

Minutes of Share Offer Meeting

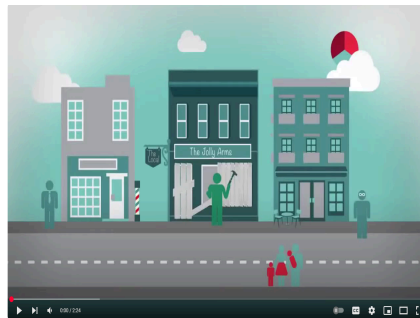
17th January 2025 19:30 to approximately 21:45
Village Hall, Cockfield

Attendees: Peter Finch (Chair), Martin Smith (Vice Chair), Vincent Scholier (Secretary), David Lewsey (Treasurer), Sarah Fletcher (Operations Manager), Neil Campbell (Architect), Alan Collard (Plunkett UK).

Apologies: Allan Ramsay (Facilities Manager).

There were approximately 70 members of the public in attendance.

The Chair opened the meeting, which was followed by each attendee presenting. The slides that were delivered (and video) can be found by clicking on the images below.



Question and answers

Questions from the audience (and our responses) are detailed below.

What happens to the money if you are a shareholder and you die?

Our share offer form includes a section for expression of wishes. You can nominate another beneficiary who will transfer the shares to up to the value of £5,000, if the value is more than £5,000 then transfers will be subject to probate.

It says in the Green Links that the Parish Council were willing to donate £100,000 to the Railway Cottage purchase, why can't this money be used to purchase the pub?

We are grateful for the support from the Parish Council, particularly, such as on securing the Asset of Community Value. We can't speak on their behalf and would welcome you to attend one of their meetings so that it can be raised. We will be approaching the Parish Council ourselves.

Why spend additional money on a coffee shop, can't you just use the pub?

We believe that it is important to offer sufficient space to allow people to meet, hold clubs and ultimately accommodate all needs. For example, siting a coffee shop inside a pub might not be a good idea, if we are trying to attract all members of the community including young people. The specific configuration of the Community Hub will be confirmed once we have secured the pub. At this stage it is important that we secure the funds.

Is there flexibility in the share raise process?

The current Share Offer, and documents, have been accredited against Community Shares Standard Mark. The Share Offer duration is set and runs through to the 16th March. There is nothing stopping us reopening a Share Offer again in the future, particularly if we wanted to target an additional raise for a project (e.g. solar panels). If we do not raise £200,000 then it is unlikely we can continue.

Has the group approached the National Lottery for funding?

We have already met with the National Lottery. Although they are interested in supporting our project, we would have to own the asset first. We will go back to them once the asset is secured.

Have you considered footfall and the importance of looking full?

The construction will be a phased approach and we don't plan to open a cafe straight away. The first phase will be to reopen the pub, followed by relocating the shop and then the cafe.

[Addendum, not mentioned in the meeting: Relating to footfall, it will be important that the Community Hub meets the needs of the Community, so we will be engaging with the village. Since we want residents to be members, we hope that this will increase the likelihood of them using it. Furthermore, members will have voting rights on what they would like to see happen.]

Have you done any research?

Yes. We surveyed the Community in 2022 to gauge the level of interest for a Community Hub. We received over 300 responses, with 98% supporting our vision and 95% would use it. Further details can be found on our website ([click here](#)). We would have been unable to secure support from Plunkett UK without evidence of research undertaken.

Is the pub going to be a Free House?

That is our intention.

Where will the money go if the pub purchase is not successful?

It is important that we work to preserve assets in the village. We would ask members whether they would support an alternative location and then take the project forward. If we do not raise £200,000 then funds will be returned to investors .

You say that the shop is only open for a limited time, what if it closes before you purchase the pub?

We have a good relationship with Barbara and Ralph. They are happy for us to continue for a limited time. Although there is no fixed date, it will certainly not be forever.

Is the Share Offer open to people living outside of Cockfield?

Yes.

Can organisations make an investment?

Yes, but there would need to be a nominated person.

What is the current status of discussions with the owner regarding the pub purchase?

Our last contact, via Merrifields, was in July 2024. It is very much down to us to demonstrate that we have the funds to complete the purchase. The pub has been up for sale for a while and it had been previously difficult to secure a dialogue. We have been told that the pub owner's priority was selling the land behind the pub. The land has now been sold and we have met with developers to share our vision. If the Labour government brings in 'right to buy' instead of 'right to bid', then this will aid our efforts in securing the pub.

Are you responsible for the newts?

Yes, we inherit any conditions applied to planning applications around the site. We would have to do an ecological survey and go from there. We would enhance the environment and protect the habitat if required.

Is the pub safeguarded, can't someone else just buy it and turn it into a house?

The pub is on the open market but currently listed as an Asset of Community Value (which runs until October 2026). We would enter a moratorium period once the owner confirms to Babergh Council that the site is for sale. The moratorium period would give exclusivity for the community to bid for the property for a six month period. After six months, the cycle moves to a 'protected period' for eighteen months, whereby the owner is free to sell without further delay. The cycle then repeats, as it has done since the listing in 2021.

If you raise the money by March, when will something happen?

We will then enter negotiations with the pub owner, the timescales of which are unknown. Now we need to secure evidence of funds.

[Addendum, not mentioned in the meeting: We would expect six months to be a reasonable timeframe to secure the pub. After this time, we would consider returning monies to investors, we will confirm this by vote].

Could the pub owner put up the price?

It is up to him, so he could. It remains unsold and we have undertaken an independent valuation, so are informed of its value. If the Labour government brings in 'right to buy', then this will aid our efforts in securing the pub, since he may not be able to sell above its market value.

There are lots of moving parts here - it's very ambitious: 1) How will you cover against trading losses, as your figures seem too optimistic and 2) Are there any willing lenders, as I'd be surprised if there would be any?

Contingencies have been built into our Business Plan and we believe that our figures are reasonable and based upon documentation available. We would be willing for people with expertise to join us and 'stress test' the financials.

[Addendum, not mentioned in the meeting: The figures in our Business Plan were considered conservative during our review with Plunkett UK. Our independent valuation by MJD Hughes, a

surveyor specialising in hospitality and recommended by Plunkett UK, included a business viability. The assumptions made in the valuation have duly considered in our financial models].

We have identified two banks willing to lend to us - Triodos and Co-op and we are currently in negotiations with them. It is important to note that our Loan to Value ratio is significantly below the 75% threshold limit that banks are willing to lend.