

MCBS Grand Opening 15th March 2019

I felt it was important today that we say a few words on behalf of the Mortimer Community Benefit Society to recognise what has been achieved in re-opening the Bell and most importantly to thank all the various groups of people who have made it possible.

As you know just over a year ago the pub closed with relatively short notice and was put up for sale by Enterprise Inns. There was a real chance at this point that the village might well lose the pub altogether or indeed that the pub and the land were sold off for some form of private development.

Most people felt that this would be a profound loss and we all know how important rural pubs are to their local communities. Yarpole of course already has a thriving sense of community and owns and manages the shop and café so retaining the pub in community ownership to compliment that was important to many of us.

In order to do so we had to form the Mortimer Community Benefit Society and so with help from the Plunkett Foundation and others we managed to create this to give us a platform to develop a business case, launch a share offer and attempt to buy the pub.

In July last year we held a successful and well attended public meeting in which we explained the business case for buying the pub and launched the share offer.

We quickly raised some £235,000 of shares from 241 shareholders the majority were from the village and its surroundings but there were also some from all points of the UK and even the USA and Germany. This was supplemented by some very generous loans from a small number of supporters. This all happened in little more than six weeks which was absolutely fantastic and shows how much support there was to get our pub back. It was a bit of a nail-biting finish, but we finally managed to purchase the Pub the day before it went to auction at the end of August last year.

Since then we and a band of wonderful volunteers and tradesmen have been refurbishing the pub bringing it back from years of neglect. We have spent around £35,000 on it so far but we know there is much more that needs doing and in time with your support we will continue to improve the buildings and the grounds to make the pub truly successful.

We also as you now know had to recruit and appoint some new Tenants something we had never done before. I am delighted to say that we were able to secure Caz and Sally who really impressed us with their experience, their welcoming and innovative attitude and their desire to work with us and the community to make the pub a long-term success. The pub has only been open a few weeks while they found their feet but already all the feedback we have had about them has been truly positive, so I definitely feel we have landed on our feet here and appointed two great people to run the pub.

So that is the story so far and I want to start to close by expressing our thanks to everyone who has made this possible.

In thanking people, it would be absolutely impossible to mention everyone who has played a part and of course there is then always the danger that we miss someone which would be unforgivable. I think it is best therefore to concentrate on groups rather than individuals

First and Foremost, we need to thank all our shareholders and the people who made those generous loans. You all believed in our ability to get this done and you backed that with your own money. Many of you will be in the room so thank you very much and can I also say that whilst today is not about fundraising we still do need more people to invest and will be running an ongoing campaign this year to encourage more people to purchase shares which will allow us to continue to develop the pub working closely with Caz and Sally.

Next, I would like to thank everyone who played a part in the refurbishment of the pub and the gardens. This has been an enormous and complex task hampered in part by restricted funds. It has been achieved in a very short time with lots of work from the MCBS Committee members supported by many volunteers and tradesmen. The volunteers in particular have been fantastic and every contribution large or small is very much appreciated. Without your hard work we simply would not have been able to open the pub within the timeframe that we have.

I would also like to thank everyone who has used the pub since it re-opened. Many are from the village and its surroundings but encouragingly some are from farther afield which is important too. It has been great to see it busy again and we simply must keep using it if we want it to be successful. Caz and Sally will work closely with us to keep developing the offer to the community, but it is up to us to use it and make it successful.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow committee members all 10 of them. It has been an enormous amount of work for us all and it has not been easy given we are all volunteers. I think we should also recognise the support our families have given us through this time as we dedicated more and more days to the pub project.

You will be pleased to know I have said enough and am encroaching on valuable drinking time but in finishing I will say that I believe the Community should be extremely proud of what they have achieved here. We set out to acquire, refurbish and open the pub for the community and that is what we have achieved and with your ongoing support it can only get better from here.

Enjoy your evening and enjoy your community pub.

Thanks for listening and someone get me a pint!