

Phil Grant  
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Planning Policies Division (A)  
Zone 4/J6  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

12<sup>th</sup> December 2003

Dear Mr Grant

We are writing to welcome the proposal in the Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas to provide explicit protection to public houses in rural areas. Our interest relates to the following policy proposal:

8. *Planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to planning proposals designed to improve the viability, accessibility or community value of existing services and facilities, such as village shops and post offices, rural petrol stations, village halls and rural public houses that play a vital role in sustaining village communities. Planning authorities should support the retention of these local facilities and should set out in development plans the criteria they will apply in considering applications that will result in the loss of vital village services (e.g., from conversion to residential use).*

As a consumer organisation with over 70,000 members we are concerned about the number of pub closures in recent years, particularly in rural areas. The most recent research suggests that up to twenty pubs a month are closing.

Public houses are a key focus for community life. A survey of all adults carried out on behalf of the Campaign for Real Ale earlier this year indicated that 84% of all adults agree that a rural pub is essential to a rural community.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore 81% agreed that a rural pub is as important to a rural community as a rural shop or post office.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Research undertaken by independent polling organisation RSGB on behalf of CAMRA. Interviews held with a representative sample of c.1000 adults in the UK. June 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Public houses are at the heart of many rural communities:

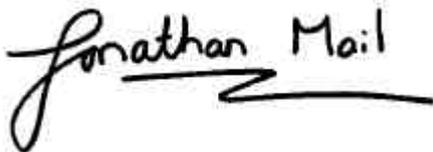
- They provide an informal meeting place for friends and family and contribute to the forming of new social bonds.
- They provide a formal meeting place for community groups and associations.
- They provide a social forum for those without access to a car that could otherwise face social isolation.
- They provide a valuable source of part time employment, providing jobs for new entrants to the workplace.
- They can often provide additional services such as cash back, retail, postal and other valuable services.

We note the finding in the Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside Report that where Local Authorities are resistant to change of use from public houses to residential use this has tempered the property market and aided the retention of viable public houses in rural communities<sup>3</sup>.

The extension of the mandatory rural rate relief scheme to public houses has helped increase the viability of rural public houses.

We urge the Government to press ahead with this important proposal, which will help stem the closure of viable rural public houses. If we can be of any assistance or you require further information please contact us.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Mail". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Jonathan Mail  
Public Affairs Manager

---

<sup>3</sup> Countryside Agency - State of the Countryside Report that where Local Authorities (Countryside Agency, London, 2002)