**Comments on planning applications 16/11609/FUL and 16/12193/LBC - ‘The Two Pigs’, Pickwick – change of use from public house to single dwelling**

**A bit of history** ... In 1837, the Spread Eagle(as The Two Pigs was known for most of its life) was put up for sale. In spite of the notice to quit, the Rawlings family: William, his wife Sarah and perhaps their son Mark (from Kelly's Directory of 1848) then perhaps another son Alfred (from Kelly's of 1867) remained in occupation at least until the time of the census in 1871 (and probably much longer). By the time of the 1901 census, we find a James Martin, publican and quarryman, in occupation. He and his wife Mahalath were still there at the time of the 1911 census but by 1915 and through to 1935, Edward John Dyke was the innkeeper (from Kelly's of 1915, 1920, 1923 and 1935). But the history of the pub goes back much further than this ... to the middle of the 18th century. Are we to witness the demise of this local institution on our watch?

**A recent Corsham Town Council Newsletter included the following**: *The Destination Corsham theme of Corsham Town Council’s Strategic Plan is all about tourism and bringing people to Corsham to discover what our beautiful town has to offer, and also to help the local economy if those people then use our shops and businesses.* Interesting then that Corsham Town Council’s ‘consultee response’ on these planning applications (from its Planning Committee meeting on 11th January 2017) was that “no objection be raised*”.*  This ‘strategy’ then, it seems, is going the same way as others, such as maintaining the strategic gap between Corsham and outlying settlements, in that it is completely ignored by the very body that created it.

**Michelle Donelan in the Market Town centres regeneration debate** in the House of Commons on 30th June 2016 said: “*Each time a favourite independent shop or café closes, we lose a small piece of what makes a community our community—it is what sets our town apart. We must march against the generic, bolster independent shops and support the diversity of each of our unique towns. I am a huge supporter of local shops and I will be holding a “shop local” campaign next summer. Other areas have run such an initiative, which is designed to promote some of the fabulous produce and variety in a local area. I will also host a “Made in Wiltshire” event in the House of Commons and I invite the Minister to come along to experience the fine delights that we have available locally”*.

Ms Donelan’s “*supporting the diversity of each of our unique towns*” would, I am sure, not be limited to shops and cafes. There are businesses, such as breweries, and retail outlets, such as pubs, which would be equally deserving of support in her campaign because of their “*fabulous produce and variety*” (great, local ales).

**From Corsham Area Board minutes of the 27th April 2011** meeting we find that “*It was noted that a petition had been received from the community centre in Corsham which had been sent on to Wiltshire Council”.*The Community Centre Association had requested that all the facilities currently available should be reproduced in the new campus and *r*ecurring messages in the ‘Save our Centre’ petition over the potential loss of bar/lounge/social facilities at Corsham Community Centre were (from the Consultation on a Corsham Community Campus report of January 2011) as follows:

1. Over nearly six decades this community centre has been loyally supported and specifically developed to meet the needs of both its members and the community at large, so what is needed is continuity – so much goes on here – why get rid of a good thing?
2. A nice club shame to lose it; a great loss to the community
3. The club atmosphere is crucial – it’s the biggest and best club in Corsham; the community needs this club; it’s the community’s club
4. The bar is a major attraction for a wide range of groups, activities and events - it generates much needed income; keep as it is – we want a bar; without the bar there would be no social functions
5. The Centre serves as a much valued focal point for the community - it’s the community ‘centre’ – we need it; don’t kill the spirit in the community

At the same meeting, we find the following exchanges: “It was proposed that there would be a facility for a bar, darts, snooker and skittles.  It was important for there to be a social meeting area with a licensed bar.  The current community centre has a bar which makes a profit and the users of the centre would like a similar facility in the new campus. *It was made clear by the Chairman of the Area Board that the Council was not prepared to subsidise a bar (*there being a number of licensed premises in the area*) although a licensed catering facility was included in the current proposal*”*.*

**So what happened?** The pleas were ignored and a popular community social facility was consigned to history. And now, with the demise of The Two Pigs, we have the worst of both worlds with the community centre and a popular local pub closed. On a recent episode of Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed* on the subject of the relationship between literature and sociology, Dick Hobbs said: "*There is no factory or workbench to go to, there is no corner pub to go to. Where do I go to find a centre of community? The pub, this cornerstone of working-class social interaction and fiction isn't there any more*".

**In a letter to Wiltshire Council in 2011** objecting to Sainsbury’s proposal to extend its Chippenham supermarket, Corsham Civic Society said the following: *Wiltshire Council wishes to have thriving local businesses. Corsham used to have 2 greengrocers, 2 butchers, a delicatessen, a cheese shop and 2 small supermarkets. There has been a 50% reduction in the number of these businesses.* From the pronouncements in previous paragraphs (in this document), we see that the local MP and Town Council are also, apparently, determined to support local businesses. Yet the same 50% reduction has occurred with our local pubs and clubs **without a word** (other than “no objection”). Still up and running are: The Methuen, The Royal Oak, The Flemish Weaver (after many misfirings), The Three Brewers, The Great Western, The Hare & Hounds, Neston Country Inn and The Harp and Crown. Gone are The White Lion, The Cross Keys (at least for the moment), The Duke of Cumberland, Rudloe Arms (effectively gone for locals), Corsham Community Centre, Rudloe Club bar, The Roebuck and now, The Two Pigs. So eight gone, eight remain – the Civic Society’s 50%. (Actually, Neston Club could also be added to the ‘gone’ list).

**Seven-hundred new homes have been approved in west Corsham** (150 at Pickwick - Redrow, 100 at Copenacre - Bellway, 170 at Bradford Road - Redcliffe, 99 at Rudloe - Hannick & Green Square and 180 at Hawthorn - Framptons) between Pickwick and Rudloe/Hawthorn. Seven-hundred homes will bring what, 1,600 ‘new’ residents (apparently 2.3 people per household is the going rate).  **And what will these new residents want? Facilities, services, openings ... not closings!** (And, by the way and just an aside, where the hell are these 1,600 people coming from? Wiltshire Council’s Planning Consultation response dated 12th November 2015 states: “We can advise of an immediate housing need of 74 households seeking affordable housing in Corsham and the surrounding community area." ... 700 new houses will bring, [at 30%], 210 affordable homes!).

**This appears to be the order of the day** ... more homes, more people, fewer services. Already, everyone (yes everyone!) in the local area does their main shopping elsewhere. The favourite is probably Melksham with its two superstores (ASDA and Sainsbury’s), three supermarkets (Waitrose, Lidl and ALDI), farmers’ superstore (Countrywide) and department store (Leekes). But others use Chippenham (Sainsbury’s, Morrisons, Tesco, Waitrose and with a new Lidl on the way), Trowbridge or Bath. Corsham is, and will further be, a dormitory town with residents working and shopping in the larger, surrounding towns. So why build 700 new homes in west Corsham and effect or sanction the closure of social facilities such as Corsham Community Centre, Rudloe Community Centre bar and now The Two Pigs? As indicated above, the local community needs openings not closings.

**The Two Pigs is or was a unique pub**, not just in Corsham but in north-west Wiltshire, through having no truck with the modern distractions of meals (although a pickled egg in a bag of crisps would provide quite a bit of protein), muzak and machines. It was an unadulterated watering hole. Wiltshire Council’s advice that the change of use application would likely be successful because of the presence of the Hare & Hounds just dozens of yards away, is inappropriate as the Two Pigs is or was a different kind of pub with, generally, a different clientele. As Ms Donelan said ... “*support the diversity” –* don’t let it just drift away with a pitiful “*no objection*”. **Andrew Swift**, the well-known author of such books as *The Lost Pubs of Bath* has said of the Two Pigs: “its loss is indeed to be regretted”.

**I appreciate that the particular situation at The Two Pigs is difficult** with the owner/landlord living above the pub so there is no good solution (other than a sale!). However, if and when future generations research the history of The Spread Eagle/Two Pigs, perhaps at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, what would the archivist say to someone who asks about what the local MP, Councils, Civic Society, community or customers said on the demise of the pub in 2016/17 after 250 years? His answer would have to be … “well it appears they didn’t say anything”. That future researcher might think “well, what a subdued, disheartened, dispirited, demoralized lot they must have been at this time”.

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28th January 2017