

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 James Eaton-Lee

Address: 8 Oxfor Oxford OX4 2DR

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on existing community facilities
- Effect on privacy
- General dislike or support for proposal

Comment:1. Music and Culture

With the gradual closure and refurbishment of various pubs and venues, Oxford has progressively lost the pubs and spaces which traditionally catered to LGBTQI groups, 'town' (non-university/tourist) residents, and alternative/subculture groups including various forms of music (See: Queering Spires).

While not explicitly an LGBTQI pub, the Wheatsheaf has long been an 'alternative' Oxford city center pub, drawing and serving a distinct set of constituencies, including queer and alternative groups unwelcome in other spaces.

It is particularly well-known for music; up until recently it was one of two well-respected city center 'alternative' music venues well-known for providing space for small, upcoming, and diverse music groups - in the city which proudly considers itself home to the Foals, Supergrass, and arguably Radiohead.

The BBC explicitly records the rise of The Foals and their early performances at The Wheatsheaf:-



Oxford's other well-known alternative music venue, The Cellar, recently closed.

Converting the first floor of The Wheatsheaf will eliminate Oxford City Center's last remaining long-standing alternative music venue.

This will do deep, long-standing damage to intangible aspects of community and culture in Oxford. While other spaces may emerge, it is likely that this will make Oxford a less diverse, less inclusive place, eliminating or relocating alternative and growing culture.

It is likely that it will further sterilise Oxford's city center, reducing the amount of 'life' present outside academic and commercial zones, and making it less relevant for Oxford residents. This may do further damage to other retailers and venues in Oxford, reducing foot traffic to other pubs, restaurants, and shops in the area. It is likely that this will contribute to a gentrification and homogenisation of remaining spaces like the Wheatsheaf itself.

This will impact not only town residents, but also student communities - many Oxford University cultural groups such as music societies rely on venues such as the wheatsheaf; these 'coming together' venues are one of the osmotic spaces in Oxford where University and Town do mix, producing the vibrant integrated society we enjoy.

The 'heritage impact assessment' provided in this planning application appears to give zero consideration to Oxford's musical or cultural heritage or these impacts.

2. Noise and privacy / wellbeing of residents

This is a congested and busy area of Oxford surrounded by pubs. It is difficult to access other than by foot, and there is no parking or 'moving in' space nearby. It is unlikely that it will provide high-quality, edifying residential space for students, who will share their entrance alleyway with three pubs and will be overlooked and hemmed in in a congested area. They appear likely to have little 'view' other than brick walls and adjacent buildings, with slim patches of sky.

With the conversion of Oxford's last remaining music venue, the residences proposed here will be in a city center increasingly undesirable as a humane space to live in, and with less relevance to the lives of young people.

I believe that it is likely that future students who are the hypothetical beneficiaries of this property would, if we could consult them, prefer to live in more diverse areas of Oxford, and to have been able to access a more vibrant and eclectic center unshorn of its independent venues, music, culture, and entertainment.

In short, this development may be of short-term logistic, academic, and commercial benefit to the property owner but at irreversible long-term cost to the character of the city of Oxford and the

quality of the lives of its residents.

Are nine cramped student rooms really worth losing Oxford city center's last, well-loved, bastion of alternative music and culture?