

30th January 2014

Planning Application – AW 336-13

The Russell Hotel – Change of Use

Objections and observations submitted by Save the Russell Hotel Campaign Group and everyone who signed the petition forwarded to Action for the Blind.

1. We believe that the Russell Hotel is the only hotel in the country that was purpose built (commissioned by Action for the Blind) for the blind and partially sighted and their guide dogs. It now also caters for people with other physical disabilities and able bodied guests are also welcome.
2. We are told that the hotel is currently fully booked and has been so for several weeks. We believe that the reason for under-occupancy in the past couple of years was because of the threat of closure which was originally proposed to take place last October and potential guests have been turned away.
3. There are at least 60 care/nursing homes in Bognor Regis and a serious dearth of hotels for a seaside resort – we cannot afford to lose another one. We are aware that Action for the Blind has wanted to sell The Russell and that Livability has been after it for at least two years. Has the hotel ever been put on the open market?
4. Livability's website promotes Ashley House as having 'large rooms and modern facilities' on the ground floor for their 14 residents. This contradicts the main reason given for the proposed move – that Ashley house is no longer fit for purpose.
5. The Russell gives back to the community and boosts financial regeneration in the Aldwick Road/seafront area. Local businesses will suffer if it is closed. Locals use the hotel for swimming, coffee and lunch breaks, meetings and other social functions.

At the Aldwick Parish Council meeting on January 20th one of the councillors commented that when she recently visited the hotel at lunchtime, there were no guests around and the main dining room was empty – as it would be – it is only used for breakfast and dinner, unless there is a function, and most guests go out during the day. They make use of trips organised by the hotel or visiting local amenities. Snacks and lunches are available in the bar area.

6. The swimming pool is invaluable for exercise and therapy for hotel guests and local residents because it is easily accessible and all one

depth. Patients recovering from surgery or illness are recommended to use the facility by Bognor Hospital and local GPs.

Last July we wrote to Livability with our suggestions for the future of the Pool. When we met the Chief Executive in September he seemed unaware of our letter nor did he have any idea of how the pool was run. He said that Livability would discuss the feasibility with the lifeguard but no approach has been made to her. It is significant that there is no mention of the swimming pool in its statement in support of the change of use dated September 2013.

Was the pool suite donated by a benefactor? Is there any covenant in existence relating to that donation or bequest?

7. Apparently, if Livability is granted the change of use and buys the hotel it plans to 'Mothball' most of the ground and second floors. What exactly does this mean? For how long? The proposals appear vague.
8. There are an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 blind or visually impaired people in the South Coast area and the hotel caters for thousands of guests as against the needs of the 14 Ashley House residents. Although we are sympathetic to their needs and wellbeing their current accommodation seems much more suitable than rooms on the first floor of the Russell Hotel with limited bathroom space if hoists are required.
9. Neither Action for the Blind nor Livability is prepared to divulge any financial details... why not? Why do both parties say 'some aspects of the transaction must remain confidential as they are commercially sensitive'? What does this mean? If Ashley House is to be demolished and the site sold for development it must be worth a great deal of money. Why can't the proceeds be used to provide purpose built accommodation for their residents? The Russell will need far more modification than a large lift to meet their needs.
10. As Ashley House intends to keep its own team the outlook for the 30 dedicated staff at the Russell is bleak. If it closes they will lose their jobs in an area of high unemployment

We understand that you will receive many letters opposing the Change of Use and hope that any submitted before the planning application notice was published (including those sent to Aldwick Parish Council) will also be considered.

Finally, Arun District Council is continually promoting the need for regeneration, including the Aldwick Road area – how does closing the Russell Hotel equate with that? We feel that Arun should be promoting more hotels and entertainment facilities particularly in the west end of Bognor Regis.

We feel strongly that any investment by Bourne Leisure should not be considered unless it proposes to offer help in the regeneration of the West End of the Town. Did any representative of Bruton Knowles ever visit the hotel and surrounding area before preparing the viability study of Livability?

If Action for The Blind is determined to sell, we feel very strongly that the Russell should be sold as a Hotel.

