

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 Craig Bradford

Address: 19 Beechgate Witney OX28 4JL

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

Comment: The Wheatsheaf is a long-standing music venue essential to the Oxford music scene, particularly in light of other recent venue losses. There is a wide variety of existing residential property - a non-trivial portion of which is empty - in Oxford that could be used as student accommodation, and there is no viable reason to convert any element of The Wheatsheaf as such.

The viability report found accompanying the planning application seeks to justify the proposal by stating that Covid 19 has had an impact on current sales and the business is therefore no longer viable. This is of course true, as the pandemic has temporarily closed or impacted many businesses worldwide. However, it cannot be made into a justification point as every business will be affected in very similar ways. To use this as a justification would imply that all music venues, bars and clubs are unviable, and this simply is not the case. Without Covid, The Wheatsheaf would still be putting on gigs and festivals, as well as drawing in its regular drinkers and people on nights out. The report even goes as far as providing financial projections based on the past 12 months (when the venue was closed)! The report then compares the redevelopment to Oxpens and Oxford station redevelopment, in an attempt to create "synergies" with them, so as to adhere to the larger redevelopments in Oxford City Centre.

The report also tries to justify itself by comparing the venue to its competition. It correctly classes itself within two categories - a pub and a live music venue. It observes many of the local pubs and

venues in Oxford and provides an insignificant impact to the surrounding area, but fails to mention two key factors. The first being that it is the last remaining live music venue in the city centre. All of the remaining live music venues are based in Cowley. The second point being that it is the only Rock and Heavy Metal bar in the city as well as providing for many other genres of music and entertainment. This is culturally significant as many other venues in the city do not and cannot cater for the music scenes for varying reasons.

The report further seeks justification within the Operation Considerations segment. They claim that they will still be able to put on only slightly smaller events downstairs with only a small reduction in overall capacity. Anyone who has been to the Wheatsheaf can plainly see this will not be possible, and claiming otherwise is equal parts farcical and disrespectful of the intelligence of anyone who reads the report. The report maintains that only a marginal loss of revenue would be expected and due to the current set up of the venue, this means that many customers go downstairs to purchase drinks. This is due to having a much wider variety of drinks than the upstairs bar as well as more bar staff. It also mentions that the current customer profile will not change. This fails to take into account that many people go to the Wheatsheaf to see live music, and without this, the majority of people will simply not go at all. The financial impact of redeveloping such a unique venue in Oxford would be devastating to it.

In short, the developer clearly has no interest in running the venue as it is, or any interest in the cultural, social or historical importance of the venue, and I would encourage them to sell it to someone who will run it as is and maintain such an important part of Oxford's community, rather than hammering the final nail into the coffin of Oxford's musical community.