**Buchlyvie Community Council**

**Minute of Extraordinary Meeting**

**07/08/2024**

**Buchlyvie Village Hall**

**Present:** Jessica Langford (Chair)

Margaret Bennie (Vice Chair)

Alan Reed (Treasurer)

Alison Moffat (Secretary)

Eilidh Weir (Member)

Colin Garvie (Black Bull Community Pub)

Sandy (Black Bull Community Pub)

**Minutes:** Ashleigh Donaldson

**Residents:** Approx 100 in attendance

**Jessica Langford, Chair**

Welcome to Colin and Sandy from Gartmore who were instrumental in the process of Gartmore community buying the Black Bull and making it into a successful community pub.

**Alan Reed, Treasurer**

We’re here to decide what we want to do. We currently have over sixty objections asking for plans to be rejected. I moved to Buchlyvie at the end of September 2023 and has met a lot of people in the pub. The availability of the pub was part of the decision making process in moving here. The pub was great and it had everything needed for a good pub and there is a real community spirit in Buchlyvie. There is concern of a dying village and we could potentially lose the pub forever.

To everyone who has commented and put in application on Stirling Council website, thank you. Urges everyone else to do so in the next week. If you can sign the petition that is being passed around please do so. This is a good opportunity to show strength of feeling.

We will take a vote on motion by show of hands, just to show we are in favour of or otherwise in terms of blocking the planning change from pub to holiday lets.

In terms of housekeeping - this is a public meeting but if anyone objects to having their photo taken, let Alan know at the end of the meeting. Someone will take photos for press purposes for Facebook/Buchlyvie Bulletin etc.

We did invite MPs and MSPs from Stirling Council but they were not able to make it, though are aware of what is happening. We have had responses from the Stirling Observer and Dundee Courier and are speaking to the Stirling Observer tomorrow.

Once we vote on a campaign committee – assuming they reject planning, the people who own the pub can come back and ask for reconsideration and appeal process or can change the application to keep the pub or sell it. We can deal with these things as we come to them. There has been talk online about a potential community buy out and we can chat about this,

**Colin Garvie, Gartmore Community Pub**

I’m one of three who went through the process, I’m the finance guy. Colin asked the community members how many of them used the pub when it was in operation to which a few people raised their hand. He made it clear that there needs to be community support and the community has to actually use the facility.

I moved to Gartmore in 1988 when the community was thriving. It had a community hall, shop, post office and pub that was privately owned. Fast forward to 2018 – we found out that owners of Black Bull wanted to sell, and had a good chance of selling with residential planning permission. The customer base of shop was going down and the pub was not making money. The demographics of village changed, there were more older folk.

They asked the owner if they’d sell for asking price to get it community owned. They got an agreement in principle then had to find money to buy the pub at around £250,000. The Scottish Land Fund were interested in supporting countryside areas that had an aging population, social isolation, and promoting and funding community activities.

They got about 90% from the Scottish Land Fun, around £220,000. To buy the pub, they needed to start up and trade, they needed staff, stock, inventory, food and drink. Once this was in place, another £70,000 from community was needed to make upgrade the interior.

A community meeting was held whereby people in the room were providing cheques to raise the money in sizable sums. A Community Benefits Company was established, not aiming for profit but aiming for surplus to reinvest. There has to be a community aspect for there will likely be no grant funding. The pub is registered as the Black Bull Hub and Pub as the ‘Hub’ aspect gets the funds.

Colin advised that you have to undertake lots of surveys of people who would use pubs, various village organisations, and will need a raft of information from the village to support any application. Surveys are a really big part of it as is a business plan. They got help from a company to complete forms to make sure correct language etc was used. Only after this, the pub was bought.

The community shop was also owned by us now but there was not enough money going through the shop. This was lost about two years ago. Now the hub and pub is the local/social hub of the village – a lot of that is because we run things there. We took all advice we could, put a submission in to Scottish Land Fund and were rejected. After trying to figure out what went wrong, they realised they did not place enough emphasis on community aspect of it. They therefore added lots of social things that were happening in village, the social isolation issues and second time around we got the money. It’s been operating for five years now. We bought it on the 5th September mid-day and opened for business at 5pm that night.

Colin emphasised the importance of ‘hub’ activity and noted some of these at the Black Bull including; Christmas lunch for older community, Heritage society talks, Two book clubs, Student meeting place, Choir meets and Quiz nights. They are also looking at setting up folk nights.

The key asset of pub is volunteers, Sandy spends 90% of his life in pub doing activities. There are six letting bedrooms now, and we spent about £300,000-£400,000 in free labour and materials.

Challenges

Financial management. We are making money, not huge amounts but we have to so we have to re-invest in the pub over next few years. We are Community Benefits Society and always looking for funding. Co-op bank, although not financially have been a great support. They have an army of volunteers they rely on.

Staff is biggest challenge. There are three ways to run a Community Pub. Firstly, it’s run by a board of directors that runs the business and delegates work to staff members. This means being reliant on staff who are mostly young students so not available all year round.

The second way is to employ a manager to take strain away from the tboard but this is high cost. Managers and chefs are not cheap due to the skills they bring. There is however, less volunteer work required here.

The third option is to buy the pub and rent to someone else. There is a removed risk of business not working as they pay you a monthly rental.

Energy will be an issue going forward as it’s expensive.

**Audience Q&A**

**Q -** How long did it take from first discussion to opening doors?

**Colin –** We started mid-2017 and bought on 4th September 2019 - just over two years. It took time and a lot of dedication from people. 2 of 3 members of board have full time jobs.

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**Q -** How many board members do you need?

**Colin –** You decide how many you want. We have 7 at the moment. Believer of having odd number, always get result on voting.

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**Q –** How much money did you need upfront?

**Colin –** £75,000 based on purchase price of £250,000. When thinking about investing in food and drink, it’s a big upfront investment. People gave cheques in exchange for shares and we agreed they couldn’t sell shares for the initial three years. Minimum purchase price of £25,000 per share. Varying shares – both get same say in running business.

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**Q –** Is it better running than before? Busier than before?

**Colin –** Yes, more of the community are using it. The problem is that if its run down, you need to think about refurb. Right food, drink, service and get people back in. Getting them involved from community point of view helps. The previous owners chucked the accommodation as they did not make an effort to rent bedrooms, they weren’t in good condition and we had to refurb them. We don’t make loads of money from food and drink, we make money on accommodation, particularly from other parts of Europe.

**Q –** There was zero communication from the owner that it was being put up for sale. How do we get round that? Can we?

**Response from audience** – The planning application says its owned by Gregor Reid. The applicant is Pop Staycations. I suspect its sold pending planning permission – this is general consensus. I suspect that Gregor has agreed a sale to Pop Staycations. They will go for an appeal or pull out – these are two options.

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**Q –** The pub has been up for sale for a few years. If someone asks Gregor what his asking price is, this would be next step? Then we would know what he is looking for.

**Response from audience -** £395,000 he is looking for. It was bought for £125,000.

**Alan Reed –** We can vote on objecting tonight to get sense of feeling.

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**Q –** Is Pop Staycations not associated with the person who runs Rachels Farm?

**Response from audience –** Cannot find this online. Speculation isn’t helpful.

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**Q –** Will the comments and objections to Stirling Council be valid or have any standing?

**Alan Motion –** I did consult with a friend who is in planning. He said – no one goes to pub so it closes then everyone complains. He worked for Sandy Fraser when he owned pub in Blanefield – The Blane Valley. He applied to convert to house, Stirling Council refused permission for the pub to close. One of the reasons used as an objection was it being one of the ‘last pubs in village’ but Sandy went back to say he did everything he could and it was not viable. Gregor could do the same thing.

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**Q –** Do we have argument to say he didn’t try?

**Alan Motion –** Yes partly a valid reason. We’d need to look at Scottish Government framework policy. Its all about having community hubs, supporting the local community, parking is another issue – he has to provide 3 or 4 private parking spaces and can’t do this on the road. Gut feeling that Stirling Council will refuse planning permission but they cannot force Gregor to keep the pub. We need to get the objections in. We will see what happens.

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**Q –** For anyone who has not put complaint in, what would you advise we say in complaint?

**A –** It comes down to policy, in terms of what matters - you are closing last pub in village, its an important historic building, a community hub, etc. The deadline is 21st August.

***Alan Reed asked everyone in attendance if they objected to planning permission to which everyone agreed. Not one person in attendance was in favour. He also asked if anyone would be interested in leading a campaign group to which one person in the audience raised their hand.***

**Comment from audience –** We’ve been here before five years ago. There’s a bit of vendetta going on between Gregor and the village. People have messaged him and he is saying it’s communities fault as they didn’t use it.

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**Comment from audience -** Nothing has been registered as a community asset – it should be, it should then make more difficult for premises to be sold.

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**Comment from audience -** I’ve looked at various ways of buying it. Firstly is that whilst it is private hands, it cannot be registered as a community asset. The other way is to do what Gartmore did. Incorporate a community benefits society – once you have gone through this process, you can then register, first right to buy pub if it ever comes up on the open market. It won’t move quickly, you’ll then have 8 months to find money.

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**Comment from audience –** I ran B+B for 16 years and made money this way. Gregor was not doing this. That’s something that was not happened before that could happen. One of draws was going to the local pub.

**Response from audience –** That will take a lot of investment. There are safety reasons why the rooms cannot be used.

**Colin Garvie –** Things need to get going if you’re really interested in it. The pub has not been sold, only sold subject to planning permission. What is the appetite from the village? I would suggest doing a survey and get as high a return rate as possible.

**Alan Reed** - If we are serious about it there are people in this room that would need to volunteer time, there are many tradesman in this room that could help. We have voted in favour of rejecting. We can get ahead of the game here but at least we will be in a position to do something.

**Alan Motion –** The planning application is 8 weeks. Or if appealed will have 12-18 months to put a committee together.

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***A few comments from the audience indicated that they’d be happy to join a committee if they knew what was involved and asked that it be added to a potential survey around who would be interested in joining one.***

**Jessica Langford –** This meeting is for you to decide what you want to do. If a group of people would like to draft a survey that would be ideal to find out who could contribute.

***The Community Council pulled together a list of names of people who would be interested in forming committee and Colin offered to provide a copy of the survey they did. All agreed would this be helpful.***

**Q –** Is there a legal reason we can’t get a price for what the pub is worth?

**Colin Garvie** – We would need to know trading position of the pub.

**Alan Reed –** Thank you to Sandy and Colin. We have had unanimous support which is a great first step.

**Jessica Langford** – If planning permission is rejected, we will see what happens. At least you will be ready if start looking at forming committee now. A final reminder that we have another community council meeting on 22nd August.

**Colin Garvie and Sandy Phillips –** It is worth doing, it’s good fun.