

STATEMENT A21 – Tom Phillips Brynolf

Pubs and community buildings are being threatened with closure all around Bristol and the country due to the inexorable spread of unaffordable flats and student digs. If The Windmill ceases to be a pub then we would be losing a major part of the character of the area. The pub is also a community hub and an essential part of the “village in a city” - i.e. community centre, pub, shop, park etc. If everything is housing then it becomes a suburb revolving around an impersonal town centre.

The continuation of places like The Windmill have to be prioritised in planning applications, as these are the heartbeat of the community’s cultural life. Otherwise, what is the point in planning policy and where does it stop?

Planning applications such as these have to be more than about a quick profit for individuals. If local views are ignored then people have no stake in an area and civic connection and responsibility is drained away. Such decisions seem small but their impact, especially cumulatively is massive, culturally, economically, socially and psychologically.

There are already 100’s of flats being, or proposed to be, built in Bedminster, so I do not see how it is necessary to close this pub to meet housing targets. In addition, all these new residents will likely want places to go.

According to the Officer’s Report, it seems the viability of the business is a moot point, as they feel the second main criteria – alternative provision – is met. This appears a circular and faintly ridiculous argument. The pub has managed for 150 years, and investors and banks were willing to back the community buyout based on a thorough business plan.

In relation to alternative provision, the report lists numerous pubs and community facilities. This “paint by numbers” planning is again spurious and has no real insight into the real effects. By this standard any pub in Bristol could be closed as there is almost bound to be several pubs within 1km or so. It makes a nonsense of the planning process. By this logic pubs can just keep closing because another pub appears on Google maps so many 100 metres away. This would include the only two other pubs actually within the ward (one of which did close and is now owned by the largest pub company in the UK). To me, the whole point of committee decisions has to be providing compassionate and nuanced consideration, away from numbers on a chart. I have to say also that the majority of these suggested “alternative” pubs are not on Windmill Hill, are old school boozers, or are sports bars.

The Windmill is a unique venue. There is nowhere else locally with the same traditional, community-embedded, family focused and welcoming vibe. I can safely say that the majority of the old clientele will never go to most places listed as an alternative.

In addition, it is suggested that there are plenty of other community facilities. This again is ludicrous, as it includes an office (Green House), a farm, a church and various sports clubs,

including a skate park. By this logic we can close the church or community centre, because there is a place in the park to do “ollies” and “360’s”.

The report also suggests that these facilities are more inclusive as they cater for people that don’t drink alcohol. This is verging on the farcical as a justification to close the Windmill. Not only is the pub a place to eat, meet and not necessarily drink alcohol, but also by this rationale the skate park is not inclusive to non boarders.

The high support for this building remaining as a pub can be clearly seen by last year’s crowd funding efforts raising £170K from small donations, despite the national situation, lockdowns and financial uncertainty at the time. That’s £170K during a pandemic! – when people could not meet to boost support - to save a loved venue. Now that times are improving, and support remains strong, it seems likely a similar effort now would meet the desired target. Please use your foresight and sagacity to decline this application and allow the opportunity for the building to continue and flourish as it should.