



Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

Mark Stone
Chief Executive
South Oxfordshire District Council
Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

23rd January 2024

Dear Mark,

Urgent – The Crown, Pishill, South Oxfordshire

We are writing on behalf of the [Campaign for Pubs](#) urging South Oxfordshire District Council to throw out the application by Russell Brand's company to convert – and by doing so permanently close - the Crown, Pishill.

The Campaign for Pubs is the grassroots campaign group established to support, promote and protect pubs, bringing together publicans, pub campaigners, customers and brewers and all who value our pub culture.

We support locals in Pishill in their campaign to stop the attempt to seek change of use of The Crown and, to just as importantly, see it re-open under new ownership (ownership that wants to run it successfully once again as Pishill's village pub).

The Crown is a wonderful historic pub of considerable architectural merit and is Grade II listed, as well as being vitally important to Pishill, as the only pub in the village. As you know, the pub has been closed since the COVID-19 pandemic after which it was put up for sale and in 2021 was bought by Pablo Diablo's Legitimate Business Firm Ltd, a company owned by Russell Brand.

The pub has never reopened as a pub since Mr. Brand's company bought it, and the only reason it is not now a pub is because Mr. Brand and his company have ignored pleas from the local community to either re-open it, or sell it to someone who will re-open it as a pub and restore it to the heart of community life in the village.

This is a disgraceful attitude to have both to the history and heritage of Pishill and to the needs of the local community. Various half-hearted suggestions of opening parts of the pub buildings for café/restaurant use (all of which themselves have been inappropriate for a historic village inn) have not progressed, and in our view are likely to be attempts to justify conversion of the rest of the pub.

It is wholly wrong that anyone – an individual or company – buys a pub for non pub use, when it is both viable and wanted by the local community (and in this case hugely important, with it being the only pub in the village). The current application is in our view an entirely selfish attempt to convert a historic village pub into what is effectively personal space, with a 'adjunct' of supposed community space to try to get the application passed. That is not remotely fulfilling the vital role the Crown Inn has played in Pishill for centuries.

Campaign for Pubs, The Volunteer Inn, 5 Watson Street, Holgate, York YO24 4BH

Email: campaign@campaignforpubs.org.uk Twitter: [@campaignforpubs](#) Facebook: [@campaignforpubs](#) Instagram: [@campaignforpubs](#)

Registered company number 12637917 Registered in England and Wales

We make no comment on the character of Mr. Brand, nor of the content of whatever he chooses to broadcast or record, however it is wholly unacceptable for any rich person (directly or via a company) to seek to take over, close and permanently destroy a historic and wanted village pub in this way, for their own non-pub usage. The idea that the Crown should be converted for this is frankly appalling.

Mr. Brand is perfectly entitled, directly or through his company, to buy suitable non-pub properties and install a recording studio from where he can do whatever podcasts and broadcasts he desires. There are many buildings he and his company could purchase to do this, including vacant barns, but it is disgraceful to be seeking to convert a historic pub for this reason.

It has not been proven that the Crown is not viable and indeed it is clear that it has been and would again be a successful business. As well as being the only pub in the village, serving food as well as drink, the Crown has hosted weddings and functions. Even in the current difficult climate, this is very clearly a viable, indeed potentially very successful pub business.

This importance of pubs is explicitly enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework and must be the basis of any decision on an application to convert a public house, especially a historic one.

Policies 83 and 92 of the NPPF say that councils should seek to plan positively for the provision of pubs and to resist their loss:

Section 83 d) states “**the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities**, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, **public houses** and places of worship”,

Section 92 states “To provide the **social, recreational** and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- a) **plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities** (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, **public houses** and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- b) **take into account and support the delivery of local strategies** to improve health, **social** and cultural **well-being** for all sections of the community;
- c) **guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services**, particularly where this would reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs.

The conversion of the Crown Inn would be an unnecessary loss of a valued pub, it could and should be open as a pub were it not for the actions of the current owner. South Oxfordshire District Council must therefore reject the planning application as it is contrary to *‘planning positively for the provision of community facilities, including public houses.’*

The permanent loss of the pub would be detrimental to the community and to the area. The application as it is means the unjustified loss of a historic public house, which would have a negative effect on community cohesion, on community spirit, on the already very limited amenities/services available in Pishill, heritage and history and the local economy.

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The reality is that the pub could – and should - be open and trading, other than the fact that the current owner has been using it for alternative/personal use, which is completely unacceptable. As you know, Pishill with Stonor Parish Council has reported the inappropriate and unacceptable change of use. As you also know, intervention was necessary to seek the removal of wholly inappropriate fencing. These things speak volumes about the intent of the owner and the attitude towards the community and local history and heritage.

This is a hugely important case. If South Oxfordshire District Council gives in to what Mr. Brand and his company want to do, it is not only sanctioning the unnecessary destruction of a historic and important village pub, it would also be sending out a very dangerous message - that rich people and companies can buy up our nation's pubs and do what they want with them, against the wishes of the communities that value them. For all these reasons, we urge South Oxfordshire District Council to throw out this application.

We also urge Mr. Brand to do the morally right thing and move out of the pub, put it up for sale at the value as a pub and allow the pub to reopen as a pub serving Pishill as it has done for several hundred years.

Pubs play a vital role in our communities. They help establish a community spirit and a source of information and assistance for residents, while also helping to reduce mental health issues related to loneliness and isolation. They provide employment in the community and are often a source of other related activities village activities which improve the general health and wellbeing of the community. The Crown Inn can and should continue to play this role and must be given the chance to do so.

The Crown, Pishill, should be a pub, it must be a pub, it is wanted and supported by the local community and is a key part of Pishill's attraction and identity. We urge South Oxfordshire District Council to throw out this application and we support the community in seeking to reclaim its local pub and see it reopened under positive ownership.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Mulholland
Campaign Director

cc Pishill with Stonor Parish Council
John Howell OBE MP, MP for Henley