



Steve Humphrey
Development Control
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
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Dear Steve Humphrey

Over the weekend I have been personally considering with friends the importance of adequate facilities within rural villages to maintain vibrant societies. Mike Taylor made an interesting point on this subject, which was that in the rural environment there is only limited access to more urban pursuits like cinema, theatre, ten pin bowling and a host of other forms of entertainment that are taken for granted by young and old in more urban environments.

In this context I would like to bring to your attention the importance of the humble village pub and its recent demise. Be it a 'Rural Service Centre' like Borough Green or a small satellite village like Wrotham, the pub is often the only form of informal community entertainment and social release and transport is difficult with late night public transport limitations and responsible driving choices.

Wrotham village is blessed with two pubs and a licensed Hotel that serves our population of approximately 1,700 whereas Borough Green, with a population around 4,300 on completion of consented development only has two pubs and a small bar serving non 'Ale' drinkers that regularly appears to be 'For Sale'.

The NPPF Planning Guidance for 'Local Plan' making, stresses the importance of sustainability as a concept and focuses on three important pillars, one of which is addressing an areas social needs. Often this is condensed down to local housing by LPA's because this is a government target, but social well-being is a combination of many aspects and the opportunity to socialise informally with friends is paramount. This can take the form of village halls that are available for hire for parties and social gatherings but nothing can replace a local pub where anyone can drop in for a chat over a pint or a coffee, a place which might host a band on a Saturday Night or a Quiz Night on Thursday and you cannot beat their fresh fish and chips with mushy peas as a Friday Night staple!

Borough Green used to be particularly well served by five Public Houses but most of these are now either housing or derelict listed buildings, none of which is a great testament to the greater planning system. **Fortunately there are two left.**

Let us ponder for a moment if another one was to close and what effect that would have for social cohesion in an expanding 'Rural Service Centre' approaching 4,700 populace? It is natural that younger and older people choose different social environments with noise, music and choice of drinks often differentiating between the groups. Two pubs would be barely adequate and one would be likely to disrupt social cohesion, encouraging the more irresponsible to travel further and potentially consume alcohol, hardly a responsible direction to be encouraged by TMBC and contrary to National Planning advice from the NPPF.

It is completely understood that the same government has specifically ruled out a change in Permitted Development rules that currently allows pubs to 'change use' into supermarkets without a planning application and this conflicts with social objectives within the LPA. Contrary advice that is very difficult for an LPA to easily resolve.

Consequently a hypothetical ancillary application to change the periphery of a pub to a supermarket would in those circumstances be likely to succeed because the main presumption was acceptable. The only way that this bias could be overcome would be if the LPA took exceptional steps to uphold social cohesion as defined within the NPPF, given an expanding and important Rural Service Centre like Borough Green, and impose an Article 4 Direction that removed Permitted Development Rights from local pubs. This is recently advocated by Nick Boles as Planning Minister in a response to CAMRA protestations regarding the loss of pubs to housing and supermarkets and there are several successful precedents. (Refer to attachments)

These matters are legally complex and will take time to consider. Fortunately this can be achieved by agreeing to a recent application to designate the Henry Simmonds Public House as a Local Community Asset (LCA) and it is my understanding that there will also be a similar application for the remaining village pub, the Horse and Hooden in due course. This will give all parties six months to further consider matters.

At present there are three churches, two pubs, three supermarkets and a host of interesting and local food retailers in Borough Green including delicatessens, greengrocers, butchers, bakers and candlestick makers that combine to make the centre unique. It would be a travesty if Tonbridge and Malling Development Control did not impose an Article 4 Direction on the remaining pubs in order that the planning process could properly consider future proposals in the light of all government guidance.

Yours sincerely

Pete Gillin