

The George Community Pub (Wickham Market) Limited

A Community Benefit Society

Wickham Market Parish Meeting Report

12th April 2021



THE GEORGE
Community Pub

The George Management Committee members apologise that they cannot be at the meeting in person but tonight have already scheduled two important meetings that will take the project to the next stage. We have asked for this progress statement to be read out on our behalf.

First of all, a reminder that there are three objectives for The George Community Pub Project:

1. Save share and protect the heritage of this Grade II listed building. The failed planning application in 2016 from the previous owner made it clear that a community pub was the only available route to save the building. This has made it possible for us to apply for heritage funds not otherwise available to other village projects
2. Bring the pub to life as a thriving and successful community asset inclusive to all. We have developed a business plan that comfortably shows the pub can be commercially viable.
3. Make it more than a pub and maximise the opportunity that restoration presents.

These objectives carry with them two additional benefits -

1. Employment: The George will provide permanent employment for 12 people (all new jobs), equating to 8.4 FTEs, making it one of the largest employers in the village.
2. Contribution to local economy: The Institute for Policy Research have reported that "Pubs inject an average of £80,000 into their local economy each year."

The George will have the pub on the ground floor and an Activities Space on the first floor, with full disabled access and a lift.

The benefits of a pub to a local community are well established contributing to both the wellbeing and financial wealth of the local community. The Activities Space is not an income stream and will be used for activities and support not available elsewhere in the village. It will be marketed and managed by a paid-for Communities Engagement Coordinator who will be working with various organisations to offer workshops, classes, lectures and social activities. In line with our determination for inclusivity these will be available to people of low income, with the activities being subsidised by income from the pub. We will also be working with NHS Suffolk Wellbeing who have written "*We are all very aware of the impact that Covid 19 has, and will have, on our communities. Having something like the George will allow us, and other organisations, the opportunity to work with communities to rebuild, strengthen and heal.*"

Our goal is to make the village a better place to live, work and visit and we see opportunities to work together with the village hall committee, and others, to achieve that. This includes allowing joint use of the Communities Engagement Co-ordinator which we will pay for.

So where are we on the journey?

We received our £82,000 Development Grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in December 2019. Since then we have employed over a dozen professional consultants to carry out many surveys, costings and developing plans for the future. We now have designs ready for submission for a planning application and these will be on the website shortly.

Over this time we have also worked closely with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and their advisors to ensure we are on course to submit our next application for the Delivery (Build) stage of the project. This application will also be submitted shortly.

We have consulted with the village, with shareholders and with near-neighbours at various stages over the last few years and in particular during the latter stages of development. All comments have been welcomed and the vast majority incorporated into our plans – even where that has led to an increase in planned cost.

It should be noted, however, that there is a small campaign group who are active in trying to derail the project and deprive the village of the benefits outlined above. A few weeks ago we launched a share pledge campaign to gauge the level of our support. This campaign is currently sitting at £180,000 with over 100 new investors to add to the 328 we already have. We believe that with now over 430 investors prepared to back the project we have overwhelming support to complete our task. The pledge campaign is still open and details can be found on our website. Any comments on this or any other aspects of the project can also be made via the contacts section of our website.

The George Management Committee
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