

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS221)

Department for Communities and Local Government

Written Statement made by: **Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Kris Hopkins)** on 26 Jan 2015.

Community Pubs

Pubs play an important role in our local communities. They provide valuable local hubs that strengthen community relationships and encourage wider social interaction, with each pub also being estimated to contribute £80,000 to the economy annually.

We have demonstrated our continued commitment to community pubs through the introduction of a broad range of financial and wider support including:

- scrapping the beer and alcohol duty escalators,
- cutting beer duty,
- funding business partners to help deliver more community-owned pubs and pubs which provide community-focussed services,
- removing red tape that hindered pubs holding live music,
- doubling small business rate relief, and increasing the temporary business rate discount for pubs with rateable values below £50,000 from £1,000 to £1,500 for 2015-16,
- cutting corporation tax and National Insurance for employers,
- giving pubs greater flexibility over weights and measures, allowing beer and wine to be served in different sizes, and
- giving publicans tied to pub companies new rights under a new statutory Code of Practice.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Communities (Stephen Williams) and I are today announcing that we want to go further than this, and increase protections to prevent the loss of those pubs that provide the most community benefit.

Through the Community Right to Bid, we have invited communities to nominate buildings and land which add most value to the local community, to be listed as Assets of Community Value, giving them a greater stake in the future of those assets. We welcome the fact that people across the country have come together to nominate over 600 pubs, making pubs the most listed type of asset. Listing triggers a moratorium on any sale, enabling local people to develop a bid to buy the pub and ensure its continued contribution to their community. We urge communities to consider which pubs they wish to see protected before they are at risk.

The Government will also be undertaking a post-implementation review of the Localism Act's Right to Bid during 2015, to see how we can further improve and streamline the nomination process in light of its successful implementation. A third of all listed assets have been pubs.

National permitted development rights are an important part of the planning system; providing flexibility, reducing bureaucracy and allowing the best use to be made of existing buildings. However, the passion for community pubs as demonstrated by the significant numbers listed as Assets of Community Value highlights the need to enable local communities to consider planning applications for the change of use of a pub of particular local value.

We therefore plan to bring forward secondary legislation at the earliest opportunity so that in England the listing of a pub as an Asset of Community Value will trigger a removal of the national permitted development rights for the change of use or demolition of those pubs that communities have identified as providing the most community benefit. This provides the right balance between protecting valued community pubs, but avoiding blanket regulation which would lead to more empty and boarded up buildings. Blanket regulation could also have adverse consequences on the asset value of pub buildings, harming the financial viability of the pub industry. This Government recognises the economic, environmental and social benefits of allowing redundant buildings to be converted into productive uses without excessive red tape.

This will mean that in future where a pub is listed as an Asset of Community Value, a planning application will be required for the change of use or demolition of a pub. This then provides an opportunity for local people to comment, and enables the local planning authority to determine the application in accordance with its local plan, any neighbourhood plan, and national policy. The local planning authority may take the listing into account as a material consideration when determining any planning application.

Local and Neighbourhood Plans should be consistent with and reflect the strong support for pubs in the National Planning Policy Framework. This encourages local planning authorities to plan positively to support the sustainability of communities. This includes plans to deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, and to promote strong rural economies through the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, including pubs.

These changes mark the next step in our ongoing support for those pubs that are so very important to local communities. We believe it will provide greater protections for pubs, and give communities a say in their preservation. But the planning system can only do so much: planning rules cannot keep pubs open which are not making money. Our broader strategy of lower taxes, less regulation and a growing economy are the best way to support a thriving and diverse pub sector.