

## THE VANBRUGH PUBLIC HOUSE: EGRA UPDATE FEBRUARY 2020

**Like many East Greenwich residents, I welcome the news that in January Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) refused a further planning application to build a house on the outdoor space at the rear of The Vanbrugh public house.**

This is the third such application in recent years from the pub's freeholder – Isle of Man based Hamna Wakaf Ltd. – which would have seen the loss of 29% of the pub's outdoor space, including part of its beer garden. For further information see the timeline below. Further attempts to develop the land should be expected given Hamna Wakaf's track record of purchasing pubs and seeking to maximise their development potential.

In my opinion these proposals represent a severe threat to the economic viability of The Vanbrugh, given that its attractive beer garden is a key selling point which marks it apart from others in the area. The proposals would not only see the loss of part of the garden, but also the blighting of the remainder of the garden given that the current attractive outlook of mature trees and shrubs would be replaced by a three-storey house.

The Vanbrugh is a community pub set in a residential location and does not attract much passing trade. I understand that it is heavily reliant on repeat custom from local families for whom the garden is a major draw, and that if the site were developed this would undermine the pub's business model and lead to a significant loss of family custom. Due to the pub's location it would not be able to make up for this loss by attracting different types of clientele. EGRA therefore opposed these development proposals.

### ***Asset of Community Value nomination***

In 2019, EGRA nominated The Vanbrugh to be added to RBG's list of Assets of Community Value (ACV) in order to help ensure that it remains part of local life. While ACV status wouldn't protect the pub from development proposals (it is not considered to be a material planning consideration by RBG) it does have the following benefits:

- 1) Allowing the local community additional time (six months) to arrange a bid to acquire the property should the owner put it on the market.
- 2) Proving the pub's community value, thereby making it more difficult for change of use of the wider premises to be granted, as the RBG Local Plan Policy EA(b) states that *"The Royal Borough supports the retention of pubs that have a community role and will resist the change of use or demolition except where continued use as a pub is no longer economically viable. Evidence must be submitted to clearly demonstrate that reasonable attempts have been made to actively market the site as a pub for at least two years"*

An ACV nomination must provide evidence that the uses of the nominated property further the social wellbeing of the local community and that it is realistic to think that the property can continue to host these uses. EGRA's nomination made a very strong case (including the results of a social wellbeing survey which received 387 responses) in accordance with the guidance received from RBG. The nomination was initially successful, with RBG accepting The Vanbrugh as an ACV in August 2019.

However, EGRA are very disappointed that The Vanbrugh's ACV status was subsequently revoked in December 2019 following a successful appeal from Hamna Wakaf, and that our members' hard work in developing the ACV nomination has therefore been in vain. The appeal process involved a review undertaken by a senior RBG officer who wasn't involved in the original decision. Furthermore, we are concerned that the reviewing officer's report appears to 'move the goalposts' by contradicting

the advice previously given by RBG officers regarding ACV nominations. Following this decision, RBG is developing a firm set of criteria upon which to judge future ACV nominations. We are supportive of this and hope it will enable RBG to defend its ACV listing decisions more robustly in future, but are disappointed that this has not been done before now. Once the criteria document is published later this year, we will decide if it is worth submitting a further ACV nomination for The Vanbrugh.

### The Vanbrugh Public House timeline:

<b>2004</b>	Premises leased to the current operator by freeholder Punch Partnerships Ltd.
<b>2013</b>	Freehold purchased by Hamna Wakaf Ltd. from Punch Partnerships Ltd.
<b>February 2017</b>	<p>Planning application 16/2443/F for construction of 2 x 4 bedroom houses refused by RBG on the grounds that it:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) would be <i>“harmful to the function of the pub”</i></li> <li>2) would be <i>“an incongruous and unduly cramped development, out of character with the established settlement pattern and with the form and structure of the surrounding Victorian buildings”</i></li> <li>3) <i>“makes no provision for basic refuse and recycling storage and no provision for secure cycle parking”</i></li> <li>4) <i>“would fail to satisfy the minimum figure of 130 sqm for a 3 storey 4 bedroom 8 person house”</i></li> </ol>
<b>July 2018</b>	<p>Planning application 17/2165/F for a 3 bedroom house refused by RBG on the grounds that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) it <i>“would constitute an incongruous development, which fails to respect the established character and appearance of the area to its detriment”</i></li> <li>2) <i>“the proposed development due to the insufficient level of private amenity space and its layout would fail to provide adequate private amenity space”</i></li> <li>3) <i>“due to its immediate location next to the bottom of the Vanbrugh Tavern beer garden would result in the creation of a poor living environment due to noise pollution and general disturbance”</i></li> </ol>
<b>August 2019</b>	<p>Appeal against RBG’s refusal of planning application 17/2165/F dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>“the amount and layout of the amenity space provided would be inadequate”</i></li> </ol>
<b>January 2020</b>	<p>Planning application 19/3587/F for a 3 bedroom house fronting Vanbrugh Hill (same plans as 17/2165/F but with more amenity space) refused by RBG on the grounds that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>“the proposed development due to the characteristics of the proposed private amenity space and its layout would fail to provide adequate private amenity space”</i></li> </ol>