

3/21/0115/FUL: The Two Brewers, 30-32 Port Vale

Change of use. Conversion of public house to create 1 one-bedroom and 1 two-bedroom dwelling

1. The above property falls within the boundary of the Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan. Subject to East Herts District Council approval, the Plan will go forward for public referendum on the 6 May.
2. The Two Brewers Pub is included on a list of community facilities in Appendix E of the Neighbourhood Plan. The appendix is linked to Neighbourhood Plan Policy HBC1: Enhanced Community Facilities. Criterion I of this Policy says: *'Existing community facilities, as listed in Appendix E, should be retained and protected. Loss of facilities will only be acceptable where alternative provision is of a scale and standard equivalent to, or superior to, the existing facilities'*.
3. The loss of any community facility in the Plan Area is very regrettable and should be strongly discouraged. As a change of use would result in the loss of this community facility, with no alternative provision proposed, the submission of a Neighbourhood Plan objection to this planning application is required. In this specific instance, however, it's relevant to note that, in common with much of the hospitality industry, The Two Brewers has been significantly impacted by the events of the last 12 months, with attendant uncertainty about the reliability of commercial income in the short to medium economic outlook.
4. It's noted that the Design and Access Statement states that the pub has *'suffered a decline in trade over many years'*; that it is *'running at a loss'*, and that *'no firm interest'* was received when the pub was marketed. Paragraph 4.38 of the Neighbourhood Plan says: *'unless they are no longer needed, community facilities should be protected from development'*. If evidence demonstrates that these premises are unsustainable as a commercial enterprise, and if no offers are forthcoming for them to be utilised as a community facility, it would be preferable for the building to be converted to residential use rather than risk it being unused or becoming derelict.
5. The absence of car parking provision in the proposal is a concern. It's recognised that this is because of the limitations of the site but no additional parking pressures should be put on local roads, particularly given existing pressures on Port Vale and surrounding roads, and the close proximity of the building to Mill Mead School.
6. Paragraph 4.65 of the Neighbourhood Plan says: *'it's essential that development proposals include strategies to promote walking and cycling'*. Criterion Ic) in Neighbourhood Plan Policy HBH3: Landscape Design says: *'sufficient, secure, covered cycle parking (should be incorporated) to encourage active travel'*. If change of use is approved, the provision of sufficient, secure covered cycle parking (in the courtyard to the rear of the property) should be included as a condition of planning permission.