

ROBIN &amp; DAPHNE HORSHAM

**CHANGE OF USE OF PUBLIC HOUSE TO A RESIDENTIAL DWELLING AT THE BLACK SMOCK INN, STATHE, BURROWBRIDGE.**

37880/28140

FULL PERMISSION

**PROPOSAL**

The proposal is for the change of use of the Blacksmock Inn to a dwelling. The Inn is sited adjacent to the River Tone, on the opposite bank to the River Parrett trail, and is just under a mile from the settlement limits of Burrowbridge..

**CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY no objection the site is located remote from essential services and facilities, in an area with very limited transport choices. The existing access suffers from restricted visibility, but given that the traffic generation of a single dwelling is likely to be significantly less than that of a pub, I would not wish to raise an objection to this proposal. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY objects, the site lies within an area at risk of flooding from the River Parrett. In accordance with PPG25, (Development and Flood Risk), local authorities should use their planning powers to guide development away from such areas. Access to the proposal would be lost in severe events. If development were permitted this would place additional burdens on the emergency services during flood events when existing commitments stretch resources. The site is within an area liable to flood and from a flood defence aspect the building would not be suitable for conversion to a dwelling. WESSEX WATER the proposal is not within a sewered area and the local authority to be satisfied that the arrangements for foul and surface water disposal are acceptable. There is a water supply in the vicinity of the site.

TOURISM OFFICER As the Tourism Officer for Taunton Deane Borough Council I am eager to assist in safe-guarding our rural heritage for the future economic benefits to the host communities it serves and retaining public houses as an important tourism asset. The diminishing numbers of rural hostelrys is threatening the very essence that is the rural appeal to potential visitors and repeat visitors. It is a unique selling point and a vital ingredient to any holiday or short break. The loss of any public house facility is regrettable but in this instance the above establishment has the potential to continue to play an important role in the local economy and the tourism sector. This proposal requires careful assessment and I would like you to consider the following information before a decision is reached on this proposal:- The Black Smock Inn in particular is a key accommodation provider and hostelry situated on the River Parrett Trail (an internationally and nationally recognised walking trail). The Black Smock Inn has advertised and been promoted by the Tourism Unit from 1997 - 2002 and has established itself as a three diamond English Tourist Board inspected Inn with Bed and Breakfast. The inn is located in one of the most important wetlands in England and attracts a high number of bird watchers and walkers throughout the year. There is

immense potential for future tourism development on the Levels and Moors with the recently awarded EU funding (Leader +). Equine tourism, cycling and teashop tourism projects are already under development in the area (Peddle the Levels & Horse Accommodation Tourism). Following the visit from the Time Team and further excavation and recordings by Somerset County Council, Athelney has been granted a site of significant national importance, which will attract new visitors to the area. In addition, the Willows and Wetland Centre one of Taunton Deane's major attractions in the area has been awarded NFU Rural Attraction of year 2002. From an economic perspective Levels and Moors Partnership and Celebrate Somerset are regenerating and raising the profile of the Willow Industry. The development of an artists studio and willow workshop at the existing willow yard at Stathe is due to commence in January 2003. PLANNING POLICY I note that Stathe is not classified as a village within the Taunton Deane Local Plan (Revised Deposit 2000). Accordingly, the provisions of policy EC10 (service provision in rural centres, villages and associated settlements) cannot apply to this proposal. However, the loss of any public house facility is to be regretted, as this will usually involve the loss of a social facility important to local character and identity. In addition, the loss of such establishments can lead to more travel, as locals are required to go elsewhere for similar facilities (I note that this may be limited in this instance, given the small number of dwellings in the locality). I also note that this facility has the potential to play an important role in the local economy, given recent tourism initiatives within the Borough (refer to the comments of the Tourism Officer). Accordingly, I refer you to Structure Plan policy 23 (Tourism Development in the Countryside). These are issues of acknowledged importance (sustainable development/economic development), and as such the proposal needs careful assessment. In addition to the views of other consultees, there are a number of questions that must be addressed before a decision is reached on this proposal. These include:- 1. What is the population of the settlement and where is the nearest alternative provision? Is it within comfortable walking distance. Accordingly, what is the potential impact on sustainable travel? 2. How long has the current landlord/landlady been resident at the pub? The public house obviously has a history of being a viable concern. Has anything changed to alter this? What is the quality of the management? Could it be improved to make the facility more attractive? 3. Are there any other facilities within the local community which act as a community/social focus? 4. Has there been any increase in nearby competition through the introduction of new facilities, refurbishment of existing nearby premises etc? 5. Has there been any attempt to sell the facility as a going concern? 6. Has diversification been tested? This could include changing the image of the pub, proving catering (if not already provided), or exploring joint use as a pub/shop/post office? 7. Is there any financial support for such facilities. I suggest contact with David Gary and officers within the Regeneration Unit. The answers to the above questions require careful consideration and should help determine the recommendation for this proposal.

PARISH COUNCIL object to the proposal. This is a famous and historic pub attracting tourists and provides a good local amenity. It would be a great loss and would be the third pub in the area to close in the last 2 years thereby depriving locals of a social venue.

1 LETTER OF OBJECTION the public house is an important part of the local community as it is the only meeting place within miles, local parties, receptions and skittles are held there, the pub is on the Somerset Levels and near the wetlands Conservation Office

who regularly use it to entertain visitors as well as being used by walkers along the Parrett trail, many country amenities are being lost leaving residents isolated, closure of the pub would force local people to travel further a field.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review the following policies apply:- Policy 19 encourages the provision of development that creates or enhances local employment and community facilities. Policy 23 this policy requires the improvement of existing attractions and accommodation in settlements or defined Tourism Development Areas and the provision of an extension to the tourism development subject to various criteria. Policy 39 requires development proposals to be compatible with the road network or, if not, to provide an acceptable improvement and achieve a shift in transport modes to alternatives to the private car.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit the following policies apply:- Policy H9 controls the detail of conversions of rural buildings to dwellings. Policy EC7a promotes the provision of local services within or adjacent to the defined limits of a rural centre or village. EC10 requires that the range of service facilities, serving associated settlements; rural centres and villages shall be maintained and enhanced. EC15 allows for new tourism and recreation facilities to be provided outside of settlement limits subject to 2 criteria, Increased visitor pressure would not harm the area and new buildings should be of small scale. EC30 proposals on land liable to flood will not be permitted unless the development will not be affected by the intrusion of flood water; the capacity of flood storage would not be reduced; flood water and flows would not be impeded; flooding risks should not be increased and the maintenance of existing flood measures would not be impeded. Policy EC30 has been superseded by the Planning policy Guidance 25 (Development and Flood Risk). The above policies encourage the provision of new tourist development. The public house is in the open countryside away from recognised rural centres or villages. As the site is already a pub with living accommodation for the landlord the impact on PPG25 is limited.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There have been several applications for change of use of Public Houses/Inns to residential over the past few years resulting in an increasing commitment to retain such facilities where they serve a local community and are not included within the settlement limits where restrictive policies apply. The Canal Inn at Wrantage and The Crown Inn at Creech Heathfield are two such examples. In both of these cases there were significant objections (15 and 17 respectively) received from local people concerned at the loss of such a valuable local amenity. Both applications were refused and the Canal Inn is currently at appeal and awaiting determination. The Blacksmock Inn is not situated within a centre of population and relies on its customers driving to it or making a detour when walking or cycling along the Parrett trail or within the area. In reply to the

consultations and a site notice posted adjacent to the Inn only Burrowbridge Parish Council and 1 resident, within the area, have written to object to the closure. The Blacksmock Inn is located in the open countryside remote from either a rural centre or village. The policies, EC7a and EC10, regarding the maintenance and provision of services contained within the Taunton Deane Local Plan, apply to defined settlements and do not apply to this site. The Blacksmock Inn is located on the opposite side of the river to the River Parrett Trail and the Tourism Officer values its contribution to the tourism facilities of the area. Policy 19 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Structure Plan seeks to enhance and promote development for employment and community facilities within the rural area and Policy 23 gives priority to the improvement of existing tourist attractions. In this respect the Blacksmock Inn is an important tourist facility that was providing key holiday accommodation and sustenance for tourists to the area. The tourist Unit has actively marketed the Inn from 1997-2002 and I consider that this needs to be carefully balanced against the applicants desire to close the Inn. In support of their application the applicant has stated that only 11 people from Burrowbridge have used the Inn in the last few weeks; the two pubs that have closed are in North Curry parish; There are still 2 pubs at Stoke St Gregory and North Curry plus another Inn at Burrowbridge; The objector lives in the Yeovil district; The Blacksmock Inn does not hold parties and receptions on a regular basis; The wetlands Conservation Office referred to by the objector does not exist and I presume he means the RSPB who eat at the pub occasionally not regularly; The Parrett Trail is on the other side of the River and the only access to the Blacksmock Inn is via a footbridge approximately half a mile away and publications on the Parrett Trail do not include this Inn, The King Alfred and Rose and Crown at Stoke St Gregory are listed but I was advised we were not included as we were not on the trail itself; The Environment Agency objection is groundless as the existing Inn includes accommodation and a public house and the proposal will result in less, not more, people in need of the emergency services; a letter has been included from the applicants stating that the profits over the last two years have been low and would not pay for a full time manager; The applicants husband is terminally ill and it has become unrealistic to continue running the Inn. (I can confirm that the Blacksmock Inn is included in Taunton Deane's visitor guide and the River Trail documents). Whilst I regret the loss of a tourism facility and local employment provider I do not consider that the proposal is contrary to any policies within either the Structure or Local Plan. One balance having regard to the relative remoteness of the inn and the low level of objections from the public I consider the proposal acceptable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, removal of permitted development rights for extensions; ancillary buildings and fences etc.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356467 MRS J MOORE**

NOTES:

