

*Supporter's comments in respect of application
19/02195/FUL*

Change of Use from public house to residential planning application: The Wagon and Horses, London Road, Cirencester GL7 2PU

As the Immediate Past Lead Member for Planning and Chairman of the Town Council's Planning Committee I fully endorse and support this Change of Use planning application which, in effect, is a resubmission of an earlier planning application 18/04250/FUL which was supported by the Town Council's planning committee on 13th December 2018 but which was subsequently refused planning consent by the Local Planning Authority on 19th March 2019 and is now the subject of an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

A number of letters objecting to the latest planning application have been submitted by a total of 10 "objectors" of whom eight are not residents of Cirencester but are residents from outlying villages (including one from Wotton-under-Edge!) the validity of which has to be questioned on that account. There are only two objections from local residents residing in the vicinity of the Wagon and Horses and these are concerned only with parking, rather than the loss of a local amenity, which throws doubt on the Town Council's most recent planning response "that the loss of the public house would be detrimental to the vitality and viability of the central part of Cirencester" or that "the proposal would also diminish the Town's cultural and tourism offerings".

Moreover, a second independently commissioned viability report, quite separate from and independent of the first report, has concluded that the Wagon and Horses is not viable and its loss would NOT be detrimental to the vitality and viability of Cirencester. This is consistent with the first report and for that reason strengthens its conclusions. It is also worth noting that the Wagon and Horses lays outside the town centre primary and secondary retail areas to which special Change of Use planning conditions apply and, additionally, lays outside the SPD area as designated in the approved Local Plan 2011-31 which is now the subject of a joint CTC/CDC master planning exercise led by Cotswold District Council later to be incorporated in the Neighbourhood Development Plan led by Cirencester Town Council.

In summary the demographics of the area do not support the continued use of the Wagon and Horses as a viable public house which stands well outside the town centre recognised for retail visitor and tourism-related purposes and which, if operated as a traditional public house, is likely to detract from the cultural offer provided by the nearby Barn Theatre. Nor has an application been made to preserve the Wagon and Horses as an Asset of Community Value for which there is no viable demonstrated demand or business case. The Wagon and Horses is not a listed building to which its proposed use and design remain sympathetic and there is no impact on the Conservation Area.

For these reasons I urge the Members to approve this application to provide additional much needed housing accommodation close to the town centre for which there is an undoubted demand and which, by reason of its walking and cycling convenience, mitigates against the demands that otherwise might be made of car parking at this location.

Objection to Application for change of use, Waggon and Horses, Cirencester.

5th September 2019

James Brown

I would like to make an objection to this second application. There appears to be little new in this from the first which was rejected. Therefore, I will mainly reiterate what I said at the planning meeting.

The Waggon and Horses, despite suggestions to the contrary, is in a good position in the town. It is more visible than the 12 Bells for example which continues to thrive.

Whilst not having car parking of its own there are two large, often free, car parks in the immediate vicinity and some on street across the road. Most urban pubs in Cirencester and elsewhere do not have private car parking. The newly refurbished and recently award winning Barn Theatre and associated conference centre are also revitalising this area of Cirencester. There is a bar and restaurant connected but only offer one type of experience and not to everyone's taste. Therefore, an opportunity exists to exploit this potential. I do not believe, as indicated by one written objection, that this would be detrimental to the offering of this facility. Pubs are not the hotbeds of disorder they once were.

The viability report points to the falling trade at the pub. What the author doesn't appreciate but has been put forward in all the letters of objection is that this was due entirely to this mismanagement of the last tenant. When he took the Waggon over he operated it very successfully with a popular and busy Thai themed restaurant, he kept his beer well and it was a popular wet pub destination. However for various reasons he lost this enthusiasm and custom started to dwindle. By the last two years or so he had reduced his opening hours, closing at lunchtimes and by the end he was often closed during his advertised opening hours, before absenting himself completely. It is well known to anyone in hospitality or retail that if a customer makes the effort to go somewhere only to find it closed they will not return.

Another pub, the Golden Farm on the Beeches demonstrates what can be done with enthusiasm and professionalism. A year ago this was on its deathbed – limited hours, no food offering, poor ale and attracting the wrong clientele. Now it is a thriving community focused pub with good food and beer, quizzes, pub teams, live music and recently CCOC award winners. Enterprise Inns managed to find tenants capable of achieving this.

I feel that the viability report greatly underestimates the potential revenue for this pub. A turnover of £250 000 rooms and pub would still be conservative and could provide a good living for an owner operator. A freeholder has a much greater choice of beer and food supplier and at a better price than a Pub Co tenant. The expansion of large “Whetherspoons” type bars is not applicable to Cirencester at the moment, and despite suitable units coming available but overlooked it seems unlikely it ever will. I understand they have looked. Also, recent figures released by Barclaycard and published in the Morning Advertiser show spending in pubs rose by 11% in 2018 compared to 2017.

In conclusion, I believe at the right price the Waggon would make an attractive opportunity. I would ask the council to consider at what stage in Cirencester does closing a pub not constitute a marginal loss and what is the minimum number considered sufficient to offer the choice, accessibility and variety required. Cirencester is growing all the time so I suggest that more leisure facilities are needed not fewer and pubs are a vital part of these.

James Brown