

# Comments for Planning Application 21/00345/FUL

## Application Summary

Application Number: 21/00345/FUL

Address: Wheatsheaf Yard, The Wheatsheaf High Street Oxford OX1 4DF

Proposal: Conversion of first and second floors to create 9no. student rooms, shared kitchen and common area. Formation of 2no. front dormers in association with a loft conversion. Removal of 1no. window to front elevation. Alteration to 1no. window and 1no. door to front elevation. Insertion of 1no. door to front elevation. Provision of bin and cycle stores

Case Officer: Tobias Fett

## Customer Details

Name: Ms Siobhán Aspen

Address: 157 Hollow Way Oxford OX4 2NE

## Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on character of area
- Effect on existing community facilities
- General dislike or support for proposal
- Other - give details

Comment: The first floor of The Wheatsheaf isn't, as has been suggested elsewhere, simply used occasionally, as a function room, it is a long established music venue, in constant, consistent use for that purpose. I have personally spent a lot of time going to see bands, and performing at the venue for over 20 years. There is a very supportive community around this venue, many people know each other by name.

I feel that as a society, we often do not pay enough attention to our emotional wellbeing. Of course, it's important that people have housing, and that people are financially secure.

It seems with planning decisions, there is impact to housing, and financial security, there is also an impact to the emotional wellbeing, firstly of those who use a particular space, such as The Wheatsheaf, but also to the local community, and wider area, indirectly. So often, perhaps normally even, planning decisions, override the emotional impact.

We have a lot of anxiety, particularly at the moment, but generally, many of us feel like the things that keep us feeling mentally well, are being eroded away, and access to live music, to arts and so forth, is a very important part of that. If we continue with replacing spaces for the community, spaces for arts, for music, with housing, we risk ending up with a society of people, sitting, rather

isolated, without real, physical connection with each other. It's great that we have the Internet, but I'm sure you can understand that it's not a replacement for being around people, and The Wheatsheaf, a music venue, provides that for many. It needs investment, not destruction.

I have read elsewhere, that there are supposedly, other venues in the city centre, that people could use, instead of The Wheatsheaf. I do not think this is the case at all. We lost The Cellar (which I think may still be sitting empty now, a great loss). The Town Hall is not suitable, it's fine for orchestras, but not rock bands, simply on the basis of the structure of the building in terms of sound, but also accessibility. The St Aldates Tavern's room upstairs isn't big enough and not sound proofed enough. I don't know if there are any plans for the upstairs at The Folly, but at present it's not suitable. MAO Oxford only has occasional events, it's an Art Gallery, not a music venue. I'm struggling to think of anywhere that would be an adequate replacement for The Wheatsheaf, certainly, given that The Cellar has not moved to another venue, it suggests there isn't one. Music in bars, is not the same thing as a music venue, they are good, but limited in terms of quality of sound, lighting, space, access, size of bands that can play. Even if there is a building that might be suitable, there is no actual opportunity.

I think the upshot of this, is that if this planning application is allowed, there will, for the first time in a very long time, and possibly forever more (since the land will be locked in for another purpose), no longer be a small live music venue, in Oxford, a city with a proud history of producing excellent quality music.

If there was ever another city of culture type event, Oxford may lose out, because really, culturally, we are becoming less diverse, at least in the city centre, and we stand to lose an entire part of our culture, if we lose The Wheatsheaf as a music venue.

In addition to the cultural impact I am very concerned at how land is used in Oxford. My first objection there, is that whilst I recognise a need for housing, I think the greatest need is for affordable housing, for the non transient population. My understanding is that both Universities have in recent years, increased numbers of students, possibly beyond what was originally considered sustainable. I think it would be healthier for us all, for the council to reconsider the impact growth of the student population has on us all, then work out how we can limit the impact of that.

The second objection, based on growth of population, is risk around spread of disease. There seems to be plenty of evidence that a major factor in disease transmission, is population density. The more we increase density, the greater the risk. There is plenty of science to back this up. For that reason, I think it would be unwise to go ahead with more housing in this location, that would increase the density of people, and increase risk of virus transmission.

I completely object to this planning application, it makes me feel very anxious that it is threatened with closure, and I would be deeply saddened, if it were to close.

The Wheatsheaf is part of Oxford's soul, and it's good thing for everyone that it exists, not just those of us that use it, but for all of us. Let's keep it that way, actually, I'd like to see more investment.