



The Roby Public House, Knowsley

Viability Study: Demolition of The Roby Public House and Replacement with 9 New Homes.

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1.0 Introduction

This viability study examines the potential demolition of The Roby Public House and the construction of nine new homes in its place. The assessment encompasses Knowsley's planning policies, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 93c, existing public houses in the area, community facilities, market analysis, economic viability, and offers a conclusive recommendation supporting the re-development.

2.0 Location

Nestled in the Roby district of Knowsley, The Roby Public House occupies a central position on Greystone Road. Surrounded by residential properties, the public house sits opposite a three story apartment block which houses a series of small convenient stores/commercial properties at ground floor level.

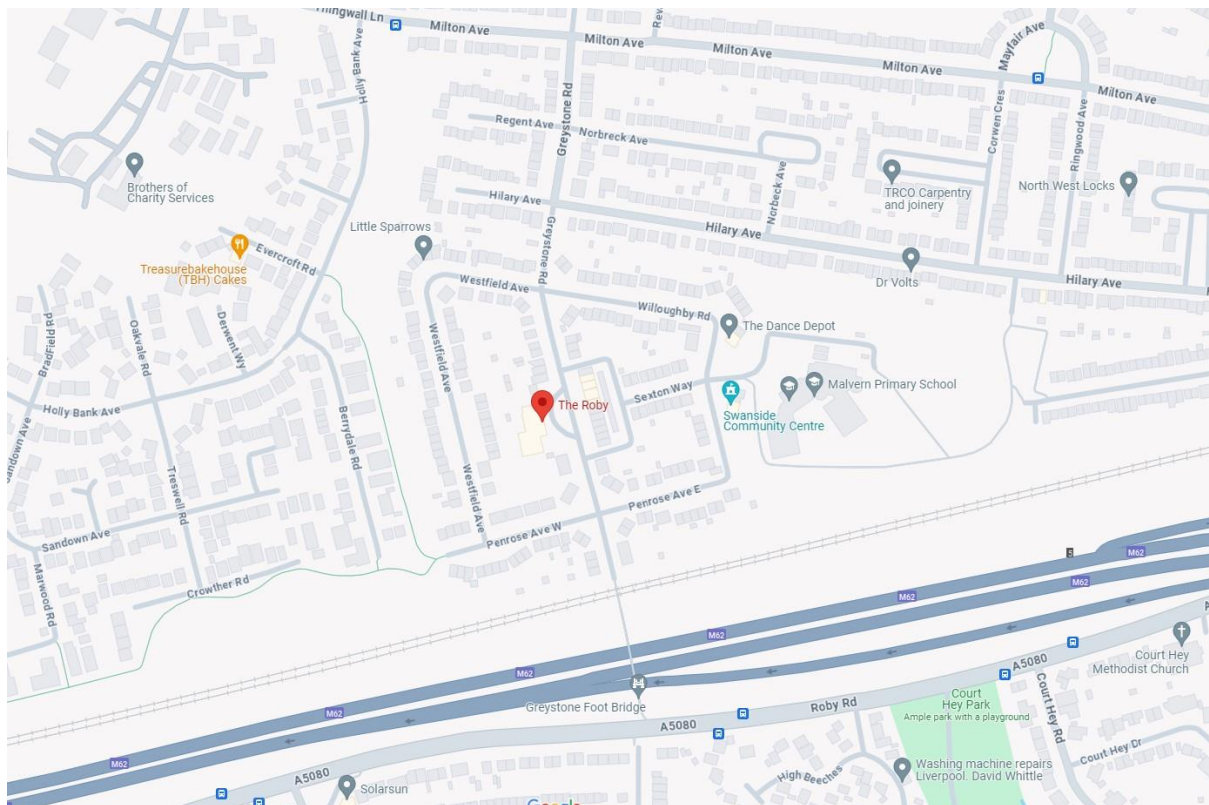


Fig.1: The Roby Public House, Knowsley



Fig.2: Location Plan

3.0 The Roby Public House/Existing State

The Roby Public House, a two-story establishment, sits along Greystone Road, Knowsley. The Public House is located within a residential neighbourhood, with semi-detached dwellings located either side of the building and a three storey apartment and commercial building opposite.

Photographs showing the existing building and its internal/external state are set out below:



Fig.3: Front View



Fig.4: Front View



Fig.5: Rear View



Fig.6: Rear View

The building has sat empty for several years and shows signs of deterioration, evident in the decaying facade, boarded-up windows, and overgrown surroundings. There is significant water ingress from roof elements and the property will require significant renovation and improvements.

Overall, all parties wishing to recommence public house trading would need to invest significant time, professional fees, application charges on top of considerable renovation costs to re-open.



Fig.7: Internal View



Fig.8: Internal View



Fig.9: Internal View



Fig.10: Internal View

4.0 Market place for public houses

The traditional British public house, once a cornerstone of community life, has faced a significant downturn in recent years, driven by a confluence of factors. The 2008 credit crunch marked the beginning of a challenging period for pubs, as economic hardship forced many consumers to tighten their belts, reducing discretionary spending on leisure activities such as visiting pubs. This financial strain led to a noticeable decline in footfall and revenue, exacerbating the financial difficulties for many establishments.

The subsequent decade saw a gradual but steady decrease in demand for public houses, influenced by changing social habits and increased competition from alternative leisure

activities. The cultural shift towards healthier lifestyles and the rising popularity of home entertainment options further eroded the traditional pub's customer base.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 dealt a particularly severe blow to the industry. Lockdown measures and social distancing regulations mandated the temporary closure of pubs, disrupting operations and leading to substantial financial losses. Even as restrictions eased, ongoing concerns about virus transmission and changes in consumer behaviour continued to impact patronage. Many pubs struggled to recover, with a significant number forced to shut their doors permanently.

The combined impact of these factors—the long-term economic effects of the 2008 financial crisis, evolving consumer preferences, and the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic—has created a perfect storm for the public house sector. The result has been a profound and sustained downturn, with many establishments facing an uncertain future as they navigate this challenging landscape.

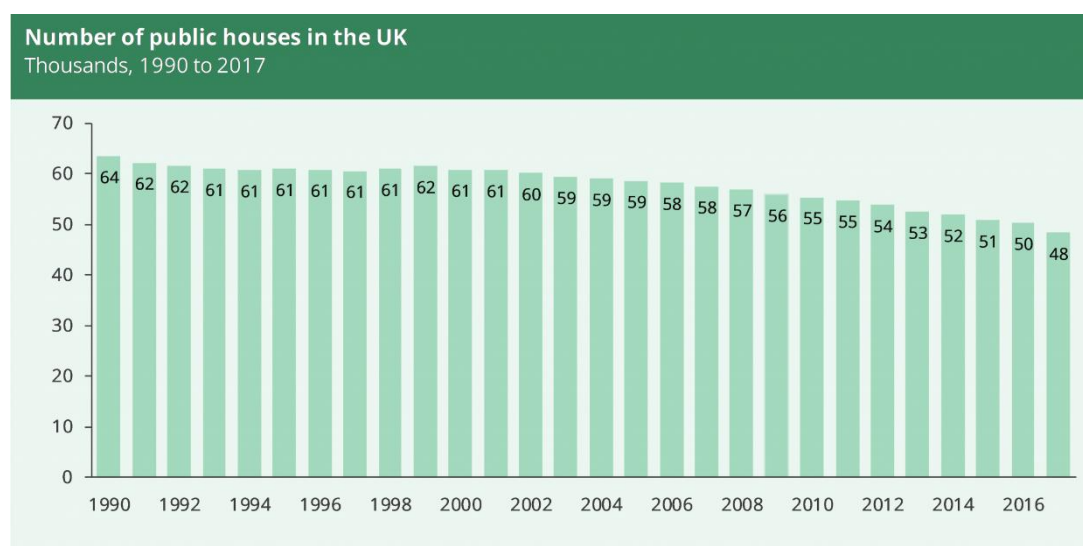


Fig. 11 Source: 'Table E5: Ownership of public houses in the UK', *British Beer and Pub Association Statistical Handbook 2018*

In conclusion, the reduction in public houses is a stark indicator of the multifaceted challenges the industry faces. The economic impact of the 2008 credit crunch, changing consumer habits, and the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have all significantly diminished demand. The current market environment, characterized by increased competition and

lingering economic uncertainty, does not provide the necessary conditions to facilitate the continuation of many public houses. Without substantial intervention and innovative adaptation, the traditional public house may continue to decline, losing its place as a central fixture in British social life.

5.0 Viability of The Roby Public House

One of the leading methodologies employed to assess the viability of a public house is the CAMARA Viability Test. This viability Test stands out as a robust framework designed to meticulously analyse various aspects critical to the viability of a project.

Using the CAMARA testing elements I details below constraints/issues for The Roby Public house:

1. **Local trade & Population** – The Roby Public house is located within a residential area which in turn should provide a substantial level of support/customers. However, it is evident from the establishments decline that local custom has deteriorated and support diminished.
2. **Customers** – The Public houses location has potential for a greater footfall however, custom has wavered and gradually reduced resulting in the properties closure.
3. **Competition/Alternatives** – There are a large number of alternatives within a 2 – 3 mile radius (See section 6).
4. **Site alternatives/flexibility** – Due to the single use of the property, its construction and make-up alternatives uses, or re-development would be costly and not viable.
5. **Parking** – Large parking facilities to the site however, these have historically been occupied by local residents and not customers of the establishment.
6. **Public Transport** – Whist located within a residential area public transport or passing trade is limited. It is believed that this had a profound effect on the decline of the public house.
7. **Multiple use** – Provision for shops are found within the area/locality. Consideration for a mixed-use re-work would result in increased costs and also reduction in public house floor area.
8. **Sale** – The property has been marketed within no interest forth coming.

6.0 Competition/Alternative public houses

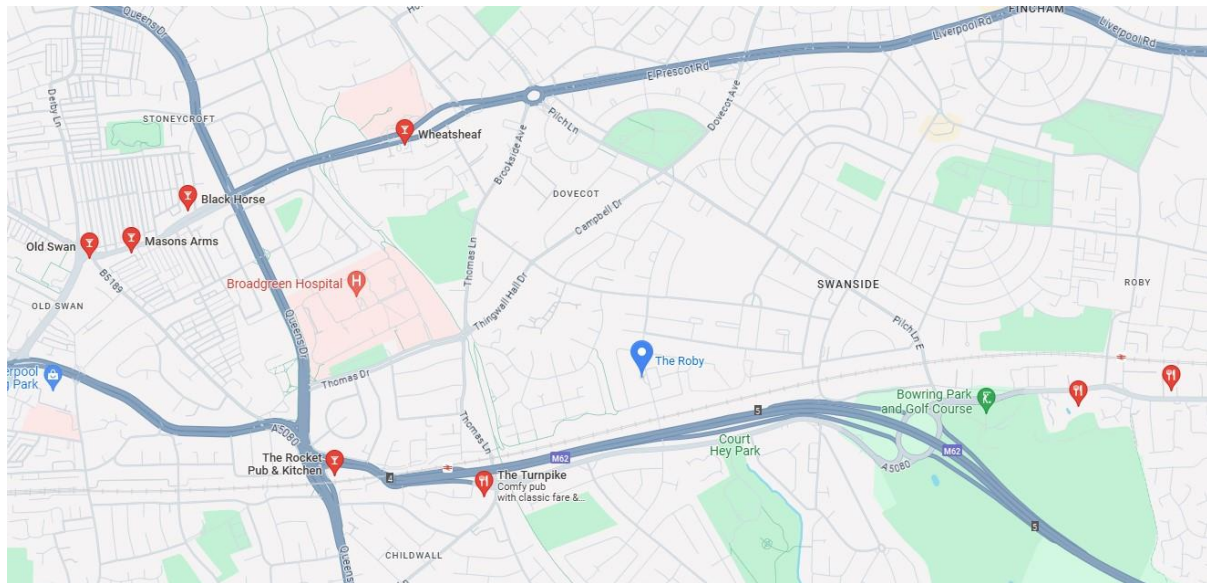


Fig. 12 Surrounding Public Houses

Wheatsheaf	-	Distance 1m
Black Horse	-	Distance 1.5m
Mason Arms	-	Distance 1.7m
Old Swan	-	Distance 1.7m
The Rocket Pub & Kitchen	-	Distance 1m
The Turnpike	-	Distance 0.6m

As outlined above, there are significant alternative provision within the surrounding area. A prospect that any future operator of The Roby would be conscious of when considering its future. The detailed alternatives above all provides attractive options to steer potential customers away from The Roby.

7.0 Existing Community Facilities

Along with the competitors outlined within section 6, The Roby district boasts vital community hubs:

1. **Roby Community Centre:** Offering a diverse range of activities for all age groups, promoting community engagement and social cohesion.
2. **Roby Library:** Providing access to extensive resources and services, fostering literacy and lifelong learning among residents.
3. **Roby Park:** A cherished green space facilitating outdoor recreation and community events, enhancing the well-being of local residents.

8.0 Economic Viability/Outlook

The deteriorating condition of The Roby Public House, coupled with declining patronage, renders it economic viability untenable. It is estimated that The Roby Public house would cost approximately £500k to renovate and rejuvenate. This estimate would render it unviable given the decline in demand of such facilities/usage and proximity of alternative competitors outlined previously.

Notwithstanding the above the potential for trade will be restricted by its location, its area and alternative facilities (Competitors noted earlier). When evaluating the facility and its previous use it would be anticipated that The Roby would need to operate as a mixed property which offered community and destination trade. Which would incorporate a Sports bar setup and some entertainment. Given its residential location it would also be anticipated that local pub sports teams would be required. All of which were evident during its previous use and factors in its decline and subsequent closure.

In short, the trades and operations of The Roby public house did not facilitate its long-term viability or survival.

9.0 Market Analysis/Alternatives

Outlined earlier within this report are the constraints of rejuvenating the existing public house. When consideration is given to the area, its prominent residential use and availability of alternative establishments in the area the land usage for residential makes it a suitable use long term.

To this end replacing it with carefully considered homes offers a financially sustainable alternative, promising significant returns on investment and rejuvenation of the location/locality.

Demolition and redevelopment would invigorate activity, generating employment opportunities during the build and bolstering property values in the area.

Knowsley Borough council faces a growing demand for high-quality housing, particularly in established residential areas like Roby. Market research indicates:

- A shortage of good quality well considered homes in the local market area, creating an opportunity for developers to meet this demand.
- A preference among affluent buyers for modern amenities and upscale living spaces, aligning with the proposed carefully considered home developments.

10.0 Knowsley & National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Considered

Knowsley's Local Plan advocates for sustainable development and high-quality housing provision. Notably:

- It encourages the redevelopment of brownfield sites to optimize land usage.
- Supports the removal of buildings no longer serving their intended purpose or contributing positively to the community which the decline of the public house no longer does.
- According to the NPPF, Paragraph 97 emphasizes the importance of efficient use of previously developed land, encouraging sustainable development that makes the most effective use of resources. Paragraph 97 specifically states:

"Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use."

11.0 Justification for Development

The following points should be considered as reasonable factors in support of the development.

1. **Surplus to Requirements:** The Roby Public House has been vacant and underutilised for a significant period, and this assessment has shown that the building and its associated land are surplus to current community needs. This aligns with criteria (a) of Paragraph 97, justifying the site's redevelopment.
2. **Housing Demand:** There is a documented need for new housing in the area. Our proposal for nine new homes directly responds to this demand, contributing to the local housing supply and providing high-quality living spaces for future residents.
3. **Sustainable Development:** The proposed development maximizes the use of previously developed land, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development promoted by the NPPF. This ensures minimal environmental impact and supports the efficient use of land resources.
4. **Community Benefit:** While the site will transition from its former use as a public house, the development will enhance the local community by providing modern housing options, improving local infrastructure, and potentially increasing property values in the vicinity.
5. **Design and Integration:** The design of the new homes has been planned with careful consideration of the local architectural style and community character, ensuring that the development integrates seamlessly into the existing neighbourhood.

The redevelopment of the former Roby Public House site into nine new homes is a strategic and thoughtful project that aligns with the NPPF's goals of promoting sustainable development and making efficient use of land. By transforming an underutilized site into a vibrant residential area, this project not only addresses local housing needs but also enhances the overall community.

12.0 Conclusion

The decline in pubs, a notable trend observed over the past few decades, can be attributed to several key factors, notably:

- Economic pressures, such as rising property costs and increasing taxes on alcohol, have made it financially challenging for many pub owners to sustain their businesses.

- Changes in social habits have also played a significant role, with a growing preference for drinking at home due to the affordability and convenience of buying alcohol from supermarkets. Moreover, the advent of digital entertainment and the shift towards online socialising have diminished the traditional role of pubs as central social hubs.

The above, and other combined factors listed in this report, have significantly impacted the viability of pubs, and in this case the decline of The Roby public house.

Considering Knowsley's planning policies, The NPPF, the condition and decline of The Roby Public House, surrounding community facilities, market demand, and economic viability, it is recommended to proceed with the demolition of the existing building and the construction of nine new homes. This approach aligns with sustainable development principles, addresses housing needs, and fosters good modern, sustainable housing design in the area.

13.0 Recommendations

- Secure necessary statutory approvals from the local authority.
- Engage with stakeholders and the community to address concerns and garner support.
- Incorporate sustainable design features and uphold high construction standards to enhance the appeal and value of the luxury homes.