

KINGTON ST MICHAEL PARISH COUNCIL

“Community Pub”

Parish Meeting

held at 7.00pm

Kington St Michael Village Hall, Kington St Michael SN14 6HX

21st March 2024

MEETING NOTES

PRESENT

Joseph Lasbury, Gillian Lasbury, Margaret Pratley, Linda Durno, Rob Durno, Alastair Morelli, Philip Tolerton, Jehanne Le Quesne, Frank Hughes, Eric Sambell, Louise Williams, John Hall, Simon Jones, Janet Elms, Gerry Elms, Dorothy Wheatley, Neil White, Deb White, Harvey Bull, Tyler Barnes, Jacqui Barnes, Gary Barnes, Jon Turner, Ian Pitman, Alan Slavinski, Paul Turner, Anthony Pugh, Bill Sutton, David Lock, Yvonne Powell, Alex Morton, Alexis Nordini, Wiltshire Councillor Howard Greenman, Parish Cllrs Gerry Gamble, Alex Hall, Vicki Ingham, Peter Macdonald, John Newton, Will Roe, Fiona Twisse, Stephen Woodhead and Vivian Vines (Parish Clerk). (All recorded from the Attendance Register)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Parish Cllr Marie-Clare Simpson.

WELCOME TO ATTENDEES

Parish Council Chairman, Gerry Gamble, welcomed all to the Meeting and outlined the reasons why the Parish Council had called the Public Meeting. In summary the Parish Council had renewed the Asset of Community Value Listing for The Jolly Huntsman Public House in 2023 and had subsequently learnt that the property was for sale on the open market. The Parish Council had considered that the potential existed for the Asset to be lost to the community and had felt that community views should be ascertained as to whether there was sufficient interest for a community-led project to acquire the premises and business to ensure the facility was retained. It was made clear that the Parish Council had no intention of acquiring the property and business but was happy to assist the community in their own endeavours. To assist this process the Parish Council, following notification from Wiltshire Council that the property was for sale, had advised them that they should be considered as a potential bidder. This allowed for the full moratorium period (until 2nd August 2024) to be put in place and for further consideration to take place.

BRIEFING FOR PARISHIONERS

Cllr Alex Hall, the Parish Council Lead Member on the project, had produced a Briefing Note on behalf of the Council as background information and this, together with an accounting spreadsheet, had been distributed to Parishioners on the Council email database and had appeared on both Parish websites in advance of the Public

Meeting. The background information was also circulated to all in attendance. The Briefing covered:

- the background,
- financial viability,
- financing,
- support available for the Project,
- looking forward to managing the Asset,
- some timelines,
- decisions to be made.

In addition financial information included the Profit and Loss Accounts for the business for years 2018 to 2023.

In introducing the background information Alex highlighted the history to date reminding all that the moratorium period could not be extended, that the Parish Council was simply an enabler with no intentions of “running a pub” and that the Project must be considered as a marathon and not a sprint as initial enthusiasm could not be lost as this was a long term commitment. With this in mind there was a need for a core group of Parishioners to become involved that stayed the course. Willing parties with perhaps professional expertise would need to be found potentially supported by the Plunkett Foundation.

QUESTIONS AND VIEWS

1. A Kington Langley attendee advised that efforts were being made to re-open the Hit or Miss PH in that village as a community facility and the early consultations within the Parish had received 167 responses showing early support. Critical mass support needs to be retained for the long-term effort and worryingly the initial start up traction and core group had dwindled to low numbers. However, he stressed that there had been many occasions where community efforts were proving successful giving examples including The Hop Pole Inn at Limpley Stoke. Details can be found at www.limpleystokecbs.org
2. How optimistic is to get loans? The Briefing Note highlighted potential financing possibilities. These included the Community Opportunity Fund (COF), Community Shares, COF Revenue Grant, Public Works Board loan and possibly the Eden Renewables Fund. All of these would need to be taken forward by a core group with guidance from The Plunkett Foundation or other advisor.
3. Why is the Pub only open on so few days and times? The questioner was advised that the present management of Public House was not under consideration at the Meeting.
4. How easy is to get and retain Managers? Any comparison with the Village Shop was irrelevant as Public House management was a different profession. Comment was made that in some circumstances it took 4 attempts to find the right person. Often it relied on local circumstances and how the management structure was set to allow favourable arrangements to be in place.
5. What was the Management Approach? The core group would need to decide on the structure, whether using a committee management arrangement or employment of a tenant landlord. Options would need to be agreed.

6. It was understood that Listed Building renovation costs were immense and that there had been local gossip that £100k would be required? The core group would need to enlist the services of a surveyor to ascertain potential costs. A Business Plan would need to be prepared that covered required works. The advantage was in this case that the business was still operating, rather than being shut down and in a derelict situation and works could be scheduled to be carried out while the business stays in operation. There could be an opportunity for a COF grant for immediate costs and refurbishment.
7. Accounting Comments/Questions. It was suggested that the recent accounting periods and turnover levels resulting in losses had been affected by the present owners reduced opening hours. In addition the accounts showed Directors salaries and premise rents that would not be applicable if it was community owned. The prepared Briefing Note had included comment on financial viability.
8. Community Benefit Society (CBS) a Warning!! It was pointed out that a CBS was very easy to start up. The issue was the ongoing responsibility when enthusiasm dwindled and people “dropped out” as had happened elsewhere. Earlier in the Meeting it had been made clear that the Project needed long-term commitment and it would be for the core group to decide if this was in place and how the right people were in the right roles. Comment was made that it appeared that The Plunkett Foundation had a high success rate when they had been involved.
9. Wiltshire Cllr Howard Greenman was pleased to see the progress being made to date, pointed out the pitfalls of some others that had tried when initial support had declined and failed and assured all that he would be supportive whenever needed.
10. **VOTE.** To move things forward Cllr Gerry Gamble called for a show of hands indicating those who supported the concept as if there was no support no further action could be taken. It was clear from the show of hands that the vast majority of attendees were in support.
11. Following this “informal resolution” the question arose as to how things would now be taken forward. Clearly there was a need for an initial core group to be formed to consider the Project in more detail and lead to a feasibility study. From a timing point of view there was a need to seek volunteers and guidance and as a Village Newsletter was to be published shortly the opportunity should be taken to seek support. It was suggested that the Annual Parish Meeting scheduled for the 15th April 2024 could provide the next opportunity for any update and public involvement.
12. Core Steering Group. Following a request for volunteers it was agreed that Linda Durno, Rob Durno, Neil White, Alex Hall and Gerry Gamble would form the Core Start Up Group and that they would consider matters further and provide a progress report at the Annual Parish Meeting.

CLOSURE OF MEETING

Parish Council Chairman, Gerry Gamble, thanked everyone for their attendance, looked forward to their future input and closed the meeting at 7.50pm