

Statement of Community Involvement

Proposal: Removal of Existing Conservatory and Installation of Open-Sided Timber Pergola with Sheet Metal Roof

Site: The Two Poplars, 118 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG41 2NU.

Date: 15/10/2024

1. Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been prepared in support of a planning application for The Two Poplars, located at 118 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG41 2NU. The proposal is to remove the existing old, poorly insulated, and damp conservatory and replace it with a high-quality, open-sided timber pergola with a sheet metal roof. The aim of the proposal is to improve the customer experience while enhancing the appearance and functionality of the outdoor space. This document outlines the efforts made to engage with the local community and relevant stakeholders, as well as the feedback received, in line with national and local planning policies.

2. The Site and Proposal

The Two Poplars is an established public house that has been serving the community for many years. The current conservatory at the rear of the property is in a state of disrepair, suffering from poor insulation and persistent dampness, making it unsuitable for regular use. The proposed replacement is an open-sided timber pergola with a sheet metal roof, which will provide a more attractive and functional outdoor seating area for patrons.

The pergola is designed to improve customer comfort by providing shelter from rain while maintaining an open and airy atmosphere. The proposal aligns with the ongoing efforts to enhance the local hospitality offer while ensuring minimal impact on the surrounding area.

3. Community Engagement Strategy

Recognising the importance of community involvement in the planning process, the applicant has undertaken steps to inform and engage with customers, and relevant stakeholders regarding the proposed changes to the public house. The following methods were used to engage the community:

- **On-site Notices:** Notices were placed within The Two Poplars, clearly outlining the proposal and providing contact details for feedback and queries.
 - **Consultation with Regular Customers:** Regular customers were informed of the plans, and their opinions were sought through informal discussions. Feedback was noted to ensure the proposal would meet the needs of the local customer base.
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4. Summary of Feedback Received

The feedback received from the community and stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive. Key points of feedback included:

- **Improved Customer Experience:** Regular customers welcomed the proposal, noting that the existing conservatory is often too cold and damp to enjoy. They expressed strong support for the creation of an outdoor seating area that would be more comfortable throughout the year.
 - **Positive Impact on Aesthetics:** Several customers commented that the removal of the dilapidated conservatory would improve the overall appearance of the pub. They appreciated the design of the proposed pergola, noting that it would be more in keeping with the character of the area.
 - **Noise and Privacy Concerns:** One customer raised concerns about potential noise from the outdoor seating area during evenings. In response, the applicant has committed to maintaining existing noise management measures and ensuring that the pergola will not significantly increase noise levels. The open-sided design will discourage amplified music or large gatherings that could disturb nearby residents.
 - A public house is classed as a 'community facility' and Local Authorities often seek to retain this type of use. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) further promotes the retention of such uses. However, the sight of a boarded up public house is all too common and there is a clear need for the business to maximise revenue streams and improve the viability of the business. Legislative changes - the "use class" of public houses has changed since 1st September 2020. These changes were enacted by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020. Community involvement for this scheme and type of proposal, demonstrated need and benefit is therefore recognised by national level policy changes. Public Houses were previously in the A4 Use Class category but are now in a 'Sui Generis' category of their own.
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5. Response to Feedback and Design Adjustments

The applicant has carefully considered all feedback and made adjustments to the proposal where appropriate:

- **Aesthetic Considerations:** The proposed pergola has been designed to blend in with the existing architecture of The Two Poplars, using natural timber materials that complement the surrounding environment. The structure will be open-sided to reduce the bulk of the roof and create a visually appealing feature.
 - **Environmentally Conscious Design:** The proposed replacement will be more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly than the existing conservatory, addressing the community's concerns about sustainability and environmental impact.
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6. Conclusion

The applicant is committed to enhancing the facilities at The Two Poplars while ensuring that the character and amenity of the surrounding area are preserved. The removal of the old, poorly insulated, and damp conservatory, and the installation of the open-sided timber pergola, is supported by the local community and reflects the needs the customers.

We believe that this proposal will enhance the social and visual appeal of The Two Poplars and contribute positively to the local area.