

Comment for planning application 22/00256/F

Application Number	22/00256/F
Location	North Arms Inn Mills Lane Wroxton OX15 6PY
Proposal	Change of Use from public house to single residential dwelling
Case Officer	James Kirkham
Organisation Name	Brian
Address	12 Bloxham Road, Banbury, OX16 9JN
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour

Comments

I am writing on behalf of the North Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. CAMRA is a national consumer organisation one of whose aims is to "support the public house as a focus of community life". CAMRA is an interested party within the scope of national planning policy. We object to this application as it would result in the permanent loss of a community facility. Retention of pubs allows them to continue to: * meet the needs of differing communities by maintaining a healthy and varied choice for the consumer; * ensure a place of informal social meeting, eating and drinking; * provide a place of employment for the Landlord and family and in many cases full and part time staff; * enliven the local economy through purchasing from other local outlets/shops and bringing visitors to the local area. The application documentation notes that the "current owners purchased the North Arms in August 2021 with a view to a change of use". It is not the function of the planning system to enable a quick return on a speculative investment. Planning is necessary to maintain and build vibrant and thriving communities, and with Wroxton being a Category A Service Village, community facilities are an essential part of that. The National Planning Policy Framework [NPPF] and policies of the adopted Local Plan favour the retention of community facilities, like pubs. The application seeks to indicate that there is sufficient alternative provision by virtue of another closed pub in the village and a hotel, plus a village hall. However, a hotel bar cannot possibly provide the same type of community provision as a thriving local pub, such as a home for sports, darts or Aunt Sally teams or similar, and previous Planning Inspectorate decisions have ruled out the consideration of facilities such as village halls as being similar provision to pubs. The application also points to a handful of pubs in nearby villages, but these are all over 1 mile away by the shortest road route, only two of them are within a short distance of the single public transport route through Wroxton, a bus service which currently stops at 6pm (no service at all on a Sunday), so there is little realistic means for Wroxton residents to have an pub evening out without driving or the expense of a taxi. The application also seeks to demonstrate that the North Arms could not be made viable, by inclusion of a report from Bruton Knowles. We expect that this report was commissioned by the applicant and caution that the principle of "who pays the piper calls the tune" may apply. The report appears to use selective figures, such as stating the potential for the garden to accommodate 30 covers but ignoring these in the turnover estimates. Also note that in part the viability calculations rely on an estimate of repair costs of 200,000 that seems based on a number of 'ideally be replaced' and 'likely to require's with no justification or breakdown. According to checkatrade.com, a typical thatched roof replacement should cost in the region of 850 per thatcher's square (~9 sq m); as the footprint of the North Arms on the plans is approximately 90 sq m, allowing for 180 sq m of pitched roof area this would place the roof replacement cost in the region of 17,000. A commercial kitchen installation should cost in the similar order, and the report notes that some stonework and repointing is required these seem a far cry from 200,000. The Planning Inspectorate have also stated that it is illogical to note that a business needs investment to prosper but that the business would be unviable because the investment could not be justified. The viability report's market commentary also trots out the tired old trope of consistently falling beer sales, whereas SIBA figures show the overall beer market growing by 2.6% in 2018, and the market for craft beer from smaller producers had been consistently growing in size for many years, prior to the pandemic. We thus remind the council of its obligation to independently assess the viability before considering granting an application which would result in the permanent loss of a community facility. We point you to The Red Lion in Bloxham as a recent example of a formerly closed and run-down pub with a similar-sized footprint to the North Arms, in a village close to Banbury having other pubs, and which was successfully turned around by a committed new owner willing to invest in the property and the business to make it into a thriving, profitable facility. We urge the council

to reject this application.

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Attachments