



Community Wellington Inn (Herefordshire) Ltd

FCA Registration Number 8641

12 Derside Close
Wellington
Hereford
HR4 8BP
30 November 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning Application 222734 Proposed 3 bed dwelling and change of use of pub garden at the Wellington Public House, Wellington

I write on behalf of Wellington's Community Pub Group, which is a small group of local residents who passionately want our pub back.

Our group was formed shortly after the pub closed in 2019 and has ever since worked tirelessly to buy our pub for the community. This started with the assistance of business advisors from the Plunkett Foundation to which we still subscribe and then CAMRA who guided us towards other community pubs to learn from. This then enabled us to set our group up as a Community Benefit Society registered with the Financial Conduct Authority as the Community Wellington Inn (Herefordshire) Limited, to help us achieve our aims.

In 2021 we got very close to buying the pub, initially holding several public meetings to formally select a committee of nine residents and then raise funds for the pub by seeking donations and selling shares to the both the local community and from afar, including from out of county and overseas. We even got an external pub designer to provide plans on how best to develop the premises, should we manage to acquire it.

We started to raise funds in July 2021 and produced both an official '*Business Plan*' and a '*Share Prospectus*' to complement this. These documents are still on our web site and can be found at wellingtonpub.org and hopefully demonstrate how professionally and how seriously we took this task. Following advice from both CAMRA and the Plunkett Foundation we commissioned an accredited pub surveyor to value the pub and then entered into negotiations with the owner and estate agent, culminating in an offer of £275,000 for the freehold which was accepted. We were advised by our specialist surveyor that this was the maximum value of the premises at this time.

In August 2021, at the peak of our fund raising efforts, we even held a beer, music and food festival in the pub garden, which had the support of the then owner. This event was properly licensed and we estimate that nearly 500 people attended on the Saturday August bank holiday, taking up absolutely all of the space in the beer garden with one of the food providers having to overflow into the car park. This proved to us that the pub did indeed have the support of the local community and that to succeed it needed all the garden and adjoining car park to do this.

By early 2022 we were almost there having raised an impressive £264,000 of our target £275,000. Unfortunately in March we learnt that the owner had accepted a higher offer of £283,000. However, we were reassured by the estate agents that this company wanted to run the premises as a pub and therefore support our goal. After much deliberation we returned all the money to our shareholders, as the pub was to reopen privately without the need for community ownership or even assistance.

We were then devastated to learn from our first contact with Choicecircle Ltd (the applicant of the current planning application) that it was actually their intention to develop the site for housing as far as possible and afterwards sell the residual estate to a third party to operate as a pub. This was because Choicecircle Ltd are housing developers and not the pub chain that we had been led to believe. Any trawl of Choicecircle's web site will confirm the nature of this company's business and further searches will lead you to other planning applications where pub and other premises have been developed for housing. Had we been informed of this at the time we would have gone back to our community, asked permission to raise funding above the valued amount and hopefully negotiate with the estate agents to acquire the asset and stop being gazumped.

Our Community Pub Group still retains its status as a Community Benefit Society, and we continue to subscribe to the Plunkett Foundation and take advice from CAMRA. Our mission remains to acquire this pub for our community when the premises goes back on sale and we are prepared go back to the village to canvass for appropriate funds to meet a realistic price for purchase.

As a Community Pub Group we therefore strongly object to the current planning application on the following grounds:

- The public houses needs all of the beer garden to the rear to operate as a viable concern, as this is the only area where customers can eat and drink in the warmer months. This has been evidenced by previous events held by the pub over the years and most recently by the Community Pub Group's festival in August 2021 which can be evidenced by photographs if so required. **To reduce the beer garden by 50% will reduce the viability of the business as a public house as it will significantly reduce the space available for sales.**
- To have a new residential house overlook the residual beer garden will be catastrophic for the pub when it reopens, leading to noise complaints and statutory nuisance. The garden in its entirety has both established planning consent and previous licensing consent to be used by the business, including for use by patrons for eating, drinking and

for ancillary music and community events. **To change the use of the back half of the beer garden to housing will therefore reduce the viability of the business to operate as a public house, as its external operations will be constricted.**

- To allow access for a new house through the current car park will also reduce the viability of the pub's future operations further, as it needs all the parking space it can get in this already congested area. At the pub's peak in the early 2000s customers frequently overflowed from the car park onto the road for several hundred metres so all spaces here are required. The proposed shared driveway access promises to be another source of irritation and complaint. **To lose any parking spaces in the car park will reduce the viability of the business to operate as a public house**
- The applicant proposes to demolish the existing conservatory to presumably compensate the loss of the valuable tables outside in the beer garden. The pub generates profit from food sales, so any reduction in space for covers will affect this adversely. **To allow the conservatory to be demolished will mean that winter sales will reduce, again reducing the viability of this business in the future.**
- The application does not make much reference to how it will dispose of its foul waste from the new dwelling, other than to main sewer. The application does not therefore offset the phosphate in its sewage, as it does not appear to have access to any wetland credit allocation scheme nor propose any onsite mitigation through a new phosphate stripping package treatment plant or otherwise. **The proposed house will therefore have a negative impact upon the river Lugg and the Wye SAC.**

In relation to policy, the Community Pub Group wishes to make the following observations if it assists:

- In policy W1(f) of the Wellington Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) it states that new small scale housing development will only be supported where it does not result in the loss of a community facility. **Clearly this planning application conflicts with this policy.**
- Likewise, policy W8 of the NDP helpfully expresses its presumption in favour of the protection of existing community facilities like the pub. It goes further to state that the proposed reuse of local community facilities (such as the pub) shall only be supported for other community type uses unless an application:
 - (a) Provides alternative provision; or
 - (b) Provides satisfactory evidence that there is no longer a need for the facility.

The applicant offers no alternative provision of a pub. Likewise the Community Pub Group wish to purchase the pub at its market value and then operate it as a going concern. **This application is therefore in conflict with policy W8 of the NDP.**

Policy W2 of the NDP already provides its allotted housing allocation and this application's proposal is outside of this and is therefore surplus to the community's current housing requirement. **This application is in conflict with policy W2 of the NDP.**

- In relation to Herefordshire Council's Local Plan Core Strategy 2011-2031, Policy SC1 seeks to retain existing social and community facilities such as this pub. It should also be noted that Policy SC1 only allows such a facility to be lost where:
 - (a) An appropriate alternative facility is available/can be provided;
 - (b) Where the facility is no longer required, viable or is fit for purpose; or
 - (c) It has been vacant and marketed for community use without success.None of these three tests are met as the pub is still required and the applicant is not offering a viable alternative. Likewise the Community Pub Group has proved it can raise funds and will do so again to operate this pub as a viable concern. **Consequently the proposal does not accord with Policy SC1 of the Core Strategy.**

I hope that these comments are of assistance in the planning authority's determination of this application.

Yours sincerely

David Wood

David Wood
Chairman - Community Wellington Inn (Herefordshire) Ltd