

# St George Community Association Development Group

## Section 62A Planning Application: S62A/2025/0082 The Bull Inn, 333 Crews Hole Road, Bristol, BS5 8BQ

### Summary

It is the position of the St George Community Association Development topic group that this planning application should be refused.

Development of proposals for this site should have proposed the following:

- i) Retain the existing building as a public house as first preference
- ii) If (i) is demonstrated to not be economically viable, then the viability of alternative uses for the building of benefit to the community, should be considered.
- iii) If (i) & (ii) are demonstrated to not be economically viable, then designs that convert the 1904 building to residential use should be considered.
- iv) In the event of the existing building being retained (options (i) (ii) or (iii)) then additional sympathetic development in the car park area should be considered.
- v) In the event that it is demonstrated that no viable design that incorporates the existing building can be produced, then the design should not be constrained to the existing building footprint with adjacent car park. A design should be developed that makes best use of the whole site, includes the provision of affordable housing and protects the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Quoting a leading member:

“the proposal is for the poorest option of possibilities, that is; the demolition of a significant local building, the retention of a dreary car park and a construction that appears out of place in location and size. What would be a private building if approved is much bigger than the community building that it would replace (it is expected that private buildings are smaller) and would have poor relationships to its boundaries, a situation that has evolved around The Bull Inn in its time, but shouldn't be replicated now because those relationships exist”.

### Detailed response

There are four issues that our group considered:

- 1) Policy DM6 – alternative provision
- 2) The desire of the local community for a pub
- 3) Whether the outline design is acceptable
- 4) Required surveys and reports

## **1. Policy DM6 - alternative provision**

The neighbourhood of Crews Hole is constrained topographically and by a lack of public transport. Topographically the area is bound by the River Avon with no footbridge for 0.7 mile and is in a river valley at the base of steep hills. The nearest pub suggested, the Lord Raglan involves a 50 metre ascent from the Bull and is beyond the 800 metre distance described in DM6. All the other pubs listed involve similar or greater ascents and greater distances sometimes including descents as well as ascents. The applicant's contention that the 800m walking distance should be extended is not accepted, indeed we believe that, given the steep slopes in the area, this figure should if anything be reduced so as to maintain the 10 minute walking limit.

The Bull Inn is the last remaining community space in Crews Hole, the two chapels having been converted into flats and the other pub, the Lamb Inn having been demolished and replaced by housing. It is also the last retail space; small groceries such as the nearby Marquess of Worcester and Jack Britton's shops, have closed over the years.

When the footbridge to St Anne's, had to be closed for an 18-month period, the lack of level, pedestrian access to a grocery store caused considerable distress to residents unable to drive and physically unable to make the ascent to alternatives.

Given these facts it is essential that as part of any full planning application for residential use the continued use of the site as a public house is demonstrated not to be economically viable. The viability of using the site for other businesses that would benefit the community, such as a café or general store with community meeting space should also be considered. Any economic assessment should take into account passing trade, both commuters and those visiting the river, Troopers Hill and Conham woodlands, as well as the local community.

It should be noted that since the closure of the Bull Inn there has been no promotion of the site as a commercial business. A member of the St George Community Association contacted a representative of the owner via the owner's website in October last year enquiring about future plans for the site and offering help with consultation with the community on the owner's proposals. The response at the time was that the owners had not yet decided the future of the site.

## **2. The desire of the local community for a pub**

In 2013 when the Bull Inn was closed there was concern in the local community that the closure would be permanent and likely to lead to the pub being replaced with housing. This led to a successful application for the pub to be designated as an Asset of Community Value. The subsequent management of the pub in a way that led to frequent visits by the police (see evidence given at the time concerning the withdrawal of the premises licence), neighbourhood disturbances and other negative behaviour meant that a renewal of the Asset of Community Value designation was not requested. However given that for many years prior to this mismanagement the pub acted as:

- a) A polling station
  - b) Meeting point for the community
  - c) Provided employment for local residents
  - d) The only licensed premises in easy walking distance, often with a food offering
- a period when the premises were mismanaged should not prevent a law-abiding, commercially viable business operating.

There is still great interest in the future of the pub given the number of enquiries on social media such as NextDoor, Facebook and Reddit. In conversation the consensus seems to be that local people would welcome the re-opening of a “good pub” preferably with a food offering, there is also support for the possibility of a small grocery store on the Spar model.

The Spring 2024 issue of “Pints West” the CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) branch magazine (see [www.camrabristol.org.uk](http://www.camrabristol.org.uk) ) contained a half page article about the Bull Inn on page 13, describing the popularity of the pub and its value. The piece ends with the paragraph “Bristol Pub Group will support any local community initiative to save the Bull Inn for the benefit of local residents and would like to see it restored to its rightful place as a much valued community hub”

There is currently at best insufficient evidence, at worst, evidence that contradicts any claim that the pub is not desired by the community.

It is essential that the applicant had carried out open consultations with local people to inform any planning application, working with the St George Community Association and the local St George Troopers Hill councillor, but this has not happened.

### **3. Is the outline design acceptable?**

The applicant refers to the Avon Valley Conservation area. There has been a pub on the site since at least the 1700s; it was rebuilt, in a slightly different location on the site to the original pub, in 1904 (see Bristol City Council’s Pinpoint mapping system, the photo of the former pub in the background of the first image on [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerAlbum.htm](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerAlbum.htm) and the licensee list in the now archived Bristol Lost Pubs website).

That image from the 1890s keeps to the description of the Avon Valley Conservation Area in Crews Hole having “steeply wooded, sloping gardens” and “predominant architectural features are pantiled and slate roofs, random stone walling, painted, rendered walls with timber windows frames and doors, generally proportioned and detailed in the cottage vernacular of the period” (18th century).

The area is of significant importance in terms of national industrial history and also local history, see [www.troopers-hill.org.uk/history](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/history) , with the pub having provided refreshment to those who made that history and also serving as a site for inquests into the deaths of those who met their deaths locally whether by natural causes, industrial accident, drowning in the nearby river or other causes.

Given the history of the site is the best use of the land being made by only building on the extreme north of the site? Should the current building be kept as a reminder of the designs created for the Bristol brewery of Georges & Co Ltd when many pubs in Bristol were remodelled in the early 1900s? This is the only example of a brick built building of that period in the vicinity. The structure of the Three Crowns pub on Blackswarth Rd was retained to good effect on Blackswarth Rd when it was recently converted into apartments. In addition retaining all or some of the structure of the original building would be more in keeping with a carbon neutral approach bearing in mind Bristol’s declaration of a climate emergency.

Having buildings on the north and south of the site with car parking spaces out of sight behind or underneath could be more visually pleasing. It also gives the option of a mixed use site, with a separate commercial site to a residential one. In addition access to the steps immediately to the south of the site would be very obvious to residents/customers and give the most convenient access when ascending to Niblett’s Hill or Dundridge Lane. The right of access via these steps to Niblett’s Hill was part of the Section 106 agreement for the Bull Lane flats above the site.

It should be noted that little-used onstreet parking options exist opposite the site which, if used by new residents and their visitors, could contribute to natural traffic calming and road safety. The speed limit on the road is 20mph.

Balconies facing a road which in peak times has heavy traffic with associated particulates would appear to risk a negative impact on the residents' health. Though, the garden to the rear of the property, if maintained could provide a shared amenity space.

One of the complaints of residents living directly opposite the pub during its period of mismanagement was the noise of music when the pub doors and windows were open in summer. Appropriate sound tests would need to show how this would be handled in any development. In addition the proposed new development has a greater area reaching 3 floors than the current building so sight lines would need to be checked to ensure the veracity of the applicant's statement.

In the opinion of the St George Community Association Development topic group insufficient thought has been given to the best use of the site that would complement the needs of existing and future local residents. In particular we would wish for a design that would support policies DM17 and DM18 regarding affordable dwellings.

If the design proposed were accepted and built there is then a risk of a subsequent application to build on the remaining, under-used space. Logistically, economically and in terms of impact on the environment it is far better, in this case, to have a single, well thought out design and development that makes best use of the whole site.

Even if the decision is made that the site can no longer viably be used as a pub, any design based on this application should be refused.

#### **4. Reports and surveys**

In addition to any reports and surveys requested by Bristol City Council we would recommend that the site be checked for the remaining presence of Japanese knotweed. This was in evidence close to the one storey section of the building.

Wildlife found frequently in the area include badger, deer, bats, slow worms and common lizards. The sheltered bank and garden of the site will be host to a wide range of invertebrates, perhaps including Red Data Book 1 species that have been found in the nearby Local Nature Reserve, Troopers Hill. We would recommend appropriate surveys be carried out at the relevant times of year by ecologists specialising in this range of wildlife and that any subsequent planting or landscaping reflect and support the species found.