

The Bell at Yarpole Vision 2020

Many people in the village - some but not all of them shareholders - have given us the benefit of their thoughts on how they would like to see The Bell. We've included some comments below, and have also called on the views of committee members, and the author of CAMRA's Great British Pubs (Adrian Tierney-Jones) to help us clarify what it is we should be aiming for. Here is what we have so far, and if you have any further thoughts, we'd like to hear from you.

What do we want from The Bell?

A heady mixture of good ale, lager, wine and food, not forgetting sympathetic conversation and hospitality.

We want to be able to go to The Bell for a first class pint of locally brewed craft beer, maybe a glass of decent French red, a zingy New Zealand white, or perhaps a G&T, and some good conversation with friends, or strangers. And maybe a snack to keep us going, something more robust to fill us up, or something too fiddly for us to cook at home. And we want it in the right atmosphere, with the kind of ambience and décor which we now have. Plus heaps of personality.

A welcoming landlady/landlord.

There are many reasons to visit a pub, but whatever they are, the first thing we expect – before we ask for a drink or a menu – is a warm welcome. A genial host is a given: without that we are not likely to feel at home. They don't have to have a fund of funny stories, so long as they can take an order, serve beer and wine at the right temperature in the right glass, and make sure we are comfortable. But we expect The Bell's eventual landlord or landlady to be friendly as well as efficient, to help us choose a good wine if we ask, to smile, and make sure we have such a good time that we can't wait to return. Indeed 'The Welcome' topped our community list of preferences:

*'It's a powerful magnet'
'Friendly atmosphere with chatty smiley staff'*

Real food at realistic prices.

A pub needs to serve a range of good quality, home-made food at reasonable prices, but whilst every pub serves sausage 'n' mash, fish 'n' chips, a Sunday roast, our simple pub dishes could **set us apart** from the rest: perhaps gammon and cabbage with parsley sauce, cheese and onion pie, kedgeree, or

loaded jacket potatoes. A blackboard of seasonal specials which change regularly will allow a chef to flex his or her creative muscle, using cheaper ingredients and unsung cuts. We want meat used cleverly to keep costs down: braised oxtail, local rabbit or lamb's breast for example. And we would like the kitchen to do as much making and baking in-house as possible, using artisan skills rather than relying on external catering suppliers. You shouldn't feel obliged to eat three courses and, at lunch, you might expect soup, gussied-up sandwiches, and some appropriately light options.

Equally, there should be room for some seriously good specials and more imaginative dishes for when we want an evening out with candles and wine. This is probably where we have the most varied opinions from our community with over thirty quotes on the 2018 vision document. To a great extent this is an area where we will defer to whoever takes over the pub, but what we seem to be agreed on is that the food should be locally sourced, seasonal where possible, and above all of good quality. The Bell at Yarpole as a true destination pub, where people come from far and wide to spend their money, as well as being supported year-round by the locals, is the dream of a rural but sustainable enterprise.

Homely from home

A pub should feel like a pub, and The Bell does: welcoming, warm, muted in décor but with enough light to see by. A fire, wooden beams and original features all help. There might be newspapers strewn about, a nook here, a cranny there where a couple can hide, and one or two big tables where a group can catch up. One of the great advantages of The Bell is the division into different areas, and the flexibility this allows for creating different atmospheres as needed under one roof, all of which is appreciated and commented on by contributors:

'Having newspapers to read to read and a comfy sofa is very appealing'

'Interesting local pictures /scenes'

'Warm and cosy in winter'

'A bar for quiet liaisons'

'a bar for dogs and farmers'

'a bar for eating'

'Relaxing ambience – log fire in winter, candles on tables: doors and windows open, fresh air, use of garden in summertime'.

A truly local local

The best pubs are firmly embedded within a network of like-minded artisan producers and retailers, and we would love to see CAMRA-approved local beers on the pumps, pork pies from a good butcher on the bar, and nearby farms name-checked on the menu. A pub known for its traditional country dishes or its regional cheese board invariably has a head start over the competition. We do have some very

good local breweries and farms around here, with which we have already have good relationships. Comments from 2018 include these:

'They should buy their meat locally ... it shows they value what local farmers produce and have an interest in meat welfare and sourcing '

*'All food should be freshly cooked using local suppliers where possible and advertised on the menu',
'Some pubs do things like 2 steak and chips plus 1/2 bottle of red wine for £20-ish. If it's cheaper than this I start to wonder where the steak came from. I'd rather pay a little more and get good local steak'.*

Beautiful Beer

What is a pub without good beer?

'This is the point of having a pub'

'It should have a good range of draught beers – reasonably priced'

'Local beers and ciders'

'Staff should know their Kolsch from their IPA's; need to use the right glassware for those precious Belgium lambics; and the entry price for a pint must remain low. Beer should be a pleasure for all'.

A good wine list

This should accommodate a wide a range of tastes without being long and over-specialised, and allow for those who want to natter and relax over a casual drink, as well as those who like to take it more seriously. It might take the form of a short, sharp list of dependable favourites but which still packs a few surprises: maybe a viognier, godello, or Riesling, that offer more complexity. Wines should come with proper glasses, not tiny goblets, and there should be significant choice by the glass.

'Good wines behind the bar, by the glass'

'Wine list for dining/ by the bottle'

'A reasonable selection between £13 - £25'

'House wines of decent quality'

No pressure to eat

The Bell should be able to accommodate those who want to drink without eating, as well as those who want to eat without drinking, so as well as tables laid for lunchers and diners there should be bar stools, unreserved tables for casual drop-ins, and space available for those who just want to have a coffee or read the paper. Otherwise, it simply isn't a pub. Our original questionnaires had several comments about an area for drinkers only:

'Welcome to customers who just want a drink'

'Seating available and not just for the diners'

Music

Our original questionnaires to the community came back with music as the second most important want at The Bell. Over the last (thirty) years we have had many music nights which have been very popular: bands (not the heavy metal type but quieter and generally local) and quite a lot of acoustic musicians or duos, some with a small amount of amplification. More recently we have had a regular acoustic session for as many musicians as want, playing different types of folk music. This has been well attended and many people came out on a weekday to eat and enjoy the ambience, including tourists in summer. We have started these sessions again while The Bell is waiting for its new tenants. Although music really comes under the heading of events it is an important part of what has made The Bell and what the community are saying they would like.

Events and Garden

As well as the three garden areas at the front, the space at the rear has great potential for a number of uses, from growing vegetables to extra seating, a play area for children, hosting the village fête, parties, weddings and beer festivals, though not all at the same time. But the pub itself is also a resource, making it the perfect place for an enthusiastic team to diversify into baking and butchery classes, wine tastings or meet-the-brewer nights: the kinds of things that would put The Bell on the map:

'Tastings and demonstrations or seminars by experts, e.g. wine, bread, olives, apples/cidermaking, honey'

Family Friendly

The next generation of pub-goers starts here. Two thirds of the original questionnaires said they wanted a family friendly area, and who would want to deny families the chance to relax together in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere? Although, of course, we shouldn't take it too far:

Children should be welcomed and catered for on the menu but this is not a crèche. Fundamentally, this is an adult space