

Press release about The White Lion Public House, Crays Pond

The owner of the White Lion in Crays Pond has been given two months to stop using it as his home.

At the High Court on Thursday 21 February 2019, Mr Timothy Straker QC issued a Court Order on South Oxfordshire District Council's application requiring Satwinder Sandhu to cease using the White Lion at Crays Pond for residential purposes by 23 April 2019. Mr Sandhu has to pay £20,000 towards the costs of the District Council.

Mr Satwinder Sandhu bought the pub from Greene King in October 2013 and soon after started to convert it into a private dwelling. Alerted by local residents, South Oxfordshire District Council forced the owner to apply for planning permission for change of use to residential. This was refused, as was an appeal. Mr Satwinder Sandhu bought the pub from Greene King in October 2013 and soon after started to convert it into a private dwelling. Alerted by local residents, South Oxfordshire District Council forced the owner to apply for planning permission for change of use to residential. This was refused, as was an appeal.

In his judgement, Mr Straker stated that Mr Sandhu had had plenty of opportunity to comply with planning control, quoting the finding of the Appeal Inspector in 2014, and noting that Mr Sandhu had been found guilty on two occasions at the Magistrates Court. Having listened to Mr Sandhu blaming the District Council, the Parish Council and the Save the White Lion Group, Mr Straker stated that Mr Sandhu had brought the situation entirely upon himself by his own actions, and by his flagrant disregard of the planning control.

In his judgement, Mr Straker outlined witness statements submitted by the District Council in respect of the Whisky Bar operated by Mr Sandhu since September 2018; Mr Straker said the Whisky Bar operation was a front and "could no more be called a pub than a fig leaf on a naked statue could be called clothing".

Mr Sandhu was urged to put the White Lion up for sale, so that he could secure new accommodation for his family, and to revert to his previous profession as a pharmacist.

Mr Sandhu was told that if he did not comply with the Court Order, it was a very serious matter and he could face prison.

Commenting on the decision, Bill Pechey of the Crays Pond Community Group said: "We are very pleased with the outcome of the case; it has been a long five and half years to get to this point but the force of the law has, at last, prevailed. Let's hope that it will lead to the White Lion becoming a centre of the community again."

Peter Dragonetti, Chairman of Goring Heath Parish Council said: “This is a great vindication of our fight to get the White Lion back as a pub, and it has brought the community together. Mr Sandhu used every means he could to defy the District Council in this matter, and the Parish Council is very pleased that SODC supported us all the way.”

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