

The Swan Public House, Worlingworth – Public Meeting No 2

Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 26th May, 2016, 7:30pm at the Community Centre

Committee Members	Role	Phone Numbers
Chris Goddard	Chair	01728 628215
Adrian Smith	Treasurer	01728 628177
Karen Osborn	Secretary	01728 628485/07903 571622
Peter Allen		01728 627730
Jan Hammond		01728 627735/07733 244400
Lavinia Wells		01728 628762/07767 870989

Approximately 75 people attended the meeting.

Agenda

- Introduction
- History and Key information
- Parish Council Involvement
- Future Ownership Options
- Private and Charitable Funding
- Questions and Answers

Chris Goddard opened the meeting

- Chris thanked Maxine for organising the very first public meeting and getting this whole campaign started.
- What do we want?
 - We want a pub in the village – as a committee we are very focussed on this and all our actions are geared to making that happen.
- Community help
 - We need to understand what the community would like from The Swan in the future and therefore we have put together a very simple questionnaire. Please could you ensure you get this back to us as your opinion really matters.
 - We are also aware that we may have to raise funding from the public to enable us to a) purchase the pub and b) cover the start-up costs. We would like an indication of whether you would be interested in investing money in any future venture.
 - We also have a bucket available for any cash donations this evening. All members of the committee have donated £20 each so far and we would welcome any donations to help us with incidental expenses.

History and Key Information

Commercial First are the owners of the pub and they have a duty to get the best price they can for it.

As we all know there is a lot to do before it can open it's doors again.

As soon as the pub has been vacated, we are preparing to undertake a survey completed and identify what the cost of the refurbishments would be.

Parish Council Involvement

The Parish Council originally placed The Swan on a register, identifying the property as an Asset of Community Value. This means that as soon as the pub is offered for sale, any community based group interested in purchasing the pub has a 6 month period in which to put forward an offer.

The Parish Council agreed, at the last meeting, to underwrite the cost of the survey, as discussed above. This agreement has been minuted in the Parish Council minutes. We are hoping that the cost might be covered by other funding, but for now, it is good to know that we have the support of the Parish Council. Without that commitment, we would not be able to assess the current state of the property, build a business case and progress any further, so this is critical to this campaign.

The cost will be approximately £900.

Future Ownership Options

Potential ownership options currently being reviewed are as follows:

- Support from a brewery to buy the pub – doesn't appear to be an option as there isn't the interest
- Lease for 3, 5 or 10 years – there has been no indication received from Commercial First that they are interested in this option
- Community acquire the freehold. Some of the options are as follows:
 - Umbrella group to manage the pub. It would be set up as a Community Interest Company. The profits would be utilised to reinvest for the community interest
 - Enterprise Investment Scheme. This would generate significant tax advantages. Although the rules are quite complicated, simply put, any investment would need to be for a minimum period of 3 years, and with a minimum of 4 investors.
 - Shared private purchase as a community asset. This would involve setting up a limited company structure and it would act as a benevolent group for the community
 - Statutory body. Effectively the pub becomes an asset of the council. Documentary evidence must be given to show that the community is involved in the decision making process.
 - Community Finance – This may not be a viable option as there are a number of deserving causes that might be looking for their own finance as well. We have contacted both our local MP, Dr Dan Poulter, and the pub minister, Marcus Jones, for their help, as we believe there is a “pub fund” available for this type of venture. We have a general response but will be pursuing this further.

Private and Charitable Funding

Currently, there is little that we can do until we have undertaken the survey and understand the full financial costs involved. However, we are trying to do as much research as possible and make contact with those organisations that will be able to assist us in the future.

- The Plunkett Foundation have agreed to support our efforts and they have provided us with a mentor to help guide us through what is required. The mentor will help with the business case planning and then assist with the next stages of our planning.

They would recommend setting up a Charitable Benefit Society, where most of the money would be raised from subscribers. This would involve a share issue. All investors would get a return on their investment, which is set at a commercial rate of interest. Grants are available on a matched funding basis. This would be a fantastic opportunity for those people looking to get a more attractive rate of interest than currently being offered through high street financial institutions, given that the interest rate is so low. Investors would only get one share each, regardless of the amount of money invested.

- Power to Change. This is an independent charitable trust set up in January 2015 with £150 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund to support, develop and grow community businesses across England.

Questions and Answers

Have we contacted breweries about potentially purchasing the pub?

- Most seem to be offloading their pubs at the moment and there does not seem to be the interest to invest.
- Adnams might be interested and the Committee should make contact with them to ensure we don't miss the opportunity.

Micro-breweries seem to be a popular addition to the pub. Have we considered this?

- It's a good idea. At the moment we have not thought that far ahead, but we will make a note of it.

Is anyone else interested in buying the pub?

- Not that we are aware of.

Has the pub been marketed?

- It will have to be. Remedial work is required and that will mean that any offer will be very low.

What is happening with the existing tenants?

- They have been given notice to quit and have until 31st May to do so.

What is the situation with the insurance? Obviously, with it being a thatch there is a greater risk?

- That is a matter for Commercial First as the current owners.

What is included as part of the pub? The beer garden at the back?

- The pub is split into 2. Commercial First own the majority of it, but Howard Mendoza owns the beer garden at the back. He bought the pub and the beer garden in 2005 and had tenants run the pub for him. We would endeavour to buy the whole lot as it is an integral part of the business.

Have we spoken to Howard Mendoza about the possibility of purchasing the land?

- Not as yet. We need to concentrate on getting the pub first.

Did the previous tenants pay to use the bowling green?

- Yes, a peppercorn rent.

Lottery Grants – have you considered these?

- These may be available but getting lottery funding is a very lengthy process which normally takes 12 months and we would therefore run out of time.

Has anyone spoken to the council? It would be useful to get the council involved as they could help advise on what could be done within the context of the listed building.

- Not at the moment

Listed building consent? Has anyone considered this?

- Of course this will need to be discussed when we have access to the building and they will have full sight of all our survey reports.

How are we going to attract customers when we can't change the format of the building?

- This is not to say that we can't change the building but we need to make sure any changes are sympathetic to the character of the building.

When can we identify what people want from the pub?

- Via the survey. We need feedback from the villagers. Please ensure that you contribute your thoughts.

What are you doing about clearing the mess at the front of the pub? It is an eyesore. There must be a number of people that could volunteer and contribute to getting the pub open again.

- We don't own the pub at the moment and therefore there is nothing that we can do to get the rubbish cleared away.
- Once we do own the pub we will be asking volunteers to help.

How do we get people into the pub?

- We need your feedback to help with this. Ideas raised on the night were coffee shop, library, shop, etc.

Close of Meeting

Vote of thanks led by Brian Smallcombe

Finally, if anyone is interested in helping us, please contact us on the numbers above.

Next public meeting will be in approximately 8 weeks time. Until then, committee meeting minutes will continue to be posted on the dedicated page for "Save Our Swan", which is hosted on the Parish Council website with a copy posted onto the notice board.

Meeting closed at 8:15pm