



**BLACK
SWAN
THEATRE**
— NORTH WALSHAM —

**new
stages**

Black Swan Public House & Theatre
Black Swan Loke, North Walsham, Norfolk NR28 9BX
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22 June 2026

Planning Application PU/26/1275

Address for application: 6 Market Place North Walsham Norfolk NR28 9BP

Re: Change of use of rear part of ground floor and upper floors from Bank (Class E) to 3 into 3 flats (Class C3). Front area of the ground floor to remain as commercial.

Objection on behalf of New Stages Projects CIC

I am writing on behalf of New Stages Projects CIC, the not-for-profit community organisation that took over the Black Swan in 2023 and transformed it into a community pub and theatre venue. Since taking over the site, we have invested heavily in bringing the building back into active and positive community use as a public house, live performance venue, and cultural space serving residents and visitors alike.

The Black Swan now operates not simply as a public house, but as a community-focused pub, theatre and events venue, supporting a broad range of cultural and community activity. In addition to activity delivered by New Stages Projects CIC, some theatre productions and events at the venue are delivered by New Stages Theatre, a registered charity, further underlining the venue's importance as a cultural and community asset.

We wish to register a formal objection to the above planning application for the conversion of the nearby commercial property into residential flats.

Our objection is not to housing in principle, but to the fact that the current planning submission and the accompanying consultant/officer assessment appear to have failed to properly consider the direct relationship between the proposed residential units and the established operation of the Black Swan pub and theatre, as well as the wider impact of the loss of another commercial unit from the heart of North Walsham town centre.

In particular, the report appears to omit any meaningful assessment of the likely impact on future occupiers from the presence of a long-established licensed venue and performance space immediately adjacent to and opposite the proposed flats.

1. Failure to properly acknowledge the Black Swan Public House and Theatre as an active neighbouring asset

The Black Swan is not simply a conventional pub. It is a community-led pub and theatre venue operated by a not-for-profit organisation and hosting a wide range of activities including:

- live music events;
- theatre productions, rehearsals and performances;
- events and performances run by New Stages Theatre, a registered charity;
- spoken word, community performances and entertainment;
- outdoor performances and events;
- use of external seating areas and courtyard space by customers and audiences.

The proposed flats would be located directly in front of the pub and adjacent to the theatre, in extremely close proximity to our trading and performance areas. Yet the planning report, as we understand it, does not properly reference the existence of the pub and theatre operation, nor the extent of our external activity, including outdoor seating and courtyard use.

This omission is a serious flaw in the assessment of the application. The Black Swan is a significant existing commercial, community and cultural use in this location, and the planning authority must take its operation fully into account when determining whether new residential accommodation is appropriate in such close proximity.

2. Inadequate consideration of noise, disturbance and the impact on future residents

A key concern is the complete lack of proper consideration of noise and amenity impacts arising from the proposed relationship between residential units and our venue.

The Black Swan hosts a range of activities that generate legitimate and foreseeable noise associated with a functioning pub and theatre, including:

- customer arrival and dispersal;
- conversation and social activity in the external seating areas;
- live music and performances;
- theatre audiences attending evening events;
- performances, rehearsals and cultural events delivered both by New Stages Projects CIC and by New Stages Theatre;
- occasional outdoor performances and events in the courtyard or surrounding external space;
- servicing, deliveries, and operational activity associated with a hospitality and performance venue.

These activities are not incidental; they are central to the venue's operation and to the cultural and economic contribution it makes to the town. Any new flats introduced immediately adjacent to or opposite these activities would inevitably create the potential for future complaints regarding noise, disturbance, evening activity, and customer behaviour, even where the venue is operating lawfully and responsibly.

We are therefore very concerned that the application documents and officer assessment appear not to address:

- the existing late afternoon and evening use of the pub and theatre;
- the use of the outdoor seating and courtyard areas;

- the impact of performances, live music, and audience activity;
- the risk of introducing noise-sensitive residential receptors into a location that is plainly adjacent to an established hospitality and entertainment venue;
- the likely consequences of future resident complaints on the ongoing viability of the Black Swan's activities.

The planning authority must give proper weight to the principle that existing community, leisure, hospitality and cultural venues should not be prejudiced by the introduction of incompatible residential development nearby. It is not acceptable for an established venue to face restrictions, complaints, or operational pressure simply because new residential accommodation has been permitted without proper assessment of its surroundings.

At the very least, the application should not be determined without a robust and specific assessment of the relationship between the proposed flats and the Black Swan's licensed, entertainment, charitable and external uses.

3. Harm to the vitality and viability of North Walsham town centre and marketplace

We are also concerned by the broader principle of yet another commercial or retail unit in North Walsham town centre / marketplace being lost to domestic use.

It is a matter of real concern that premises in the high street and marketplace area, which should contribute to the vitality, activity and economic life of the town centre, are increasingly being proposed for conversion to residential accommodation. North Walsham needs a thriving marketplace and town centre, with active commercial uses, independent businesses, hospitality, retail, cultural activity and reasons for people to visit, spend time, and support the local economy.

The loss of another commercial property to domestic use in such a central location risks further eroding the mix of uses that makes the town centre viable and attractive. While each application must be considered on its own merits, there must also be regard to the cumulative effect of gradually replacing commercial and public-facing town-centre premises with private residential accommodation.

This is particularly concerning where the site sits in close proximity to an existing community pub and theatre venue that is actively helping to drive footfall, evening economy activity, and cultural engagement in the town centre. Rather than supporting the vitality of the marketplace and surrounding businesses, this proposal risks undermining it by removing another potential commercial premises from active town-centre use and introducing a more sensitive residential use immediately next to an established leisure and performance venue.

In our view, the application should therefore also be assessed against the broader objective of maintaining and strengthening the commercial, cultural and community vitality of North Walsham town centre, rather than permitting further erosion of active commercial frontage and business space in favour of residential conversion.

4. Waste storage, refuse management and visual amenity concerns

A further concern is the practical management of waste and refuse associated with additional residential flats in this location, and the likely effect on the appearance and amenity of the area immediately surrounding the Black Swan.

This part of North Walsham is already affected by the visual and environmental impact of residential refuse storage. We already see bins associated with flats around the churchyard left in prominent locations, and these can be unsightly, create unpleasant smells, and have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the area. That existing situation already causes concern locally.

Against that background, it is troubling that this application appears not to address in any meaningful way how refuse and recycling associated with the proposed flats will be stored and presented, particularly given the constrained nature of the site and its proximity to the entrance, frontage and approach to the Black Swan pub and theatre.

A significant amount of volunteer time and effort has gone into improving the appearance of the courtyard, outdoor areas and setting of the Black Swan in order to create an attractive, welcoming and well-kept venue for customers, audiences and visitors. The venue is now an important part of the experience of the marketplace and town centre, and considerable work has been undertaken to enhance its visual appeal and public-facing environment.

There is therefore a very real concern that this proposal could result in additional domestic bins, refuse storage or collection arrangements being located in prominent positions at the end of the road or close to the venue, harming the appearance of the area and undermining the effort that has gone into improving the site and making it attractive to visitors.

The planning authority should require clear and convincing detail on:

- the exact location of refuse and recycling storage for each flat;
- whether bins would be visible from Black Swan Lane, the approach to the pub/theatre, the marketplace, or nearby public spaces;
- whether refuse storage would adversely affect the setting, appearance or attractiveness of the Black Swan and its courtyard;
- how odour, litter, overflow and collection-day bin presentation would be managed;
- whether there is genuinely sufficient and appropriate space on site to accommodate refuse storage without creating visual clutter or harm to local amenity.

In our view, refuse and waste management is not a minor detail in this location. It goes directly to the quality of the environment around a community pub and theatre venue that has worked hard to improve the area and encourage visitors into the town centre.

5. Failure to consider the impact on the operation and viability of a valued community asset

The Black Swan is not just a business; it is a community asset that has been brought back into meaningful use by a not-for-profit organisation. Its programme of live music, theatre, performance, and community events – including activity delivered in conjunction with New Stages Theatre, a registered charity – forms a key part of its public benefit and local value.

Allowing residential flats in such immediate proximity, without proper assessment or mitigation, creates a clear risk that the normal operation of the venue could later be challenged or constrained. This could include pressure around:

- evening performances and event timings;
- outdoor seating and courtyard use;
- live music and amplified performances;
- audience arrival and dispersal;
- routine hospitality trade associated with a pub and theatre venue.

This is a significant planning concern. A decision that fails to protect an established community venue from foreseeable future conflict with new residential occupiers would be contrary to sound planning principles and potentially harmful to the long-term sustainability of the Black Swan as a cultural, charitable and social facility.

6. Highway safety, access and conflict with pedestrians

We also object on highway and public safety grounds.

The proposed development would intensify residential use in an area that already experiences access and movement problems, particularly in and around Black Swan Lane. There is already an existing issue with vehicles driving down Black Swan Lane and reaching a dead end, creating confusion, reversing movements, and conflict with pedestrians.

This is already problematic and potentially dangerous given the nature of our operation. At busy times, the area is used by:

- pub customers entering and leaving the venue;
- theatre audiences arriving before performances and dispersing afterwards;
- people using the outdoor seating and courtyard;
- staff, performers, suppliers, and visitors moving between the venue and surrounding area.

Introducing additional residential units in this immediate location is likely to increase vehicular activity, servicing demands, drop-offs, visitor parking pressure, and general movement conflict in an already constrained area. We are particularly concerned that this will exacerbate risks to customers and audience members, especially during busy event times and in the evening.

The application therefore requires much more careful scrutiny of:

- vehicle access arrangements;
- whether vehicles will continue to enter Black Swan Lane unnecessarily and have to turn or reverse;
- pedestrian safety during peak pub and theatre trading periods;
- conflict between residents' vehicles/visitors and venue users;
- visibility, servicing and emergency access implications.

As matters stand, we do not believe the proposal has adequately assessed the real conditions on the ground or the existing intensity of public use associated with the Black Swan.

7. The current report is materially incomplete

Our principal concern is that the current planning assessment appears to have been prepared without a proper understanding of the site context. A report that fails to mention the Black Swan's operation as a pub and theatre venue, its outdoor seating and courtyard, its live events and performances, and the likely amenity and access implications for both future residents and our existing customers is, in our view, materially incomplete.

It is particularly concerning that the report appears not to recognise that the venue supports not only commercial hospitality use, but also wider community and charitable cultural activity, including events and productions delivered by New Stages Theatre. This omission significantly understates the nature and intensity of the existing use, and the importance of the venue to the local area.

It is also disappointing that the application appears to be treated in isolation from the wider town-centre context, without meaningful regard to the continued loss of commercial premises in the marketplace and high street area to residential conversion. Similarly, the practical implications of introducing additional domestic refuse storage into this already sensitive and visible location do not appear to have been adequately addressed.

Before any decision is made, we request that the local planning authority:

1. Undertake or require a full reassessment of the relationship between the proposed flats and the Black Swan pub/theatre operation.
2. Assess noise and disturbance properly, including the effect of live music, theatre events, outdoor seating, courtyard use, customer arrival/departure, and evening trading activity.
3. Consider the impact on the continued viability of the Black Swan as an established community, cultural and hospitality venue, including the risk of future complaints from residents.
4. Take into account the role of New Stages Theatre as a registered charity operating performances and events from the venue, and the public benefit associated with that activity.
5. Consider the wider impact of the loss of another commercial premises within North Walsham marketplace / town centre to residential use, and the implications for town-centre vitality and viability.
6. Require proper assessment of waste storage, refuse management and visual amenity impacts, including the location and prominence of bins and their effect on the appearance of the area and the setting of the Black Swan.
7. Reassess access and highway safety issues around Black Swan Lane, including existing dead-end vehicle movements and pedestrian conflict at busy times.
8. Ensure that the application is considered in the context of the need to protect existing community venues and town-centre leisure uses from inappropriate adjacent residential development.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, New Stages Projects CIC objects to this application in its current form.

The proposal has not, in our view, been supported by an adequate assessment of the very real planning impacts arising from the location of the proposed flats immediately adjacent to

a working pub and theatre venue with outdoor seating, courtyard use, live music, performances, and significant customer and audience footfall. Nor does it appear to properly address the existing access and safety issues affecting Black Swan Lane.

The failure to properly acknowledge the full nature of the Black Swan's operation – including its role as a venue for theatre and charitable cultural activity delivered in part by New Stages Theatre – is a serious omission in the assessment of the application. We are also deeply concerned by the continued loss of commercial premises in the heart of North Walsham to residential conversion, at a time when the marketplace and town centre need active businesses, venues and public-facing uses in order to thrive. In addition, the application appears not to have properly considered the practical and visual impact of refuse and bin storage in a highly visible location adjacent to a community venue that has been significantly improved by volunteers for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

We respectfully ask that the application be refused, or at the very least not determined until these issues have been fully and properly assessed.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Ballard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke at the end of the name.

Joseph Ballard
Chief Executive, New Stages Projects CIC