

22 July 2024



Richard Byrne
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By email:
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Dear Richard,

THE ALDERMAN, 52 CHIPPENHAM ROAD, ROMFORD, RM3 8HX – PROGRESS UPDATE
APPLICATION REF: P1274.23

We write on behalf of our Client, Havering and Wates Regeneration LLP (the 'Applicant') to provide a progress update with regard to application ref: P1274.23 for the '*Demolition of all existing buildings and structures*' on site at The Alderman, 52 Chippenham Road, Romford, RM3 8HX.

Application Overview

The Proposed Development seeks to demolish the existing buildings and structures on site to ensure the timely delivery of the wider redevelopment proposals for the Chippenham Road Site. The wider redevelopment proposals incorporate the provision of a 100% affordable housing scheme, requiring on-start commencement of construction by 2027.

Whilst the Applicant is engaging in pre-application discussions with the LBH at this time for the wider redevelopment proposals, it is imperative that demolition is commenced as soon as possible. The pub, in its location, is positioned right next to the wider site which has prior approval for demolition. The continuous use of the pub is preventing the demolition of the wider site which in turn is resulting in empty, hoarded up buildings which are attracting anti-social behaviour. The demolition of the existing pub will allow works to begin on the wider site ensuring that affordable housing can be constructed in a timely manner in due course.

On 16 August 2023, a planning application (ref: P1274.23) was submitted for "*Demolition of all existing buildings and structures.*" This was validated on 17 August 2024. Since then we have engaged with planning officers to understand any concerns with the application given that it has not yet been determined. Planning officers have noted that robust justification is required that

demonstrates that the pub does not have any heritage, social, economic and cultural value to local communities in line with Policy HC7 (Protecting Public Houses) of the London Plan.

This response should be read in conjunction with our responses dated 31st January 2024 and 14th March 2024. We consider that the principal outstanding question, that of whether the public house has social value, has been conclusively addressed according to the requirements of London Plan Policy HC7 (Protecting Public Houses). This correspondence considers the public house in terms of its heritage, economic, social or cultural value to local communities, noting that the pub has no heritage, social, economic and cultural value and therefore, its loss not protected by Policy HC7.

The policy sets out that where value is identified, applications that propose the loss of a public house should be refused “unless there is authoritative marketing evidence that demonstrates that there is no realistic prospect of the building being used as a pub in the foreseeable future”. Even if a small amount of value is identified by officers, the requirement for such marketing should be considered in the context of the weight afforded to this value, and the significant public benefits of clearing this site to enable the development of 100% affordable housing, consistent with longstanding Council ambitions and decision-making in relation to this site. These will be further reinforced by the imminent planning application for the wider redevelopment of Chippenham Road. These are material considerations specific to this site that carry weight in the planning balance.

We nonetheless consider that the pub does not offer heritage, economic, social or cultural value to local communities in line with Policy HC7, and therefore its loss is acceptable. The purpose of this letter is to set out our position to date and should be read in conjunction with previously submitted application material and associated correspondence. We hope this letter can help to find a way forward to reach determination of the application at the earliest possible time.

Planning Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) makes it clear that “for the purposes of any determination to be made under the Planning Act, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material consideration indicate otherwise”. The adopted statutory Development Plan for the Borough, and relevant to the Site, comprises:

- The London Plan (2021)
- The Havering Local Plan (2021)
- Policies Map North (2021)
- Joint Waste Development Plan (2012)
- Site Specific Allocations (2008)

The London Plan was adopted in 2021 and sets the strategic objectives for growth and development across London. At a local level, the Havering Local Plan sets the aspirations for development in the borough.

The Site is not subject to any site-specific designations. It does, however, sit to the immediate south of the Harold Hill District Centre.

Planning Assessment

Demolition of the Public House

Paragraph 93 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces and community facilities including, for example, public houses.

Policy HC7 of the London Plan seeks to protect public houses which have a heritage, economic, social or cultural value to local communities, or where they contribute to the wider policy objectives for town centres, night-time economy areas, cultural quarters and creative enterprise zones. Policy HC7 requires that applications proposing the loss of a public house with heritage, cultural, economic or social value be refused unless there is authoritative marketing evidence that demonstrates there is no realistic prospect of the building being used as a pub in the foreseeable future.

Supporting paragraph 7.76 of Policy HC7 notes that, when assessing whether a pub has a heritage, cultural, economic or social value, a broad range of characteristics should be considered including whether the pub:

- a. is in a Conservation Area
- b. is a locally- or statutory-listed building
- c. has a license for entertainment, events, film, performances, music or sport
- d. operates or is closely associated with a sports club or team
- e. has rooms or areas for hire
- f. is making a positive contribution to the night-time economy
- g. is making a positive contribution to the local community
- h. is catering for one or more specific group or community.

The Havering Local Plan does not set out considerations for loss of Public Houses beyond those within Policy HC7 of the London Plan. As such, an assessment of the heritage, cultural, economic or social value of the public house has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out in Policy HC7.

It evident the premises does not have a heritage, economic, social or cultural value for the following reasons:

- **Heritage:**

- The building is not located within a conservation area and is not a statutory or locally listed building. The building is of low aesthetic value and makes little contribution to the character of the local area and sense of place, most notably through its contrasting form, layout and appearance in relation to the surroundings.
- The Public House does not have heritage value.

- **Cultural:**

- The Site is not operated by a sports club or team, nor closely associated with one. Whilst the premises has a license (obtained 2015) for films, indoor sporting events and recorded music, it does not benefit from a website or social media presence promoting any form of club, welcoming people to join. There appears to be a low (negligible) cultural offer at the premises, noting that almost all drinking venues offer some form of film/recorded music playback, and many play sports events on TV and contain some form of activity (i.e. darts, pool). The provision of this in itself cannot be considered to provide a strong cultural offer, particularly if the facilities and events are poorly attended (as discussed below under social).
- The Public House does not have cultural value to merit its retention.

- **Economic:**

- The premises does not contain any rooms available for hire, nor does it make a positive contribution to the night-time economy. The premises now ceases operation at 8pm – earlier now than the 9pm closing time previously noted – and therefore fails to provide a meaningful night-time contribution. It is evident from this that the operator does not see value in keeping the pub open to serve the night-time economy. It is understood that the pub is principally attended by a small pool of regulars, and so has a limited economic relationship with the activity taking place in Harold Hill Town Centre.
- Additionally, the Site sits outside of the Harold Hill District Town Centre with poor frontage to Dartfields rather than the main Chippenham Road. The Site provides little meaningful contribution to the wider function and vitality of the Harold Hill Town Centre.
- The Public House does not therefore have economic value to justify its retention.

- **Social:**

- On review against the London Plan HC7 criteria, there is no evidence that the pub supports any specific groups or communities. Visitor numbers have fallen in recent years, as some former residents have moved away, and the pub is now principally attended by a small pool of patrons. As noted in the original submission, The Alderman does not host live or electronic music, nor does it generate civic pride or a sense of belonging within the wider community as evidenced as part of the wider consultation on the redevelopment of Harold Hill where the view of pub was generally negative. A number of residents have expressed their support for the demolition of The Alderman due to poor perception, little contribution to civic life, its negative visual appearance and negative impact on the neighbourhood. In response to public consultations, most residents have supported its removal and welcomed alternative plans for the site.
- We have separately worked with the landlady who is familiar and has a good relationship with the pub's patrons to carry out a survey of pub users. We received only four responses to this, which are summarised in further detail in the next section on consultation. We acknowledge from the evidence provided by the survey that individual patrons have strong personal connections to the pub, that the pub serves a limited function to support their needs, and may therefore have value to them personally. However, the NPPF at paragraph 8 is clear about what is meant by social objectives with respect to achieving sustainable development, that being supporting "communities' health, social and cultural well-being". Value to the small number of patrons does not outweigh the clear absence of social value to the community as set out above, which is the key consideration in Policy HC7.
- We note that other pubs across London have been demolished in London under Policy HC7 even where they are still in use and so presumably of some value to individual patrons. As set out in our email to officers dated 14th March 2024, the GLA in its recent Stage 1 Report on the Church Street proposals considered at paragraph 61 that (bold added) **'...the public house was not specifically identified to be of any particular importance to local residents during the extensive consultation carried out on the proposals.'** This was for a pub that was still in use at the time of the application, similar to The Alderman. In this respect, the decision clearly considered the absence of social value to the community, and therefore accepted the loss of the pub under Policy HC7.
- Since planning policy is formulated to protect assets of value to the community, and no such value has been identified, it is therefore clearly evident that the pub has no social value to the community, which is the requirement in Policy HC7.

As such, the Public House is not subject to the protections set out in London Plan Policy HC7, which only seeks to protect public houses that have heritage, cultural, economic and/or social value. Authoritative marketing evidence is therefore not required for the demolition and/or redevelopment of The Alderman Public House.

Consultation to Date

The Applicant, through its strategic partnership, is committed to working closely with the local community on delivering regeneration plans that align with the community's needs and ambitions.

Officers have previously requested consideration of whether there is a "social aspect" associated with The Alderman Pub to understand its use. This includes who uses the pub, why they use the pub, where they live and what would be the effect of the loss of the pub. As we have previously set out in correspondence with planning officers, this goes beyond the requirements of Policy HC7, and is wholly impractical to gather such evidence, including in terms of data protection requirements. We previously set out within our response note (dated January 2024) the public consultation carried out which confirms a lack of social value to the community, the social value associated with the pub akin to many other pubs across the UK which does not afford the pub a social value of significance that warrants its protection under Policy HC7 particularly noting the pub does not have any other value of significance. Despite this, we have carried out additional public consultation with the community and a survey of pub users to highlight that the pub does not have any social value or other value.

To achieve this aim, a robust and thorough programme of pre-application public consultation was undertaken between Tuesday 18 July and Monday 08 August 2023 and again between Monday 15th April and Monday 6th May 2024.

A number of methodologies were employed to ensure that all interested parties and groups in the area were engaged. During the most recent public consultation between April and May of this year (2024), a community leaflet promoting the consultation was initially issued to all residents living within close proximity to the proposed overall Chippenham Road site. Following this, a press release was issued to local media detailing the proposed and details of the public consultation. Details were also shared on social media channels X and Facebook encouraging all members of the public to get involved. A project website and community information phoneline were set up to collate feedback and answer questions. During the period, two public exhibitions were held at the Harold Hill Library, less than 5 minutes' walk around the corner from the pub.

A total of 73 pieces of feedback were received during the public consultation, and 45 people visited. With regards to the Alderman Pub, subject of application ref: P1274.23, the below questions were asked of those who infilled the survey.

- **How frequently do you visit the Alderman Pub?**

Of the 73 people surveyed, 56 people (76%) responded 'Never', 8 (10%) people responded 'Weekly', 2 (2%) people responded 'monthly' and 5 people did not answer the question. This response provides a clear narrative that the pub is only used by a very small minority of people on a weekly or monthly basis. It is important to note that this consultation was well-communicated (as set out above), and patrons of the pub were given every opportunity to attend. It is evident that The Alderman Pub is not a well utilised pub within the area and does not provide a social or cultural hub for the community.

The considerations of Policy HC7 are clearly set out by the GLA's past decision making and we have equally demonstrated to date and through this additional consultation exercise, that the Alderman is not identified as an asset of community value and is not identified to be of any particular social value (or other value) to the community during public consultation.

- **Would you support the relocation of a family friendly licensed premises within the new development?**

In response to this question, 37 people responded 'No', 29 people responded 'Yes' and 7 people did not answer the question. Half of the respondents would not support the relocation of a licenced premises to serve the area. There is therefore no clear support for the re-provision of a public house, reinforcing the limited contribution the existing pub makes in terms of its social and cultural value to meeting the needs of the community. Nonetheless, the provision of a public house is being explored as part of the proposed redevelopment of Farnham and Hilldene.

Survey of pub users

As mentioned above, in addition to the public consultation, as requested by the planning officer, the Landlady of The Alderman Pub expressively undertook consultation with active pub goers to understand how well the pub was utilised, by who and what for. Whilst the comments received were positive in nature, only four responses were received overall which is crucial to note in this instance.

The questions asked through the survey to those in the pub, are set out below:

- **Do you visit any other public houses within 2 miles of Chippenham Road?**
- **Do you want to see a new Public House within the Harold Hill Town Centre Regeneration?**
- **If you answered 'yes', please tell us what type of pub you would like to see.**

Of the four respondents who undertook the survey, one person made reference to 'Deer's Rest' as another nearby pub, located some 0.8 miles from The Alderman Pub. Two respondents

confirmed they would want to see a new public house open as part of Harold Hill Town Centre Regeneration, and the other two respondents would not like to see this. One respondent suggested a new public house would provide a venue to hold parties such as birthdays, anniversaries and weddings etc. The remaining three respondents, in response to the last question commented beyond what was asked. For example, it was noted by one respondent that 'there is a need for this pub', another questioned 'why shut this pub?' and the other commented that there is 'no need to close a good friendly community and a new [pub] would not have the [same] atmosphere as the Alderman.'

Whilst the pub may have value to a very small minority, planning policy is not formulated to protect these individual interests but to support sustainable development in line with the social objective set out in paragraph 8 of the NPPF to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities. As evident from the public consultation, the community do not see any social or cultural value in the pub.

This is in the context of a consultation that reached four people, all of whom were regular pub users. Given the opportunity to comment on the pub demolition application, and to comment on the consultation survey online and in person, we can only conclude that (leaving aside those people who might have been unable to respond to the consultation) that many people do not use the pub or do not consider its loss worth responding to.

We recognise, as was set out in the Inspectors' Report on the London Plan that public houses do not need to be a focus for all sections of the community. The Inspectors highlighted as an example the LGBTQ+ community, for which there was strong evidence of the need to protect pubs for this community. However, there is little evidence of need to protect the Alderman pub given it does not offer heritage, cultural, social or economic value to the community. The patrons who attend the pub do not form a clear community, and in any case the personal value that the pub offers to them is not protected by planning policy, only the social value it offers to the community in line with the NPPF and the London Plan. The use of a pub alone, and value to a small number of individual patrons, cannot be said to warrant protection in planning policy terms.

It is important to note in this context that the applicant is not seeking the demolition of the pub for its own sake without regard for local people. The demolition of such a pub in this location will ultimately give back to the community by providing space for a much-needed development of 100% affordable housing in the context of significant under delivery in Havering. This would provide significant social value in itself to the local community and therefore much more closely align with the social objective of the sustainable development objectives in the NPPF. These are clear site-specific circumstances that represent material considerations that should weigh in the planning balance.

Conclusion

In accordance with the assessment set out above, the public house is not of heritage, cultural, economic or social value and is therefore not protected under the provisions set out within Policy HC7 of the London Plan.

In any case, even if officers disagree with this assessment, there is a dire need to deliver affordable housing to alleviate pressure and meet the borough's housing needs. The proposals at Chippenham Road have the potential to address a considerable proportion of this requirement at 138 homes. The delivery of housing, particularly affordable housing, should therefore be given weight, particularly in the context of an acute housing need at a local and regional level. The demolition of a pub, with no social, cultural, heritage or economic value, is far outweighed by the benefits that a 100% affordable housing scheme will deliver. Its demolition will enable timely delivery of affordable homes. We therefore encourage officers to take a favourable decision on this application.

As such, we consider the proposals to comply with the relevant policy considerations as set out in this letter and respectfully request that planning permission be granted.

If you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Yours sincerely



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For and on behalf of Avison Young (UK) Limited