

Social Impact Report

1. Community Identity and Everyday Social Infrastructure

The Hare & Hounds plays a distinctive and irreplaceable role in the social infrastructure of Old Town. As the only public house within the village, it has functioned not simply as a commercial premises but as a key point of everyday social contact, informal support, and shared community identity. This type of low-threshold, informal social space is widely recognised as fundamental to community cohesion, particularly in rural hilltop settlements characterised by dispersed housing and limited evening provision.

Old Town benefits from a small Post Office/shop, a Post Office café, a community centre, and Wainsgate Chapel as a cultural venue. Each contributes positively to village life. However, these facilities serve different and non-substitutable functions. The Post Office and café operate primarily during daytime hours. The community centre is used for pre-booked and organised activities and does not operate as an informal drop-in space. Wainsgate Chapel provides important cultural and heritage value but functions on an event-based basis rather than as part of daily social life.

The Hare & Hounds is unique within Old Town in offering:

- Evening and weekend accessibility
- Informal, spontaneous social contact without booking or membership
- Intergenerational interaction in a non-programmed setting
- A familiar and psychologically safe environment for regular, low-key engagement

This form of everyday social infrastructure supports neighbourliness, trust, and mutual awareness in ways that cannot be replicated by formal venues or facilities located outside the village. Its loss would remove the last remaining informal social anchor in Old Town and fundamentally alter the character and functioning of Old Town. Once converted to residential use, this role cannot be reinstated.

Planning relevance:

Calderdale Local Plan Policy HW4 (loss of community facilities); NPPF paragraphs 15.11–15.12 (retention of local services and facilities supporting community wellbeing, particularly in rural areas).

2. Documented Community Use and Continuity Over Time

The community role of the Hare & Hounds is not recent, incidental, or anecdotal. It is supported by a documented history of sustained community, cultural, charitable, and civic use spanning more than two decades.

A chronological Community Use Event Register has been compiled using independent third-party sources including HebWeb archives, public event listings, charity records, visitor accounts, and community testimony. This evidence demonstrates consistent use of the Hare & Hounds as a community venue from at least 1999 through to 2025.

The register shows the pub has functioned over time as:

- A hub for regular social activity, including long-standing weekly quiz nights and recurring live music and seasonal music events
- A venue for community meetings, heritage talks, and local history events
- A base for arts and cultural activity, including repeated participation in the Old Town Art Mile
- A hub for charity walks, fundraising events, and community-led initiatives
- A focal point for seasonal and intergenerational events, including annual Bonfire Night and fireworks celebrations
- A venue supporting emergency and crisis-related community response, including major flood relief fundraising following the 2015 Calder Valley floods and the hosting of community meal preparation and distribution during the Covid-19 period
- A recognised destination for visitors, walkers, and campers staying locally, supporting rural tourism

Importantly, many of these activities were regular and recurring rather than exceptional, demonstrating sustained everyday use of the premises as a social meeting place rather than reliance on occasional events.

Periods of reduced opening hours or constrained trading, often associated with changes in ownership or operating model, should not be interpreted as evidence of a lack of community requirement. Instead, they represent interruptions within an otherwise well-documented pattern of sustained community use. Evidence indicates that demand has persisted independently of individual operators or business models.

This longitudinal evidence demonstrates that the Hare & Hounds has operated as durable social infrastructure embedded in the life of Old Town. Its community function is proven, repeatable, and historically evidenced rather than aspirational. This pattern of use is consistent with national evidence on the longterm sustainability of community pubs and it demonstrates ongoing social demand rather than historic or exceptional activity.

Planning relevance:

Policy HW4(b) (facility no longer required); evidential weight against claims of redundancy or lack of community need.

3. Inclusion, Accessibility, Health, and Wellbeing

Old Town is a hilltop community where geography directly shapes residents' ability to participate in social life. Steep gradients, narrow lanes, limited lighting, and harsh winter conditions significantly increase the effort, risk, and energy required to travel off the hill. These factors disproportionately affect older residents and people with health conditions or inability to access transport.

In this context, the Hare & Hounds has historically provided an inclusive and genuinely accessible local facility. Its location within the village means it is usable in real terms, not merely theoretically accessible on a map. For many residents, the ability to walk to a nearby social space determines whether participation is possible at all.

Key accessibility factors include:

- **Energy-limited access:** Short, local visits are achievable, whereas travelling to Peckett Well or down to Hebden Bridge and back is completely unrealistic for many residents.
- **Weather and safety:** Darkness, ice, heavy rain, and uneven surfaces make off-hill travel unsafe or impractical for some of the year.
- **Transport constraints:** Evening public transport options are not available, and not all residents drive or feel confident driving at night. Many cannot afford to pay for a taxi or rely on others to provide transport.
- **Social accessibility:** Familiar, informal local settings reduce the threshold for participation and allow shorter, low-pressure interactions.

The Hare & Hounds has been particularly important for residents who live alone. For many, it provides a reason to leave the house, a familiar place to be recognised, and an opportunity for regular low-pressure social contact. Loss of such a setting increases the risk of isolation, particularly for those without access to transport or wider social networks.

Informal, everyday social contact is a recognised protective factor for mental health and wellbeing, particularly in rural communities. The Hare & Hounds has provided a neutral, welcoming environment where residents can spend time with others without the pressure of formal participation, structured activity, or advance planning.

This role has been particularly evident during winter months and holiday periods. The pub has provided Christmas meals both on site and through delivery to isolated or less mobile residents, ensuring that individuals who might otherwise have been alone were supported and included. Such actions demonstrate community care extending beyond commercial operation.

The loss of the Hare & Hounds would make social contact increasingly conditional on mobility, confidence, and access to transport, increasing isolation and negatively affecting health and wellbeing for those least able to absorb that loss.

Planning relevance:

NPPF paragraphs 15.11–15.12 (access to services, community wellbeing); Policy HW4 (disproportionate impact on access and inclusion).

4. Civic, Volunteer, and Community Resilience Functions

Beyond its social role, the Hare & Hounds has functioned as part of Old Town's informal civic and resilience infrastructure, supporting both routine community activity and collective response during periods of disruption.

The pub has provided a flexible base for community-led events, fundraising activity, and shared village occasions, including large, well-organised Bonfire Night and fireworks celebrations. These events have offered safe, inclusive alternatives to informal hillside gatherings and have strengthened intergenerational community ties.

The Hare & Hounds has also played a critical role during adverse conditions. As one of the few buildings in the village with backup power, it has provided essential support during prolonged electricity outages, and also as a point of contact for residents seeking information or assistance. During periods of severe weather, the pub has acted as a practical anchor point for informal coordination and mutual aid.

In hilltop communities where power cuts and severe weather are recurrent, such informal resilience infrastructure is essential. Alternative venues within Old Town do not provide equivalent availability, facilities, or accessibility. The loss of the Hare & Hounds would therefore reduce the village's capacity to function collectively and increase vulnerability during disruption.

Planning relevance:

Policy HW4(b) (ongoing requirement); NPPF paragraph 15.12 (supporting sustainable, resilient communities).

5. Local Economy, Tourism, and Rural Sustainability

The Hare & Hounds contributes to the local economy in ways that extend beyond its role as a hospitality business. As the only pub in Old Town, it functions as a destination, drawing visitors who might not otherwise travel up the hill from Hebden Bridge.

Visitors using the pub often combine their visit with use of other village amenities, supporting linked local spending and reinforcing Old Town's viability as an active settlement rather than a purely residential outpost.

The Hare & Hounds has also provided local employment opportunities within Old Town, including part-time, flexible, and evening work that is accessible to residents who may not be able to travel off the hill for employment. Rural hilltop settlements such as Old Town offer limited local job opportunities, and the loss of a village pub removes one of the few sources of accessible employment within walking distance.

Employment associated with community pubs often supports a diverse workforce, including older residents, people returning to work, carers, and those seeking supplementary income. These roles contribute to social inclusion, skills development, and local economic participation. Conversion to residential use would permanently remove this employment function, with no equivalent replacement within the village.

The pub has supported rural tourism through on-site accommodation and informal motorhome and camper stopovers, encouraging visitors to stay locally, eat on site, and contribute to the village economy. Its loss would reduce the attractiveness of Old Town as a base for visitors and weaken the wider rural tourism ecosystem.

From a long-term perspective, retaining a community pub aligns with sustainable rural economic planning. Conversion to residential use would permanently remove this economic function, with no equivalent replacement for employment, visitor draw, or linked spending.

Planning relevance:

NPPF paragraphs 15.11–15.12 (vitality of rural settlements); Policy HW4 (economic and social role of community facilities).

6. Loss of the Asset and Absence of Reasonable Alternatives

The proposed change of use would result in the permanent loss of Old Town's only informal, walkable evening social space. While other facilities exist within the village, none perform the same function or are accessible in equivalent practical terms. No alternative venue within Old Town provides an informal, drop-in social space open during evenings and weekends that can be reached on foot by residents.

The evidence demonstrates that:

- No appropriate alternative facility exists within Old Town that can substitute for the role of the Hare & Hounds.
- The Hare & Hounds remains required, as evidenced by sustained community use over time, including regular social activity, community events, and reliance during periods of disruption.
- Periods of reduced opening hours or constrained trading do not equate to a lack of community demand, but reflect changes in ownership or operating model within an otherwise well-evidenced pattern of ongoing use.
- Reasonable alternatives to permanent loss have not been fully explored or exhausted.

In particular, the application assumes that permanent loss of the Hare & Hounds is inevitable, without demonstrating that alternative options for retention have been meaningfully tested. National evidence shows that community pubs can remain viable when operated through community ownership, partnership arrangements, or mixed-use models that combine hospitality with community, cultural, and resilience functions. These approaches are now well established and supported by national policy, sector guidance, and funding programmes. There is no evidence that such alternatives have been properly considered prior to the proposal for permanent residential conversion.

Once lost to residential use, the Hare & Hounds cannot be replaced, relocated, or functionally recreated elsewhere within the village. The impact of this loss would therefore be irreversible and cumulative, affecting not only current residents but the long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience of Old Town as a settlement.

The loss of the Hare & Hounds represents not only the removal of a physical facility, but a reduction in residents' choice and autonomy in how they participate in social life. Social engagement would become increasingly conditional on mobility, confidence, financial means, and access to transport, with disproportionate impacts on those least able to travel off the hill.

From a social impact perspective, the application places disproportionate weight on short-term financial considerations while underestimating long-term harm to community life, access, wellbeing, resilience, and the local economy. Permanent conversion would remove the opportunity to explore nationally evidenced and policy-supported community pub models and would foreclose future options that could otherwise sustain the Hare & Hounds as a community asset.

Planning relevance:

Calderdale Local Plan Policy HW4(a)–(c) (loss of community facilities and requirement to consider reasonable alternatives); NPPF paragraphs 15.11–15.12 (support for sustainable, inclusive, and resilient rural communities).

7. Future Community Use and Evidence of Ongoing Viability

National and regional evidence demonstrates that community pubs are not only socially valuable but economically viable when retained for community-led or community-supported use.

Data from the Plunkett Foundation shows that community-owned pubs have a one-year survival rate of approximately 99 percent, significantly outperforming privately operated rural pubs. The sector has continued to grow, with increasing numbers of rural communities successfully sustaining pubs through diversified use, volunteer involvement, and mixed trading models.

Research supported by CAMRA and Pub is The Hub 2025 further demonstrates that rural pubs deliver substantial social return, with every £1 invested in community pub activity generating more than £8 in social value. These benefits include reduced isolation, improved wellbeing, local employment, volunteer opportunities, and strengthened community resilience.

This evidence directly challenges any assumption that reduced opening hours or recent trading difficulties indicate a lack of long-term viability. National policy and funding programmes explicitly recognise rural pubs as social infrastructure capable of adapting to changing patterns of use.

In the case of the Hare & Hounds, the documented Community Use Event Register demonstrates sustained demand for the building as a social and community asset over more than two decades. This establishes a credible basis for continued community use, whether through community ownership, partnership models, or diversified operation combining hospitality with community, cultural, and resilience functions.

National evidence also highlights the role of community pubs in sustaining local employment and volunteering opportunities, particularly in rural settlements where alternative work within walking distance is limited.

Permanent conversion to residential use would remove the opportunity to explore these nationally recognised and policy-supported models. Once lost, the social, economic, and resilience value of the building cannot be recovered.

Planning relevance:

Policy HW4(b) (ongoing requirement and viability); Policy HW3 (community infrastructure); NPPF paragraphs 15.11–15.12 (support for sustainable rural services).