


**Statement for planning enquiry into The Queens against the refusal of planning permission:
Lara Roberts**



My husband and I moved to Selborne December 1999. At that point we were not married, had no children and imagined that we would live here for a couple of years and then move on. 25 years later we are still here, albeit in our second house, and cannot imagine that we will ever leave.

The Queens Hotel

Our connection with The Queens has always been a strong one. It is the reason we moved into the village in the first place. Before looking at the house that we purchased we visited the pub to check out the 'village vibe'. We were already committed before we even saw the house.

We met many of our friends within the building of the Queens. We were encouraged to join the Selborne Wine Society, which met monthly there. Their Friday night fish and chips were legendary and the Sunday dinner voluminous. We had just moved down from London and encouraged many friends to join us for the weekends. In this the accommodation at The Queens was essential.

When we were looking for a wedding venue The Queens not only offered the pub, all its rooms, the field behind to put up a marquee and updated all their electrics so we could have large fridges and catering units parked in the carpark, as the kitchen wasn't big enough. We took over the place for 2 weeks. This would not have been achievable anywhere else.

A few years later The Queens hosted my 40th birthday party. This turned out to be the inaugural event for our now, legendary, Zig Zag Band. No party in a village is a party without them!

It's not just all party at the Queens. On many occasions my husband hired its rooms to host business and team meetings, providing an opportunity to bring more people to the village to experience all it has to offer without having to leave its boundaries.

Closure of The Queens Hotel

Whenever a local icon is sold on there is always worry, but the fact that DWD had managed to acquire the building without the tie to Punch Taverns, was an exciting thought. They promised that they were looking to improve the pub and were putting in an experienced manager. However, within 6 months they had closed it, saying it wasn't viable. What

became clear was that they closed it, ripped everything out and purposely destroyed it for the purpose of attaining change of use to housing.

I know this because when the council told Warwick development that they had to prove that no one wanted to buy it as a pub before they would consider changing use, they put it on the market.

I phoned Savills, the agent to register an interest, and was told that any offer had to be “north of a million”. This is a direct quote.

Bear in mind at this point the building was completely gutted. It didn't even have a staircase, and they had paid in the region of £850k as a newly refurbished fully functional pub with rooms. The cost of returning it to its previous state was estimated at £750k.

Not surprisingly the pub did not sell and DWD left it to rot and become an eye sore on the village High St.

The Tap Room

After much pressure DWD have had to change their tack. The result of that is the Tap Room. I go there regularly, as do my family. We like it. It's a great place to have a chat and meet someone new. However, its future is not secure, mainly because it is not big enough to fit enough people and it is not open long enough,(5-8pm Thursday to Saturday), to make any money. It had a manager, a very good one, but he had to be let go because his salary could not be covered. He has been replaced with volunteers. This is not sustainable. It's size limits what it can do. You definitely couldn't have a wedding, birthday, business meeting there. Some would say we have the Arms and the Wakes, but they come with their own problems and no rooms.

Clearly 3 self catered flats have been built in place of the previous accommodation. Each are spacious and well appointed, but DWD do not allow bookings of only one night. I had another go last night and the minimum I could book was 4 nights. To be fair, if they did it would be very expensive on the basis they add a £100 cleaning fee to each stay. Plus they are full on flats with space for up to 6 people. There is nowhere for the single or the couple.

DWD state that part of the downstairs of the building is to be set aside for use as a Village run shop. This is news to our shop committee who are currently looking at other sites in the

village where they might be able to put up a building. The Wakes have said they do not want to take it on.

Looking Ahead

The two different sides to this debate will argue their own pros and cons. As a villager of 25 years, who loves this place. I see only two issues. One is, if planning permission is agreed for the site of the Queens then there is nowhere that is able to provide affordable, catered, rooms to rent for people to stay on a nightly basis.

Secondly, a significant precedent is set if planning is given to DWD. This says that any developer targeting one of our public buildings will be able to build houses unopposed. It would be open season in the Selborne. Arguably The Wakes could be at risk as it is known to be struggling with its finances currently. Development could be the easy solution to their problem. The Village shop has been closed and change of use applied for. Development would again be the next step. When I moved here, we had two pubs, one with rooms, an art gallery, a pottery, a museum, a village shop and an antique shop. We are now down to one pub, no rooms, no village shop.

We want to be a destination venue. For people to come here, spend their money here, stay here, eat here, explore here. If the planners are not careful we will end up being one big housing estate, with no amenities, and no one coming here. Their argument that no one wants to run the Queens as a pub with rooms is inaccurate. Over the last 9 years a number of people have put themselves forward. It is a great business prospect. You only have to try to book a table, any day of the week, at one of the pubs in the surrounding villages to see this.

