

# Economic Development

Laura Payne  
Development Management  
Planning & Development Service

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Dear Laura

## **PA/2025/2233 – The Crown Inn, Stone – conversion to residential – Economic Development Comments**

Pubs and the wider hospitality sector have faced significant challenges in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic intensified an existing pattern of pub closures, although it is recognised that some establishments have continued to thrive and new venues have opened. More recently, issues such as staffing shortages have placed further pressure on the sector.

The Planning Statement and accompanying Marketing Report note that the Crown Inn closed in 2016 and was placed on the open market in April 2020, at the outset of Covid-19 restrictions. Marketing particulars listed in the November 2025 report, along with previous reports, confirm that the property has been advertised as a public house and has attracted some interest for alternative commercial uses. This suggests that options beyond its current lawful use have been explored. However, given that the Crown Inn has remained closed for a considerable period, there has been no opportunity to test alternative business models or approaches to running the premises in recent years.

The applicant's agent highlights the presence of The Ferry Inn, approximately 0.6 miles away, The Black Lion in Appledore, 1.9 miles away, and the Memorial Hall, as evidence that Policy EMP10 criterion (a) is met. However, the walking route to The Ferry Inn lacks continuous footpath provision, and the Public Rights of Way referenced do not create a safe, direct walking link between Stone in Oxney and The Ferry Inn. While the Memorial Hall and Cricket Club offer occasional social events and pop-up pub facilities, these are sporadic in nature and cannot be considered comparable to a year-round commercial pub operation.

Having regard to the Local Plan, Policy EMP10 is a key material consideration. In assessing criterion (a), we consider that no suitable alternative pub provision exists within a reasonable walking distance for a full-time public house use. If viewed purely as a venue for occasional social activities, then some level of alternative provision may arguably exist.

In assessing criterion (b), the marketing information indicates that the property has been appropriately marketed over a reasonable period. What cannot be evidenced is whether different operational models for retaining the pub use could realistically have been tested. While previous applications list a range of alternative use enquiries, the current submission provides little detail on why these did not progress. The November 2025 Marketing Update outlines general challenges facing the industry, though not all directly relate to this specific premises. A viability assessment prepared by Mr Thirkell concludes that operational pub use is not viable, supported by financial modelling. Given the prolonged vacancy and genuine attempts to let the property, it is reasonable to consider that criterion (b) has been met.

The question of business models has come up, seeking to understand whether buying or renting / operating the pub would be different. I would suggest it is also logical that any prospective purchaser seeking to retain the building as a pub would assess operational challenges and opportunities, considering return on investment alongside capital and revenue requirements. The lack of a buyer willing to pursue such an operation suggests that the prospect of the property returning to pub use is low.

While we cannot provide technical commercial advice, the evidence indicates that if purchasers have not been willing to take on the premises for pub or similar commercial use, it is unlikely that potential tenants or operators would find it viable either. This may relate to lease terms, expected profit margins, required incentives, operational restrictions (for example, brewery tie-ins), or other factors such as location and customer base. Although the precise reasons that interested parties did not progress their enquiries are unknown, it is reasonable to infer that the site was not considered a sound investment for pub or other hospitality uses.

Yours sincerely

**Tom Jenkins**  
Economic Development Manager