

SAVE

THE CHESHAM ARMS

MEDIA RELEASE

10 June 2014

RESIDENTS PREPARE FOR KEY BATTLE IN FIGHT TO SAVE PUB PUBLIC HEARING ON SPLITTING PUB UP BEGINS ON 24TH JUNE, HACKNEY PICTUREHOUSE

Residents are preparing themselves for a key stage of their fight to save the Chesham Arms pub in Hackney. Beginning on 24th June, a Public Inquiry will be held into the division of the property and rental of part of it as a flat, a move the developer made without planning permission, despite warnings from Hackney Council this was required. The hearing is expected to last two days and will take place in Hackney Picturehouse, MareStreet [1].

The Chesham Arms operated in Mehetabel Road for almost 150 years before being bought, and then closed, by a property developer in October 2012 who wants to convert the popular pub into flats [2]. Since then a determined campaign by local people has seen the building listed as Hackney's first Asset of Community Value, a status the group also successfully defended in front of a judge following another challenge by the developer.

The Planning Inquiry is the latest stage – and perhaps the most crucial so far – in the battle to save the pub, and follows complaints by eagle-eyed local residents, who spotted an advertisement for a newly self-contained flat on the upper floor of the pub. Hackney Council had previously warned the owner that dividing the property in this way required planning permission, and when this was ignored took legal steps requiring the developer to stop. It is this Enforcement Notice that is being challenged by the developer in the Inquiry.

The hearing is crucial because the property developer has asked the Planning Inspector to grant planning permission for the creation of the flat. If this were granted, future use of the pub would be under serious threat, as the access to the flat has been created right through the centre of the original pub, destroying the bar and completely dividing the pub in two. Local residents will therefore be asking the Inspector to throw this request out.

The Churchwell Residents' Group, representing householders in the streets around the Chesham Arms, have been allowed a formal role in the Inquiry, alongside the developer and Hackney Council. They have spent months preparing their case, and collecting evidence from other planning decisions all around the country.

Local resident Martyn Williams, who will give evidence at the Planning Inquiry, said

“When we started trying to save our local pub, I can't say I ever expected to be called up before a judge or would need to speak at a Public Inquiry. I hoped the developer would do the decent thing – apply for planning permission for his proposed flats, let local voices be heard and let the Council make a decision.”

Instead, this developer has thrown huge sums of money at lawyers and experts to try and outwit us with all kinds of bizarre legal challenges. So far, good local knowledge and a lot of careful research means we have held our own and won every battle. We are quietly confident we can do it again."

--ENDS--

For further information please contact

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NOTES

[1] The Planning Inquiry will begin at the Picturehouse, Mare Street, Hackney E8 1HE at 10am on Tuesday 24th June 2014. Sitting hours will be until 5pm, and we have been advised the Inquiry is likely to take 2 days. A decision will be given sometime after the actual hearing – this usually takes 4-8 weeks.

Residents and other supporters of the Chesham Arms are expected to hold a demonstration outside the Picturehouse from 9am – further details will be circulated nearer the time.

[2] A brief timeline of the Chesham Arms is given below:

1860s – Chesham Arms is built as a pub when Mehetabel and Isabella Road were laid out on land that was once part of the grounds of Sutton House. The first record of the pub is in the Post Office directory of 1866, which lists "Edmund Evans, Beer Retailer". It goes on to trade for almost 150 years with no record of any previous closure.

4th October 2012 – The Chesham Arms is sold to property developer, Mukund Patel. The pub is still serving customers the night before the sale completed, but has never opened its doors since.

15th November 2012 – A representative of the new owner wrote to the Hackney Gazette saying a planning application would shortly be prepared to convert the pub to flats. No application has ever been received.

December 2012 – Chesham Arms is added to Hackney's Local List of Heritage Buildings.

11th March 2013 – The Chesham Arms becomes Hackney's first Asset of Community Value – recognising the importance of the pub as a social and community space and offering limited legal protection.

June 2013 – The owner of the Chesham Arms informs Hackney Council he intends to convert the ground floor of the pub into temporary offices for two years from August 2013. New regulations allow this ground floor change as "permitted development" and so outside the control of the Council. Although one of these offices has now been let (at a peppercorn rent), they remain unused other than for storage.

September 2013 – The owner advertises a self contained flat for rent on the upper floor of the Chesham Arms. After residents' complaints that this change had not received planning permission, Hackney Council begin an investigation.

17th October 2013 – A legal challenge to the listing of the Chesham Arms as an Asset of Community Value by the owner of the Chesham Arms is rejected by Judge Nicholas Warren after a hearing in Hackney Town Hall.

24th October 2013 – Hackney Council take enforcement action over the new flat – this is challenged by the owner leading to the current Planning Inquiry.

ABOUT US

The Save the Chesham Action Group was formed by local residents to campaign to keep the pub operating as a pub. The campaign has collected over 2500 signatures on petitions opposing the loss of the pub.

The campaign website is at www.savethechesham.org and you can follow the campaign at twitter (www.twitter.com/savethechesham) or facebook (www.facebook.com/savethechesham)