notified and will consider the application. They have no formal powers to block applications but their comments will be taken into account so they are worth lobbying.

Before submitting an objection

Consider the application carefully. The application will be lodged on the Council's website so you will be able to study both it and any associated documents. Make a note of the deadline given for receipt of objections. You could also contact the local planning office and ask to speak to the Duty Planning Officer, especially if there are aspects of the application you are unclear about.

Review the Local Plan policy. The current Local Plan will be on the Council's website and also available to view at their offices. Most Plans contain policies which seek retention of community facilities, like pubs, though some are more robust than others whilst a few have no relevant policies at all. If you can locate supportive policies you should refer to them in your objection (if not, use the National Planning Policy Framework policies – see 'Saving Your Local Pub')

Check the planning history. It's well worth checking what, if any, previous applications have been made concerning the pub – you can search for these in the part of the website where you found the current application. If, for instance, a previous change of use attempt was refused, you can see what arguments were used against it.

Submitting your objection

You should be able to submit your objection online – there is normally a link from the planning application itself, often titled 'Make a Comment'. You could also write an objection letter, in which case you need to include either the planning reference number or full address.

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You obviously need to set out clearly the reasons for your objections and you might wish to use separate sub-headings for each reason, which might include:

- loss of a community facility where local people meet and socialise;
- lack of convenient alternative facilities;
- economic impact e.g. on employment and tourism;
- access/traffic – visual impact

Applicants will also often claim that the current business is not commercially viable. Our Public House Viability Test will help you compile evidence to counteract such claims. The problems may, for instance, lie in the way the business has been run.

'Saving your Local Pub' has much more detail on writing effective objections.

Monitor the application

Once your objection is in, you can ask the case officer to keep you informed. Nowadays, most uncontroversial decisions are dealt with by Council officers rather than the Planning Committee, comprised of elected Members. However, if there are strong objections to a proposal then there's a good chance it will be taken to Committee. That being so, you are entitled to lobby Members in advance of the meeting and you can also see the officers' report to the Committee, which will include their recommendations.

Attending the meeting

Most Councils allow the public to speak at Committee meetings but you will need to notify them in advance. You would normally be given two or three minutes to address the Committee. If you are representing other people, you'll need their permission to speak on their behalf.

Next steps

If the application is approved, then that is usually the end of the matter. If you feel the Council acted improperly or outside their powers, you may be able to pursue a complaint though this is unlikely to result in a change to the decision.

Should the application be refused, the applicant might go to appeal. You will be notified of any appeal and how it will be conducted – either in writing or at a hearing. Your original objections will be taken into account by the Planning Inspector but you will also have the chance to make further representations and, if there is a hearing, to speak there.