

Letter received from Mrs Griffiths – a local objector and speaker at Committee.

Following this morning's meeting in the Malt Shovel car park:-

It is becoming only too commonplace for developers to buy village pubs, bring about a decline in profit by poor management, then cry 'not viable' in order to secure a lucrative Planning Permission.

Viability Report

The Viability Report shows that the Malt Shovel was in profit immediately prior to being purchased by the present owner.

After many months closure while the sale went through the present owner re-opened the Malt Shovel in December 2014 but closed it again the following month. It is optimistic for any business to expect to show a profit in the first year let alone the first month. The Malt Shovel was then closed for a further 8 months.

The temporary landlord from June 2015 – June 2016 was an inexperienced young man, reputedly a member of the owner's family. The Malt Shovel (re-named Mill House for some inexplicable reason) was run abysmally with, at times, no beer, no wine, no chef and disinterested staff.

The Viability Report is dated 5th July 2017. It is a snapshot in time, taken after nearly 3 years of mismanagement by the present owner, it does not reflect the success it might have been had it been run like The Plough and other professionally run gastro pubs in the surrounding area, which are frequently fully booked at the weekends and busy during the week.

Asset to the local Community.

The Lambourn and Upper Lambourn area is known worldwide as being a major centre of the racing world. It is a feather in West Berkshire's cap and a trophy to be prized and protected.

The Malt Shovel, Upper Lambourn's only amenity, was used by trainers, owners, racegoers stable staff, residents, racing enthusiasts, passers-by, cyclists and many more. Outside tables attracted families, walkers, cyclists and many others. The rooms provided much needed accommodation for visitors and there is the potential for them to be rented out long-term to stable staff, providing low the cost accommodation new build flats will not.

Re-sale.

Mention was made that no group of people came forward with a proposal to purchase the Malt Shovel. While ostensibly being available, with a For Sale board prominently displayed, viewings were not allowed. I rang the agents for a viewing in mid 2016 on behalf of an investor in London but was refused. I know of another group interested in a joint venture who were also refused a viewing. I heard this morning there was a third group, also refused. I would be happy to contribute time and funding to a rescue plan. Without access to the building it was impossible for anyone to formulate a rescue plan.

The price being asked for the Malt Shovel was unrealistic but nevertheless a starting point for an honest negotiation had the owner been sincere in his intention to sell.

Flooding.

Despite the Environment Agency requesting a professional Flood Risk Assessment none has been produced, or if one has been it has not been published on the Planning website. In 2014 the Lambourn Valley was flooded for several months. Raw sewage was boiling up through manhole covers and entering people's houses. Limes Cottage

(opposite the Malt Shovel), where I lived for 3 years, was flooded to approximately 40cms, taking a year to make habitable again. It ill behoves the Council to put residents at risk of flooding by knowingly approving dwellings in unsuitable locations, particularly as the flats may be uninsurable or only insurable at high cost because of the flooding history.

Low Cost Housing

Low cost accommodation is needed, but this proposal is not it. One of the flats is marked out to be low cost housing, however the rest would be sold on a commercial basis for as much as the market would allow. A flat with a minimum value of £150,000 would need a buyer with a salary in excess of £45,000 pa or a tenant able to pay £190 pw (5% return + utilities + Council Tax). If the Malt Shovel remains as it is there is the potential for the accommodation rooms to be rented out long-term to stable staff at the going rate of approx £80 all in.

The option to convert to flats will always be there, however if the conversion to flats is permitted the ability to retain the Malt Shovel as a community asset would be lost forever.

This Planning Application needs to be refused.

DC