

BGC/JJ

24 September 2021

The Planning Department  
Ryedale District Council  
Ryedale House  
Old Malton Road  
Malton YO17 7HH

For the attention of Jill Thompson

Dear Ms Thompson

re: White Swan Inn, Low Street, Thornton le Clay, North Yorkshire YO60 7TG

I have been asked by the Members of The Save Our Swan Group, about the above property, in the context of my past involvement with it, and an application for planning permission to change its use from public house to residential property. I have been approached on this matter since I am extremely active in the licensed property market throughout North and East Yorkshire in particular, but also in general terms throughout the North of England.

I understand that an application for change of use of the public house to that of a residential dwelling has been made, and that this proposition is of concern to the village. I have sympathy with this.

I have had several involvements with the White Swan Inn, going back for twenty years or so. This has been in the context of providing valuation advice to several parties, including the previous owners of the freehold in the pub, and the last tenant to operate it, Ms. Julie Long. My most recent involvement with the business was in providing Ms. Long with some general advice about her position, in 2018.

I understand that one of the key factors affecting this application is to establish whether or not, as a public house, the White Swan Inn was or could be a viable proposition. Indeed, as I note below on my visits between 2015 and 2018 this was certainly the case.

I also understand that the present owners have carried out a considerable amount of work to the building. This I believe has involved alterations to the internal parts, with some of the trading areas being stripped out, and the size of the car park to the rear of the property having been reduced noticeably and partly used as a 'builders yard'. This is clearly a detrimental move to have made, to the extent that presumably the property will need to be altered again in order for it to be useable as a public house with a large car park.

All I can say on that point is that when I last formally visited the property it was set out and arranged in such a manner that it could be easily managed, and traded as a typical Village Local Inn, and having a catering offering. The internal arrangement was such that, in my opinion, the outlet could be operated by a partnership of two people, both working full time, and thereby keeping the number of staff required to be employed, at a minimum. This is normal for such public houses. This is always the best way in which such Village Inns can be traded successfully, with tight control over operating and overhead costs being exercised by the proprietors.

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Added to that the property had a large gravelled car park to its rear, as well as a very generous area of grassland, the whole of the site being unusually large. There would never therefore be, in my opinion, any issues or difficulties with being able to easily accommodate any number of customers who might drive to the White Swan Inn.

The business was certainly operating in such a way that it met the needs of locals, who might generally only wish to visit the pub for drinks, but equally of course would suit any catering requirements for the village. At the same time it was a destination driven catering outlet, with trade being drawn in from a wide geographical area, of course all that being car borne.

I had access to trading and financial information which was given to me by Ms. Long, but additionally I had the benefit of knowledge of similar trading statistics stretching back to 2015 when I also inspected.

I am also aware that the performance of the White Swan Inn had been somewhat erratic going back over a number of years prior to that, for whatever reason, levels of trade had declined somewhat before Ms. Long took over the running of the pub.

In terms of the viability or otherwise of this business, one needs to consider that the average competent operator might realistically and reasonably expect to achieve in terms of total sales. This also applies to the mix of income, between wet sales and catering. In other words, one does not look at the business and value it on the basis of its actual sales and performance, unless that of course reflects what the average competent operator would be expected to achieve.

In my experience a Village Inn such as this one, with a mix of trade between wet sales and catering income, could be expected to achieve an optimum level of sales of around £5,000 gross per week. This would translate itself into an income of about £200,000 net of VAT per annum. From this one would expect the business, run by two proprietors on a full time basis, to be capable of generating a trading profit of the order of £50,000 per annum.

That is in fact a scenario which I would expect to be achieved in today's market, going forward. Clearly the last eighteen months have been disastrous for this sector of business, but also pubs and restaurants have generally been seeing excellent levels of sales and profitability over the late Spring and Summer period, following the lifting of the lockdowns. Going forward therefore one would reasonably expect to be confident of achieving levels of sales and profitability which I note.

In summary therefore I would consider that this business should be a viable proposition, on the basis that it is operated by average competent operators, generally being a partnership of two people working full time, and living on the premises.

I hope this is helpful to you in considering the planning application.

I have been asked to forward a copy of this letter to the Secretary of the Save Our Swan Group, Mrs. S. Mills, which I accordingly do.

Yours sincerely,

Barry G. Crux FRICS ACIArb  
Chartered Surveyor  
Barry Crux & Company