

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: Miss Rachel Dixon

Address: 46 Oatlands Road Oxford OX2 0ET

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

Comment: To lose half of the Wheatsheaf to student housing would be an irreparable tragedy. As an American now living in Oxford, I can tell you from experience how cities erode when they start prioritising transient students over long-term residents. In my hometown-Lexington, Kentucky-the municipal government has done just that. Businesses have been re-zoned and converted into student flats, university buildings have spilled into former trade districts, and any planning application related to students is automatically approved with little consideration. The result is bleak: Lexington's downtown has emptied out, with leaders now scrambling to "revitalise" once-thriving shopping lanes. But for Lexington, I fear it is now too late.

When I came to Oxford 2.5 years ago, the city's commitment to arts and culture was a breath of fresh air. Yes, you are a scholarly city, but Oxford is far more than just a university town. I was enraptured by the historic architecture, many pubs and diverse array of non-academic experiences on offer. I got introduced to the Wheatsheaf by way of my boyfriend, who is a member of the Oxford Imps, a comedy troupe which performs in the pub's upstairs venue. The space was unlike anything I had experienced before-cosy and inviting, tucked away in one of the city's cobblestone alleyways. Before the pandemic, I was at the Wheatsheaf every Monday, patronising both the Imps shows and the bar downstairs. I've been counting down the days until we can return, as there are no other venues like it in the city.

Unfortunately, as I've lived in Oxford, I've been witness to another trend behind my discovery of these hidden treasures: the slow erasure of many of these historic sites, just as I get used to visiting them. In the name of "better" budget sheets, we have seen a great many establishments close (Boswell's, Elmer Cotton Sports, Hardy's Sweet Shoppe, Illyria Pottery...and too many others to list) and once-public blocks privatised in the pursuit of student accommodation. This trend is completely antithetical to the Council's purported commitment to helping small businesses and cultural institutions thrive. Will students really keep coming to Oxford fifty years from now when no entertainment venues are left?

I know you are already getting a host of comments citing specific subsections of the Council's Local Plan, dishonesties in the proposed planning application and other oversights. However, I thought it might benefit the discussion to add a simple outsider's perspective: if you approve the proposed planning application, you will be choosing short-term profit over long-term community investment. I have seen the result of this choice in America. What a tragedy it would be if Oxford continues to become like so many cities in the States-relics of the past, beholden to capitalistic interests that undermine community wellbeing. Stop the trend: save the Wheatsheaf.