

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 Gareth Epps

Address: Hoarstone Cottage Hundley Way Charlbury OX7 3QU

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on existing community facilities
- Local plan policies
- Other - give details

Comment: This application should be refused as it seeks to strip Oxford city centre of a well-loved live music venue - now unique in the centre after the closure of other venues. By removing ancillary uses to the existing pub, the application also comprises a Trojan horse that undermines the integrity of the Wheatsheaf pub. Both these facts breach the Oxford Local Plan 2036.

Para 1.68 of that Plan states that: "Oxford has a rich infrastructure of cultural and social activities and venues, from theatres, museums, cinemas, galleries, sports and music venues to restaurants and pubs. These uses help to keep the centres vibrant and active and add greatly to the local quality of life. The Local Plan seeks to encourage the development of the uses within the city and district centres and protect them from being lost through redevelopment to other higher land value uses."

Evidently residential accommodation in the city centre is a higher land value use. Despite the misleading information supplied by the applicant that claims there are other live music venues similar to the Wheatsheaf (quoting classical music venues as equivalent to rock venues, as well as numerous venues miles out of the city centre and indeed some outside the Council area), the upper floors of The Wheatsheaf are now virtually the only gig venue in the city centre for emerging rock bands. I first went to events there in the late 1980s and the venue's reputation has grown in the intervening years. With the closure of numerous other small venues in the City Centre in

recent years, the adverse impact of this application is significant for the city as a whole; there would be nowhere else for the next Radiohead, Supergrass or Foals to play as an emerging band to a small city centre audience.

Para 1.69 states that: "A wide range of community, leisure, sport, recreation and cultural facilities appropriate to Oxford's diverse communities are supported. The Local Plan seeks to retain existing facilities, unless suitable and accessible alternatives are proposed. New facilities that support the growth of the city and enhance its sustainability, such as state schools, primary healthcare facilities and community centres will be supported; new development that actively supports and sustains community wellbeing is to be welcomed."

There are numerous examples, particularly in London but in other UK locations too, where the conversion of a pub's upper floors have been treated by developers as a precursor to the loss of the pub as a whole. The Wheatsheaf is one of Oxford's renowned local pubs; the trade and wider industry has like many industries been adversely impacted by the Covid pandemic, but they will bounce back. By contrast, the loss of the function rooms and pub accommodation itself jeopardises the viability of the pub. With a shortage of affordable accommodation for the pub tenant or manager in the city, the long term stability of the pub as a business is threatened. The extinguishment of the function room and music venue business will also adversely affect the income of the pub. Thus the long term sustainability of this community facility is harmed by this application.

The applicant has submitted misleading information in support of this application. Officers should look at the facts, support their Plan policies and reject it.