

I, Alfred Murray, Managing Director of the Longville Arms Ltd, Much Wenlock, Shropshire (the applicant) would like to make the following comments in respect of the planning application to change of use of the Longville Arms to residential. I have been proactively engaging with your officers since this planning application was formally submitted in July 2018 in order to provide assistance in the determination of this property. This proposal has understandably generated interest from the local community and my planning submission has clearly set out the efforts that I have made to keep the public house running since I took over the premises. It is unfortunate that, despite both my efforts and the owners before me, that it has not been possible for this public house to be run as a viable operation, however my planning submission robustly demonstrates that every effort has been made over a significant period of time to provide every chance of success of this premises. By way of background, I have substantial experience in running public houses in the area, as I am an experienced investor in two very successful public houses located in Shropshire

I have reviewed the Committee Report and the recommendations of the officer. I would like to take this opportunity to provide the committee members with my comments on your officer's recommendations and would be grateful if these could be set out in the supplementary planning committee report so that they can be fully digested by the members in advance of the committee meeting.

I purchased the Longville Arms in December 2011 at the asking price of £360,000 plus Land Tax, stamp duty, Legal and survey fees, less a discount to rectify a drainage issue, all plus VAT. I purchased the closed public house from Enterprise Inns Ltd at approximately half the price at which they had purchased the premises only 3 years earlier. This represents approximately £120,000 per annum (£10,000 per month); a 50% LOSS on their investment, which reflected the fact that it was no longer trading profitably and had not done so for some considerable time. I did request a copy of accounts from Mrs Jillian Livingstone, the former publican of the Longville arms to confirm their assertion that the pub traded profitably, but unfortunately she declined to do so. I had hoped that I could turn around the fortunes of the Longville Arms by investing approximately £75,000 in improving the facilities. It turned out to be a forlorn hope in that from the time I purchased the property, until the time that it was closed in 2017 I never made a profit in any of the years that I was there. In fact I incurred trading losses of some £70,000, equalling £14,000 per annum which is a completely unacceptable and unsustainable level. The allegation is that I deliberately ran down the trade to bring about the closure of the pub has entirely no basis whatsoever as from my point of view is plainly preposterous, as I could have refused to invest the amounts which I did and instead let the premises continue fall into disrepair. The Planning Statement that was submitted with this planning application (which your officers have summarised in the committee report) quite clearly shows a strong and cogent economic case for the reasons why the pub fell into its present fatal problems. To ignore such reasons is a bit like King Canute trying to turn back the waves. As recently evidenced in an article in the Shropshire Star some 40% of all public houses in Shropshire have closed in the last 20 years.

I am also accused of trying to over sell the premises by asking for a much higher price than is needed. I have taken advice from a well-known chain of agents specializing in the sale of licenced premises. At the same time I am also seeking to recover my initial capital costs as well as the losses that have been sustained totalling some £500,000, I do not think that it is unreasonable. There is no duty upon me to continue to pile up losses without trying to mitigate them. Evidence has been given as the efforts which my agents have taken to try and achieve

a sale. In deed the members of the community who have decided to impose an ACV on the property have been noted by a deafening silence in their efforts either to request a visit of the premises or even submit a bid for the property. No offers or communication with a request to view have been received to date from anyone in the community. I would argue that the reason for this is that it is entirely obvious to people that whoever bought it would also struggle to make a profit and make it a success.

Again it has been argued in the committee report that no attempt has been made to turn it into a destination venue. To do so would require considerable further investment for a venture that is highly speculative with little prospect of success. Reference is made to the Plume of Feathers, the most prominent local destination pub, which is again closed and boarded up a for the third time in recent years, but it seems to attract people who retain the vain hope that they can make a success of something which is plainly unobtainable, as is confirmed by numerous different tenants in recent years.

Unfortunately, the community could or would not support the pub to the sufficient extent required whilst it was open. It is set in beautiful rolling isolated countryside which is served by a road that does not carry the passing traffic required to serve and sustain this premises. This route cannot even justify or support a local bus service. People have referred to the amenities available at the property but this is not a village hall. It is a commercial undertaking that has to stand on its own feet in which it has not been able to do so for some considerable period of time. Reference is made by the objectors to the application by citing the case of a family of cyclists who were bemoaning the closure of the pub but were in fact consuming their own packed sandwiches and drink on the seating provided by the pub on the carpark, which sums up the problem in a very graphic way.

Each surrounding neighbouring villages has its own facility to host any/all local events rendering the Public house function room redundant.

It is disappointing there has been no mention in the report of my sincere offer of a Unilateral Undertaking that if planning permission were to be granted then that permission will not be implemented until the Wenlock Edge Public House is open as the alternative.

Times have changed as have people's habits. The recession from 2007 onwards as well as the drink driving laws have blown in the cold winds of change.

In light of the above, I would request that members approve this planning application and overturn your officer's recommendation for refusal.

I thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to comment on the planning committee and sincerely hope that you can support this planning application.

Regards  
Alf Murray