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Subject: Comment Received from Public Access
Date: 08 May 2024 11:18:21

Application Reference No. : HPK/2024/0110

Site Address: Swan Hotel Buxton Road New Mills Derbyshire SK22 3JS High Peak

Comments by: Beth Underdown

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Submission: Support

Comments: As a long time New Mills resident and a member of the Fitness In Mind gym facility, I'd like to write in support of this planning application, commenting on the planning aspects of the proposed change of use and on the importance to the town of New Mills that this development be permitted.

In terms of the change of use of the old stable yard as a pub, thinking about noise and light pollution, the gym is not very near residential properties - it's much further from the nearest residence than is, say, New Bodies gym on Chapel St, which also uses its outdoor space for classes. So any of the above impacts would be extremely minimal to start with. It might also be considered that the gym only operates for about four hours every day, with the very latest classes ending at 8pm; operated as a pub garden as part of the former business, there would have been a risk of noise continuously and until midnight.

In terms of traffic, there is parking for fourteen cars easily on the pub frontage and carpark, and room for another two or three in the stable yard. The maximum capacity of any class is sixteen, so any impact on local parking must be extremely minimal; in terms of traffic, the junction itself is so busy that another sixteen cars at isolated times of day is not making a substantive difference.

In terms of visual impact and ecology, particularly of the outdoor astroturf area, the area is well screened by trees from surrounding properties - in summer, it's hard to believe it would be visible at all - and the elevated parts of it are extremely minimal, really just amounting to a few slim poles and bars. I am deeply interested in ecology and the environment, and kept a close eye on the construction of the astroturf. No ecologically valuable habitat was lost in its construction: the outdoor area was constructed on scrubland consisting of rough brambles significantly invaded by rose bay willow herb and Himalayan balsam. This had no significant value as a habitat, and if anything the construction of the astroturf involved some clearing of harmful invasive species. If the gym development is permitted to stay, I would be invested in encouraging the owners to improve the ecological value of the space surrounding the astroturf via wildlife-friendly planting, helping to stabilise the ground and avoid flooding.

Thinking about the planning history of the property and the impact upon the living conditions of local people, the building has been out of use as a pub for some time. Its proximity to the A6 makes it unsuitable for use as housing - and, indeed, for use as a pub. The gym has brought sensible usage to an empty building at risk of dereliction and decay. Its occupancy, usage and care may make local residents feel safer, in that the building is now monitored more frequently, avoiding any risks of crime and squatting.

Moreover, in providing high quality, challenging exercise classes with a daytime schedule, the gym provides an invaluable service to stay-at-home parents, particularly women, who are currently incredibly poorly served by the other exercise offerings available in the town (challenging classes elsewhere tend to be in the evening, when parents are busy; daytime classes tend to be geared at retirees; other gyms in New Mills are geared pretty firmly at men only). In a nationwide obesity emergency, to prevent this facility from being offered seems ill-advised.

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