

KING WILLIAM IV – Planning Application - 23/07884/FUL

BACKGROUND

A planning application has recently been submitted seeking change of use of the property to a single residence. The Save the KWIV Group has been operating for over 8 years since the pub closed in 2015 seeking continued use as a public house with potential village ownership.

A copy of the application can be seen using the following link;

<https://publicaccess.wycombe.gov.uk/idxpa-web/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=S4A211SCLX000>

1. History,

The King William IV was first licenced for use as a public house in 1827 so it has served generations of Speen residents for some 200 years prior to the closure in 2015. It is the last public house in Speen. There are no other properties or sites available that could replace it.

2. Marketing,

The owner has had the property on the market for over 8 years seeking offers in excess of figures between £825,000 and £925,000 s.t.c. (excluding fixtures and fittings). We are aware that various pub operators have expressed interest in the building but have not pursued the matter because of the scale of the asking price. Clearly after 8 years of marketing it must be quite clear that these figures are far too high or a deal would have materialised.

By contrast the Save the KWIV group commissioned and paid for a formal detailed open market valuation from specialist licenced property agents, Christie and Co (part of which is included without our consent in the planning application). Their report valued the property at £600,000 less £150,000 which were estimated to be required to address disrepairs which had been allowed to develop and to enable the property to be re-opened as a pub. Their valuation figure of £450,000 is supported by evidence of sales of comparable properties in the locality and projections of potential trade levels.

3. Community Interest,

The Save the KWIV group has carried out detailed comprehensive survey of villagers in February 2021. This is available online at;

https://www.savethekingwilliam.org/_files/ugd/79d041_b4acb4121db14b2ca161bd03c6a939e7.pdf

The results confirm a determination to see the property re-opened as a public house and developed as a general hub for village activities. Pledges have been secured from over 80 village households to input funds to facilitate a purchase. Well in excess of £500,000 has been pledged and offers have been submitted to the owner having regard to the professional advice provided to buy the freehold interest. The group have also considered other proposals from the owners agents to redevelop part of the site but in all cases the proposed asking price, which is unsupported by any evidence of value, has been far too high.

4. Viability,

People will be aware that rural pubs have suffered countless closures in recent years. However, the 2023 Plunkett report on Community Businesses confirms a far better trading record with 768 such community businesses trading including 27 new businesses opening during the year with others showing a good long term survival rate.

5. Planning Legislation,

Changes of Use of properties are controlled by the Use Classes Order of 1987, which divides differing land uses into various categories. This legislation was updated in September 2020 and public house use now falls within a “Sui Generis” or specific use class all of its own. This change was made to provide greater protection for pubs. Any change of use now requires planning consent from the local authority. Planning decisions by local authorities must be based on whether applications are correctly aligned with current local and national policies.

6. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – as revised on 19th December 2023

This sets out the governments core strategy for the country and certain policies are particularly pertinent to the King William IV

e.g. Para. 8. Achieving Sustainable Development -sets out a social objective- *“to support strong vibrant and healthy communities.....with accessible services”*.

Para 87. Supporting a Prosperous Rural Community – planning policies should enable –Para 88(d). *“the retention and development of accessible services and community facilities such as local shops, meeting places,....public houses and places of worship”*.

7. Local Plan policies in the Wycombe Local Plan- Adopted in August 2019

This sets out local policies to achieve both local and national needs. Various policies are very pertinent for the current application on the King William IV and other community facilities.

e.g. Policy DM29.2 –*“Land or buildings currently or last used for community use must be retained unless the applicant has clearly demonstrated through an exhaustive needs assessment that the land and/or buildings proposed to be lost are surplus to any community needs.”*

Para 6.92 The NPPF describes how the *“planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities and that planning policies should guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs,”* Planning policies should also promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship”.

Para 6.93 *‘This policy applies to the full range of facilities required for communities to meet their day to day needs for social, recreational and cultural activity’.....community uses protected by this policy includes ‘public houses.’*

Para 6.94 *“These uses enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments and the presumption is therefore that they should be retained. In rural areas, pubs serve a unique, and pre-eminent, role as community facilities. In all cases the onus is on the developer to evidence that their removal will not reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs for social, recreational or cultural facilities or services. The Council will therefore normally resist the loss of community facilities and land.”*

8. Action by Buckinghamshire Council - Informal Planning Officer Note

The council issued their own Informal Planning Officer Note in February 2021 highlighting the key policy issues as applied to the King William IV itself. The document highlights key principles including the following;

“The public house is classed as a community facility and the council will seek to retain this type of use. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also promotes the retention of such uses. Furthermore, bringing the building back into active use as a public house is encouraged because the use contributes to the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and adds to the vitality of the conservation area. Conversely, applications for the change of use of the building are likely to be considered harmful to its special interest.”

“The King William IV, surrounding listed buildings and the Speen Conservation Area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purposes of Paras 193-196 of the NPPF. Heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and great weight is given in the planning process to the conservation of their significance and to the conservation of their surroundings.”

A copy of this document can be found using the following link;

https://www.savethekingwilliam.org/files/ugd/79d041_ac80fbccb10d47ef933b46dce8983ed3.pdf

9. Current Planning Application,

The current planning application provides no evidence of any needs survey as required by Policy DM29.2 of the Local Plan. The detailed survey of the entire village carried out by the Save the KWIV group confirms strong interest from the community in developing the property as a village hub with substantial financial backing from numerous households.

The application does not in any way demonstrate that the pub would not be viable. The evidence merely indicates that it is not viable at a commercially unrealistic and unsupported asking price of £925,000.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The application fails to meet the requirements of the Local Plan and would be contrary to established policy set out in both the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework and should therefore be refused.
2. The applicant has failed to carry out any needs survey to support the application as required in the Local Plan. By contrast the only survey that has been conducted clearly demonstrates that the last public house in the village is NOT surplus to needs.
3. The level of the asking price adopted from the outset has effectively frustrated any opportunity for the community or any other genuine prospective publican or pub company to acquire the property at a realistic price.
4. The application provides no evidence to suggest that the property is unviable and evidence from the Plunkett Foundation report of 2023 shows that community run businesses can succeed where private businesses have failed.
5. The village survey conducted by the Save the KWIV group confirms that the local community remains keen to see this property retained as a public house and developed as a village hub. This opportunity would be lost forever if change of use were permitted depriving an immediate village community of over 750 people of a place to socialise.

Against this background the Save the KWIV group strongly objects to the application and consider that it should be refused by the Council.

To register your views you can comment on the application on the Council website or you may wish to write to or email Sarah White, (sarah.white@buckinghamshire.gov.uk), the case officer at Buckinghamshire Council quoting the reference 23/07884/FUL or email Buckinghamshire Council (planning@wycombe.gov.uk).

Representations need to be lodged before 16th February 2024 to ensure that they are taken into consideration. The following link provides guidance on how to register your views;

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/having-a-say-and-reporting-issues/how-to-comment-on-a-planning-application/>

Thank you.

Save the KWIV Group

KWIV Speen Limited is a Community Benefit Society. Registration No:8499