

STATEMENT A25 – Mike Cranney

We are a small company, run by 2 directors and our partners. Both directors have over 50 years of industry experience between them. We have two other pubs, one is now leased to a former member of staff, who was closed throughout the height of the pandemic, the other is The Lazy Dog. The extra debt that we had to introduce to the business to survive and keep our staff employed, coupled with the wide scale cost increases have put enormous pressure on the financial health of the business.

We bought the windmill in a dilapidated state in 2006. With substantial investment we completely renovated the building from top to bottom and created stand-alone 4-bedroom flat above the pub with completely separate utilities and entrance. We transformed the ground floor into a successful local pub, which flourished for the first few years. Over the years other venues opened in the area, slowly diminishing our trade, until we were no longer able to operate at a profit.

It is important to note that the valuation that was commissioned to support the campaign to 'save the windmill' was carried out by an agent from York who had no knowledge of the unique market conditions that exist in Bristol. We were housing a vulnerable family of refugees when the agent carried out his valuation and we wanted to ensure that the family who were residing were not disturbed; they were very unsettled at the time. He did not view the separate flat that was recently valued by Ocean estate agents at 195k.

Fleurets are an extremely well respected and highly experienced agent that specialise in the hospitality sector. They initially valued the site at 525k; we reduced the asking price to 495k after 6 months of marketing the site.

In February 2020 we agreed to lease the site to a local brewery; the pandemic hit and the buyer pulled out.

The 'save the windmill' campaign were given the opportunity to lease the venue with the same terms that were agreed with the local brewery, after it was clear that they were unable to raise funds to purchase. The 15-year lease agreement fixed the rent at 27.5k per year which is considerably less than half of the 64k per year that the 'save the windmill' campaign had forecast to charge a tenant as part of their own business plan.

The Windmill was initially developed from a collection of dwellings. It is a Victorian building on 4 different levels. The market conditions that we are now operating in are significantly more challenging than in years gone by. The venue is not equipped to operate successfully under the trading conditions of modern hospitality. The kitchen is far too small to cope with the increased demand for a credible food offering. The toilets are on 2 levels and are unable to accommodate wheelchairs. The site has a small courtyard garden that does not provide the desired customer experience in summer. If you are to be profitable in today's market conditions, a venue needs to capitalise on more and more opportunities to trade. The site simply isn't able to do this.

I urge the committee to grant consent for change of use and allow the reinstatement of the dwellings that were once in its place and provide a sympathetic and attractive development on the footprint of The Windmill. Thereby stabilising the financial situation for a well-supported community pub, The Lazy Dog and help to secure the employment of the 25 staff.