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An Epsom 17th century pub to become supermarket?

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A 17th century pub could be transformed into a Sainsbury's Local. Plans have been submitted to refurbish the Grade II-listed drinking establishment, on Dorking Road in Epsom, to a convenience store.

If approved, a Sainsbury's convenience store would take over the ground floor of the historic building and install an ATM machine outside. Plans also include resurfacing and reducing the car park to just 13 spaces, four of which will be reserved for delivery vehicles.

The former White Horse Public House was converted into Lava Lounge, a restaurant and cocktail bar, in 2020. Lava Lounge closed in January 2024, having been on the market for at least two years according to planning documents.

Used for centuries for drinking, the former purpose of the pub is no longer viable according to Sainsbury's. "Given the wealth of drinking establishments in Epsom, not just in the town centre, it is unlikely that the loss of a facility which has already been closed for a year could be considered a detriment," the application said.

Serving a specific catchment area, the proposed Sainsbury's is said to be conveniently located for nearby residents, visitors and employees at Epsom hospital as well as passing trade. The development will also create around 20 new jobs, a mixture of full and part-time.

"Very little appears to have survived" from the 17th-18th century on the ground floor, planning documents state, perhaps only the thick walls around the chimney breasts. The timber framed structure at first floor level appears to be correctly placed for a historic building but, the report says, the timbers appear to be modern.

Sainsbury's heritage statement states the proposals would have a "neutral effect" on the special interest of a listed building. The report says the vast majority of the building's internal heritage value has been lost from modern adaptations.

Planning documents read: "The core of the building has a hipped slate roof and is of timber framed construction, some of which is evidently modern, but which may form the altered remains of the 17th or 18th century building referred to in the Listing description. The pub has a parapeted brick frontage which likely dates from the middle of the 19th century."

The scheme proposes removing the replacement of the Victorian-style sash window, as well as reconfiguring and refurbishing the insides of the former pub. Demolishing the covered yard at the back of the site, Sainsbury's plans to build an extension to form a 'back of house' for the convenience store.

Minor modifications to the historic part of the building are needed to use the original pub building for the back office part of the shop. The application clarifies the historic part of the building is not being used for a sales area.

Neighbours can comment on the application on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's website. No decision date has been listed yet.

View outside the Lava Lounge, and former White Horse Pub, in Epsom. (Credit: Sainsbury\'s/ Epsom and Ewell Planning Documents)

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