

Ram Supporters Group – Update December 2019

We are all part of The Ram Supporters Group – united in wanting to keep The Ram as a pub for our village. This is an update to all supporters.

As you know pubs are an endangered species, and we are part of a different kind of extinction rebellion, fighting to keep The Ram Inn as a pub and a historic, social and community centre within the village. We have been cheered by your support and offers of help from others who have rescued their own locals back from the brink.

Thank you to all of you for your amazing support – you have offered skills, knowledge and contacts, and pledged to help the campaign financially. We have supporters in and outside the village.

Over 60 of you came to the public meeting on 14 November - a fantastic show of strength. Details of the lively and helpful discussion are available on the Woodchester Parish website, thanks to the Parish Council Clerk Ann Bijkerk:

<https://www.woodchesterparish.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Meeting-to-Discuss-Public-Opinion-and-Support-for-Options-relating-to-Sale-of-The-Ram.pdf>

We asked interested individuals to come forward to be part of a working group for the campaign. As a result we have set up The Ram Supporters Steering Group.

Position to date

The Ram was registered as an Asset of Community Value in 2018. This requires the owners to notify Stroud District Council of any intention to sell the pub, which they did in September 2019. The community has a protected six months until March 2020 to bid for the pub. This does not mean that the owners have to accept any such bid, but the pub cannot be sold to another buyer until after this date.

Mike and Eileen McAsey have owned The Ram for 29 years. They gained planning permission for two houses on what is currently the pub car park in February 2019. Their son, Phil McAsey, is landlord and licensee and their representative in the sale.

Following meetings and communications with them we understand the following:

- the asking price is £850K, for the pub, land and planning permission
- the pub is not for sale on the open market at the moment
- the pub is not for sale separately from the housing development.

The conditions on the planning permission state that 'Prior to the residential dwellings hereby permitted being constructed, the pub car park, vehicular and pedestrian access within the car park shall be laid out and constructed in accordance with the submitted plan, with the area of driveway within at least 5.0m of the carriageway edge of the public road surfaced in bound material, and shall be maintained as such thereafter'. This means the pub and housing development are inextricably tied together.

Ram Supporters Steering Group

Following the public meeting, we had the first meeting of the Ram Supporters Steering Group on 5 December. We have appointed formal roles of Chair, Richard Waldon, Treasurer, Bert Cossins, and Secretary, Jean Lawton. At the meeting the Group considered our main options:

Option 1: Fight any change of use application

This is fundamental to our cause and we will rally support and fight any such application at any point in the future. We also agreed to gather more information about how this might come about and what the criteria are for an application to be successful.

Option 2: Facilitate a third party to make an independent bid

An ideal outcome would be that a new, sympathetic and experienced buyer purchases and revitalises The Ram. We have heard that there are potential buyers, although the pub is not currently being marketed for sale.

Option 3: Make a community bid for the pub

Following publicity and the public meeting many people have offered to contribute to such a bid. The financial and ownership structure would need careful thought and scrupulous governance, and options were discussed, including lessons from how the village shop was set up. We have contacts who can offer help with this, including industry experts and other community pub groups.

There is a charity, The Plunkett Foundation, which has expertise in helping communities to buy and run local assets, such as pubs. Members of the Steering Group have had a useful initial meeting with them.

We discussed the asking price and the pub's value on the open market. The Ram has great assets in its position and outlook, historic charm, plentiful parking and being a free house not tied to brewery. The issues which would impact its value include: the condition of the pub buildings, the reduced turnover and custom in recent years, particularly since the closure of the kitchen, and the planning conditions for the development of the houses already mentioned.

The Group decided not to make an offer on the pub at this time. Given the likely market value is somewhat less than the current asking price, we could not risk local investors' money in an overpriced asset. We know from other community pubs and experts that a realistic price may take some time to emerge through the open market. For example, the Crown at Minchinhampton offered at £750K was eventually sold c£500K.

Next steps

We are delighted with the community support from you, and now have a formal structure and a wealth of contacts, which will allow us to take an active and effective stance in our campaign. We would still like to hear from you if you have contacts or would like to offer support in any way or you know of others who want to be kept informed.

Contact details:

Our email is RamSupGroup@gmail.com