

DRAFT NEW LONDON PLAN – EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

Written Statement: Matter M50

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The question asks if Policy HC7 would address detailed issues that would more appropriately be dealt with in local plans and neighbourhood plans and if it would provide an effective and justified framework for the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood plans as to protection of existing public houses and support for new ones.

CAMRA believes that Policy HC7 stops short of addressing issues in such detail that would better be dealt with at borough and neighbourhood levels but provides justified strategic guidance for adoption and amplification in those more detailed plans.

We believe such reasoned strategic guidance is necessary in pursuit of the recommendations of the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework under the heading of Promoting healthy and safe communities:

91. Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other
- c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs

92. To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;
- c) guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- d) ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and
- e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

The acknowledged contribution of public houses to social wellbeing is echoed at HC7 A 1) and B and in the wording of the subsequent paragraphs. We recommend

that Policy HC7 should therefore be cross referenced under the Social Infrastructure heading and suggest, as we noted in commenting last February, that the following final sentence be added to paragraph 5.1.1: 'Another key component of social infrastructure is addressed separately in Chapter 7, Policy HC7 Protecting public houses.'

Nationally, we observe two main factors contributing to the closure of so many pubs, as noted at 7.7.2 and recently highlighted in publicity surrounding the numbers of closures by borough released by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). In rural areas, lack of public transport in the evening puts many pubs out of business. In urban areas, the greater potential value of the site for alternative use is the major threat, especially in London where residential property prices are typically so much higher than elsewhere.

London now has more than 100 small breweries, but paradoxically so many fewer local pubs able to serve their beers. From the consumers', publicans' and brewers' perspective, strong local pub protection policies, diligently enforced, are therefore needed in the capital more than ever and we commend the New London Plan in capturing best practice.

In a survey undertaken last year by the CAMRA Office looking simply at the wording of local plans, five London Boroughs scored among the top ten rated, but at the other end of the scale a few boroughs had no kind of pub protection policy at all and were therefore non-compliant with NPPF or the adopted London Plan as amended by FALP. Given the time period that has elapsed with this framework in place, stronger and more robust guidance now from regional policy is entirely proportionate; moreover needed. Recently Enfield issued a new plan for consultation with no such policy despite earlier assurances.

In recognising the scale of the threat to London pubs, we urge planners to appreciate that the pattern of pub ownership nationally has changed radically over recent decades. Traditionally within living memory, most pubs were owned by breweries and operated under a mutually beneficial tied house system: local brewers and publicans had a shared interest in selling as much of their beer and in as good a condition as possible through their pubs.

Instead, nowadays it is property companies that own the freehold of most pubs, often with a view to selling to developers as many of those pubs as can generate more income from potential conversion of their sites to other, more profitable uses. Such companies may seek to impose rent increases that are beyond their leaseholders' or tenants' means: this year already both the Dispensary in Leman Street, Aldgate and the Telegraph on Putney Heath have closed as a result.

Often, too, tying a succession of tenants to paying twice as much for their beer supplies as they would do if free of tie, so that they cannot then afford to pay their rents, staff, utility bills and maintenance costs and earn a living may be geared to arguing, for planning purposes, that the pub in question is non-viable.

The entitlement of a property company landlord to dictate which beverages and other supplies a tied publican can stock, from whom to buy them and at what price, is an historical anomaly that operates against the interests of small brewers,

publicans and consumers alike. No other shopkeepers are constrained by the same anti-competitive practices.

To help save pubs, CAMRA is calling for urgent reform of the Pubs Code under which tied tenants of the largest pub owning businesses should be no worse off than if they were free of tie, for a comprehensive review of business rates – pubs with a rateable value between £51,000 and £100,000 are now worse off than before the autumn 2018 budget – and for consideration of lower duty rates on draught beer.

What the planning system can do is make clear that applications for change of use from pubs will now be approved only exceptionally. Policies in place need to be enforced by Local Planning Authorities and enforcement decisions respected by the Planning Inspectorate, to which developers tend to appeal. Pubs must be protected and seen to be protected. To this end, we therefore commend Policy HC7 and the arguments of the related explanatory paragraphs in establishing a much more supportive strategic planning regime for London pubs.

GMS
11 January 2019