

Public Houses - Future after closure

Motion raised at Full Council been referred to Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Motion:

1. Public Houses - Proposed by Councillor St. John, Seconded by Councillor Langridge. Councillor Harry St. John proposed the motion, which details that if a public house is closed for whatever reason, and the applicant can prove they have tried to make it viable, or have failed to find a buyer for the pub as a pub at a realistic price reflecting its true commercial value (over a realistic marketing period of at least 12 months), and not some exaggerated hope value for residential conversion, the Council's policy (currently defined in E5) will seek, in the first instance, to see the building reused for a suitable community use. If there is no obvious need or demand for that type of use, then the Council's second preference would be conversion to affordable housing to provide smaller dwellings for local people resident in the parish or adjoining parishes, and this should be secured in perpetuity by a suitable S106 agreement to supplement the known shortage of affordable dwellings for local people especially in rural villages. The third preference should be commercial use - office, workshops or even retail to encourage more employment opportunities in rural locations. Councillor St. John proposed that the resolutions attached to the motion are agreed by Council. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Langridge. After advice from the Chair that it would be reasonable for the motion to be referred to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, Councillor St. John stated that he was happy for this to happen, as it would benefit for the relevant wording be attached to any resolutions in line with the Local Plan. Council **Resolved** to refer the motion to the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Response from Chris Hargraves - Planning Policy Manager WODC

Policy E5 of the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 relates to the development and retention of local services and community facilities including commercially run facilities such as shops and pubs. In essence the policy seeks to protect such uses by requiring alternative forms of development to demonstrate that suitable alternative provision will remain and that in the case of pubs, shops and other commercially run services and facilities, that the existing use is no longer viable and is incapable of being made viable or adapted.

The motion suggests that an alternative 'sequential' approach should be taken whereby if it can be demonstrated that a pub is not viable, the Council's first preference would be for the building to be retained in some form of community use, followed by affordable housing and then, an alternative commercial use such as offices or workshops.

Members will be aware that a new Local Plan is being prepared to cover the period up to 2041 with an initial public consultation taking place in autumn 2022 and further consultation planned during 2023.

This process will provide the opportunity to consider the current wording of Policy E5 and whether it needs to be updated and augmented including in relation to the potential sequential approach outlined in the motion.