

## **Delight as village raises enough to save its pub and heritage.**

**The George Community Pub Wickham Market will receive additional funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund bringing their total grant award to £1.5 million. This together with shareholders' funds, the Community Share Booster Programme, Co-op Finance, and other grant providers raised close to £550,000 and in addition £195,000 has been awarded by The Community Ownership Fund as part of the Government's Levelling Up programme.**

**Restoration will start within weeks and the first evidence of work will be the immediate reduction of the highly visible scaffolding which has long been a blot on the local landscape.**

It is ten years since the George was almost destroyed by fire and eight years since a group of volunteers got together to try and save this historic Grade II listed building. During that time, we have seen Brexit, Covid, five Prime Ministers and the Ukraine war. There could never have been a tougher, more inflationary time to take on a challenge like this.

Support for the restoration of The George has been overwhelming and as many more homes are currently being built in Wickham Market there is an ever-growing demand for a village pub. The George is the last remaining pub in Wickham Market which makes its survival even more important in helping revive the High Street by bringing more employment and footfall to the village.

**The road to success was not easy.**

In November 2021 The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded the George a £988,200 Heritage Enterprise grant which alongside shareholder funds and other grants was thought to be enough to complete the renovation. However, when tenders were received for the building work, inflation had taken its toll and costs were shown to be far higher than original projections.

**A combined effort was needed to save the project.**

To bridge the funding gap cost savings were made wherever possible with the enormous support and help of Seamans Building. Shareholders were asked once again to dig deep, and they did so generously. And finally, alongside support from The Community Ownership Fund and additional grants The National Lottery Heritage Fund were asked to consider an increase to their original grant award. These all combined to fill the funding gap and with building costs now fixed, the grant increase approved, and more shareholders on board, the project will go ahead.

**A spokesman for the George Committee said:**

*"Without the success of this project this important Grade II listed building would have been demolished and lost forever. We can now ensure that The George will be saved to serve many generations to come. As an inclusive, friendly place to meet and eat with friends and family it will be the 'peoples pub' and the heartbeat of a thriving village. We thank everyone that have helped with their belief and investment including National Lottery players everywhere".*

**How long will the re-build take?**

The activity space on the first floor will be open and available as a community room and visitor centre in early spring 2024. This will be followed by the fully fitted pub which will be open and available in Autumn 2024 in time for next year's Christmas festivities. Work will involve specialised skills to preserve the ancient timbers and heritage features of the building, many of which will be left exposed as a record of the restoration.

Downstairs will feature a bar, restaurant, modern kitchen, and beer garden while upstairs there will be a purpose-built community space accessible by lift and stairs. A programme of well-being activities is in development to be funded by the pub, so that all in the community irrespective of their physical, mental, or financial situation will have an inclusive place in which to meet and socialise.

The whole construction will be to the latest and most energy efficient standards but with the main body of the pub fully restored to its 16<sup>th</sup> Century glory. During the re-build, hard hat tours will be taking place to enable work to be seen close-up together with presentations on the heritage of The George and the methods of its restoration.

### **Why so expensive?**

Building anything today is expensive. The price of materials has risen dramatically. Added to that, there is an important heritage restoration element to consider. The finished footprint of the building will be larger than the original to allow space for a new kitchen and full accessibility throughout the building including wider doors, toilets, and a lift.

### **The importance of restoration**

Thanks to the investment from our community, wider supporters, and funding partners this unique building will now be saved from the Heritage at Risk List. It's not only fantastic news for Wickham Market but a success story for Heritage nationwide. It will be a new beginning for Wickham's last remaining pub which fell into disrepair following an extensive fire in 2013 when it was revealed that what was thought to be a 17<sup>th</sup> Century building is now believed to date back to the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century and the time of King Henry VIII.

### **About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future.

Since the National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised over £43 billion for projects and more than 635,000 grants have been awarded across the UK.

Each week, thanks to National Lottery players, £30 million is raised for good causes across the UK.

[www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk)

Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund



## **The George**

Community Pub, Wickham Market

### **Contacts for further information about the George Community Pub:**

**Bill Wolff Evans** – Chairman

Tel: 07966 499275

Email: [info.wmgeorge@gmail.com](mailto:info.wmgeorge@gmail.com)



Made possible with

## **Heritage Fund**