

Notes from 'The Exeter' meeting, 13/10/24

Present:

Andrew Saunders (AS), Martin Tavener (MT), Caroline Tavener (CT), Sue Roberts (SR), Kerry Roberts (KR), Trevor Sanders (TS), Jackie Mann (JM), Denny Davies (DD), Bry Uglow (BU), Andy Grzesinski (AG), Paul Uglow (PU), Paul Chaplin (PC), Mandy Plumridge (MP), Karl Wilson (KW), Andrew Foster (AF), Guy Wadworth (GW), Susan Hyde (SH), Sheila Ball (SB), John Spivey (JS), Sabrina Sokolowski (SS), Ross Compton (RC – note taking).

Introduction

The meeting had no formal agenda. AS delivered a statement to bring everyone up to speed on the events of the last two weeks, and where this puts the group as follows:

There were two viewings of The Exeter, including a potential buyer from Surrey and a resident of the village (GW). Those from Surrey are no longer engaged. GW clarified his position as having made an acceptable offer which is contingent on a property sale, with a proposal to rent the Exeter and allow the community to run the pub.

Noel Tancock (NT – not present) has been in touch directly with Anna Mann to negotiate a 6-month rent-free tenancy, with the community entity being responsible for all utilities estimated at £2k per month. The priority would be on keeping the pub open, in recognition that once it closes, it will likely remain closed in the absence of a realistic buyer. The long-term aim in the event of opening would remain to buy the property as a community asset.

It is important that the Thorverton Arms continues to thrive, and that no undercutting should be undertaken.

In order to move forward, there is an urgent need for volunteers to staff the pub, as well as an initial start-up fund estimated as being IR £5k. Flyers and forms have been developed to raise awareness in the community and to start to develop a team. A social media presence is being worked on, and the aim, subject to volunteers and funds is to open at some point in mid-November.

AS opened to the floor for comments and questions.

JM – reminded of the significant work even as the doors are closed between Rick and Matt leaving and the target opening date – keeping beer, flushing lines etc. It is important to have volunteers who can manage this. Cautioned that certain equipment would go.

Response to note that NT had spoken to Matt at length regarding suppliers inc. brewery owned equipment.

GW – felt that the start-up fund figure was too low, and should be more like £10k. Also noted that perhaps Rick and Matt could let accounts run for a further month, with the aim of the community team covering the bills. Cautioned that nobody would extend credit to an unknown entity.

Response to note that fund had been calculated and again that supplier details were at least in discussion already.

AG – queried whether there had already been any volunteers come forward.

Response from SS to note that Sally Tancock (ST – not present) had ~27 volunteers already, though this was intended as being the initial working party for cleaning and preparation, rather than a regular bar/kitchen team.

JM – noted that much of the pub contents would go, including the guns etc.

Response from AS/SR to clarify that is not the case, as pub is not being sold and Anna confirmed contents remains.

KW – queried when the wiring was last checked, noting the importance of a valid certificate for insurance.

Response that the belief it is all in place (as building currently has valid insurance), but this would be checked. ACTION – NT to check with Rick/Matt.

MP – noting her involvement with the set-up of the community pub in Stoke Canon, suggested that it is worth ensuring the trustworthiness of volunteers through police checks or similar, and that perhaps a working party should vet volunteers. Noted the need for systems to be in place, so that any changes don't cause concern among volunteers.

JM – queried who the licensee would be and noted that they need to be on the premises.

Response from AS that Jan Wills would be the licensee and SR confirmed that it is no longer the case that that individual has to be on the premises.

TS – noted gratitude for the presence of M and importance of both pubs.

SH – highlighted the need to protect The Exeter.

There was a general discussion on the recent loss of the shop and prior loss of The Bell.

JM – noted the need for commitment from volunteers and that there was a risk both in terms of the number that may come forward (i.e. not enough) or the level of commitment that may drop over time, resulting in inconsistency.

RC – concurred, and noted that this is a key consideration.

TS – noted that much hangs on the number of volunteers to come forward.

MP – confirmed that the Stoke Canon pub is run entirely by volunteers but that they pay a coordinator and also make weekend payments in order to ensure consistency. They also have a second income from rental of an apartment, which could be considered.

KW – concurred that the rental of the flat would be a good revenue stream.

SR – confirmed that there are no plans to rent as yet, but could be in the longer term. Noted that work is needed to the living space.

TS – noted that it is impossible to spend money on a property when there is no guarantee of being able to remain in it.

BU – queried the status of the ACV application.

Response from AS to confirm that it has not been submitted.

DD- raised a question regarding what the ACV provides in terms of assistance for funding.

Response from SR to confirm that the ACV status is important in applying for funding and in the process for potential purchase.

AS – noted that some government funding was no longer available, but that the pending budget may see similar funding streams put in place.

SS – noted that the combination of a track record of running The Exeter successfully, along with the ACV status may prove the concept of the community hub aspect and stand The Exeter in good stead.

AF – noted that the CLT website needs to be updated and that there was some confusion over where to get relevant information and who to contact. Some volunteers had submitted information to the CLT.

Response that an email address has been set up and that communications would be managed via that preferentially.

BU – noted that the involvement of the CLT is important to the ACV, as the CLT is the entity to take forward any potential purchase in the future.

GW – highlighted that a bank account would be needed and queried again whether we can raise £10k. Also noted that funding would be unlikely for a pub when there is a second in the village.

Response from AS that a bank account is in place already, and that one of the aims of the group going forward was to establish the fund with the aid of the community. SS also noted in response that The Exeter can't just be a pub, hence the community hub aspect.

AG – noted the need to separate the longer term aims from the immediate needs of keeping the pub open.

CT – asked whether the ACV could be picked up to relieve Jan. ACTION – AS to speak with JW and progress.

TS – asked whether we should be expanding on the amount that is needed as a start-up fund? BU further suggested that perhaps we could have a 'progress pint glass' or such, to help make people aware of progress. It was also confirmed that the Street Party fund had pledged £500 already, and that there had been some private contributions also.

AS asked whether there were any objections to proceeding, to which there were none. Resolved to progress with calling for volunteers and donations.