

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: Mrs Domonique Wightman

Address: Farmoor Farm House, Oakes Lane, Farmoor, Oxford OX2 9PB

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on existing community facilities
- Local plan policies

Comment:As a regular gig attendee in the upstairs venue at the Wheatsheaf, I urge you not to approve the planning application.

The Oxford Local Plan 2036, V7 specifically states: 'The City Council will seek to protect and retain existing cultural and community facilities. 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.'

Make no mistake, as the sole remaining gig venue in the city centre (following the recent closure of The Cellar and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre,) the upstairs venue at the Wheatsheaf IS a unique and irreplaceable cultural and community facility. It is also the only venue in greater Oxford which caters for the rock and heavy metal genre / crowd (although it also caters for other genres,) and is one of only 5 venues in the wider area which could profess to be in any way comparable (and even then loosely,) to the Wheatsheaf in terms of music events (not the 29 that the Viability Assessment lists - most of which aren't even venues or cater solely for classical music - e.g. The Catweazle Club is a weekly event held at East Oxford Community Centre / the Sheldonian is a theatre and rarely even holds classical music events.) They also list the Jericho Tavern twice, which tells you all you need to know about their sloppy attention to detail.

The viability assessment is a poorly researched document, written by authors who openly admit

that they didn't even visit Oxford (or clearly speak to anyone with local knowledge,) in order to understand its complex web of facilities and community culture.

However, its core finding, that the pub and its upstairs venue are viable IS clearly true, which would seem to preclude not being viable as a reason for planning approval, under V6 of the Oxford Local Plan 2036. Despite the fact they attempt to muddy the waters by separating the upstairs venue from the downstairs pub in terms of that viability, the two are inseparable, even more so because the authors do not back-up their assertion with any documentary evidence of the split in revenue (merely verbal hearsay, which they clearly believe supports their argument.)

However, regardless of that belief, their very own assessment states that the upstairs accounts for 25% of turnover, which (even if it were true,) clearly does not represent what the same document later attempts to characterise as a "marginal loss of revenue" - it being close to a third of turnover. The reality is likely to be a far higher percentage, because as anyone who has been there knows, the majority of people buy their drinks downstairs because there is greater choice and they also get to see their friends in the downstairs bar between acts. Furthermore, any estimate of percentage turnover does not take into account the fact that gigs do not take place every night of the week, so their importance to the business is disproportionately higher.

I would therefore suggest that the upstairs venue is probably responsible for around fifty percent of revenue, particularly when you factor in the habit that the regulars have of going to the Wheatsheaf just in case the band playing upstairs is to their liking, so they can then buy a ticket on the spur of the moment. Even if they don't, it will have been the very fact that a gig is taking place that drew them there in the first place. This also doesn't factor in the general good will that having a music venue attached to the pub instils in its clientele.

Clearly, the applicant is keen to convert the whole pub into flats eventually, and in years to come, would use the much reduced turnover of the remaining pub to justify shutting that down too (even though they would have implicitly brought about that reduction in revenue themselves by closing the upstairs venue.)

Indeed, using this logic, perhaps the Planning Authority would look kindly on allowing even more gigs to take place in the venue, to improve the revenue even more (as I understand it has been operating recently under some kind of restriction of the number of events it can host?) This would meet the Local Plan 2036's stated aim of: "In principle, applications to extend capacity, improve access and make more intensive cultural/community use of existing sites will be supported."