

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 Mark Gunther

Address: 31 Thorne Close Kidlington Oxford OX5 1SJ

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

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

Comment:I wish to object to this application: it contravenes the City Council's Local Plan 2036. I highlight two specific contraventions: failure to demonstrate unviability of the music venue, and failure to demonstrate preservation of facility.

For the first contravention, Policy V6(f) states that "Planning applications for the change of use of a public house MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY EVIDENCE to demonstrate that the continuation of the use of the premises as a PUBLIC HOUSE IS NOT VIABLE. It must be demonstrated that: [...] f) all reasonable efforts have been made to support and improve the operation and management of the business."

The Viability Assessment in no way demonstrates that The Wheatsheaf is unviable, with or without the first-floor music room. The Financial Performance Overview (p17) shows a completely misleading graph, giving the impression of a precipitous drop in the EDITBA margin from 20% to 14% over three years. But note that the right-hand vertical axis is not zero-based, so the drop is not as steep as the slope suggests (a classic way to lie with statistics).

More importantly, the horizontal axis is not evenly divided: the three columns represent 15, 12, 8.5 months respectively. It would only be reasonable to compare the performance for the extended FY18 (April to June 15 months later) with a normal FY19 (July to June) if the additional 3 months were representative of the whole year; no evidence is provided to support that assumption. If the three months from April to June provides better performance than the year as a whole, FY18 will appear artificially better than FY19.

Worse, a full 12 months' rent is declared for FY20, despite there being only 8.5 months of income; of course that will skew the figures! Redoing the calculation with 8.5 months' rent saves £13417; the EDITBA becomes £69678, with a margin of 17.5% - compared to 18.5% for FY19. Given the uncertainty we have experienced this past year, I submit that the EDITBA margin is essentially the same in FY19 and FY20. Certainly no sign that the current business is "unviable": average EDITBA figures for bars range from 10% to 20%.

For the second contravention, Policy V7 states that "The City Council will seek to protect and retain existing [performance venues and arts buildings]. Planning permission will NOT BE GRANTED for development that results in the LOSS OF SUCH FACILITIES UNLESS NEW OR IMPROVED FACILITIES CAN BE PROVIDED at a location equally or more accessible by walking, cycling and public transport."

The application offers no "new or improved facilities" to replace the lost music venue. Moreover, the bald conclusion (p24) that the loss of The Wheatsheaf as a music venue will have no impact on the community is completely unsupported. In particular, the list of alternative venues (p37) is mostly irrelevant: the O2 Academy, Town Hall, and Sheldonian Theatre are in no way comparable in size to The Wheatsheaf; the Holywell Music Room, Jacqueline du Pre Building, and Sheldonian are not at all conducive to the kind of music mostly put on at The Wheatsheaf; and to top it all, the Jericho Tavern is listed twice.