

**Walworth Society Objection to Planning Application 21/AP/3524 for The Beehive Public House (62 Carter Street SE17 3EW) and a proposed change of use of the ground floor from its current use as a pub to residential accommodation.**

The Walworth Society objects to this application.

1. We note that The Beehive is identified in the Southwark Council Article 4 directions in relation to public houses and that there are restrictions on change of use, demolition or alteration. In this case change of use is proposed of the ground floor from a public house to residential use. The public house article 4 consultation report from August 2017 states that “Public houses play an important role in the community and have unique historic characteristics which should be recognised as key social, cultural and heritage assets” and notes further that “Over the last ten years 79 public houses in the borough have closed down and 54 of these have subsequently been lost to demolition or change of use”. The report goes on to state that the impacts of the loss of a public house include:

- the loss of local community hubs which support social and community cohesion
- contributing to a sense of diminishing local character and distinctiveness
- that pubs are frequently valuable heritage assets offering significant historic value.

We strongly asset that the Beehive is a valuable heritage asset as a building (sitting as it does within the Sutherland Square Conservation Area), that the Beehive PH serves to support social and community cohesion and that its loss would contribute to a sense of diminishing local character and distinctiveness.

In the Schedule of pubs subject to the proposed Article 4 Direction the Beehive is specifically identified as being in a Conservation Area, as having an ACV and having characteristics that make it significant to the local community.

2. Planning Policy – Support for the retention of public houses. The relevant saved policies relating to change of use or demolition of public houses in the Southwark Plan are policy 1.7 (development within town and local centres), policy 1.10 (services outside the town and local centres), policy 3.15 (conservation of the historic environment), policy 3.16 (conservation areas).

Planning policy is guided by saved Southwark Plan policies and the significant weight that should now be given to the New Southwark Plan which is scheduled for adoption early in 2022. The NSP states that pubs are important to Southwark for reasons which include:

- Pubs make a strong contribution to the historic character and social fabric of an area, particularly through their architectural features and historical and cultural connections.
- Pubs also make a strong contribution to Southwark’s vibrant and diverse night-time economy.
- Pubs provide a positive economic role in contributing to the vibrancy and vitality of shopping areas.
- Pubs that have been designated as Assets of Community Value are recognised by local residents and the council as having an important place and role within our communities.

The Beehive is important to the first, second and fourth of these criteria.

Policy 41 of the NSP states that:

- Pubs must be protected from development resulting in a change of use or loss of the pub.
- In exceptional circumstances, development proposals resulting in the loss of a pub will only be permitted where there is no market demand for the pub use. This needs to be demonstrated by a marketing exercise for two years, immediately prior to any planning application, for both its existing condition and as an opportunity for improved pub use at market rates.
- The registration or nomination of a pub as an Asset of Community Value will be treated as a significant material consideration.

In relation to the demand for the pub, the Design and Access statement accompanying this application does not comment about the overall/longer-term viability of the Beehive as a business. It appears solely to rely on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to an assertion, unsupported and unsubstantiated by any marketing/research data (as required by Policy 41), that the Beehive is unable to re-open.

As well as the lack of research into the viability of the Beehive as a business, we assert that this statement is incorrect and that most of the hospitality venues in Walworth have now re-opened. This is the case in West Walworth in relation to the Manor of Walworth, the Tankard PH, the Safestay hostel bar, Pineapple PH (by Draper House), the Canterbury Arms (Maddock Way) and the tap room at the Orbit Brewery – all of which are now open. Indeed, more widely across Walworth and the Elephant & Castle other venues are now opening as bars. In West Walworth, with the exception of the Robert Peel PH which closed for reasons not related to economic viability, almost all of the public houses have now re-opened with the exception of the Beehive.

Rather than there being a history of decline and loss of viability as a business, the owners of the Beehive have latterly sought to emphasise the strength of the business. We note that on Rightmove (<https://www.rightmove.co.uk/commercial-property-for-sale/property-55420434.html>), a leasehold for the property has recently been offered and has been described (presumably in agreement with the owners) as being “ATTRACTIVE AND SUBSTANTIAL 19th CENTURY INN OFFERED ON A NEW 10 YEAR PRIVATE 'FREE OF TIE' LEASE, LOCATED IN THE HIGHLY DESIRABLE AND AFFLUENT SOUTH EAST LONDON DISTRICT OF WALWORTH”

Other assertions about the viability and potential of the business in these particulars include:

- Impressive and well positioned property situated in the highly desirable prime location of Walworth.
- Advised turnover for YE July 2017 circa £450,000 (incl. VAT). Current sales consistent with 2017. We would quite easily expect a fully focussed and fully committed operator to achieve a turnover well in excess of £600,000 (incl. VAT).
- Immense potential for catering/events orientated operators.
- The inn draws an excellent level of local trade from Walworth itself which is further enhanced by its first-class reputation for top quality beers and an excellent food offering that attracts trade from a desirable clientele emanating from the nearby surrounding towns and larger catchment areas that culminate in providing a continuous and consistent flow of repeat trade and is also well serviced by local schools, shops and amenities.
- An enviable place to reside offering an amazing business opportunity.

None of this is compatible with the assertion in the application that this is a business that cannot trade successfully.

3. The Beehive is currently designated as an Asset of Community Value. We note the significance of an Asset of Community Value (ACV) designation in NSP Policy P41. The Walworth Society originally made an application for the Beehive to be considered as an ACV in 2015 and the Beehive was placed on the list of successful ACVs on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015 until 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. On 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 the Beehive was successfully listed for a second time as an ACV and this is scheduled to last until 4<sup>th</sup> October 2025. The grounds that the society made for the Beehive to be made an ACV are outlined below and chime extremely strongly with the rationale for the Article 4 direction protecting pubs and Policy P41 of the NSP.

The grounds for its significance (that were set out in the successful ACV application) are:

In terms of its **uses**, the Beehive is extremely important to the life and soul of West Walworth and the wider Walworth area in general combining as it does:

- The Beehive is a focus for community life in West Walworth. People feel safe there and are happy to go there alone; it has a friendly feel with a mix of drink and high-quality food.
- People like the fact that it combines an historic setting with a pleasant atmosphere.
- This sense of coming together is also associated with its location at the crossroads of a number of destinations and routes across West Walworth. Again, its success and value are linked to its capacity to be a central location that people are naturally drawn to to meet and socialise.
- It is an important pub and social space in an area that has lost so many other pubs in recent years.
- The Beehive is important in an area that is principally residential in nature and has a shortage of focal points for its social and communal life.
- It is a community hub which welcomes people from diverse backgrounds.
- It is a focal point for the local area and animates the public realm in both summer and winter when it is busy and full of people enjoying themselves.
- In essence the Beehive is the community heart of the surrounding area. Although there are other pubs in West Walworth, there are none close to the Beehive and the Beehive is situated amongst extremely dense residential housing which is largely made up of Council Estates.
- It is a place that is sufficiently friendly and relaxed that people can form friendships with other people who go there.
- The pub plays an important role for local organisations. Again, in an area where venues are few on the ground, the Beehive offers an appropriate semi-formal character which is appropriate for organisations to make use of for meetings, other gatherings and social events associated with their businesses.
- The Beehive has a good layout as a building which allows for flexible uses whether people are coming for a drink singly or as a group. This is useful in an area where people do not necessarily have much space where they live as is the case in West Walworth. Newington ward (which the Beehive sits in) has extremely high residential densities (per hectare) that are significantly above the Southwark and London averages.
- There is a significant contrast between the Beehive and other Walworth pubs with the Beehive having a more intimate atmosphere and meeting a local need that no other venue does across the Walworth area.

It is **architecturally and historically significant** owing to:

- The land around the current pub was originally market gardens. Some of Walworth's Gardens were pleasure grounds for local public use and that of visitors from the centre of the city eg Beehive Tea Gardens and Montpelier Tavern and Tea Gardens. The presence of a pub in this area goes back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
- The history of cricket owes a significant debt to the area as the Montpelier Cricket Club, one of the strongest clubs in South London in the early 19th Century used the Beehive Grounds until new building encroached to such a degree that the acquisition of these grounds left the Montpelier Club without premises. Land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall at Kennington Oval was then found for the purposes of building a new cricket ground and a cornerstone of English cricket was born in terms of the Oval Cricket ground and the Surrey County Cricket Club.
- The pub remained intact through the almost total redevelopment of the area after the Second World War and the creation of the Penrose Estate from the remnants of Carter Street.

4. We continue to maintain that the Heritage Statement that accompanies this application (and is part of the Design and Access) statement is so slight that it does not in fact represent a Heritage Statement and that the application should not be considered valid. There has been no change of content between the original Design and Access Statement that was submitted with the application and the revised document. No consideration (/additional consideration) has been given in the application to the issue of heritage.

The society could not object more strongly to this application and believes that this is an opportunistic application seeking to overcome the strong desire that Southwark Council has to protect the remaining pubs in the borough and the desire of local people for the Beehive to be retained at the heart of our community. We believe that no case has been made for the long-term lack of viability of the pub; in fact, the applicants have until recently been asserting the potential of the pub as a business. We believe that the case that has been made in the two successful Asset of Community Value applications and listings underscores the significance of this pub to the community in West Walworth and that its loss would be a significant blow to the cohesion and wellbeing of an area that is already poorly served by community amenities.