

# The Former White Hart Pub, St Albans Road, South Mimms, Herts, EN6 3PJ.

## Alternative Uses Assessment

February 2024



WARNER



# Contents page

1. Introduction	2
2. Site and Surrounding Area	4
3. Relevant Local Facilities	5
4. Planning Policy	10
5. Discussion	12
6. Conclusion	21



# 1 Introduction

This Statement has been produced by Warner Planning to support a Planning Application at the former White Hart Pub, St Albans Road, South Mimms, Herts, EN6 3PJ.

The application seeks permission for the partial demolition of the existing built form on the site and the conversion and extension of the former public house into six apartments, conversion of outbuilding into a two-bedroom apartment and construction of a detached two-bedroom infill dwelling, along with associated landscaping, bin store and parking.

This Statement is submitted in conjunction with a Planning Statement and associated plans for the application.



**Figure 1: Site Location (not to scale, for identification purposes only).**

The White Hart is a vacant former Public House under Use Class A4 and has remained as such since the facility's closure in 2021. The Applicant purchased the site in 2021 following the closure of the site. The pub was owned and operated by McMullens, a renowned local brewery with nearly 200 years brewing heritage in Hertfordshire.

The building is located with the Geen Belt and is Grade II listed. There is also a War Memorial on the northern portion of the site, which will be retained.



This Statement provides a sequential assessment of the alternative uses for the Site and demonstrates that redevelopment for residential purposes represents the most optimum use.

Attached to this report is a letter from the commercial agency Hartnell Taylor Cook, who has also assessed the site in the context of the local market and national trends.



## 2 The site and surrounding area

The Site is situated in the northern portion of South Mimms (outlined in Figure 1 below) and, in regard to the wider context, is situated to the west of Potters Bar. The settlement of South Mimms is described in the adopted Development Plan as a 'Small Settlement', which is defined as being within the Green Belt and largely residential in character and land use, relying on larger settlements nearby for employment and local services.

The Site area measures circa 0.27ha, a large majority of which is covered by the vacant public house (The White Hart), which closed in 2021. This includes the built form of the public house, a paved outdoor seating area and the car park, which is covered in hardstanding, with some planting on its southern boundary. On the northern portion of the site is the South Mimms Cross War Memorial with associated benches.

In terms of the surrounding uses of the site, these are predominantly residential to the north, south, south-west and north-east. Immediately abutting the eastern and southern boundaries of the site are the B556 and Blanche Lane respectively. Looking slightly further afield, to the west of the site, there is agricultural land, and to the east is a car wash, shop and garage. To the south of the site is St Giles Church.



**Figure 2:** Streetview of the application site from the B556, looking north-west from the access.



### 3 Relevant Local Facilities

There are several important local facilities to consider when appraising the Application Site and its place within the wider village context.

The Black Horse Public House is located circa 270m to the north of the Application Site. It is a Grade II listed building (ref: 1295796) with the following description:

*“Public House. Early C18, extended and altered. Red brick, tiled roof. 2 storeys and attic. Central entrance to front now a window with architrave. Flanking ground floor canted bay windows. 3 first floor flush frame glazing bar sashes with cambered brick heads. One blind window to left of centre. Stuccoed plinth. Continuous plat band, largely concealed to front by bay windows. Stack to right on front pitch. Left return has ground floor entrance under gabled hood. Second plat band at eaves level. First floor sash and attic casement. External stack added to rear of ridge. Right return wall is roughcast. To rear centre full height short gabled wing of original build. C19 lean-to and C20 1 storey extensions to rear and C20 1 storey flat roofed extension to right. Interior: upper part of original staircase survives with turned balusters and a square newel. Some original roof timbers survive.”*



Figure 3: The Black Horse (Google Streetview)



Within the wider context, a further Public House called The Old Guinea is located 1.1km to the south-west of the Application Site. This pub is located on Crossoaks Lane and is within easy reach of the South Mimms village core.



**Figure 4: The Old Guinea (Google Streetview)**

The early-mid 1800s were a Golden Age in South Mimms' history. Inns and Public Houses became common as places where travellers could stop for a break and refreshment. They also became popular with the many blacksmiths, farriers, wheelwrights, carpenters, carriers, cordwainers and bakers that worked in the area. South Mimms no longer has the boom of the 18th and 19th centuries and is a rural settlement with an estimated population of 855, and the demand for travellers has reduced following the construction of the A1(M) and M25.

South Mimms also has a Village Hall, which is located circa 180m south of the site and is owned by Hertsmere Borough Council, but is run and managed as a community asset by the South Mimms Village Hall Management Committee, a registered charity. It provides a facility for community gatherings, with a modern well equipped kitchen and parking. There is the provision of 12 round tables, 18 oblong tables and 100 chairs. In terms of events hosted in the building these non-exhaustively include a Community Book Swap, Yoga, Tots Playgroup and Dog Training. Within 60m of the Village Hall is an area of outside space, that consists of a fenced play area, sports pitch and open space.





**Figure 5: South Mimms Village Hall (Google Streetview)**

Within the village, there is also a Primary School (St Giles CofE) with a capacity of 105 students and the Church of St Giles.



**Figure 6: Church of St Giles (Google Streetview)**

There is also a convenience shop and car wash available in the immediate vicinity of the site.







**Figure 7: Convenience Shop and Car Wash (Google Streetview)**

It should also be noted that South Mimms is associated with a significant service station along the M25, which offers a range of established food outlets, convenience shops and a hotel.





## 4 Planning Policy Context

Hertsmere's Development Plan recognises that given the finite amount of land available for development in the district it is possible that planning applications may be made which seek to replace community facilities with other forms of development.

Policy SADM32 (Key Community Facilities) is as follows:

*Proposals for the provision or enhancement of community facilities will be permitted provided:*

- ✿ they will principally serve a local community or meet a wider, unmet need which cannot be accommodated elsewhere;*
- ✿ they are appropriately located and designed having regard to other plan policies, particularly Policies SP1, CS13, CS24 and CS27, and the amenity of adjoining occupiers and the local area;*
- ✿ they are or can be made accessible by public transport, walking and cycling;*
- ✿ where appropriate, they are designed to be able to accommodate a range of community uses and users;*
- ✿ any proposal to develop a school on a new site is supported by evidence demonstrating the need for a new site; and*
- ✿ they satisfy the terms of Policy CS25 and provide for an appropriate amount of car parking in line with the Parking Standards SPD.*

Policy CS14 (Heritage Assets) sets out that:

*All development proposals must conserve or enhance the historic environment of the Borough in order to maintain and where possible improve local environmental quality. Development proposals should be sensitively designed to a high quality and not cause harm to identified, protected sites, buildings or locations of heritage or archaeological value including Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments or their setting, and identified and as yet unidentified Archaeological Remains. The Council will take account of available historic environment characterisation work, including Conservation Area appraisals and archaeological assessments, when making decisions affecting heritage assets and their settings*

Policy CS18 (Access to Services) is as follows:

*The Council will work with local service providers to facilitate and promote their land use and buildings requirements through the identification of mixed-use and other development opportunities in the Site Allocations DPD. The Council will also require new development to contribute to the Community Strategy aim of achieving fair access to key community*



*facilities and the wider goal of creating a safer and more sustainable environment. New proposals will be assessed against their impact on existing local infrastructure, services and resources and where necessary, new provision of required key community facilities should be made as part of the development in consultation with the local community and local service providers and in order to meet or fund any infrastructure impact, having regard to the provisions of Policy CS21.*

Policy CS19 (Key Community Facilities) sets out that:

*Proposals for the provision or dual use of key community facilities, including educational, healthcare and recreational facilities, will be supported, subject to any environmental constraints and other relevant policies. The loss, reduction or displacement of facilities and sites will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that they are surplus to the needs of the local community or are no longer fit for purpose. It should also be demonstrated that there is no reasonable scope for alternative community uses to be provided and that any required, replacement accommodation elsewhere is satisfactory for all of its users, having regard to the provisions of Policy CS21.*



## 5 Discussion

This section of the report provides a sequential assessment of alternative use and development of the former White Hart Public House.

### **Retention as a Public house or Conversion to a Restaurant**

Since 2000, a quarter of pubs have closed in the UK, totalling more than 13,000 locations. The changing of lifestyles and drinking habits, along with supermarket competition, has led to a long-term decline of Public Houses.

The mass beer market has seen and continues to experience a shift to the off-trade, which, combined with the success of anti-drink drive legislation, have been significant factors leading to a general decline in the volume of traditional on-licensed wet sales. Statistics produced by the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) in their UK Quarterly Beer Barometer show a decline in annual beer sales in the on-trade between Quarter 4, 2000 and 2019 from 23,358,000 to 12,632,000 barrels, a decline of c.46%. The highest level of annual decline was reported in 2008, which would be consistent with the introduction of the ban on smoking in public places, and whilst the decline in beer volumes has continued until Q3 2018, total volumes saw small increases in the four quarters thereafter to Q4 2019.

During the same period, annual beer sales in the off-trade showed an increase from 11,215,000 to 15,352,000 barrels, an increase of c.37%. This marks a significant switch between beer volumes consumed in properties such as Public Houses and those consumed at home and purchased from locations such as supermarkets. The shift has been so significant that in 2015 the volume of beer sold in the off-trade exceeded the volume of beer sold in the on-trade for the first time and has been consistently rising ever since.

In June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union in the Brexit vote. Despite the uncertainty relating to Brexit, the economy proved more resilient than many expected. 2016 ended positively with strong consumer spending; however, over the course of 2017, this became more restricted amid concerns over the economy, personal finances and weak wage growth. More recently, but pre-Covid, the UK economy grew by a rate of 1.4% during 2019, up from 1.3% in 2018 but down from the 1.8% growth in 2017. The UK ultimately left the European Union in January 2021 after a year of transition.

In the aftermath of the Brexit vote, import costs increased, particularly in the food sectors, and inflation rose strongly. In 2017, inflation stood at 2.6%, falling to 2.3% in 2018 and 1.7% in 2019 ([www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)).



As a consequence of rising costs and weak wage growth, consumer spending once again came under close scrutiny. Whilst the pub sector proved relatively resilient to these pressures, the press widely reported on the struggles of the restaurant and retail sectors. Numerous restaurants across the branded, corporate and independent sectors were closed and/or placed on the market for sale and profit warnings were issued by a number of the major retailers.

Then, the sector was forced to face the challenges created by Covid-19.

The impact of the policies adopted by the Government during the pandemic including, in particular, social distancing, had a material effect on how all hospitality businesses were able to trade and inevitably, some businesses have suffered badly. Those businesses that have been most able to cope during restricted trading periods are those with more open trading areas, have outside spaces and offer food.

Regardless of the extent to which individual outlets have been able to cope from a turnover perspective, there has been a cost implication as businesses have needed to recruit additional staff to 'police' social distancing requirements and to be able to offer table service. Furthermore, many businesses have put in place practices to reduce the risk of staff and customers spreading the virus. For some, ultimately, it was just uneconomic to warrant opening at the most restricted points.

Whilst many government initiatives were introduced to support hospitality businesses, many costs remain fixed and generally, the operators of hospitality businesses have been faced with a lack of cash flow. Even since restrictions were relaxed, consumer confidence remains mixed, particularly given infection numbers, and there is still uncertainty and risk for operators. Other recent and ongoing challenges are coming in the form of staff shortages within the hospitality sector and the supply chain, as well as product shortages.

Reacting back in 2020 to the news of new sweeping lockdown measures, Emma McClarkin, Chief Executive of the British Beer & Pub Association, said: "*As a sector, we are of course devastated to have to close our pubs and are fearful for their future, but we recognise the situation and that the spread of Covid-19 is serious.*" Adding: "*Make no mistake, this could be the final straw for thousands of pubs and brewers*". The pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures led to a significant decrease of trade of Public Houses, with limited assistance and relief available to help such businesses cope with the fallout of Covid-19.

With lockdowns behind them, pubs are facing a new crisis: The soaring cost of energy. In an open letter to the prime minister, the British Beer & Pub Association warned that "*energy price increases have come at a time when the pub and brewing sectors had just begun to piece together their recovery from the pandemic, with many venues still carrying debt accrued from this time. Without Government support, all of the positive work done to support the*



*sector during the pandemic could be wasted, as unprecedented costs tip many pubs and brewers over the edge."*

As figures from the BBPA show, the number of pubs in the country has been steadily decreasing over the past few decades. In 1980 there were 69,000 open drinking establishments in the UK and after years of erosion the figure had fallen to just 47,200 in 2019. At the end of 2021 the figure had dropped to 46,350.

The fall in trade has hit pubs and breweries very hard, with poorly performing Public Houses unfortunately closing. This is the case in South Mimms, where the size of the village means it is only economically viable for one pub to be supported.

The pub was owned and operated by McMullens, a renowned Hertfordshire-based brewery and closed in 2021 following a significant drop in trading – stating that the business had become economically unviable. The listed building was in significant need of refurbishment to bring it up to modern standards, with the investment not viable based on trading performance. The White Hart is located on St Albans Road, with another Public House, The Black Horse located circa 270m to the north. For a village with such a small and reduced customer base, there is a large provision of Public Houses that outstrip the demand for such a facility. The Black Horse, similar to The White Hart, has been in operation since the 18th century and there is also the more modern addition of The Old Guinea.

Given that the White Hart is a listed building, the proposals would enable the retention, restoration and preservation of the key features whilst the Site is brought into a suitable and sustainable alternative use that would not detract from the heritage of the building. As such, the Application Site can be considered the least important to the character of the village core in terms of use as its real significance is in relation to the built form which is sought to be retained and preserved.

Businesses that suffer from strong competition are more prone to becoming unviable. This is exacerbated where the immediate local catchment population is limited. South Mimms recorded a population of just 855 at the 2011 Census. This will include those aged <18 years.

Consequently, it is reasonable to estimate that the 18+ year-old population of South Mimms may well be less than 700. The Black Horse continues to trade and is situated less than 300m from the White Hart.

The internal trading areas at The White Hart are small, with the main trading spaces extending to less than 1,100 sq ft. Such small trading areas immediately place a limitation on its economic viability. The kitchen is small and the property does not lend itself to relocating this to another area of the existing property. An extension of the property would be required to enable a more



substantive food offering, the cost of which would likely negate the benefit of any increase in food sales.

Data from McMullen illustrates the historical barrelage volumes achieved at the White Hart between 2005 and 2019. Please note a barrel is equivalent to 288 pints. The data below relates to all draught and bottled beer, lager and cider sold at the White Hart. It does not include wines, spirits or soft drink:

### **Year Barrels**

2005 - 365  
2006 - 364  
2007 - 325  
2008 - 307  
2009 - 290  
2010 - 283  
2011 - 248  
2012 - 232  
2013 - 206  
2014 - 181  
2015 - 179  
2016 - 182  
2017 - 140  
2018 - 148  
2019 - 162

It is abundantly clear from this data that beer volumes and, therefore, turnover achieved at the pub have consistently declined, almost year on year without exception, over a 15-year period. Volumes in 2019 represent less than half of that achieved in 2005. It should further be noted that the significant investment in 2007 by McMullens did not reverse - nor even halt - the decline. These trends clearly demonstrate over a long period that a pub is an unsustainable business in this location.

The location and nature of the pub will mean custom is drawn almost solely from the immediate residential area and business community, which in itself is a limiting factor, especially given the extent of competition in the locality and South Mimms small population. Pubs are increasingly reliant on passing trade and high footfall areas – as characterised by a number of operators focusing on town centre locations. South Mimms is a quiet village with minimal passing trade beyond those living and working in the area, which severely weakens the long term viability of the Site as a pub.





Competition within the wider local area is strong and these pubs present a broad range of styles of offering capable of catering for all customer requirements and demands and would present concern to potential operators for the White Hart.

It is thought that the same economic factors that have affected the Application Property are also likely to have affected the other Public Houses within the village, and the reduction in the supply of these facilities with the closing down of The White Hart are likely to have a positive effect upon the remaining Public Houses in and around South Mimms. The declining sales at The White Hart show that a village of this size is an unsustainable location for two Public Houses, in addition to those in the surrounding area, this is with the leakage of demand to the nearby larger settlements in mind.

Both The Black Horse and The Old Guinea present an acceptable alternative means of meeting the demand of The White Hart, and in this case, the loss of the community facility would be acceptable due to the suitable facilities near the Application Site, in accordance with Local Plan and the NPPF.

The former pub building is also unsuitable for restaurant use. The restaurant industry has also come under increased pressure in recent months due to the cost of living crisis - which has dramatically impacted wholesale prices - and a huge rise in utility costs (gas, electricity etc).

Therefore, the majority of successful restaurants need a large number of tables to form an economically viable business. The existing building does not provide a large or flexible enough space to accommodate these requirements - whilst the investment needed in the building further deems this use unlikely to meet modern occupiers' needs.

Appendix A of this document also includes an assessment from commercial agent Hartnell Taylor Cook, who states that the site is economically unviable for continued pub use, and that a restaurant operator would be unable to profitably and sustainably operate from the building.

Fleurets have considered the potential turnover and profit achievable by a reasonably efficient operator, however, this is dependent on the property being repaired, refurbished, equipped and fitted out with new inventory, fixtures, fittings and equipment. The cost is uneconomic and will not provide for any profit to be obtainable. White Hart does not remain an economically viable proposition as a public house.

As a result, a pub or restaurant is not a viable continued use for the site.

### **Alternative Community Facility**

The site has been assessed against a range of different community uses, which is summarised in the following table. As demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this Statement, South Mimms already



has a range of community facilities.

Community Use	Commentary
School	The existing building is too small, and the floor plan is not appropriate for a school. The property has insufficient open space for a school. Within South Mimms, there is already a primary school, which has some capacity, so an additional school would be inappropriate.
Medical Use	Given the number of residents in South Mimms and the availability of Medial Services in surrounding large villages it does not appear a suitable option.
Village Hall	There is already a well-established village hall in South Mimms
Place of Worship	The existing building is too small, and the floor plan is not appropriate for a place of worship. There is already a church in the village, and there are some ethical concerns for a religious facility in a former Public House.
Public House	Discussed in the previous section of this chapter.
Convenience Shop	There is already a well-established shop in South Mimms

It is thought that with the village of South Mimms being of such small size (855 people), the demand for increased and improved community facilities is likely to be low. Like the provision of Public Houses, the demand from the village itself is low, with this already being captured by the existing facilities within the village and in nearby larger settlements. The village is deemed close enough to Potters Bar to benefit from the facilities within the local town. It would be a more sustainable option to locate these facilities within Potters Bar where there is a greater, more established need in a more sustainable area for these uses. The White Hart has been assessed to provide an alternative community facility however, given its compromised and inefficient layout, coupled with nearby alternative facilities such as the Village Hall, 2 Jays Nursery and a range of further facilities in Potters Bar, there is limited demand or critical mass generated by the local population for more similar uses.

### Nursery / Medical Use

The listed building status of the former White Hart makes it unattractive to the majority of modern occupiers – particularly those in the medical sector. The outdated nature and the limitations on what alterations can be made to listed buildings pose huge challenges for change of use to a medical facility or nursery.

For a medical facility, these constraints will likely prevent the conversion into a modern, energy-efficient building. It is understood that the Applicant has been in discussions with the NHS ICB, who have noted that there are no plans for a new facility in South Mimms.

The applicant has had conversations with nursery operators regarding the building’s viability for



such uses. However, the location is deemed to be unsuitable to occupiers due to its lack of public transport connections and lack of proximity to other services. The need for a nursery in South Mimms is already addressed by the 2 Jays facility, located just 1 mile from the site on Crossoaks Lane. South Mimms does not have sufficient demand for multiple nursery facilities, with nearby towns such as Potters Bar, London Colney and Borehamwood meeting the wider need.

The Applicant has also approached two well-known nursery providers in Monkey Puzzle and Busy Bees – both of whom confirmed that they have no requirements for a facility in South Mimms due to its location being unsuitable.

### **Office Use**

The UK regional office market has seen substantial changes in recent years, mirroring the broader uncertainties within the sector. In response to the pandemic, there has been a noticeable trend among office occupiers towards high-quality, energy-efficient buildings strategically positioned near key transportation hubs. However, the regional market has experienced limited refurbishment and development activities, primarily attributed to escalating finance costs and high construction expenses, which have dampened developer interest. The sector comes under pressure from hybrid working trends and heightened risk of obsolescence. Improvements in technology have made it easier for employers and employees to utilise flexible working practices. Young people, being adept with technology are more willing to adopt new forms of working and are driving this trend. Around 83% of university students surveyed by Workthere in its 'The Office of the Future' report (2019) stated that flexible working is important.

Office investment is becoming increasingly selective as to where it will locate. Over the last three years in the UK, 76% of new office development is located within the 20 top office locations.

The North London & Herts office market has seen letting activity remain at below-trend levels over the past few years. This slow pace of activity has been largely due to a lack of larger lettings and businesses re-assessing their requirements post-Covid pandemic. Supply remained above 1m sqft at the end of Q3 2023, standing at 1.08m sqft, with grade A supply representing only 9% of stock on the market. The availability rate dipped below 6.0% again at the end of Q3 2023, standing at 5.9%, compared to 8.7% for the South-East region as a whole. Demand strengthened significantly in the second half of 2023 but remains below the levels seen at the end of 2022. The most significant improvement has been seen in the demand for larger buildings, where a number of requirements returned to the market.

Considering these market dynamics, South Mimms emerges as an unsuitable location for office



use for several reasons. The lack of nearby services and amenities diminishes its appeal to potential office occupiers. In contrast, locations like Potters Bar, Borehamwood and Hatfield, boasting superior public transport connections and amenities, are more likely to attract office occupiers.

The current state of the existing building further lessens its suitability for modern occupiers. Substantial improvements are imperative to bring the property up to acceptable standards and its limitations make it a less-than-ideal choice for businesses seeking contemporary and well-equipped office spaces.

The existing layout does not facilitate the organisation of modern office space and functionality required for a productive work environment. The property lacks the necessary infrastructure, such as adequate power outlets and data connectivity, crucial for modern office setups – and this would be both costly and risky to implement considering its secondary/tertiary location. Furthermore, considerations for factors like natural light, ventilation, and ergonomic design, which are integral to an optimal office environment, are not adequately addressed by the current property layout and structure.

The building's suitability to modern office occupiers is further weakened by its designation as a listed building, significantly reducing the scope to make the necessary alterations to bring it up to the necessary standard.

These combined challenges demonstrate that the property is highly unlikely to provide sufficient quality office space for occupiers and investors.

Policy CS10 of the Development Plan encourages the provision of new office space on designated employment areas, which this site is not. Any office space on this site could conflict with existing office sites and designated employment areas.

South Mimms has little to no provision of office accommodation, demonstrating the lack of demand in this location and the subject being unsuitable for office development.

Agents Hartnell Taylor Cook also conclude that *"These combined challenges demonstrate that the property is unlikely to provide sufficient quality office space for occupiers and investors."*

A change of use of the building to office use, would not be sustainable, profitable or appropriate.

## Building Condition



As the property currently stands, it is in a poor condition and requires significant capital investment. The owner of the property has provided a Schedule of Condition. The report provides an estimate of remedial expenditure for the property to continue to be utilised as a public house and in order for the property to maximise trading potential.

Item	Budget Cost Allowance
Structural repairs	£85,000
Roof repairs	£25,000
Brickwork repairs	£20,000
External timbers	£25,000
Replacement Windows	£60,000
External doors	£10,000
External decorations	£25,000
Damp repairs	£15,000
Replacement Rainwater goods	£15,000
Internal decorations	£25,000
Commercial kitchen	£100,000
Commercial toilets	£25,000
Domestic kitchens	£20,000
Domestic bathrooms	£10,000
Refurbishment of domestic accommodation	£25,000
Commercial Floor coverings	£25,000
Replacement Mechanical & Electrical	£100,000
	<hr/>
	<b>£610,000</b>

The above sum does not include new inventory or investment in the external areas. The cost of these aspects is in addition and could easily add a further £100,000. Given the trading history of the public house, such works are not viable.



## 6 Conclusion

This Statement has been produced by Warner Planning to support a Planning Application at The White Hart Pub, St Albans Road, South Mimms, Herts, EN6 3PJ. The application seeks permission for the partial demolition of the existing built form on the site and the conversion and extension of the former public house into six apartments, conversion of outbuilding into a two-bedroom apartment and construction of a detached two-bedroom infill dwelling, along with associated landscaping, bin store and parking.

A major constraint to development in South Mimms is the location of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The importance of development on already developed brownfield land to increase the housing stock within the district is clear to see. Without the supply of brownfield land, Hertsmere would be required to release parcels of Green Belt designation to manage the demand for housing. Green Belt land provides five key purposes as described by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Application Site is considered a parcel of vacant, inefficiently used land, and the proposal would encourage the recycling of this land into a more suitable and consistent use for its surroundings. The proposal looks to introduce a conjunctive form of housing development into the housing stock of Hertsmere. The proposal offers significant benefits, especially the delivery of housing at a time when the Council are unable to demonstrate a five year housing land supply.

Overall, the proposal is in accordance with the new Local Plan and NPPF and is acceptable for redevelopment.

There is precedent in Hertfordshire of similar types of development being allowed. Notably, The Hope and Anchor Public House in Welham Green was granted permission for Change of use from a Public House (A4) to three residential dwellings (C3) and the Erection of six dwellings in November 2022. This is a similar type of application, highlighting that the principle of a Public House being redeveloped for residential purposes is acceptable. In regard to the loss of a community facility, the Council was happy to proceed on the basis that there was an alternative means of meeting the demand in another sustainable location. Furthermore, there is another application at The East, Great North Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7TB which was also approved for the Erection of 8 x 4 bedroom dwellings with associated parking, bin/storage and retention of existing vehicular access following demolition of existing Public House. This again made the same argument as the other application and highlights the in-principle acceptability of this type of scheme in Hertfordshire, these are discussed in full within the Planning Statement.

The former Public House in South Mimms has been shut for a considerable amount of time due



to the decline in the volume of sales. This decline evidences a lack of demand for this facility. The development as set out would enable the retention, restoration and preservation of a Grade II listed building.

The Public House sector has suffered a considerable decline over the last 20 years, following changing drinking practices, supermarket competition, changes in lifestyles, increases in of taxation, smoking law changes, the pandemic and the energy crisis. The cumulative effect of these matters has resulted in the closure of Public Houses such as the former White Hart.

The pub is in a poor condition and does not meet the standards required for modern operators. The investment required to bring it back in to a state of repair and condition to enable it to trade will be significant and economically unviable based on the long term decline in trading performance at this location. An operator would need to be able to raise funds, either via cash reserves or finance and be willing to invest this in such a property during a time where both finance costs and utility bills are squeezing businesses.

The village of South Mimms offers another other Grade II listed Public House, which dilutes the demand in such a small village. The Black Horse will be able to capture the demand of the closed facility on the application site, offering the possibility for their own improved performance.

It is considered that there are compelling grounds to support the proposed development, including:

- ✿ Provide homes that can be delivered immediately.
- ✿ Re-use of a previously developed site.
- ✿ Retain and restore a listed building.
- ✿ Bring into use an under-utilised and vacant site.
- ✿ Appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.
- ✿ Sympathetic to on site and surrounding heritage assets.
- ✿ Create a high quality design.
- ✿ Additional residential units to further add to the mix of housing types.
- ✿ Alternative Community Facilities available to negate any loss.
- ✿ The proposal is well related to the adjoining buildings, and complements the area's character.
- ✿ New Landscaping with a biodiversity net increase.
- ✿ New biodiversity opportunities – especially bird and bat boxes.
- ✿ Reduction of vehicle movements and activity from the site.
- ✿ The site is located in a sustainable location, close to facilities.
- ✿ Sustainability measures integrated into the development.
- ✿ Residents will deliver economic benefits by supporting local businesses.



✿ Economic benefits during the construction phase and post-construction, the occupiers

As confirmed in this Statement and the supporting agent's letter, there are no alternative uses appropriate for the building.

As demonstrated, the proposal is the optimum viable use for site and redevelopment should be approved promptly.





## Appendix 1: Hartnell Taylor Cook



The White Hart, St Albans Road  
South Mimms EN6 3PJ

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Dear Recipient,

We are pleased to provide our thoughts regarding the viability of the above property in regards to its continued use as a public house and the practicality of its potential conversion to alternative commercial uses.

### Introduction

---

Founded in 1922, Hartnell Taylor Cook (HTC) are one of the UK's leading independent property consultancies, providing a full range of services across the UK.

HTC specialise in retail, leisure, trade and mixed-use property agency, development and investment throughout the UK, but with a focus on London, the Home Counties, and the South East.

In terms of my personal credentials, I am a Senior Associate Director within the retail, development, and consultancy team at HTC. Prior to joining HTC, I was in the Retail, Restaurants & Leisure Team at Lambert Smith Hampton for c. 8 years. My role at LSH was similar to my existing role, although with a more specific focus on the retail, restaurants & leisure market.

I have over 10 years' worth of experience, and a diverse background encompassing both freehold and leasehold advice to private and corporate clients, developers, statutory bodies, Insolvency Practitioners and tenants. This includes both acquisition and disposal work.

### Loss of the Public House

---

The market for public houses has steadily declined over the past c. 20 years due to falling demand resulting from changing consumer preferences and lifestyle habits. The start of the decline can be attributed to the introduction of anti-tobacco laws and the increased sale and promotion of cheap alcohol in supermarkets. This began to encourage people away from traditional pubs and socialise in different ways.

The rise of online entertainment options and increasing focus on health and wellness, in particularly from younger generations, means people are now inclined to socialise in different ways. The traditional pub model no longer aligns with the changing preferences of the evolving population – particularly the younger demographic who are becoming progressively more health-conscious and less likely to drink alcohol.

The Covid-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst to expedite these cultural shifts and prompt people to re-assess their social and recreational choices. Many people turned to virtual gatherings, home-based activities and outdoor experiences, shifting away from the traditional pub setting. As a result, the demand for traditional pubs has experienced a notable decline during and after the pandemic, with many pubs, bars and restaurants continuing to grapple with falling demand and debt incurred during this period.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, economic influences have contributed to a further decline in the pub market. Factors such as rising energy and wholesale costs for alcohol and food have significantly affected operational costs, which coupled with the aforementioned decrease in trade and consumer habits, have created a very challenging environment for pub establishments.

### Subject to Contract

Hartnell Taylor Cook is regulated by RICS

Hartnell Taylor Cook LLP is a Limited Liability Partnership registered in England and Wales OC 313211

**Without Prejudice**

Page 1

[htc.uk.com](http://htc.uk.com)

To illustrate this, we are aware that an average of 51 pubs per month were lost during the first quarter of 2023, rising to around 77 per month between April & June. Many large pub operators in the UK are disposing of assets and reducing their portfolio's. The likes of JD Wetherspoons for example who had a portfolio of 32 public houses for sale in September 2022 (10 freehold, 22 leasehold), and recently have put another 11 of its pubs on the market (10 freeholds, 1 leasehold). In a trading update, it said in the financial year-to-date, it had opened three pubs, and sold, closed or surrendered to the landlord 28 pubs. In addition to the aforementioned reasons for closing, they also stated that *'almost all are related to circumstance [...] where there is another Wetherspoons pub nearby.'*

The Milton Portfolio Op Co 3 Ltd. (former Wear Inns Pub) portfolio of 25 pubs was put up for sale by administrators last month. According to Costar News the operator *'despite continuing to trade robustly, the industry has struggled to recover from the hit to business that came with the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.'*

Reduced demand means that pubs are now competing for a smaller overall slice of the market, and hence locations such as South Mimms can no longer viably provide enough business for more than one pub, especially if there is competition situated in the wider area. In the case of South Mimms, The Black Horse pub competes with the former White Hart and provides both food and beverage offerings. Furthermore, The Old Guinea on Crossoaks Lane is situated just 0.9 miles away, providing further pub/restaurant facilities in the area.

The shifts in consumer demand are also evidenced by changing requirements from operators over the past few years. The majority of occupiers that we work with have shifted their requirements from market towns and villages to more central, prime locations with high footfall, or close to trains and tube stations. Whilst requirements still individually depend on the size and population of the town, local demographics and other competition, there is a clear trend towards more sustainable locations with significant passing trade. For example, we sold a former Nationwide Building Society bank on St Peter's Street in St Albans to McMullen's, who converted it to a pub which opened in June 2023. After a competitive bidding process with over 15 offers, the property was acquired for a price in excess of £2m, which shows McMullen's intent on opening properties in the appropriate locations which would be viable investments for them.

Conversely, the White Hart was clearly unprofitable as McMullens were forced to close their doors to customers in February 2021. The fact that McMullens remain active across the county suggests that the location was no longer suitable to their business plan and had become economically unviable. We understand that the building required significant investment to modernise, which was simply not viable in light of its trading performance. The building has notable constraints – specifically, being a listed building, alterations and general maintenance would have proved very costly and difficult to achieve. This, coupled with its compromised internal layout and energy inefficiency (leading to soaring utility costs), left McMullens with an unprofitable pub that was unable to justify the required significant capital expenditure to bring it up to modern standards.

The combination of an unpopular location, expensive and outdated building to operate and nearby competition illustrates that the site is economically unviable for continued pub use.

## **Restaurant**

---

Similarly to the market for public houses, the UK restaurant market has encountered several challenges in recent years, impacting its dynamics and profitability. Some key challenges include:

**Cost Pressures & staff shortages:** The industry has faced increasing costs related to ingredients, labour, and overhead expenses. Fluctuations in the cost of living and the impact of external economic factors have strained the financial sustainability of many restaurants. The devastating labour crisis in the restaurant market was brought on by intensified visa regulations due to Brexit, and the movement of workers to other industries during Covid-19. These labour shortages have led to further pressure on profit margins.

**Brexit Uncertainties:** The uncertainties surrounding Brexit, including changes in labour markets and supply chain disruptions, have affected the restaurant industry. Issues such as potential labour shortages and uncertainties about trade agreements have added complexity to restaurant operations.

**Changing Consumer Preferences:** As with the public house sector, evolving consumer preferences, driven by health consciousness, dietary trends, and a demand for unique dining experiences, have forced restaurants to adapt their menus and offerings.

**Impact of Technology:** The rise of food delivery platforms and online reservations has changed consumer behaviour. Restaurants that have not embraced technology or adapted to the digital landscape have found it challenging to reach and retain customers.

**Economic Downturns and Pandemic Impact:** Economic downturns, such as the global financial crisis and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic, have significantly impacted the restaurant industry. Lockdowns, restrictions, and changes in consumer behaviour during the pandemic have posed unprecedented challenges for many establishments.

**Rising Operating Costs:** Beyond food and labour costs, other operational expenses, including rent, utilities, and compliance with regulatory standards, have increased. This puts additional pressure on profit margins, especially for smaller and independent restaurants.

In addition, restaurants typically have high fit-out costs, and the recent increase in interest rates have meant that borrowing money to create these premises has become more expensive, and recovering that debt takes longer during a time of increased uncertainty and falling trade.

The above pressures have led to many closures of licensed premises throughout the UK, and according to the Alixpartners CGA Hospitality Market Monitor, from the year commencing July 2022 – July 2023, 5,376 venues shut, which means that the UK lost around one in 18 of its licensed premises over that 12 month period. In period from September 2022 to October 2023, there were 3,766 net closures, which equates to just over 10 per day, and this brought the total number of Britain's licensed premises to under 100,000, which shows a net reduction in total outlets between 2003 & 2023 of -30.6%.

Despite all this, there are still some restaurant occupiers actively seeking new premises and locations, but we are finding the majority of these occupiers want to locate in high footfall locations with open plan and flexible layouts which they can easily fit out and trade in prominent locations. We would strongly refute that South Mimms meets any of these location requirements and is unlikely to attract investment from a restaurant business. Further, nearby towns such as Potters Bar attracts a substantial range of major chain and independent restaurants that are far easier to access and benefit from significant passing trade in comparison to South Mimms. This, plus the lack of transport connections and slightly remote location of the site, means restaurant businesses are unlikely to be attracted to South Mimms over better connected locations nearby.

Moreover, a substantial refurbishment and investment would be needed in order to convert the property to restaurant use, which I suspect would not be a viable in this location. The property itself is outdated whilst its heritage designation renders alterations / modernisation extremely difficult and expensive to achieve. The floorplate is awkward and poses huge challenges for a restaurant operator due to the lack of large, open plan layout, instead being characterised by a number of smaller connected rooms. The capacity is limited by the configuration of the building, the kitchen is too small and the basement has very low ceiling heights. As outlined previously, the capital investment required to increase the size of the building to provide the necessary covers, office space and kitchen to generate a viable business is likely to prove unfeasible.

All of these issues will negatively affect prospective owners' ability to run a profitable and sustainable business and are confirmation that the property would not be suitable for conversion to restaurant use.

### **Nursery / Medical Use**

---

The listed building status of the former White Hart makes it unattractive to the majority of modern occupiers – particularly those in the medical sector. The outdated nature and the limitations on what alterations can be made to listed buildings, this poses huge challenges for change of use to a medical facility or nursery.

For a medical facility, these constraints will likely prevent the conversion into a modern, energy efficient building. It is understood that the Applicant has been in discussions with the NHS ICB who have noted that there are no plans for a new facility in South Mimms.

We also understand that the applicant has had conversations with nursery operators regarding the building's viability for such uses. However, the location is deemed to be unsuitable to occupiers due to its lack of public transport connections and lack of proximity to other services. The need for a nursery in South Mimms is already addressed by the 2 Jays facility, located just 1 mile from the site on Crossoaks Lane. South Mimms does not have sufficient demand for multiple nursery facilities, with nearby towns such as Potters Bar, London Colney and Borehamwood meeting the wider need.

We understand that the Applicant has approach two well-known nursery providers in Monkey Puzzle and Busy Bees – both of whom confirmed that they have no requirements for a facility in South Mimms due to its location being unsuitable.

### **Office Use**

---

The UK regional office market has seen substantial changes in recent years, mirroring the broader uncertainties within the sector. In response to the pandemic, there has been a noticeable trend among office occupiers towards high-quality, energy-efficient buildings strategically positioned near key transportation hubs. However, the regional market has experienced limited refurbishment and development activities, primarily attributed to escalating finance costs and high construction expenses, which have dampened developer interest.

Considering these market dynamics, South Mimms emerges as an unsuitable location for office use for several reasons. The lack of nearby services and amenities diminishes its appeal to potential office occupiers. In contrast, locations like Potters Bar, Borehamwood and Hatfield, boasting superior public transport connections and amenities, are more likely to attract office occupiers.

The current state of the existing building further lessens its suitability for modern occupiers. Substantial improvements are imperative to bring the property up to acceptable standards and its limitations make it a less-than-ideal choice for businesses seeking contemporary and well-equipped office spaces.

The existing layout does not facilitate the organisation of modern office space and functionality required for a productive work environment. The property lacks the necessary infrastructure, such as adequate power outlets and data connectivity, crucial for modern office setups – and this would be both costly and risky to implement considering its secondary/tertiary location. Furthermore, considerations for factors like natural light, ventilation, and ergonomic design, which are integral to an optimal office environment, are not adequately addressed by the current property layout and structure.

The building's suitability to modern office occupiers is further weakened by its designation as a listed building, significantly reducing the scope to make the necessary alterations to bring it up to the necessary standard.

These combined challenges demonstrate that the property is highly unlikely to provide sufficient quality office space for occupiers and investors.

### **Summary**

---

The subject faces multiple challenges that render it unsuitable for continuation as a public house, or for conversion into a restaurant, office, or nursery building. South Mimms is a small village and is adequately served – in terms of pubs and restaurants – by The Black Horse and The Old Guinea. There is very limited footfall and passing trade available to attract investment from a new pub/restaurant operator.

As a location, South Mimms itself is at best secondary, with a lack of demand for commercial buildings from businesses, which is instead absorbed by nearby towns such as Potters Bar and Borehamwood. The

subject lacks the essential features to attract commercial users, such as proximity to services, amenities and public transport connections.

Furthermore, the building itself is in poor conditions and requires significant capital expenditure to meet satisfactory standards for modern occupiers. Its layout limitations, minimal car parking and energy inefficiency make it impractical to create a conducive and profitable environment for a pub, restaurant or other commercial or community use. For a medical building, the property lacks the necessary infrastructure and spatial configurations essential for a healthcare or nursery facility, and the demand within the village is not significant enough to justify investment into these sectors.

Lastly, the building's heritage designation render all of the above required changes and alterations extremely costly and difficult to implement, whilst its running costs will worry prospective users at a time where rising utility costs threaten both commercial and hospitality markets.

In summary, the combination of a very small local population, lack of footfall and passing traffic, layout constraints, energy inefficient building, cost of re-positioning the building, coupled with the diminishing market demand in these sectors, renders the property both economically unviable and unsuitable for any of these commercial or community uses.

Yours faithfully,



**Jonathan Moore BSc (Hons) MRICS**

**Hartnell Taylor Cook**

**Senior Associate Director**

**DD: 020 7788 3827**

**E: [jonathan.moore@htc.uk.com](mailto:jonathan.moore@htc.uk.com)**