

Planning Statement

**The Winterbourne Arms,
Winterbourne, Newbury RG20
8BB**

Prepared For
Nicholas Roffe

9021
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CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following statement has been prepared for Nicholas Roffe in support of a planning application for the conversion of the Winterbourne Arms Public House (hereby referred to as 'The Site') into a single residential dwelling.
- 1.2 The second section of the report identifies and describes the extent of the site and its main characteristics, together with the relevant planning history.
- 1.3 The third section sets out the relevant planning policy context and includes an assessment of the proposal and the case for allowing planning permission.
- 1.4 The final section summarises the findings of the report and sets out the conclusions.



2 THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

THE SITE

- 2.1 The site comprises of an existing public house located in the rural settlement of Winterbourne, which is close to the M4 Motorway (1km to the North) and the A34 dual carriageway (2km to the East). It enjoys a countryside setting accessed via an unnamed Road. The village is otherwise characterised by residential development which has grown in a predominantly linear pattern along the through road.
- 2.2 The site is centrally located within the village and comprises of a detached two storey building, constructed in red brick, timber framed panels and slate roof. It benefits from a car park to the rear of the property and is neighboured on each side by residential properties and their associated gardens. Whilst it is a pleasant building, it is of little historic architectural interest and is neither listed or located within a conservation area.



- 2.3 The site forms part of a cluster of otherwise residential dwellings however Winterbourne does not have a formal settlement boundary, as defined on the Council's local plan proposal map, and therefore is in open countryside in planning terms. Despite this, it can still be said to be located within a settlement as per its common meaning. The site also lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 2.4 The current layout of the building includes a bar and restaurant on the ground floor with a kitchen and cellar behind. The first floor is then occupied by bedrooms, a domestic kitchen and bathrooms.



PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.5 A search of the Council's online planning register reveals the following planning history for the property:

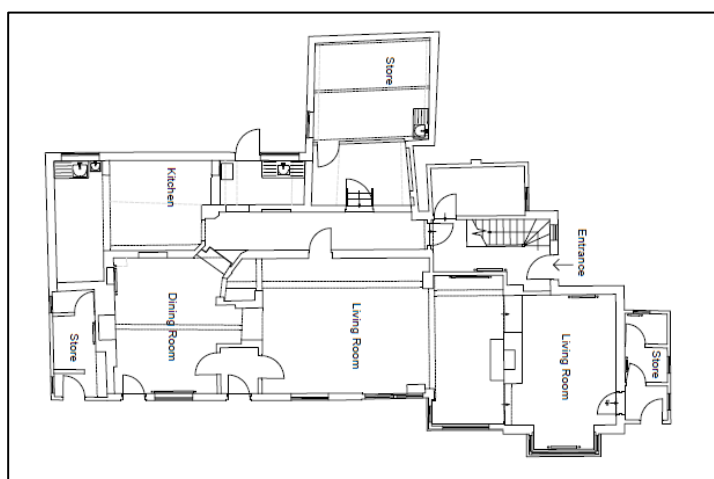
Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
00/00473/FUL	Single storey additions onto public house.	Refused	20/12/2000
01/00035/FUL	Single storey additions onto public house.	Approved	27/02/2001

Table 1. Planning History

- 2.6 Notwithstanding the above history, the approved single storey extension does not appear to have been implemented. The property has therefore been modified very little in recent years. Whilst it has a lawful use as a Public House the business closed in 2017.

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.7 The proposed development does not seek any external alterations to the building, but the rooms would be subject to some modest renovations to enable its use as a single dwelling. Whilst these do not require express planning permission, a change of use of the public house is required for it to be used as a single dwelling.



- 2.8 Access to the site would remain as existing, with parking and private amenity space kept at the rear.



3 PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 3.2 For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan comprises of policies from the:
- Core Strategy (CS) Development Plan Document (2006-2026)
 - West Berkshire District Local Plan (LP) 1991-2006 (saved policies)
 - Proposal Map
- 3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Governments planning policy objectives is also referred to as it is a material planning consideration in planning decisions.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 3.4 The NPPF makes clear that the Government wishes to boost the supply of homes. To facilitate this objective, the Council's spatial strategy, as set out in the Area Delivery Plan Policy 1 of the Core Strategy, seeks to direct new development to the main settlement areas of the district, according to a defined hierarchy. The village of Winterbourne is outside these formal settlement areas and is therefore considered under countryside policies, where there is a general position of constraint towards inappropriate development.
- 3.5 Regard can also be made to the recently published NPPF which makes clear that planning decisions should encourage the effective use of land. In doing so, paragraph 118(d) states that planning policies and decisions should "*promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings*".
- 3.6 There is therefore a national policy incentive to make use of buildings such as the Winterbourne Arms, which has not been fully utilised due to its closure in 2017, to enable it to be brought back into a viable use that safeguards its future.



- 3.7 The Council's saved Local Plan policy ENV.19 is also relevant and establishes that proposals for the reuse or adaptation of existing buildings in the countryside will be permitted, subject to certain considerations. The following are most relevant to the proposed development. We set out our response to each below:
- *the form, bulk and general design of the existing buildings are in keeping with their surroundings;*
- 3.8 The proposed development only includes modest internal changes which do not in themselves require planning permission. Externally the building is to remain as existing. Consequently, whilst there would be a material change of use, the character and appearance of the building in the context of its surroundings will not be harmed.
- *the existing buildings are suitable for the proposed new use(s) without needing extensive alterations, rebuilding and/or enlargement;*
- 3.9 As indicated above, the proposed development would not involve extensive alterations, rebuilding and/or enlargement. The only change will be very modest works to the internal fixtures and fittings, which do not themselves require planning permission.
- *The conversion respects local building styles and materials;*
- 3.10 There are no proposed changes to the existing buildings external appearance or materials.
- *the proposed curtilage of the new development is not visually intrusive or harmful to the amenities of the surrounding countryside;*
- 3.11 The site as a public house already benefits from its own curtilage which is clearly defined. The site is also centrally located within the settlement with residential properties either side. A change of use of the site to a dwelling would be in keeping with that existing domestic setting, so would not be visually intrusive or harmful to surrounding amenity. It should also be noted that a public house, due to associated noise impacts and the coming and goings of cars, has a greater adverse impact on amenity. The proposed use could therefore be considered an enhancement in this respect.



- the proposed new use(s) would not generate traffic of a type or amount harmful to local rural roads, or require improvements which would detrimentally affect the character of such roads or the area generally;

3.12 The main road running through the village is an unnamed rural road which is mainly used for local traffic. It would not require any improvements because of the proposed development. It should also be noted that, with little local or passing trade, the pub has needed to rely on clients who drove to the site. In comparison, a single dwelling would not generate high numbers of car and other types of vehicle movements (e.g. from daily deliveries). As such, the proposed development will result in a reduction in the number of movements associated with the site, a benefit in highway and sustainability terms.

- *the proposed new use(s) would not result in material harm to the environmental qualities of the surrounding rural area.*

3.13 The proposed development does not seek any material changes to the physical characteristics of the site and so would not impact on the environmental qualities of the surrounding rural area. However, as already indicated, the reduction in potential car journeys can be considered a benefit to the local environment.

3.14 The proposed development therefore satisfies all the requirements of Policy ENV.19 of the Local Plan.

LOSS OF PUBLIC HOUSE

3.15 Section 8 of the NPPF (promoting healthy and safe communities) states at paragraph 92 that planning policies and decisions 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*”. This can include local shops, meeting places, *public houses* and places of worship.

3.16 Also relevant is Policy CS10 of the Council’s Core Strategy, which states that:

“Existing small and medium sized enterprises within the rural areas will be supported in order to provide local job opportunities and maintain the vitality of smaller rural settlements. Proposals seeking the loss of such existing sites and premises must demonstrate that the proposal does not negatively impact upon the local economy, and the vitality and viability of the surrounding rural area.”



- 3.17 Whilst there is therefore a position for retaining small and medium sized enterprises within rural areas, including public houses, the second part of the policy provides for some flexibility acknowledging that not all rural enterprises should be retained if they are not viable. Public Houses are a unique resource which are viewed in the planning system as a community facility yet they are a commercial business that must make money to be viable.
- 3.18 The Council has also produced a supplementary planning document on public houses. Whilst this dates to 2000, in the absence of any up to date guidance, this remains the only specific test for assessing the loss of the public house and we understand that it continues to be applied by the Council¹. Paragraph 6.1 sets out criteria to be used in the assessment of applications for development resulting in the loss of a public house. We consider each in turn as follows:
- (i) *whether it would have an adverse effect on the local character, diversity and amenity of the area;*
- 3.19 Whilst regrettable that the proposal will result in the loss of the public house, as detailed in more detail below due to the financial constraints of running the business, it could no longer operate at a profit. Consequently, it is no longer sustainable as a business and ultimately this resulted in its closure in 2017. The building also needs additional investment due to its state of repair. For example, it needs a new roof and repair to one of its chimneys. In addition, the cellar and dry storage area needs rebuilding due to crumbling brickwork and the interior walls are suffering from rising damp.
- 3.20 Without the prospect of investment from the pub business, to safeguard the building's future an alternative viable use is required, otherwise the buildings deterioration is likely to accelerate. This is an important planning consideration, because an empty, disused building will gradually result in the loss of visual amenity to the area and will have a detrimental impact on the character of the village.

¹ We reserve the right to challenge this document on the basis that it is not up to date and was prepared in both another policy context and pre-NPPF



3.21 The proposed development offers a viable alternative which would not only finance the repair work required to bring the building back to good condition, it will also secure the long-term use of the building for generations to come.

(ii) whether it can be demonstrated that alternative acceptable public house provision exists (defined in terms of location, size, range of facilities and quality of provision) or can be made available in the local area/community;

3.22 A search of the local area reveals that there are five public houses within a 3.5mile radius of the Winterbourne Arms, which we list below:

- 1) The Crab (formerly known as The Blue Boar). This is a historic civil war inn situated on the old Oxford to Southampton road. It serves food and drink all day and has letting rooms.
- 2) The Bell at Boxford. This is a pub and restaurant with letting rooms.
- 3) The Blackbird at Bagnor. This is a Michelin Star rated gastropub.
- 4) The Red Lion at Chieveley. This is a managed Arkells Dining Pub and has recently benefitted from a refurbishment including the addition of letting rooms.
- 5) The Fox and Hounds at Donnington. This is a family owned drinking and dining pub.

3.23 In addition to the above, Newbury Town Centre is only four miles from Winterbourne and has a wide selection of pubs, restaurants and coffee houses, offering even more choice when seeking out alternative provision in the local area. These are wide ranging in terms of their size, quality, and facilities they offer, providing sufficient alternative provision to the Winterbourne Arms.

(iii) evidence exists that the loss of the public house would comprise an unacceptable decline in the standard of community services for locals and visitors;

3.24 There is no evidence that the loss of the pub would result in an unacceptable decline in the standard of community services. Being a rural community, the village residents are already reliant on services and facilities which are outside the limits of Winterbourne and whilst the



site could be considered a remaining community hub, it has already been closed since 2017. As such it has not been relied upon for some time as a community facility.

3.25 Also, the unfortunate reality is that Winterbourne, which comprises of approximately 28 dwellings, with a further 12 within the Parish boundary only has a population of 206 persons². This is not itself large enough to sustain the business on its own and so to be economically viable the business would need to attract more passing trade and visitors from outside the area. Due to its location away from main roads and given the availability of alternative provision elsewhere in more accessible areas, the pub can no longer reasonably continue to operate as a sustainable business. The listed pubs in paragraphs 3.22 and 3.23 above are all in more accessible locations than the application property. If people are going to be driving, then the search area for viable alternatives is further reaching.

(iv) whether it can be demonstrated that the public house is no longer economically viable and that all reasonable attempts have been made to sell or let the building as a public house at a realistic price for no less than 6 months.

3.26 Information received from the current owners suggests that the business did trade successfully during the 1990s and continued to trade successfully into the 2000s. Unfortunately, when the recession hit in 2008 it suffered a major decline. Trade had only recovered to 66% of its pre-recession trade by 2015. It has also been impacted by a change in people's habits, with supermarkets and off licences now selling more than 50% of beer sold with the number of pints sold in pubs reportedly declining from 29 million per day to less than 11million today.

3.27 Also, before closing in 2017 Draught Beer sales at the pub made up less than 4% of its trade, whereas food sales made up over 60% of its income and ancillary sales of drinks to accompany food made up another 25%. Furthermore, it is understood, from the business' main suppliers Dayla, and before them Waverley, that supplies of Real Ale have never exceeded 50 composite barrels per annum during the previous two landlords' occupancy. During the final months of the business being open this was down to 35 barrels per annum (a barrel equates to about £1000 of sales net of VAT). This is important because Real Ale sales of about 80 pints per week

² 2011 Census



are insufficient to keep the real ales in good condition, particularly when they have tried to have at least two available.

3.28 In addition, cigarette sales at the pub declined by over 50% over the period 2008 to 2015, resulting in the cigarette machine being removed as an uneconomic sales point.

3.29 In 2008 the business had operating fixed costs of £44,000. These had risen to £48,000 in 2015 and today would exceed £52,000. To cover these costs alone, the business needs to take £104,000. To offer food at least a chef at £25-40,000pa is required, a barperson at circa £20,000pa and a waiting/washer-up at circa £18000 pa. If you want to open 7 days at least a 2nd Chef at circa £22-28,000pa, another bar person at circa £20,000pa and another waiting person at circa £18,000 is required. This equates to another £260,000, or a total of £364,000 (£7000 per week) to break even. In 2008 the business took £382,230, in 2015 only £261,260.

3.30 The below table provides an overview of the business viability:

	2008	2015
Gross turnover	£382230	£261260
Nett of VAT	£325303	£217716
Cost of Sales		
Food 55% Margin	£87831	£70540
Drink 60% Margin	£61192	£41801
Overheads		
Business Rates	£7140	£8800
Electricity/Gas/ Water	£6500	£8500
Rent 2008	£30000	
Mortgage 2015		£30000
Licence	£185	£185
Insurance	£500	£500
Staff costs	£120000	£100000
Total	£313048	£260226
Nett Profit	£12255	£-42,510

Table 2. Costs Appraisal

3.31 The above clearly demonstrates a significant decline in the profitability in the business, with substantial losses made in 2015. It is no longer a viable enterprise.

3.32 Notwithstanding the above, marketing of the property has been undertaken by Fleurets Leisure Property Specialists since October 2017 and details are provided as part of this



application. Their letter dated 18th October 2018 confirms that the property was actively marketed for just over 10 months. It was sold to the present owners in August 2018 however due to the viability of the business as a public house being unsustainable, the proposed development is considered its optimal viable use.

OTHER MATTERS

- 3.33 In addition to the above, the Core Strategy requires the amenity of neighbouring properties and future occupiers to be considered as well as highway implications. In this case the property already benefits from a large area of private amenity space which will serve well as a private garden. As no alterations to the building are proposed there will also be no change in the physical relationship of the building with the neighbouring properties.
- 3.34 However, as already expressed, given that public houses are often considered as being unneighbourly, due to noise and other associated impacts, the proposed residential use would be an enhancement in comparison. It will not therefore result in harm in this respect.
- 3.35 In terms of highway impacts, it is accepted that due to its relatively remote location, there is an inevitable reliance on the use of the private motor car for travelling to and from the site. However, this is likely to be true of any potential use of the site, but critically the existing use also has an impact and therefore needs to be considered in the planning balance.
- 3.36 The proposed use would result in the creation of a single residential unit, but this will have a relatively low car usage compared to the potential number of vehicular trips from a public house. As such, there would be a significant reduction in the number of car journeys which is a clear benefit in terms of the sustainability of the site. Consequently, the harm would not lead to an unacceptable impact in planning terms.



4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The NPPF clearly emphasises that there is a need to boost the supply of homes and encourages the reuse of under-utilised land and buildings in meeting that need. The rationale being that this represents a sustainable form of development. In this case sustainability of the application site is further improve proposed development as it will reduce the amount of people using the site who are reliant on the private motor car.
- 4.2 The proposed conversion results in no change to the appearance of the existing building with the only change being the amendments relating to internal changes to fixtures and fitting, which do not themselves require planning permission. The lack of change ensures that the visual impact of the building on the street the area, the countryside and the AONB is not materially altered.
- 4.3 In terms of the loss of public house, we have demonstrated that the property has been marketed, but more critically that the use of the public house as a business is not a reasonable prospect. Indeed, the business had been operating at a loss which ultimately led to its closure in 2017.
- 4.4 The application provides the council with the ideal opportunity to provide new dwellings in line with current government policy. However, it also ensures that the building is not left to deteriorate by securing an optimal and viable use for the building.
- 4.5 In having regard to the overall planning balance, it is our assessment that the proposed development complies with the aims of the relevant development plan policies and in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.