

ASHTON HAYES PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman-Cllr. Jane Colville
Vice Chairman- Cllr. Garry Charnock

Acting Clerk-Richard Salmon

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22/1/14

Mr. S Robinson
CEO Cheshire West & Chester Council
HQ
58 Nicholas Street
Chester
CH1 2NP

Dear Mr Robinson,

Re: The Golden Lion pub, Ashton Hayes

I write on behalf of Ashton Hayes Parish Council and our community. It is now a year since our only village pub closed and the owner appears to have no inclination to reopen the business or sell it. The building and site is fast becoming an eyesore. We have tried to engage with the owner but with little success. The community has now approached the Parish Council in order that this impasse might be overcome and we now request the help of Cheshire West and Chester in finding a resolution to the matter.

In the past, The Golden Lion was an extremely popular and successful small village pub. It was sold by the brewery in 2011/ 2012 at a time when the community had expressed a serious interest in purchasing the business and running it as a community social enterprise. Our successful track record in running the community shop, community energy company and community field gave us the confidence to embark on a community pub. Public meetings and surveys have indicated to us that residents see the pub as a vital facility for the village and many people have expressed their willingness to invest in the venture. We have been left in no doubt that we could finance the purchase and this is one reason why we registered the pub as a community asset under the CLG Act (Localism Bill) in 2012.

In fact it is the first community asset in Cheshire West and Chester to have been registered using the powers of the Localism Bill.

Our dilemma is that the owner does not appear willing to consider a sale. We have heard from several sources that he has said many times that he is quite prepared to allow the pub to `rot` and `fall down` and we are increasingly of the view that this is exactly what he intends. We assume he believes that this approach will improve his chances of securing future planning approval for residential development on a part of the site or indeed the whole of it.

As a community Ashton Hayes is a national leader in community carbon reduction and social enterprise. Our good work is mentioned several times in the Government's Community Energy Strategy that will be issued shortly. We are also seen as a beacon for community sustainability and are often interviewed by the national and international media about our future plans. In the coming weeks we will be telling the media of our desire to develop a 'Community Sustainability Hub' which we would like to locate at the Golden Lion, if we are able to buy the Pub.

We were also co-founders of the Carbon Leapfrog Charity in the City of London that provides pro-bono legal help to communities like Ashton Hayes who wish to lead a more sustainable lifestyle. The Charity, (now called Pure Leapfrog), has since helped 100 communities with free legal advice and members of Ashton Hayes Parish Council are active in the management of the Charity. It has just been nominated for an Ashden Award for its work.

We have worked well with Cheshire West and Chester over the past decade and together we have been able to change attitudes in relation to community support and engagement. We have been successful in securing funding over £500,000 in grants for our Going Carbon Neutral Project and a further £250,000 in commercial investment from the likes of Scottish Power Energy Networks and EA Technologies. The village shop now helps to guide fledgling community shop ventures through their development including their relationship with the Plunkett Foundation. Our Community Field was voted 'Most Improved Recreation Field' in the QEII Awards last year. We very recently featured on the national news concerning our local Snow Angels initiative which is a good example of community resilience at work and which is having a considerable impact on the local community.

The University of Chester has been our long term partner and has benefitted from the publicity the project has brought to the point where it now runs a Master's course in Sustainability in Business and Communities. This brings benefits to Chester in terms of increased student numbers.

We are very well supported by Ward Councillor Eleanor Johnson and she has already sought advice from appropriate officers concerning the pub and the options open to use via the Borough Council.

We have also sought advice and information from outside bodies such as the Plunkett Foundation and Locality both of which have experience in guiding communities who wish to ensure the viability of important community facilities such as the local pub. We have recently sought advice and information regarding the possibility of embarking on the Compulsory Purchase Order route but to date the Council's legal office has not been encouraging.

We now ask that that Cheshire West and Chester reconsider its views and takes a more proactive approach to helping Ashton Hayes. We have become aware through our research into this that some local authorities already have policies and procedures to support community purchases under the Localism Act. It would be helpful if you could advise us of any relevant policies which the Council are prepared to include. We are in turn very happy to refer you to those Local Authorities and the measures they have taken.

We would request an urgent meeting with your appropriate representatives to discuss how we can move forward.

Yours Sincerely

Richard Salmon. (Acting Clerk Ashton Hayes Parish Council)

Copied to
Councillor Mike Jones
Councillor Eleanor Johnson