

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: Mr Freddie Locock-Harrison

Address: 51 Reliance Way Oxford OX4 2FW

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
- Local plan policies
- Other - give details

Comment: Just stop this while you still can. The soul has already been ripped out of the Oxford Music Scene - we've produced some of the biggest names in indie/alternative music since the 1990s and yet, through mismanagement and misappropriation, the City Council has systematically wiped out 95% of all creative space in the city centre and is now coming for the sole remaining city centre live music venue.

As part of the support documentation for this, the developer has listed 29* other 'live venues' in the City Centre (*this should be 28 even by their own logic as they've somehow listed Jericho Tavern twice which is impressive incompetence). Of the 28, the vast majority are in Cowley or Jericho i.e. not the city centre. The remaining amount is made up of a baffling mix of Churches (St Giles? St Michael at the Northgate??) and spaces that are not accessible to the public like the Jacqueline Du Pre Music Building (also not in the city centre). This is not to criticise any of these places but more highlight that this defence is either wilfully ignorant or genuinely misinformed. Either way it does not hold up to even the lightest scrutiny.

The council has been playing a dangerous game for a while now by giving planning permission to close off independent spaces and we are now reaching the sad end game of this.

According to the 2017 UK Live Music Census, (<http://uklivemusiccensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/UK-Live-Music-Census-2017-full-report.pdf>; Figure 58), Oxford has 110 venues where live music can be played across both the centre and the surrounding districts. This number will have declined since 2017 but we do not have a more up to date census so I will use these figures. With a population of 150,000, this comes out roughly at 1 music venue for every 1,300 city residents.

Norwich, a city of smaller yet similar size (c. 140,000 people), has 230 total venues, coming in at 1 music venue for every 600 city residents (see <https://www.norfolkjigguide.com/venue-list>). Norwich has invested a significant amount of money and cultural capital into its live music scene and, as a result, arts and culture are flourishing there. The same cannot be said for Oxford.

Oxford is better placed than Norwich with closer ties to the capital. It boasts a larger population and is globally renowned for its rich cultural history, so why on earth is the council closing down venues? We have one of the largest 18-24 population percentages in the country so the economic argument doesn't even make sense. You are proposing to take away the last live music venue in the city centre and to replace it with 9 (9!) student rooms? Student accommodation is a serious problem in the city and I understand the need for more of it, especially in the centre, but in this case the weigh up between what you're adding and what you're taking away has to be taken into account.

The Wheatsheaf sets a precedent - if we lose the last city centre live music venue, then we lose any chance we had of reversing the cultural decline of the past 20 years and of restarting Oxford's once thriving music and arts scene.