

## **Notes from informal discussions on the future of The Bell and MCBS. 19 October 2023.**

JS reminded all that nothing discussed in this forum was binding and was designed to gauge feelings in the room about our possible options and how we may proceed in the future.

### **Possible options are -**

**4th Tenant.** Do we seek a new tenant along the same / similar business model as before, given that we have had three failures in the past? The big issue here is that we hoped we had the right tenant this time around. Experienced pub and business owners have shied away from taking on the Bell. This leaves us taking a chance on keen, but often younger applicants... . 31/61 agreed, but only if the right person came forward.

**Run the pub as a community venture.** Do we look to continue to run the pub with limited opening hours and food options such as pop up events (Pie night, Pizza evening etc)? GW explained that whilst this was probably the most cost effective way of maintaining some income over a short term period, the scheme relies very heavily on volunteers coming forward to assist in the many tasks required in running the pub and not just standing behind the bar chatting to customers. Given the amount of time and effort involved, it would require a paid supervisor (similar to the Gallery Cafe) who was ultimately responsible for arranging Stock, staffing, regulatory requirements, cleaning etc. This is entirely possible, but the romantic notion of all pulling together to keep the pub running, in reality means 3 or 4 people working many hours a week while the majority of others tell us what a brilliant thing it is to have the pub open again... .. 35/61 agreed that this was a worthwhile option

**Enter into a partnership with a tenant.** This is probably the murkiest of all the options and there was a suggestion that the Gallery cafe might benefit from moving into the pub, whilst continuing to run alongside the pub business. This did not prove popular among the attendees and in fact strong concerns and fears were voiced over the damage it may cause to the fabric of the cafe business. Partnership with a new tenant would mean MCBS taking increased risk and expenditure in return for a lower rent but potential higher monthly returns... .. 9/61 thought this may be worth exploring further

**Employ a manager.** Similar to above but this is where MCBS take 100% of the expenditure including salaries and associated costs. This is the model that has been used initially at other pubs before transitioning into a partnership agreement. Whilst it has proved successful at Neenton and Orleton, both of these pubs had a bigger footfall of customers and also ready made applicants as managers who were prepared to invest time and effort into the business. We would be starting from a much lower base than these pubs. There was very little support for this notion and no indicative vote was taken.

**Sell the pub.** This was always going to be the most emotive subject and JS / GW advised it wasn't just a case of selling the pub for housing and everyone gets their money back. There were options to explore within this heading and included... .. Look to sell some or all of the garden area at the back of the pub for either low cost or even Border Oak style housing, This would certainly generate enough income to clear any outstanding debts and also allow the MCBS to make further improvements to the pub and its business models. This would make it more appealing to any new tenant but would it have an adverse effect on the charm and USP of the pub itself. Also, we would have no control whatsoever who lived in these houses and any problems or nuisance that may cause. There would be significant legal hurdles regarding rights of way that needed investigating. An initial 5/61 thought this may be an option but that support may increase with more detailed information. Look to utilise the rear field for holiday / short stay accommodation. This generated some support, although the type of unit and likely users gave some concern. There is an option of using a company who manage Glamping pods and Yurts who would pay us to have their units on site. However, the pub would need to be open at least six days a week for them to consider it. There would also be some infrastructure required at our expense in terms of Utility feed and lit pathways etc. We would also get a % of letting fees above an agreed threshold. The concern would be late night summer BBQ's, Music or general late night outdoor conversations should groups / parties hire them. Shepherds huts would be a viable option as these would be smaller individual units and involve slightly less infrastructure, but we would be liable for the purchase and management of these. We would however, keep 100% of the profit. Again, we only be of maximum use if the pub benefitted from meal bookings. Space for Camper and Tourer Vans with electricity hook ups. This is a very viable option and could prove popular among the Van community. It is low cost / low return in terms of rental space but requires little infrastructure work and the hope is the pub benefits from additional footfall. 27/61 thought these options are worth consideration and the committee would look to explore some or all of these over the coming months.

**Sell the Pub as a whole or as a business.** As mentioned, this was going to be an issue for many people as the reason for their initial investment was to save the Bell from developers and to keep our village pub alive. The options are we could sell the whole pub and land to an individual or pub chain to run it as a business but would include a covenant saying it can only be used as a pub/hospitality business. This could ultimately be brought out in the future for an agreed sum and end up as housing in the future. Just 4/61 agreed.

**We could approach local breweries such as Wye Valley, Ludlow Brewery, Hobsons** etc to see if they would like to take it over as one of their 'managed houses'. This would take away all the administrative tasks of the society but we would no longer own the land or the building and could end up back where we were in 2018. GW agreed to make further contact with these to investigate.

As JS mentioned at the start of this discussion, this was purely to find out people's feelings about the pub and in no way binding as they would need much greater consideration by shareholders. The committee will discuss and review these findings over the coming months and make further representations if and when they become necessary.

The informal discussion was closed and members were invited to stay behind for drinks.