

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE SAVE THE CABINET ACTION GROUP

Councillors block application to change Reed pub into a house

Campaigners and supporters in Reed were celebrating last night (Thursday) after elected councillors at North Herts District Council refused planning permission to convert the grade II listed Cabinet pub into a house.

The Planning Control Committee voted by a majority of 10 to 2 to block the application.

The developer now has the right of appeal. Two applications for retrospective listed building consent fall to be determined at a later date.

About 70 supporters of the campaign to save The Cabinet attended the meeting in Letchworth.

Addressing the Committee, Mike Howes, Chair of the Save the Cabinet Action Group, noted that national planning policy favoured the retention of local services such as pubs. The campaign had submitted strong evidence, he said, demonstrating that the Cabinet remained viable as a pub, and that there had been continuing interest over time in buying it as such.

Officers at North Herts District Council had recommended that the applications be granted.

But Gerald Morris, District Councillor for Ermine Ward, which includes Reed, argued that if the pub had not been viable it would not have traded for centuries. He drew attention to the fact that work had already been done on the Cabinet, and that the application was made retrospectively. He said:

“Do not allow our planning system to be used in this way. There are times when I believe we need to send a clear message that this is not acceptable.

“Please let the villagers bring this listed historical building back as a thriving asset for the community and for the local towns and villages in North Hertfordshire.”

During the debate among councillors, speakers noted that community pubs elsewhere in the district had proved successful. As well as questions around the economic viability of a pub, the impact on the community of losing their pub permanently should be taken into account.

Speaking after the meeting, Mike Howes said:

“We’re naturally delighted and hugely relieved that Members of the Council demonstrated their good judgement and turned down this deeply unwelcome proposal to convert the last pub in our village into a house.

“There’s a long way to go, but we think this is a hugely important step on the way to getting our pub back.

“We hope now that North Herts District Council will follow the example of other local authorities and properly enforce the law. They should require the developer to

restore The Cabinet to its former state as a pub, as it was before he made his alterations in clear breach of planning law.”

Contacts (not for publication please):

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Save the Cabinet Action Group was established in October 2016 to resist the application to turn The Cabinet at Reed into a house.

The Cabinet is a 400-year old building, and is considered a village icon – it even appears on the village sign. It is believed to be the only pub in Britain bearing the name.

The Cabinet was a thriving, popular pub, widely known as “a little gem”.

It closed in 2011 and was put up for sale. The Action Group provided evidence of several offers to buy the pub which were refused by the then owners. It was eventually sold at auction in late 2015 to the present owner for £375,000. Documents before the Planning Control Committee suggested that the building was, as a pub, valued at no more than £250,000.

The kitchen was removed during 2015, and further works were carried out in mid-2016. The retrospective applications for planning and listed building consent were submitted in September 2016.

Under Section 9 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, carrying out work to a listed building without first obtaining the necessary consent is a criminal offence.

The Action Group engaged Anthony Miller FRICS to prepare a viability study on The Cabinet.

Following the decision to refuse planning permission, the developer has 6 months to lodge an appeal. If he does, interested parties would have a further opportunity to make representations.

The 6 month period would be reduced if the planning authority decided to issue an enforcement notice under section 172 of the Town and County Planning Act 1990.

According to the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), 21 pubs are closing every week – see <http://www.camra.org.uk/kc2-pub-protection> .

More information is available on our Facebook page, “Save the Cabinet at Reed”.