

Notes from 'The Exeter' meeting, 6th September 2024

Present:

Andrew Foster (AF), Andrew Saunders (AS), James Carver (JC), Helen Ratcliffe (HR – note-taking), Bry Uglow (BU), Clare O'Connor (CO'C), Jerry Parkinson (JP), Caroline Taverner (CT), Sue Roberts (SR), Martin Taverner (MT), Paul Chaplin (PC), John Truswell (JT), Oliver Wills (OW), Jan Wills (JW), Andy Grzesinski (AG), Jane Gryzinski (JG), Ross Compton (RC), Sabrina Compton (SC), Sally Tancock (ST), Noel Tancock (NT), ClareLou (CL), Guy Bracewell (GB)

Introduction:

AF welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the current situation, following conversations with the owners and their agent:

- There is no-one in the running to buy the pub at the moment
- The owners are keen to keep the pub open after Matt and Rick leave, and ideally would like to see it continue operating as a pub after it is sold
- The agent is taking this group and its intentions seriously, especially as it is operating under the auspices of TCLT
- AS, GB and JT have put together an agenda for this meeting, following which it would make sense to identify small groups of volunteers to tackle the various aspects of the project in order to achieve our aims

Nomination to have 'The Exeter' designated as an ACV (Asset of Community Value)

JW updated the meeting on progress to date:

- A draft application has been circulated to the group for comment
- At a meeting with Arron Beecham from MDDC, it was stressed that we need to demonstrate that The Exeter is (and has even more potential to be) more to the community than just a pub
- Any memories, stories, feelings, ideas for the future which would help the application should be shared with Jan as soon as possible, please, as the sooner the application is made, the better **(ACTION: ALL)**
- The Board of TCLT will confer to confirm that the application will be made in its name **(ACTION: AF/HR)**
- The designation of ACV would give the community the right to bid (for a period of six months) and it was also noted that an application for the building's use to be changed cannot be made without it being on the market for a certain length of time – so we may be able to buy ourselves some time to take the project forward

Community Communications Plan

GB emphasised the need to engage the wider community in establishing both what a community hub might entail and who would be able/willing to volunteer to join sub-groups to take the project forward:

- A poster/flyer would be useful to use/deliver in and around the village (and possibly at ThorFest next weekend) to raise awareness of the project and invite people to share their opinions/views **(ACTION: GB)**
- A community questionnaire is vital to gather both the quantitative and qualitative data which will be needed to inform a Business Plan

- Both paper and digital versions of the questionnaire should be available, with digital versions distributed via the TCLT website and email lists from local clubs/organisations (subject to the necessary data protection requirements)
- The sample questionnaire available from the Plunkett Foundation could be used as a starting point to draft our questionnaire, which should then be circulated to the group for comment/input **(ACTION: GB)**

Community Hub Concept

Various suggestions have already been made as to what a Community Hub might entail and one or more targeted Focus Groups may help to expand the list:

- Pub
- Shop
- Coffee Shop
- Library
- Space for younger people to gather and socialise
- Space for community wellbeing
- Hairdresser
- Post Office – HR explained that, although the sub-postmistress is open to the idea of moving the Post Office into a Community Hub at some point, we need to exercise caution, as its current status as a Community Post Office (which attracts funding from Post Office Ltd) might be at risk if it is not moved into an existing, established business. It should also be noted that it is enabled to operate alongside a newsagent and stationery shop through the support of Thorverton Cooperative Trust Ltd, a not-for-profit community organisation established in 2001.

All additional ideas are welcome too!

Funding

AS reported that there are various organisations who can help with funding opportunities:

- The Plunkett Foundation, with whom AS has already had a positive conversation and who, once they have received the output from our questionnaire, will help point us in the right direction for grant possibilities
- CAMRA – AS and JT have a meeting next week with the local rep whose responsibility is to save local pubs from closure
- The Pub is the Hub, who may be able to provide £3k seedcorn funding
- Lottery Funding
- Government-backed Community Ownership Fund, assuming it is re-instated in some form following the forthcoming budget
- The Charity Bank (for loans rather than grants)
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In addition, JT reported that one of the people he worked with on saving the Craufurd Arms in Maidenhead has also helped with various other pub project and would be willing to offer assistance.

BU and CO'C volunteered to look into other grant funding opportunities:

(ACTION: BU/CO'C)

It was noted that, in order to apply for grant and/or loan funding, it is essential that we have prepared a 3-5 year strategy and Business Plan. It may also be helpful to demonstrate that pledges have been made for share ownership from members of the community.

It was agreed that, after the CAMRA meeting, JT would share the Business Plan from the Craufurd Arms project. It was also agreed that it would be very helpful to have a local accountant on board – please have a think about who that might be!

Keeping the Pub Open

The owners appear to want to keep the pub open if at all possible, presumably as it would both deteriorate if not in use and also be less attractive as a sales proposition. However, they have not been successful so far in finding someone to come and manage it on their behalf.

It could be possible that we take it on, although careful thought and planning is required to make this happen in a very short period of time:

It was agreed to split the consideration of this into two parallel work streams:

- Logistics
- Finance/business plan

Logistics

- A management team, in addition to volunteers, would be needed
- Licencing would need to be sorted out
- TUPE may be a consideration – CT volunteered to investigate this
(ACTION: CT)
- A management team, in addition to volunteers, would be needed
- Negotiations with suppliers would need to take place, particularly in relation to equipment
- There are a couple of people locally (eg SR) who have cellar experience who may be willing to be called upon to help
- The flat upstairs would need some 'love' if, for example, it is to become attractive for a manager to live in
- Catering: models other than cooking on the premises could be considered – as examples, renting out the kitchen to someone who then keeps what they make (eg Stoke Canon), or inviting food vans to attend on particular evenings (eg Five Bells)

SC/SR volunteered (possibly with the addition of Sue Hyde who was unable to be at the meeting) to investigate the logistics of keeping the pub open

(ACTION: SC/SR)

Finance/business plan

- We need to understand the current financial model
- We need to know on what basis the owners might be prepared to set up a rolling lease for us

JT and NT (volunteered by ST!) volunteered to talk to Matt about the day to day financing and running of the pub

(ACTION: JT/NT)

Conclusion

It was agreed that there are three main priorities which need to be worked on with some haste:

- Submitting the ACV application
- Raising community awareness
- Keeping the pub open

RC volunteered to draft a Project Plan (and Gantt Chart) to help achieve these (and the longer-term aim of developing a Community Hub) and which will incorporate key milestones and dependencies **(ACTION: RC)**

Finally, as it is important, and in some cases urgent, that we get to work on some of the issues straightaway, please could volunteers to sign up to each topic and spread the word as widely as possible in the village. **(ACTION: ALL)**