

Our Ref: JJK/123
Your Ref: 190040

2nd October 2019

J Sturgess Esq.
Caldecott Group
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Dear James

Re: The Gardeners Arms, 48 Surley Row, Emmer Green, Reading, RG4 8NA

I understand the Caseworker who is looking after this application has asked for clarification regarding the loss of the pub and the catchment areas.

This is often problematic because there is no clear guidance as to what constitutes a catchment area or a "reasonable walking distance" and it was for that reason that I took a radius from The Gardeners of a little over 1km. I have looked at the public comments on the LPA's web-site and there is one comment that is in favour of retaining the pub and that is from a person whose address appears to be approximately 1300m from The Gardeners. Bearing that in mind and setting it in the context of The Gardeners being in a suburban setting where one's social circle tends to be somewhat more dispersed than in a small village, I still consider the following to be relevant:

The White Horse, Kidmore End – 570m
The Black Horse, Kidmore End – 590m
The Caversham Rose, Caversham – 950m
The Prince Of Wales, Caversham – 1160m
The Baron Cadogan, Caversham – 1220m
The Clifton Arms, Caversham – 1320m
The Fox and Hounds, Caversham – 1420m

Clearly, as the distance increases the value in providing suitable alternative provision decreases and one must at all times be objective in assessing whether those pubs do actually provide a genuine alternative. Of the above pubs the ones that in my opinion

are least comparable are The Caversham Rose, The Baron Cadogan and The Fox and Hounds:

The Caversham Rose underwent a major refurbishment in 2017 and has been taken upmarket but even before then, as an Ember Inn, it was a mid-market food-led destination pub which provided a very different offering to that of The Gardeners.

As a J D Wetherspoon pub *The Baron Cadogan* operated under a very different business model to that of The Gardeners even though as a former “Meet and Eat” The Gardeners was a value-led operation. The difference between the two was essentially down to the focus of the Wetherspoons operation being on price – certain beers (although not all) are generally circa £1.00 per pint cheaper than elsewhere and main courses are also typically a pound or two cheaper - and the lack of background music, televised sport and pub games. This can lead to Wetherspoons pubs sometimes being somewhat characterless but they invariably occupy High Street locations which make them high volume operations. The Baron Cadogan has been sold recently to a local operator but the essential trading style has remained unaltered.

The Fox and Hounds also operates under a different business model to The Gardeners. It places a strong emphasis on real ale and craft beers and in 2015 and 2016 won Pub of The Year from the local branch of CAMRA. It does offer the same facilities one would expect of a community pub - darts, pool, quiz nights, live sport and music – but, dare I say it, its clientele is a little trendier. Food is based around a pizza menu and “events” are often drinks related, eg beer launches, beer festivals, a recent rum and reggae weekend. It is also the furthest away of the pubs that I have considered and consequently is less relevant.

Of the remaining pubs I think there is a lot of cross-over:

The White Horse targets a very similar clientele to The Gardeners, has a very similar offer and, frankly, is a better-appointed pub in a more advantageous location. It is located on the green facing the local shopping parade and is on the main Peppard Road heading north out of the city. The pricing structure is a little more expensive than that at The Gardeners but is still at the value-led end of the market. Drinks are also discounted by 10% when live sport is televised. The menu consists largely of bar meals at a “value” price-point with regular promotions. Those promotions are still as mentioned in my report and are not dissimilar to those that are offered in “Meet and Eat” venues elsewhere. As at The Gardeners televised sport features strongly and live music and karaoke are also regularly put on. The White Horse has a large trade patio rather than a beer garden but as the garden at The Gardeners is subject to licensing restrictions and close monitoring by the police and the local community I do not consider that to be a significant difference.

The Black Horse is on the opposite side of the road to The White Horse and offers a more traditional two-bar environment with separate lounge and public bars. It is a smaller pub than The Gardeners but, like The Gardeners, offers darts, pool, televised live sport, a weekly quiz night and an outside trading space. Unlike The Gardeners it does not offer food, which is unusual in this day and age, and that is

something that both the operator and the owner, Ei Group, may look to remedy. The pub trades as a community pub.

The Prince Of Wales is a little over 1km and away and offers a very similar experience to that at The Gardeners. It is well-appointed and has all of the usual “local-pub” characteristics – darts, pool, live music, televised sport, community events, charity events – and features a well-priced pizza food offering. The garden at The Prince Of Wales is a major selling point and provides extensive open and covered trade areas. The pricing structure is not currently as competitive as at The Gardeners but that is something that could change.

The last pub of those that I consider suitable alternative venues is *The Clifton Arms*. This is a little further away again from The Gardeners and operates as a traditional locals’ pub with darts, pool and televised sport. Without being too harsh it is not as well appointed as the other three pubs but still has a reasonable food offering – bar meals such as roast lunches, gammon and chips etc – and a covered outside seating area. Bar prices are higher than at The Gardeners but food prices are comparable.

Although I understand that the pub has now ceased trading I think it is significant that, hitherto, the customers that left The Gardeners did not appear to have returned despite changes in operator. This suggests that the pubs to which they migrated satisfied their requirements and proved to be suitable alternatives. It is impossible to say which pubs attracted which customers but the offers of The White Horse, The Black Horse and The Prince Of Wales in particular, and to a lesser extent The Clifton Arms, have marked similarities to that of The Gardeners. It is also impossible to say which type of customer left The Gardeners but my analysis of the throughput at 16.6 of my report strongly suggests that customer migration was broad based. It is self-evident that no two pubs can ever be exactly the same but the criterion here is that The Gardeners’ *“function can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility”* and I think, on balance, it can.

I am conscious that my duty in preparing my report, and in writing this letter, is to the planning authority and I continue to remain impartial but it has not escaped my notice that there have been eight public comments about this application and of those only one has been straightforwardly in favour of retaining the pub. I do not want to read too much into that but taken in conjunction with the lack of an ACV nomination for the pub it does seem to suggest that there is a general apathy about the potential loss of the pub.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J J Keane', with a stylized, flowing script.

J J Keane