

STATEMENT A12 – Tessa Fitzjohn

I am writing to object to the planning application for change of use for the Windmill Pub, and to challenge the owner's view that the pub isn't financially viable.

I was a founder member of the Save the Windmill Group, and we tried to raise 500K to buy the Windmill and turn it into a community pub in 2019 -20.

We started by checking out the viability, and decided that we could make a reasonable profit. These figures were provided in our share offer, which was shown to our residents who agreed to buy 197,000 of shares in the pub: to Tridos Bank who felt we had a going concern by offering the group a 150,000 mortgage and the Plunkett Foundation a grant of 100K. Unfortunately we failed to raise the full 500K and owner was not prepared to lower his price. We discussed the possibility of offering 400K but it wasn't acceptable.

So I dispute the owner's argument that the Windmill isn't viable as incorrect.

The second issue I would like to challenge has been raised by the planning officer, who states that there are numerous pubs within close proximity to Windmill Hill. This is true to some extent. However my argument concerns the matter of principal.

Imagine our cities, towns and villages, without corner shops, theatres or cinemas to name a few of the important public assets we enjoy. Buildings that provide opportunities for meeting each other, having fun, learning, and purchasing food and drink. Do we want our cities to be devoid of opportunities to connect to each other?

My corner shop was sold four years ago. The owner was determined to sell to some one who would run it as a shop and he held out for just that person probably making far less money by doing so.

During Covid the same corner shop became an essential ingredient in supporting the community, particular older, more vulnerable members of our communities so they could purchase food and importantly speak for a few minutes to some one face to face who knew them and cared about them.

So I ask you to consider what a 'local pub', like the windmill brings to the area and why a ' local pub' cannot be considered in the same way. A valued resource enjoyed for many more reasons than just 'going for a drink'.