

Augustus John, Fordingbridge, Hampshire

Comments from Nominators to Request for Review of Listing as Asset of Community Value by Simply Planning on behalf of New River Trustee 7 Limited and New River Trustee 8 Limited

The submission from the owners clearly reiterates that the current use is likely to continue and that the owners intend the pub business to continue in the manner of a successful business. It also accepts that pubs are capable of being Assets of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011 (The Act).

The fact that Peter Simpson, a member of CAMRA, lives in Lymington does not consider the reason he is involved as lead nominator. The definition of a local person under the The Act is a person eligible to vote in the Local Authority or a neighbouring Local Authority. The Local Authority of New Forest District Council includes both Fordingbridge and Lymington.

Despite the pub being an hour drive from Lymington it has been patronised on at least five occasions in the last few months by Mr. Simpson (a local person under The Act), primarily because the pub offers community activities which further his social wellbeing and he feels part of the local community of customers.

These activities include providing quality meals from local producers (including Loosehanger Cheeses) with a high standard of value, creativity and presentation, an artist's wall which was used for the entirety of January 2016 to display his artwork, a quiz night with questions to his interest, live music from local artists not heard elsewhere and the novelty of silent movies starring Charlie Chaplin which to his knowledge are not shown in any other pub.

It is accepted that there is a Campaign by CAMRA to nominate pubs that are considered under threat. It is not the primary purpose to apply for listing nomination just because there has been a change of ownership. All pubs which have large land area which may be targeted for development or conversion into supermarkets are considered under threat due to Permitted Development Rights which only an ACV listing can currently prevent.

The Augustus John was by chance found to have been disposed of by Marstons (a Pubco) as, it is understood, part of a package of over 200 pubs considered surplus to requirements and not fitting their current business model.

The manner in which the current licensees have successfully brought the Augustus John up to a high standard as a Community Pub is also fully deserving of recognition as an Asset of Community Value.

By reference to points extracted from Appendix A:

The décor and furnishing is of an attractive and homely nature that is clearly a source of social wellbeing to the local community. Customers may sit and read in comfortable armchairs and have the opportunity to watch classic films on advertised nights. The pub is a long walk from the centre of Fordingbridge and the large car park enables local walkers to safely leave their cars off the main highway and take exercise on routes supported by maps provided by the pub.

The horticultural displays reflect the attractive, internal ambiance of the pub and are made possible by the landlord being a former horticulturalist. It is agreed it is good business practice but more importantly the efforts made further the wellbeing of the customers.

The date of the ACV application is the relevant date for the purpose of the review. The Car Boot and other sales have since been discontinued and been replaced by early opening and provision of breakfasts for walkers who can now park in the car park. Photographic evidence is enclosed of a Car Boot Sale which has previously taken place. It is not proposed to take photos of walkers attending early on a Saturday morning as this is considered intrusive.

The classic car and motorcycle visitors may not always be from the local community but their vehicles create an attraction and talking point for the local customers and therefore contribute to the social wellbeing of the local community.

The artist's wall and the toys and games have been accepted as furthering social wellbeing by the owners. These items are part of the overall method in which the pub fulfils the requirements of a community pub and cannot be reasonably isolated from the whole environment which sets this particular pub apart from others in the location.

It is not clear what evidence the owners expect to see to support take-away food being made available from the pub to the local community. Customers would not normally travel from outside the local community or the food would be cold. The facility furthers the social wellbeing of the local community.

The Act has no requirement for comparison to the facilities of other premises. The matter of concern is whether the sole asset being nominated fulfils the purpose of social wellbeing to the local community. The events including themed food nights, quizzes and live music from local performers all contribute to the social wellbeing of the local community. The local performers themselves also obtain social wellbeing by being given the opportunity to perform in a friendly, well run and respectable environment.

The patronage by the local groups was confirmed by talking to the local customers. The ambiance and welcome of the Augustus John makes the pub the chosen venue over others in the locality.

The locality to other attractions is relevant as the pub provides parking and breakfast facilities which enhance the experience of both local people and visitors and therefore further their social wellbeing.

In response to the comment recorded as stated by Councillor Ann Sevier, there is insufficient awareness of the threat to pubs by the general public. It is generally not until sale and change of use have actually taken place, often with negotiations out of the public eye, that the public are aware of a problem and then it is invariably and intentionally too late for the pub to be saved.

It must be made clear that it is not the sole intention of The Act to protect threatened pubs. The Act also provides a welcome method of promoting and rewarding pubs which are of benefit to and loved by the local community. A pub which has been listed as an Asset of Community Value by the local people promotes it as a place the community want to be and can increase the trade of that pub.

The Act does not concisely define a Community Pub. The Campaign for Real Ale has now (31 March 2016) put forward a definition as:-

“A licensed hub which encourages social interactions and puts something back into the communities it serves”. By “encourage social interactions” we mean discussions and conversation between customers, whether those customers be family, friends, acquaintances or strangers. By

“put something back” we mean to offer some facility or undertake some action which is of benefit to a community, without any motivation based on direct financial benefit to the pub.

By “community” we do not necessarily mean a group of people living in a specific geographical location. A community is a group of individuals with something in common: neighbourhood of residence, workplace, hobbies and mutual interest are a few obvious and relevant examples. The members of a community have some interest in common: something which enables them to identify, one with another. Each person is likely to belong to many different communities, some important, some unimportant, some with a strong sense of identity, some with very little. People establish personal identities in relation to the communities to which they feel they belong. Membership of a community often implies some responsibility for other members. Communities have a capacity for mutual care and support in distress or when problems arise, and the way that communities respond to the threatened loss of their pub is an example of this.

In conclusion the Augustus John fulfils all the requirements of an Asset of Community Value and no alteration to this status is justified.

Deric Payne – Chairman and Pubs Preservation Officer – South Hampshire CAMRA
Peter Simpson – CAMRA Member and Customer of the Augustus John

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