

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 22 April 2024 15:30
To: Planning Folder New
Subject: Application No: 24/00229/FUL - The Oddfellows Arms, 25, Main Street, Higham On The Hill - Proposed Development of 7 dwellings including the conversion of the existing building into 2 dwellings.

On behalf of over 400 Local Branch members of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) I am writing to OBJECT, in the strongest possible terms, to this latest application to deprive Higham On The Hill of a vital village facility.

Our Branch has consistently opposed the loss of the Oddfellows Arms and supported the campaign by the local community group to acquire the building for use as a village hub. The Branch has objected to the previous three applications, which the Borough Council considered to be unacceptable. These applications were deemed contrary to adopted Local Plan policies, including the loss of a vital community use in an expanding village devoid of such facilities.

The Borough Council has recognised the importance of the Oddfellows Arms, in terms of its contribution to the health, well being and sustainability of the village, by bestowing an Asset of Community Value (ACV) on it.

The current application is no different to those submitted previously, in terms of the loss of the public house, and should be dealt with in the same manner.

The overarching principles of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) (Paras. 84d and 93), the Borough Council's Core Strategies (Policy 12) as well as Policy DM25 of the adopted Local Plan, are all designed to ensure that Local Planning Authorities guard against the unnecessary loss of valued local facilities, such as public houses and wherever possible, to enhance the sustainability of communities, particularly in rural areas.

The loss of the Oddfellows Arms, proposed by this application, would be clearly contrary to all these policies and aspirations and should be refused out of hand. Future policies in the emerging Local Plan (CLT01 and CLT02) seek to bolster the protection of public houses as essential community assets.

The applicant's contention that there is a surplus of public houses within the immediate locality exceeding the needs of the community, citing the fact that the building has been closed and is not capable of functioning, is disingenuous to say the least and totally ignores the fact there is a large, active, local community group wishing to acquire the pub and run it for the benefit of the village and the wider area.

The Oddfellows Arms has suffered a prolonged period of underinvestment, making the pub unattractive as a destination and thereby promoting the idea of 'unviability'. The out of date marketing strategy put forward by the applicant fails to consider alternative methods of sustainability and is somewhat irrelevant now that there is a local community group well advanced in the formulation of a business model which would see the Oddfellows reopen as a hub for the village. With the assistance of The Plunkett Foundation they have developed a strong business case based on the tried and tested examples of community owned and operated pubs/shops across the country, mostly in public houses which were deemed 'unviable'

by the previous owners. A professional valuation of the property has been undertaken which has led to the award of a substantial grant from the Government's Community Ownership Fund. All aspects of a successful and long lasting community venture are in place apart from the intransigence of the present owners/applicant.

Suggesting there is a surplus of pubs in the immediate locality and pointing to the nearest one being 1.8 miles away is laughable. The second nearest, at 2 miles distance, is also, now closed. CAMRA have carried out studies which conclude that public houses should be within a reasonable walking distance of 800 metres in urban and rural centres, if they are to meet their full potential as community hubs. Higham On The Hill is currently witnessing the development of an additional 60 homes, increasing the settlement by a third, notwithstanding the properties that the applicant wishes to build. On this basis alone, there is all the more reason to protect an existing community asset like the Oddfellows Arms and allow the local village group to acquire and run it.

As well as important components of the local economy, public houses are vital spaces for socialisation, community activities and cultural exchange, often hosting community meetings, evening classes, sports and social clubs and activities, including quizzes, live music and entertainment.

National and Local policies have been passed to protect these important and valuable assets and prevent their loss to other, less sustainable uses, which would diminish the community's ability to meet its day to day needs. To allow this application would consign Higham On The Hill to becoming an entirely dormitory settlement and if the adopted National and Local Policies and Guidance are to mean anything at all, the Local Planning Authority should REFUSE this proposal out of hand and support the local action group in their unstinting endeavours to secure ownership of The Oddfellows Arms, thereby achieving the sustainable form of community Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and the country, are trying to promote.

Yours faithfully,
Chris Merriman
Hinckley and Bosworth CAMRA,

