

CAMRA's Public House Viability Test Assessing Trade Potential

1 Local Trade

What is the location of the pub? Village, suburban, urban, town centre, isolated country?

Village.

What is the catchment area of the pub?

Guilden Morden village and surrounding villages and towns.

How many adults live within a one mile radius?

Over 1,000 in Guilden Morden and Steeple Morden

In rural areas, how many adults live within a ten mile radius?

Over 50,000 - this includes Letchworth Garden City, Biggleswade, Royston, Sandy, Baldock, Potton, Gamlingay, Henlow, Ashwell and the Mordens

Are there any developments planned for the area? Industrial, residential, strategic projects?

Residential housing developments being built on the west side of Royston

Is there daytime working population?

The Mordens have a demographic profile that is supportive for a pub; it is an affluent area with a high proportion of large detached houses and has an above average proportion of experienced professionals working as consultants/directors who are based at home either part or full time; also a significant proportion are retired/semi-retired

2 Visitor Potential

Is the pub in a well visited/popular location? Is it in a picturesque town or village, on a canal/river side, on a long distance footpath, or on a cycle route?

Walkers, cyclists, families and others regularly pass through the village and have had lunch at The Three Tuns.

Does the pub appeal to those groups who regularly drive out to pubs?

Yes. It is a traditional village pub with beamed ceilings, open fires, dining facilities and a large garden with play equipment for children.

Is tourism encouraged in this area?

Ashwell (within 3 miles) has a high number of tourists annually

Has the pub ever been included in any visitor or tourist guide?

Not yet.

Does the pub act as a focus for community activities? Sports teams, social groups, local societies, community meetings etc?

When the pub was open, it was host to many social groups and was the registered address of a local charity

3 Competition

In rural areas, how many pubs are there within a one mile radius and within a five mile radius?

Two within one mile and seventeen within five miles. Of the seventeen only 3 or 4 would be in direct competition - it is often difficult to get a table for lunch mid-week without booking.

In urban areas, how many pubs are there within reasonable walking distance?

N.A.

Bearing in mind that people like a choice, does the pub, by its character, location, design, potentially cater for different groups of people from those of its nearest competitor(s)?

Yes. The nearest competitor is a wet sales only pub that has no garden or commercial kitchen with a largely male customer base. It is not open at lunchtimes from Monday to Thursday. The Three Tuns was a family friendly pub open lunchtimes and evenings throughout the week with a large garden and a commercial kitchen serving food.

If no, could the pub be developed to cater for different groups?

N.A.

4 Flexibility of the Site

Does the pub/site have unused rooms or outbuildings that could be brought into use? Function rooms, store rooms etc.

There are upstairs rooms that could be used as function rooms, depending on whether the owner chose to use them for this purpose or as their main residential home. The storage shed could also be incorporated into the pub to enlarge the bar and improve the gents toilets.

Is the site large enough to allow for building extensions?

Yes.

Have planning applications ever been submitted to extend/develop the pub building? If yes, when and what was the outcome?

Yes, over 30 years ago. Extension to public bar since converted (approx. 7 years ago) into a dining room.

If planning consent was not available for building work, is any adjoining land suitable for any other use? Camping facility etc.

While the garden is not suitable for camping facilities, it is large enough to enable a conservatory or other extension to be added.

Has the pub been well maintained?

The building is Grade 2 listed, but has deteriorated slowly under brewery ownership with under-investment for over 20 years; since it was sold by Greene King in 2013, the building has been left vacant and has declined further.

5 Parking

Is there access to appropriate numbers of car parking spaces?

Yes.

If no, is there any scope for expansion?

The existing car park could be expanded.

6 Public Transport

Is there a bus stop outside or near the pub and/or a rail station within easy walking distance?

Bus stop outside.

How frequent is public transport in the area?

2 hourly during the day – no services in the evenings or Sundays.

How reliable is the public transport in the area?

Reliable.

Has the pub made actual/potential customers aware of any public transport services available to/from it?

Not known.

Are there taxi firms in the locality?

8 miles away in Royston.

Has the pub entered any favourable agreements with a local taxi firm?

Not known.

7 Multiple Use

In the light of government guidance through the National Planning Policy Framework (see the Appendix) what is the extent of community facilities in the local area – is there a shop, post office, community centre etc?

There is a village shop but not a post office. There is a village hall.

If the pub is the sole remaining facility within the area, is there scope for the pub to combine its function with that of a shop, post office or other community use, bed & breakfast or self-catering – especially in tourist areas?

The pub could broaden its services in a number of areas – as a tea room, a cycling hub, a parcel drop, a library or a venue for car boot sales

The following points are not currently applicable as the pub has closed and waiting for it to reopen.

Partial Loss

(These questions come into play if the application seeks changes which would reduce the size of the pub or convert non-public areas, such as licensee

accommodation, to other uses). How would the proposals impact on the long-term financial health of the business?

The current owner has applied for change of use for the building from a pub into a residential dwelling. A previous application to build housing on the pub garden was withdrawn. If either application were to be approved, a 160 year-old pub would be lost to the community permanently.

Would a smaller pub still be able to attract sufficient trade? Would the smaller size make it less attractive to customers e.g. because there were fewer facilities?

The long-term viability of the pub is dependent on having sufficient space for the garden, a commercial kitchen and a car parking area. Any reduction in size would be detrimental.

Would any loss of licensee accommodation make the pub less attractive to potential future publicans?

Yes. Any loss of licensee accommodation would put unnecessary restrictions on potential landlords with families.

Competition Case Studies

Are there any successful pubs in neighbouring areas of similar population density?

Yes. Examples include the Pig & Abbot in Abington Pigotts (population 162) and The Chequers in Wrestlingworth (population 740). Both are villages that are smaller than Guilden Morden (population 929).

What factors are contributing to their success?

A traditional country pub atmosphere with attractive rooms, open fires, good beer, good food and good service.

The Business Past and Present

Having built up a picture of the business potential of the pub, it may be relevant to question why the pub is not thriving and why the owners are seeking change of use.

The Three Tuns was sold by the brewery and was bought by a land speculator with no interest in The Three Tuns remaining a pub. An alternative buyer with a successful local catering business and the intention of re-opening the pub made a similar priced bid in 2013. This potential buyer has confirmed that they would bid again if the pub were to be put up for sale at a realistic price as a pub.

Is the business run by a tenant or a manager?

Previously run by a tenant. The building was allowed to deteriorate by the brewery.

Does the pub management have local support?

There is strong local support for re-opening the pub as evidenced by over 100 individuals objecting to the recent change of use application.

Has the pub been managed well in the past?

No – the key issues were a declining quality of food and service that was not sufficiently welcoming. In part these reflected the lack of resources provided under brewery ownership, but the tenant was also not sufficiently adept at business management or customer care.

Is there any evidence to support this?

Yes. The pub was often under-staffed and the level of skill applied in the kitchen was below average.

Are trading figures available for the last four years and/or from previous management regimes?

We only have access to figures supposedly from Greene King but Greene King would not confirm their accuracy. These show a decline in beer sales only.

Have there been recent efforts to ensure viability? e.g. has the pub opened regularly and at convenient hours?

Unfortunately The Three Tuns has been closed since January 2013. The current owner has stated that she has no intention of re-opening the pub.

Has the focus/theme of the pub changed recently?

No.

Is the pub taking advantage of the income opportunities offered by serving food?

It did when it was open and would do so again.

How many times a day *was* food served?

Lunchtime and evening throughout the week.

How many times a week?

Six with Sunday lunch up to 19.00 – later if pre-ordered.

Were any catering facilities being optimised?

To a limited extent with off sales of menu items (takeaways) and catering for special events (eg birthday parties).

Has the rent/repair policy of the owner undermined the viability of the pub?

Not known – but this seems probable.

Are there any non-standard circumstances relating to local authority business / rates / taxes?

Not known.

Are there any possible unclaimed reliefs? e.g. where rate abatement is not granted automatically but has to be claimed.

Not known.

**Completed by Three Tuns Action Group
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