

The Friends of The Boot & Shoe Inn, Flintham, Nottinghamshire

Background

At the start of 2016 it was clear that our pub's future was at risk and that it could well follow the fate of many other English pubs and be developed for housing. We held a public meeting and as a result 44 locals put their names on a register of concerned people. A committee was formed with a brief that any four committee members could represent the Friends of the Boot and Shoe (FofBS). We submitted a successful application to have the pub recorded as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) on Rushcliffe's register. This meant that if the pub was put up for sale the village would have a six month window to prepare a community bid which would then be submitted to the owners. They would still not necessarily be obliged to sell it to the community and the decision could still be in favour of a prospective publican or a developer. Fortunately this rocky period seemed to be overcome by various landlords who made every effort to keep the pub open.

Closure in 2018

The Boot and Shoe was eventually closed in June 2018 and despite various interested parties being keen to take on the tenancy, the owners – Star Pubs and Bars, a subsidiary of Heineken, kept the pub closed. During the closure we wrote three times to the brewery regarding the continued closure. Interim managers reopened it in December 2018, perhaps part of a strategy to present the pub as a going concern when it came up for sale in April 2019.

At this point it was clear that we needed to take some swift action to prevent the permanent closure of The Boot and Shoe. The owners had put the pub up for sale but had not informed Rushcliffe Borough Council. Immediately we took advice, contacting The Campaign for Real Ale, The Plunkett Foundation and The Pub's the Hub. Each group has a keen interest in maintaining public houses at the centre of the community. Firstly we made Rushcliffe aware that the pub was for sale and they duly set up a 30 day period during which we would have to decide whether to submit a community bid which could delay the sale by six months.

Public Meeting in April 2019

We had to move quickly and we called a public meeting on 23rd April 2019 advertising online and on posters inside and outside the pub. 43 people attended, including the temporary landlord and other interested parties. The possible courses of action were outlined including various strategies for community purchase, or even relinquishing the property to developers. Those at the meeting were asked if they would be willing to financially support a community purchase and only eight people including four of the committee offered a financial contribution towards the cost. Andrew Kay, a local resident, addressed the meeting and said he was prepared to purchase the property, with a commitment to improving it and to maintaining it as a community pub. The meeting unanimously supported his offer and therefore the committee followed their lead by backing his bid.

The FofBS then contacted the estate agents and confirmed their support for Andrew Kay, as a local private buyer who had the community interest at heart.

During the 30 day moratorium Andrew was involved in discussion with the estate agents to secure the pub's purchase for the community. There were other interested parties with similar aims and also some property developers. The committee were aware of the sensitivity of the situation and were asked by the estate agent and by Andrew to maintain confidentiality. After further discussion it was agreed that we would withdraw our right to a further six-month moratorium if Andrew Kay was assured of completing the purchase. It was only on the penultimate day that we had these assurances and we immediately contacted Rushcliffe and withdrew our option to extend the moratorium. There followed a few unsettling days while we waited for confirmation from the estate agent that the sale would go through, but contracts were exchanged.

Throughout the whole process the FofBS consulted Rushcliffe Borough Council frequently for clarification regarding the terms of the Asset of Community Value (ACV). We also received excellent advice and constant support at every turn of events from Pub Is The Hub and the Plunkett Foundation. During the process we have been reassured by the great support which we have received from villagers and we are delighted with the outcome. Andrew completed the purchase on 15th July.

Looking Forward

The next stage is for the FofBS to watch as building work takes place and the pub is refurbished. Andrew intends to make major improvements all throughout, including the bar, dining area, letting rooms, landlord's quarters, outside seating, toilets and some windows.

Once the new tenants have been found we look forward to The Boot and Shoe reopening and becoming a firm favourite for local villages to eat, drink and socialise.

Mike Ansell, Sue Clayton, Iain Munro, Roy Simpson, Andrew Wilson, John Wyles

The Friends of the Boot and Shoe Committee, July 27th 2019