KEEPING LOCAL

HOW TO SAVE LONDON'S PUBS AS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

The London pub is an institution. From the famous haunts of historical figures to quiet discoveries on side streets, these stalwarts of the British streetscape cater to a broad clientele with a diverse range of needs: quick drinks after work, a family lunch at the weekend, somewhere to while away an evening with friends.

Yet this institution is under threat: with closures nationally at 18 a week by the end of 2012[1], nationwide the number of pubs has shrunk in the last thirty years from around 70,000 to nearer 50,000 and the situation in London reflects the national trend.[2] If London is a conglomeration of villages, what does it mean if fewer and fewer of these have their village pub?

This report seeks to explore the reasons for the rate of pub closures in the capital, why this is a trend that should be resisted and what can be done to stem the flow of closures.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Brewers may like to promote the idea of a timeless tradition of hospitality, but in reality the industry has changed dramatically in the last few decades. The Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order of 1989 sought to break up the dominance of a handful of large breweries who not only supplied the beer but also owned the pubs themselves. Guest ales from rival brewers became a common feature, but more fundamentally the ownership of the pubs was shifted onto newly formed pub-owning companies or "pubcos". In 2009 these companies owned approximately 51% of all pubs in the UK [3]

With those breweries divested of their property portfolios now focused on marketing their products, the pubcos and independent pub owners have sought to maximise sales in what is an increasingly competitive leisure market. Smaller-scale breweries, who are permitted to run pubs, have responded in kind so that the industry as a whole is a far more professional operation than ever before. Catering and Hospitality Management courses are offered to staff and the pubs themselves have evolved to appeal to specific market areas. The pub today is rarely the cloistered male den of a few decades previously; it is archetypally a family-oriented business with as much emphasis on food as drink. [4]

In a 2012 report commissioned by CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale), the Institute for Public Policy Research identified the categories of on-licensed premises as follows:

- Town centre pubs, bars, and clubs
- Food-led pubs
- Local/community pubs
- Licensed accommodation
- Licensed restaurants
- Sports, social and members' clubs [5]

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1. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/foodanddrinknews/9646395/Pub-closures-rise-due-to-beer-tax-campaigners-warn.html

2. Muir, R. (2012) Pubs and Places, London: Institute for Public Policy Research p. 13

3. Muir p. 7

4. Pratten, J. D. (2003) The Changing Nature of the British Pub, British Food Journal, Vol. 105 Iss: 4 p. 257

5. Muir p. 6

An earlier analysis by the sociologist J.D. Pratten had broken down the pub categories further into theme pubs, child-friendly pubs, sport pubs, specialist beer houses etc, but however they are categorised it is clear that the modern concept of the pub contains a multitude of variants.[6] Yet despite this explosion of customer-oriented diversification, the figures show a marked downward trend: by 2010 pubs were closing nationally at the rate of 25 a week, with London and the North West being the worst hit.[7]

The data below offsets closures, including conversions and demolitions, against reopenings and new build establishments to arrive at a net figure for each year. Putting these figures into context, in a period which has seen London's population grow from an estimated 7,364,100 [8] to over 8,200,000 [9], London has seen the demolition of 414 former pubs.

There have been many local fluctuations, but South East London has fared consistently badly, with a net annual loss of more than thirty pubs on three occasions. Lewisham has lost 36% of its pubs in the last decade with Evelyn and Telegraph Hill wards both losing over 70% of their pubs and Whitefoot ward losing all its pubs.[10]

Annual net gains/losses per CAMRA London region 2003-2012
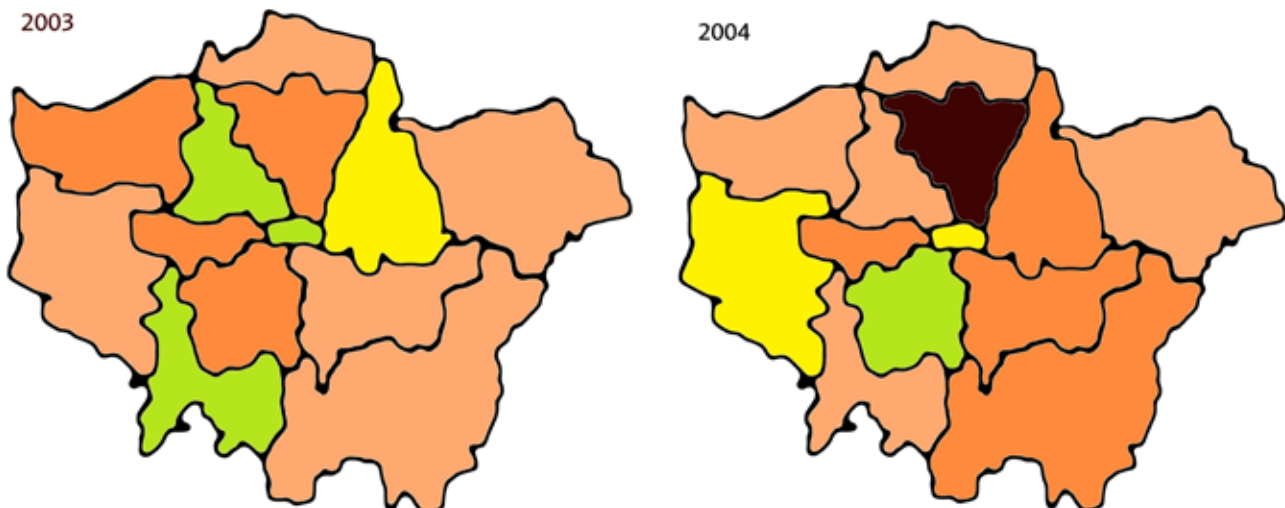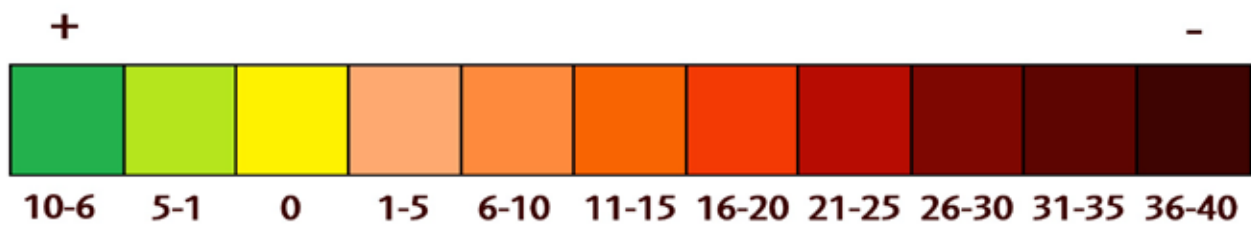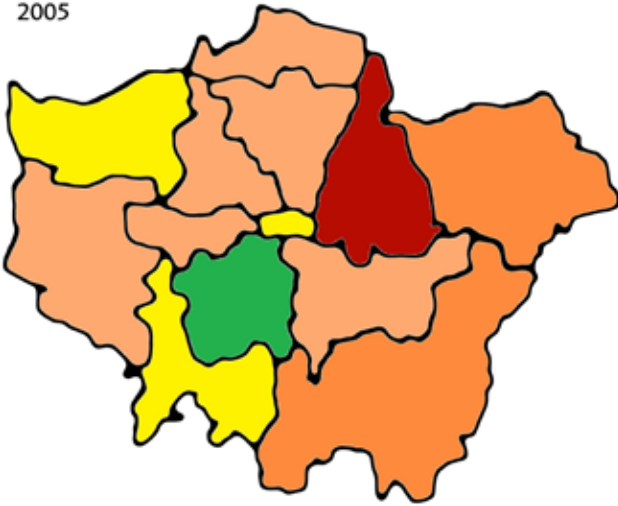
6. Pratten pp. 257-8

7. www.beerandpub.com/news/pub-closures-running-at-25-per-week-new-national-and-regional-survey

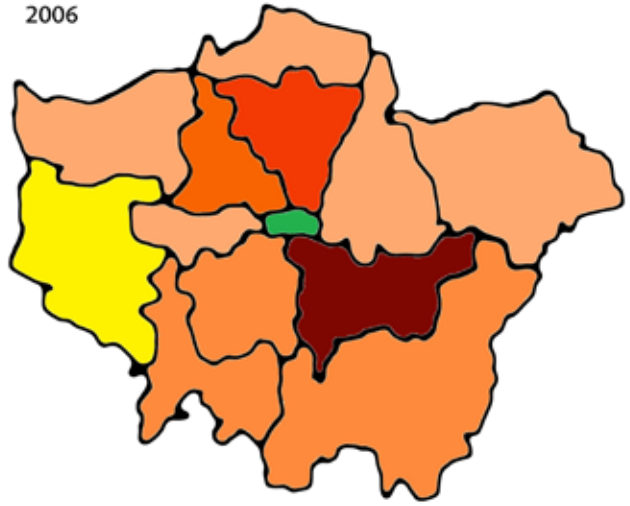8. http://www.londononline.co.uk/factfile/historical/

9. http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Update%2018-2012%20Mid-Year%20Population%20Estimates%202011_0.pdf

10. London Borough of Lewisham (2012) Pubs in Lewisham: an evidence base study p.27
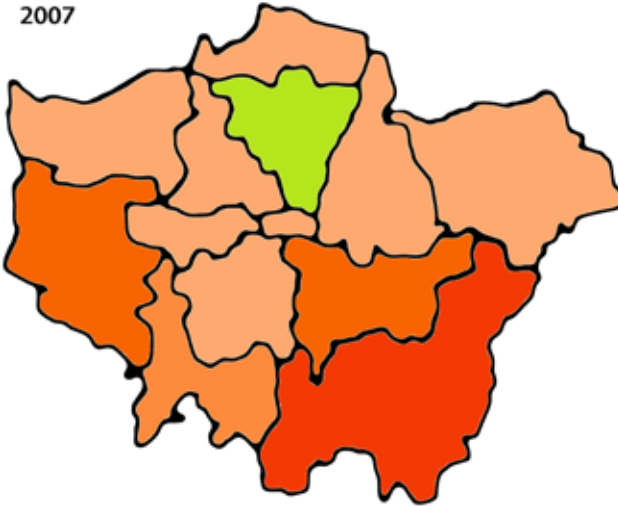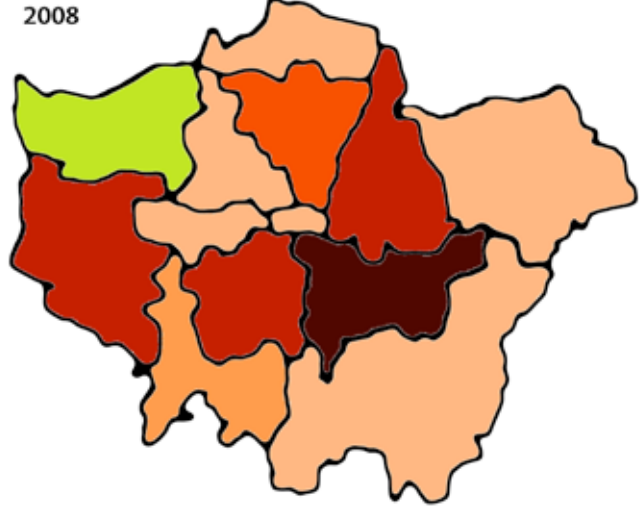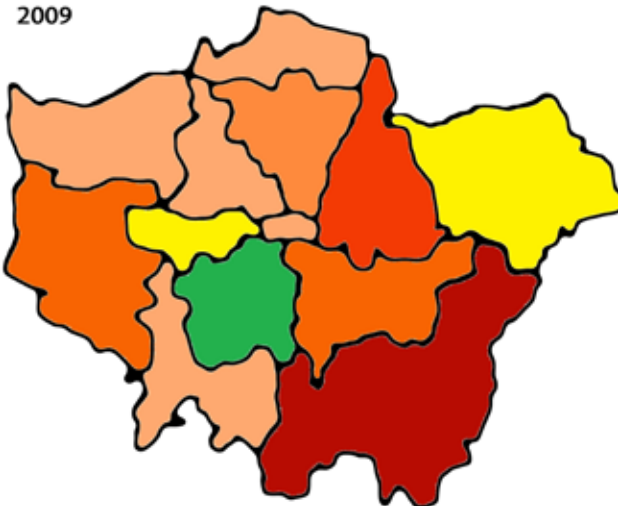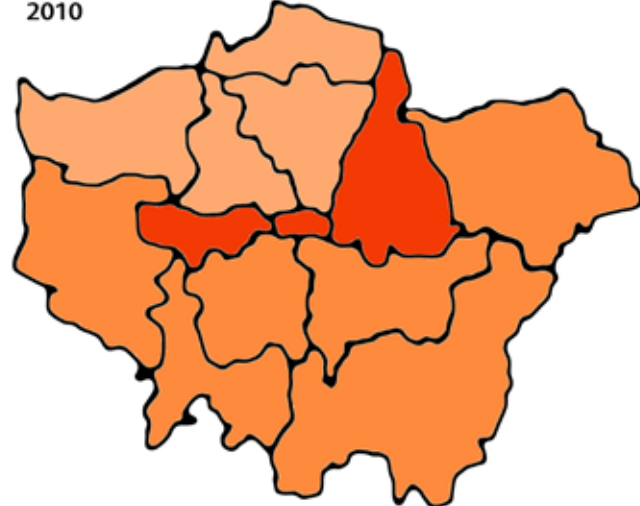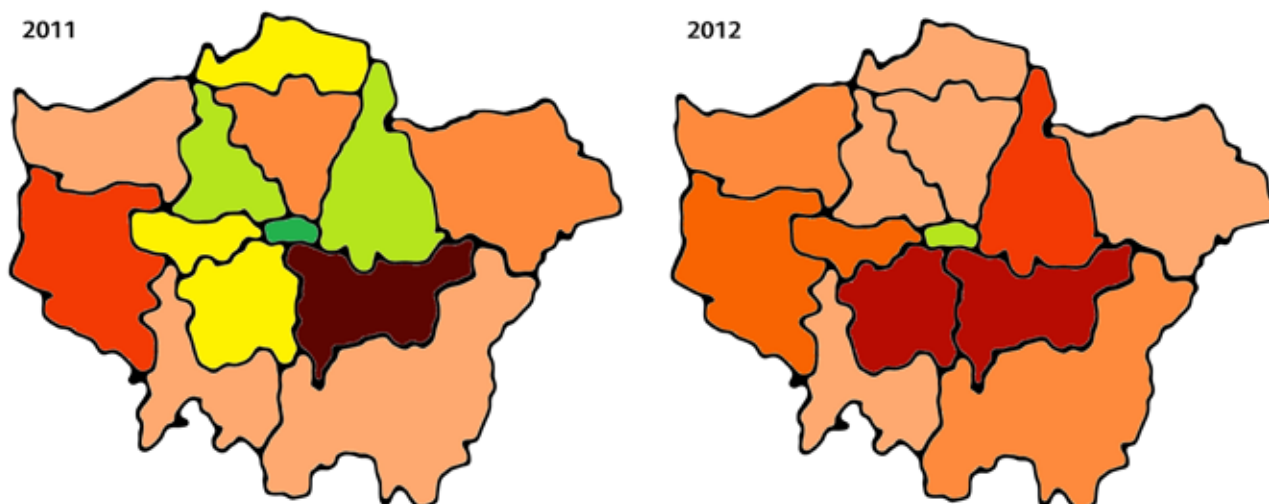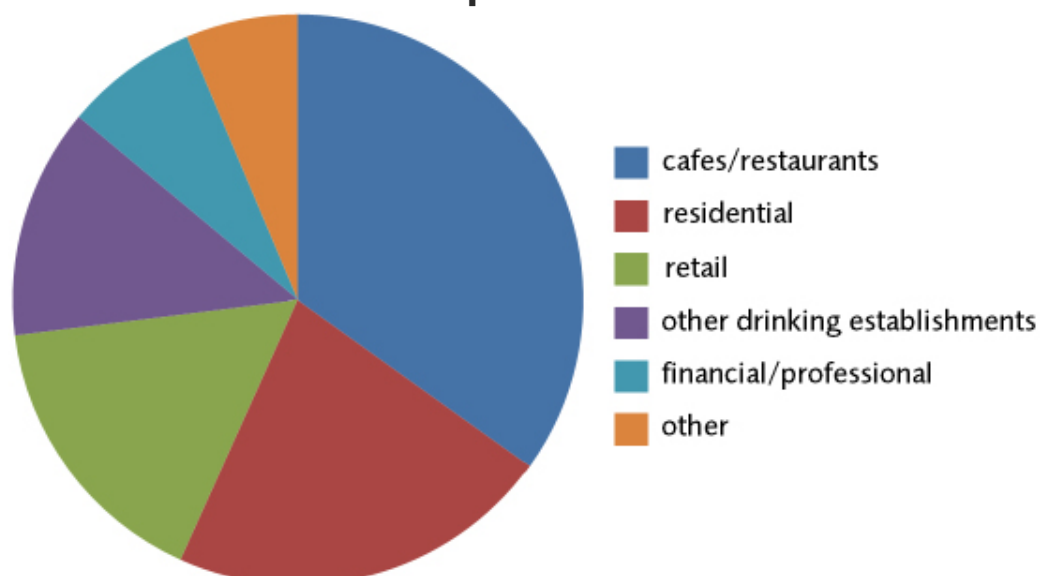
2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

Source: Capital Pubcheck on behalf of CAMRA Greater London Region

The vast majority of these losses are pubs which close in the course of the year and whose future remains uncertain at the time of Capital Pubcheck's annual survey on behalf of CAMRA Greater London Region. While some of these do reopen as pubs, the high number of demolitions and conversions to other uses renders a great many pub sites lost to the community as drinking establishments. Between 2003 and 2012 Capital Pubcheck recorded 897 changes of use for former pub sites. Approximately a third of these were conversions to cafes and restaurants, which in some cases could be seen to provide a similar shared community space to a pub. Indeed, it was noted when the 2005 amendments were made to the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order that it was not clear exactly which category a gastro pub would belong to.[11] The data compiled by Capital Pubcheck however groups gastro pubs with pubs, and classes restaurants separately. Conversion to a restaurant, open only to diners, is a significant change from a pub's hospitality model, while conversion to residential, retail and professional services removes or radically alters shared community spaces, changing the tone of the high street.

Proportion of conversions from pubs to other uses in London 2003-2012

- ■ cafes/restaurants
- ■ residential
- ■ retail
- ■ other drinking establishments
- ■ financial/professional
- ■ other

Source: Capital Pubcheck on behalf of CAMRA Greater London Region

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11. www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/85/pdfs/uksiem_20050085_en.pdf

FACTORS BEHIND CLOSURE

Alcohol duty escalator

Maintaining the tax on beer and cider at a rate 2% above inflation, the alcohol tax escalator is seen by many in the brewing and hospitality industry as a pivotal factor in the pressure publicans are facing to stay afloat, as beer and cider become ever more expensive, relative to other goods. However, the Government has defended the escalator as a key element in debt reduction, estimated to raise over £100M over the next two years[12,] and Simon Clarke of the Fair Pint Campaign has argued that tax concessions should only be granted once assurances have been secured from breweries and pubcos that the benefits would be passed onto the consumer.[13]

Supermarket alcohol offers

In November 2012 the Home Office launched a consultation into a minimum price of 45p per unit for alcohol in England and Wales. This follows the introduction of a 50p minimum price in Scotland. That legislation has however been challenged by the European Commission, which argues that it is incompatible with EU law, while the Scotch Whisky Association and the European Spirits Organisation have also challenged the legality of the minimum price.[14]

The minimum price has been campaigned for by, amongst others, the hospitality industry, as a means not only of cracking down on binge drinking but also to curtail the sale of alcohol "loss leaders" in supermarkets. These items are sold at such a low price that they lose the supermarket money, but are seen as a way of enticing customers into the store, where they will spend money on other items. The price of beer sold in pubs has seen a 187 percentage point increase in the last 25 years, while off-trade prices have risen by just 52 percentage points.[15]

Smoking ban

It is hard to find convincing evidence that the ban is a prime cause of closures. Craven and Marlow are sceptical of the "fairly large empirical literature [reporting] that bans exert no adverse effects on owners"[16], stating that "economic theory predicts that bans exert differential effects on businesses"[17]. The correlation between the introduction of the smoking ban in 2007 and the increase in closures since then is often cited but the onset of the global recession in 2008 allied to an ever-decreasing footfall on the high street means it is very difficult to extract ban-related closures as a discrete category.

Pub owners have certainly felt the economic impact of trying to provide smokers with comfortable surroundings that abide by the law, with the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers stating that the ban has resulted in an average expenditure of £6,000 per member on outdoor facilities.[18] The IPPR report Pubs and Places differentiates between pubs able to adapt using their outdoor space in this manner from "landlocked" pubs with no such adaptability, with the latter reporting a significant loss in trade. Nevertheless the report does state that "73% of licensees supported the ban staying in

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12. www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/General-News/Treasury-says-removing-beer-duty-escalator-would-cost-105m

13. www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-2247045/Beer-duty-escalator-punitive-tax-rises-deterring-drinkers-crippling-pubs-argues-Camra.html

14. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-20526338

15. Muir p. 16

16. Craven, B. & Marlow, M. L. (2008) Economic Effects of Smoking Bans on Restaurants and Pubs, Economic Affairs December 2008; Oxford, Blackwell (Institute of Economic Affairs) p.59

17. Craven & Marlow p. 60

18. Muir p. 18

place and a quarter of pubs said they had even attracted new customers because of the ban."[19] The anecdotal evidence from interviewing landlords and pub managers for this report is that the ban has had little impact in terms of numbers, bringing in significant new custom (ie people who avoided the smoky environment pre-ban) to offset any loss in smoking clientele.

Economic downturn

The second half of 2008 (one year after the introduction of the smoking ban) saw "the biggest drop-off in [pub] sales in the third quarter of the year for a decade"[20], a decline underlined by the findings of a report by Mintel undertaken in 2009 which stated that "eating and drinking out are top of the list of leisure activities that consumers are planning to cut back on as a result of the recession"[21]. Figures published by the IPPR support the idea that a reduction in national spending power equates to a fall in pub turnover.[22]

Decreased footfall

The Portas Review, published in 2011, acknowledges both the impact of the recession and the general trend towards out-of-town and online shopping. Town centre sales were seen to have fallen from 50% of retail spending to 42.5% with "non-store" sales being the main beneficiary.[23] But it is not just the upsurge in e-commerce that threatens the high street: Portas reports that "out-of-town retail floorspace has risen by 30% whilst that in town has fallen by 14%"[24] The pub trade, dependent to a large extent on passing custom, feeds off footfall and our high streets simply do not see the volume of people they did in the past.

Pubcos

The economic factors above are not to be confused with "manufactured failure" where pubcos force pubs in their portfolio not to be profitable. The pubcos are in debt: Punch Taverns have conceded they face bankruptcy[25] and are currently trying to sell off 2,000 pubs from their portfolio. In order to facilitate a planning change of use for the property, and thus unlock its lucrative residential development potential, the pubcos try to recoup their losses through high wholesale pricing: "whilst the pubco is able to buy beer cheaply from the brewery, it can charge their pub landlords a price of their choosing. Consequently, the consumer is usually paying a significantly inflated price for a pint of beer, and tied pub landlords are being forced to sell beer at a loss. As a result of upward only rent reviews, and beer that has to be bought at inflated prices from the pubco, enormous pressure is being placed on many tied landlords who struggle to make a living. Huge numbers of landlords are simply being forced out of the market."[26]

If publicans hand their keys in, the pubco can claim the establishment is not a viable business (regardless of turnover) and can attempt to sell the property at a high price for conversion to residential use – thus liquidating their assets. One strategy frequently employed is initially only to convert the upper floors to residential use and to keep the ground floor as a pub. The pub is then at risk of losing its licence due to noise pollution complaints from the residents above, which could

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19. Muir p. 18

20. Andrews D. & Turner, S. (2012) Is the pub still the hub? International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 24 Iss: 4 p 545

21. Mintel Pub visiting – UK – November 2009 quoted in Andrews & Turner p. 545

22. Muir p. 14

23. Portas, M. (2011) The Portas Review, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills p. 8

24. Portas p. 10

25. www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/oct/24/punch-taverns-debt-crisis

26. http://www.fairpint.org.uk/assets/policybriefing.pdf

then lead to residential conversion of the ground floor.

Conversion to retail

Whereas borough councils can reject property development through the change of use planning procedure, the conversion to retail (from A4, public houses, to A1, retail) requires no change of class. It is thus much easier for a company to convert a pub into a retail outlet. Liam Fox MP, outlining a proposed pub-to-retail conversion in his Somerset constituency in a recent letter to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, stated that "planning permission would be given to Tesco on the basis that it does not represent a change of use. Most people would see this as a fundamental change of purpose and feel the presumption in planning law is wrong".[27]

There are certainly occasions when a dilapidated pub can successfully be converted into a retail unit which benefits the community, acting as an "anchor" business, attracting footfall and providing key services. But too often the properties being targeted are thriving businesses in their own right and the loss to the community of the one is at least equal to the advantages of the other.

CASE: THE CATFORD BRIDGE TAVERN

Originally opened as The Railway Tavern, it was under the name The Copperfield that the pub went into serious decline. Rumours of drug trading and prostitution as well as stabbings on the premises meant that locals crossed the road to avoid it. In January 2012 The Copperfield was closed down.

Seeing the potential of a large period building in a good location, and having had success with similar pubs across south London, a firm called Antic took the premises over under a Tenancy of Will from the leaseholder, Punch Taverns. The advantage of the Tenancy of Will was the speed with which the agreement could be signed off and the pub was closed for just two months for refurbishment and kitchen installation. The disadvantage of this tenancy was that the leaseholder would be obliged to give Antic just 24 hours' notice should they want them to vacate the premises.

The pub reopened as The Catford Bridge Tavern on 1 March 2012 and by the summer trade was brisk with a clientele comprised mostly of regular visitors. It quickly established a reputation for its food as well as its range of beer and came to be seen as a hub for the community with a weekly quiz night and function room.

In November 2012, the freeholder cancelled the lease with Punch Taverns, ending Antic's agreement with them and forcing the pub to close. The new leaseholder was a national retailer and the intention was to convert the property into a mix of retail premises and residential use, for which the freeholder applied for planning permission.

The pub staff mobilised a campaign to save the pub with an online petition, flyers and t-shirts printed. The council received 600 objections to the plans and on 23 November they refused permission to develop the site citing amongst other reasons that "the loss of a public house and the creation of a retail unit would have a negative impact on the viability and vitality of Catford town

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27. http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article3690251.ece

centre" contrary to Lewisham's Core Strategy Strategic Objective 4. Also cited were Policies 4.1 and 4.8 of the London Plan and paragraph 152 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The pub was also locally listed by the council and was the subject of an Article 4 Direction prohibiting conversion from its current Class A4 (public house) usage to A1 (shops), A2 (financial and professional services), or A3 (restaurants and cafes).

With the options for the site restricted to housing a pub or remaining empty, The Catford Bridge Tavern reopened on 7 December 2012 with the national retailer retaining the leasehold. They currently employ 18 people.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY HUB

As outlined above, the modern pub can be oriented towards fine-dining, family entertainment, sports viewing, micro-brewing and many other fields. This multi-faceted existence can make it difficult to ascertain its function as a community hub. What are the key factors that result in a pub's central position in the social fabric of its community?

Community cohesion

One of the recurring responses to the closure of the Catford Bridge Tavern was its clientele bemoaning the loss of their (in many cases relatively new) circle of friends. Despite having only been open for eight months, a powerful sense of belonging to a distinct community unit had been fostered by the pub, as evidenced by the strength of the support group mustered in the face of closure. The modern city is often seen as an alienating environment, lacking social interaction, and enterprises that encourage a sense of community should be encouraged. An IPPR poll conducted in 2012 found that 23% of pub goers had made new friends in their local pub in the previous six months and 19% considered that they had mixed with people "they would not normally mix with."[28]

Pubs frequently have rooms for hire for local groups and charities to hold meetings in, and these rooms are often the only example of such spaces in a community. Public events for local causes are also often hosted by pubs and Punch Taverns recently estimated that their pubs raise an average of £3,369 a year for charity.[29]

Sociable drinking model

The social impact of the community-minded pub also extends beyond its walls: a pub where young people can congregate safely as part of a community impacts on incidences of anti-social drinking in public places. The Government's Champion for Active Safer Communities, Baroness Newlove, has said that she wants to see "responsible drinking, so we can rid our streets of drunken violence and intimidation. We need direct, effective action on the ground to make a difference, and make 'sociable drinking' the acceptable norm."[30] Sociable drinking is at the heart of the pub-as-community-hub concept.

Economic impact

In 2008 the pub industry nationwide was estimated to provide around 350,000 full- and part-time jobs[31], or an average of six people per establishment. Pubs with kitchens frequently employ three

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28. Muir p. 32
29. Muir p. 37
30. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-1-million-fund-to-give-local-communities-the-tools-to-tackle-binge-and-under-age-drinking
31. Muir p. 29

times that number. In addition to providing local employment, pubs can themselves act as "anchor" businesses, drawing retail units into an area. On a wider scale, real ale pubs support local and regional breweries to a far greater extent than supermarket trade, with regional breweries selling 76% of their products to pubs.[32]

Public services

In the absence of a local Post Office, library or other amenity, rural pubs often step into the breach. Indeed the Pub is the Hub organisation was set up specifically to assist rural pubs in meeting community needs. City pubs have followed suit to a certain extent with book swaps and by joining the Useyourlocal parcel-to-pub scheme. This allows locals to collect parcels from their pub if they're not at home, rather than having to make the journey to a collection centre.

Cultural value

As any owner who has considered changing the pub's established name will have discovered, a pub can be as much a historical artefact as a thriving business. Name changes are often seen as a betrayal of cultural heritage, and the buildings, furniture and fixtures can provide a link back through centuries of community life. Old staging-posts are commemorated in the large number of bus stops named for nearby pubs, and even entire London districts (Angel, Manor House) take their name from inns. Pubs are often local landmarks and can impart a very real sense of belonging to an area.

Clearly a community that in part defines itself by proximity to one pub will be adversely affected by that pub's closure, economically, socially and culturally, and there are many such communities in London. But alongside this are urban areas served by several pubs and bars, and even here, where the concept of the single local pub doesn't apply, the sense of community cohesion provided by these establishments is very strong: Crystal Palace in South East London has at its heart a triangle of streets with a high density of retail and hospitality outlets. For the purposes of this survey, all establishments with a separate drinks area, whether pubs, bars or restaurants, were listed, and local residents were asked which they frequented and why.

The close proximity of a range of different establishments is reflected in the fact that 64% of respondents visited different pubs depending on the occasion. Only 25% of those asked considered themselves to have a "local".
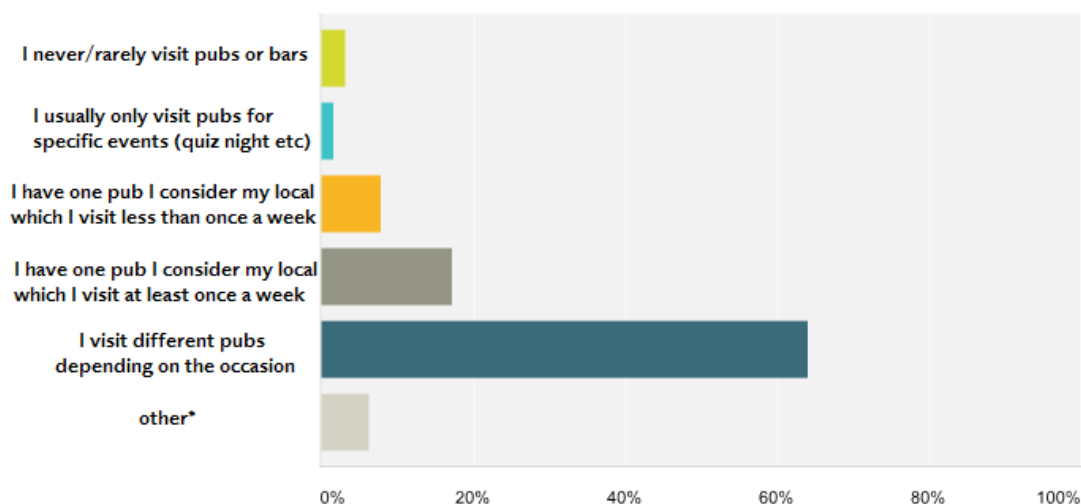
*the majority of respondents in the "other" category regularly visited several different pubs, not all of them in the Crystal Palace area.

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32. Muir p. 30

When asked which establishment they would be most likely to visit purely for a drink, the largest single group (44%) opted for a real ale pub noted for its beer festival and live music. The second most popular pub in the survey also serves a range of ales and regional ciders. The two key factors were the quality of the drinks served and the atmosphere of the pub, with the sense of being a recognised member of the community contributing strongly to the latter:

> *"Landlord recognises me! Other places can be friendly or not friendly - but Rick is the only person who greets me like I'm a regular, even if I haven't been for weeks. I like the range of beers too, but actually the welcome is the biggest reason."*

This is supported by the fact that the top four categories in deciding on a place to visit were the drinks served, the atmosphere, the friendliness of the staff and the friendliness of the clientele.

When asked about the potential impact of losing a pub, a third of respondents said they would regret it, but could easily go to another pub nearby, in line with three quarters of those taking the survey considering themselves not to have one local. Yet undermining this "local-less" trend, more than half of all respondents felt that losing a pub would have an adverse affect both on community cohesion and their own individual social interaction. More than 10% said they would lose access to local services.

Indeed the overwhelming number of comments in the survey were related to how well pubs knitted the community together:

> *"Pubs are a long-standing part of British culture and its social life and when they close, a little bit of the life of an area vanishes."*

> *"Pubs are one of the last places where a community of all ages and backgrounds can gather and connect. The Gastro-Wine Bar limits ages to the 20-30 something professionals."*

> *"Having discovered a great local pub I see the importance pubs have to a community. A place for friends to meet or go for a peaceful drink."*

> *"Pubs in Crystal Palace are the life blood that keep the community together and supported."*

Even in an area with a wide choice of drinking establishments, the notion of the pub as community hub, in social if not economic terms, is undiluted. It was this strength of community feeling that led the regulars of one pub in Carshalton to go to extraordinary lengths to ensure their local remained open:

CASE: THE HOPE, CARSHALTON

With buildings dating back to 1850, a pub has occupied the site since 1870.

By the late 1990s the pub was underused and served a limited range of lager. Having ceased trading for eight months, it was eventually reopened by a holding company on behalf of Punch Taverns as a means of keeping it from falling into disrepair, trading at a low level until someone new could take the lease.

The staff identified a gap in the market in Carshalton for a real ale specialist pub. The holding company however were not keen, as real ale represents more work than keg beers and lagers. Supplies from the holding company were erratic, but word of mouth built up trade and the business was growing when it was discovered that an enquiry had been registered with the council concerning planning for permission

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for conversion to flats and a restaurant: Punch Taverns' sizeable debt meant they were keen to sell the property and had opened negotiations with the people submitting the planning enquiry.

The staff and regulars of the pub came up with the idea of buying the pub themselves and a deal was struck whereby if they could come up with the required £75,000, Punch would be happy to offer them the lease, rather than face the uncertainty of a planning application. The £75,000 was duly raised by the pub staff and clientele and in May 2010 the newly formed company entered into a 20 year lease from Punch Taverns free of tie. The terms of the lease mean they are not obliged to buy any stock from Punch. In total the cost of taking over the pub was nearer £108,000, taking into account expenditure such as stock, security deposits, VAT, legal fees etc. The pub has since established a niche for itself in the local economy as a real ale specialist with no music, no TV and no quiz nights.

Punch Taverns originally agreed a sale price but after five months there was a change of personnel at Punch and the pub was informed that they wanted to raise the price by 40%. With a rent review due in five years, The Hope has the intention of owning their own freehold by 2015. The investors currently number 32 and each has a 5p dividend in every pound for the first two years.

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

The Community Right to Bid was introduced in September 2012 and offers communities the chance to bid to buy local assets such as pubs or libraries, should they be put up for sale. In order for the Right to Bid to apply, the resource must be on the list of 'assets of community value'. When an asset is put on the market, the community then has six months to prepare a bid.[33]

It is onto this register of assets of community value that campaigners in Battersea are hoping retrospectively to put their pub, which was forced to close last year:

CASE: THE CASTLE, BATTERSEA

Originally built in the 17th Century, the current building was designed by William Ingram, Son and Archer in 1964 and opened in 1965. The pub is located in the Battersea Square Conservation Area.

The property was bought in August 2011 by developers Languard Investments, who have bought and redeveloped a number of pubs in Wandsworth, and a planning application was submitted in February 2012. The application was for the demolition of the site and the construction of a five-storey residential building with no pub. This was withdrawn by Languard before making further applications in July and August of that year. These applications covered the demolition of the existing site and the construction of a five-storey building with a new pub on the ground floor.

A Defend The Castle campaign group was set up and many objections were made on a number of points by local residents, the Assembly Member and the local MP - one of the key objections being that The Castle was regarded as a community hub. As a vibrant, viable business with a large garden (in an area offering limited outside space), the pub was a focal point for community activities and the MP Jane Ellison stated that "had The Castle not been sold before [the Localism Bill] came into effect, I would have sought to list it as a community asset".

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33. http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/community-right-to-bid/

In September 2012 the applications were rejected and in October further applications were put forward by Languard Investments for a smaller building with a pub on the ground floor. Wandsworth Council were not minded at this time to include pubs on their list of community assets, for which the Assets of Community Value Regulations (England) 2012 made provision, and in December the new applications were conditionally approved. The pub ceased trading on 31 December 2012.

The local campaign remained active and in early 2013 a petition was organised and a submission to Wandsworth Council was made in an attempt to have the pub registered as an Asset of Community Value. Wandsworth Council are due to decide on the listing on 21 March.

Several of London's borough councils have taken a proactive approach to protecting local pubs.

Lewisham Council adopted its Core Strategy document in June 2011, which advocates growing the local economy through "protecting and enhancing…providers of sustainable local shopping facilities and services to continue to support basic community needs."[34] It was this policy (Core Strategic Objective 4), alongside the London Plan, which was quoted in their refusal of planning permission for The Catford Bridge Tavern.

Islington Council submitted their Development Management Policies document to the Planning Inspectorate in August 2012. In it they state that:

The council supports the retention of Public Houses, and opposes their redevelopment, demolition and Change of Use.

Applications for the Change of Use, redevelopment and/or demolition of a Public House
must demonstrate that:

    i. the Public House has been vacant for a continuous period of 2 years or more and continuous marketing evidence has been provided for the vacant 2 year period to demonstrate there is no realistic prospect of the unit being used as a Public House in the foreseeable future;

    ii. the proposed alternative use will not detrimentally affect the vitality of the area and the character of the street scene;

    iii. the proposal does not constitute the loss of a service of particular value to the local community; and

    iv. significant features of historic or character value are retained.[35]

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea submitted two draft policies specific to pubs for examination in January 2013. These seek to resist the loss of pubs as well as protecting character and usage. The two draft policies state that:

The Council will resist the loss of Public Houses and other Drinking Establishments (Class A4) throughout the Borough; and Restaurants and Cafes (Class A3) and Financial and Professional Services (Class A2) outside of Higher Order Town Centres.

The Council will resist the change of use of any building where the current use contributes to the

34.   www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/planning/policy/Documents/CoreStrategyAdoptedVersion.pdf

35.   www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Planning-and-building-control/Publicity/Public-consultation/2012-2013/ (2012-10-03)-Development-Management-Policies-Submission.pdf p. 79

character and significance of the surrounding area, and to its sense of place.[36]

Further afield, another draft policy was submitted in December by Cambridge City Council. This document sought to permit redevelopment only where:

(a) The pub has been marketed for 12 months as a public house free of tie and restrictive covenant and for alternative local commercial or community facility, at a price agreed with the Council following an independent professional valuation (paid for by the developer) and there has been no interest in either the free- or lease-hold either as a public house, restaurant or other use falling within the 'A' use classes or as a community facility falling within 'D1' use class; and

(b) All reasonable efforts have been made to preserve the facility (including all diversification options explored – and evidence supplied to illustrate this) but it has been proven that it would not be economically viable to retain the building or site for its existing or any other 'A' or 'D1' class use; and

(c) It has been otherwise demonstrated that the local community no longer needs the public house or any alternative 'A' or 'D1' class use and its loss would not damage the availability of local commercial or community facilities that provide for day-to-day needs in the local area.[37]

This draft policy has come under criticism from the British Beer and Pub Association, as it could result in the freeholder being forced to maintain an empty property for months. The BBPA also maintain that it goes against the more flexible approach to planning embodied by the National Planning Policy Framework. Cambridge City Council have however defended the policy as "providing protection to pubs being important community facilities while ensuring that redevelopment or change of use is possible subject to a set of criteria being met"[38.]

In addition to the planning policy of the boroughs, the London Plan specifies that "development proposals should protect and enhance facilities and services that meet the needs of particular groups and communities. Proposals involving loss of these facilities without adequate justification or provision for replacement should be resisted."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The protection of London's pub heritage is not just a question of historical preservation: the best pubs are vital, vibrant centres for their communities. It is up to pub managers and borough councils to work together to ensure that these community hubs continue to serve their local areas.

1. Across London there are too few planning policies which adopt a robust stance in support of existing pubs, an omission which is contributing to the demise of the local. Planning policies which set out a clear inclination to retain pubs should be adopted London-wide.

2. In addition to this, councils should apply stringent criteria when considering change of use or redevelopment:

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36. http://uk.sitestat.com/rbkc/rbkc/s?idoc&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=http://uk.sitestat.com/rbkc/rbkc/s?idoc&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=http://uk.sitestat.com/rbkc/rbkc/s?idoc&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planningan-dconservation/planningpolicy/idoc.ashx?docid=a2d63cb4-f9de-4f57-a15a-74ad279a1a1c&version=-1

37. www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/www.cambridge.gov.uk/files/docs/protection-of-public-houses-ippg.pdf

38. www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/General-News/BBPA-questions-legality-of-Cambridge-City-Council-plans-to-protect-pubs

- Have all reasonable efforts have been made to preserve the facility?
- Will the proposed alternative use affect the character of the neighbourhood?
- Has it been demonstrated that the local community no longer needs the pub?
- Are significant historical or cultural features threatened?

3. The London Plan policy 3.1B should be amended to encourage all borough councils to implement these stricter criteria in order to protect the high street and local communities.

4. Borough councils should adopt a proactive approach to limiting the number of high street shops selling alcohol. In consultation with local residents and businesses, councils can implement a saturation zone licensing policy, whereby any application for a new licence within the zone (typically seen as saturated with existing licensed premises) can be rejected on receipt of reasonable representations from interested parties. The onus would be on the applicant to prove that their business would not contribute to the "cumulative impact" of multiple licensed premises leading to anti-social behaviour in the vicinity. With a shift of emphasis away from cheap off-licence alcohol, these saturation zones could embrace the sociable drinking model of the community pub.

5. Publicans should identify and exploit public service niches in their community in addition to the traditional hospitality offered by the trade. By establishing themselves not only as cultural and social lynchpins, but also as service providers (parcel collection, book swaps), local pubs are better situated to gain Asset of Community Value status. Borough councils in turn need to publicise the opportunity for pubs to apply for ACV status.

6. Further consideration needs to be given to the proposed minimum alcohol unit price. In addition to the potential health benefits,[39] the end of loss leader alcohol retailing in supermarkets would give pubs a more level playing field to instil the sociable drinking model in their local communities.

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Acknowledgments

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39. www.addictionjournal.org/press-releases/drop-in-alcohol-related-deaths-by-nearly-a-third-follows-minimum-alcohol-price-i

FEEDBACK
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