From:
To: DCAdmin
Subject: Objection to Application 2023/62/90434/E: Babes in the Wood.
Date: 21 March 2023 11:56:18

For the attention of Elenya Jackson: Case officer.

Could you kindly upload this objection to the planning application website comments section.

Just by way of confirmation I do not want my personal details to be made public.

Regards,

I wish to object to Application 2023/62/90434/E - Babes in the Wood.

The previous and long standing use of the application site served the **whole** community as a Public House - the clue is surely in the wording - for drinkers and non drinkers alike and at various times provided a meeting place for associated activities - quizzes, darts, dominoes, snooker, folk music evenings, pre and/or post wedding, funeral and other occasions and serving food. The applicant has at least acknowledged that "a pub holds value for the local community" (item 5.8 of the Planning Statement).

The application is seeking to provide "a community centre with a small prayer room", although the submitted supporting plan shows a totally cleared floor space for one large prayer hall (capable of accommodating a substantial number of people) and, curiously, an additional smaller area described as "not surveyed".

The Planning Statement (item 1.2) states that this proposal is "to meet the social and religious needs of the local Muslim community residing in the area", whilst there is an admission that "Upper Soothill has a small Muslim population" (item 3.1).

The proposals would represent an even smaller minority of the demographic of the area immediately surrounding the application site. It would not therefore represent **the** community of the immediate area, contrary to the assertion that "the proposed facility will be at the heart of the community it is intended to serve" (item 5.6), nor that it would provide "a community use of equal value" (item 5.8).

A great deal is made of the proposals enabling Muslim residents of Upper Soothill to be able to walk to the proposed facility, rather than the current situation whereby they "must travel by car to established mosques and education centres", and thereby acknowledging that "this causes strain on local roads and results in on- street parking and traffic issues" (item 3.2).

I'm not entirely sure what defines Upper Soothill - the exact configuration and extent - but for the moment if it can be assumed that the centre of such an area could be the junction of the B6124 Soothill Lane and, say, Solway Road. Based on this, then the Dawatal - Islam Mosque (a purpose built, large footprint, two storey building) on Westacre Drive and the Soothill Community Association on Broomsdale Road are actually closer than the application site. It would seem that the application is proposing to transfer current traffic problems to a new location! This would only further compound the situation at the Babes in the Wood, which is already an extremely busy junction, a situation which will be even further exacerbated if proposals for the adjacent Heybeck Lane and Chidswell allocations are implemented. I am far from convinced that the applicant's assertion that "no parking or highway safety concerns are anticipated" (item 9.1) is at all realistic. As for walking, possibly five times to daily prayers, especially in winter, over a distance further than the current situation, really?

The Planning Statement suggests that for a number of years the Friends of Upper Soothill have searched for a suitable property, but unfortunately doesn't provide further detail of properties considered. I wonder if the Whitfield Centre has been/ could be considered ? I appreciate there may be valid practical or logistical reasons why this may not be an option, or appropriate. However it has two large

halls, a fully equipped kitchen, a range of office sizes and large parking and outdoor space. As far as I am aware it already caters for the blind and visually impaired, baby and toddler classes, over 50's activity group and Age UK. Nevertheless I believe it to be in use only three times a week -Tuesdays/ Wednesdays/ Thursdays and for limited times (8.30 am - 4.30 pm). If feasible, this would really provide an integrated community hub and would actually offer a realistic walking opportunity for the Muslim residents of Upper Soothill. In passing there is also no detail provided of the measures taken to retain the building as a public house, or seeking alternative uses compatible with the immediate demographic.

I notice that no pre- application advice has been sought, although work in some form seems to have already been carried out over a period of time. I would expect the planning case officer would need to conduct a thorough and current inspection of the property prior to any decision being made.

As to the detail - there appears to be a major contradiction as to the intended hours of use. The Planning Statement suggests 11.00 am - 7.30 pm., whilst the application form advises 5.00 am - midnight!
It seems to be confirmed that; the upper floor would be for residential use (item 1.1), there would be no changes to the external appearance of the building (item 8.1), and no external sound amplifiers would be used, including the call to prayer (item 6.4), but no mention of internal amplification.

I believe that, at the very least, there is so much further clarification to be sought from / information to be provided by the applicant, but would suggest that this change of use is completely inappropriate, does not comply with Kirklees Planning Policy LP48 (in that it does not provide an equal or better replacement facility for the **whole** community) and therefore, even at this stage, should be refused.