

# 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: Megan Morgan

Address: 89 Putney Bridge Road London SW15 2PA

## Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on character of area
- General dislike or support for proposal
- Other - give details

Comment: I am very concerned about the proposed plans to convert the Wheatsheaf's upstairs music and arts venue into student accommodation. Oxford Local Plan 20136 V7 says that Oxford City Council will seek to protect and retain existing cultural and community facilities but approving these plans would go completely against this commitment.

The Wheatsheaf has been central to Oxford grassroots cultural performances for over 20 years, providing local bands and comedians, including the Oxford Imps improv troupe of which I am a member, an affordable, central location in which to perform. Performing at the Wheatsheaf as part of the Oxford Imps has also helped to launch the careers of several notable comedians, including Rachel Parris, Sophie Duker, Ivo Graham and Joseph Morpurgo. After the closure of The Cellar a few years ago, the loss of the Wheatsheaf would leave local acts with very limited venue choice in central Oxford and be a big knock to an arts scene which is otherwise admired globally. Closing down the Wheatsheaf's performance space pushes central Oxford to become an increasingly commercial space, existing primarily for tourists interested in touring shows and cookie-cutter Oxford experiences rather than a space to share with the creative people who live, work and study here.

The application suggests that alternative venues to the Wheatsheaf are available but this is simply not true. As a producer for the Oxford Imps, I have done extensive research into central Oxford

venues of a comparable size and price point to hire and they do not exist. Of the 29 alternative venues listed in the application as providing an 'adequate supply of live music venues within walking distance' of the Wheatsheaf, many are not suitable comparisons. The Jericho Tavern is mentioned twice while many other venues are either much larger, a far distance out of the centre of town (e.g. Isis Farmhouse) or are part of college buildings. College arts venues are rarely a viable option for local arts groups because the commercial hiring rates are prohibitive, never mind the fact that local groups and audience members alike may feel uncomfortable performing in a university space. Other available venues may not have adequate supply of lighting and tech equipment.

The application also implies that the performance venue is no longer viable based on its financial returns from the previous year. To use financial data taken during the last 12 months of intermittent lockdowns and restrictions caused by COVID-19 does not give a realistic picture of the Wheatsheaf venue's earning power. Other pubs and venues have been forced to close too but are optimistic about reopening as restrictions ease. The Wheatsheaf has operated successfully for 21 years and can continue to do so if given the chance.