

Introduction

This is our seventh report of our progress against the items identified in our Social Impact Plan (SIP) which we prepared as a condition of our grant support and loan financing received.

The report covers the year from March 2023 to February 2024. We are pleased to be able to report another successful year with our tenant passing the three-year milestone.

The year allowed us to begin to plan for the redevelopment of the premises of the Yew Tree Pub and consider restructuring the finances of the Society to allow greater stability.

We are happy with the progress that we have made in delivering against our social impact objectives and confident that we have made arrangements to continue to achieve them.

Avon Dassett remains a very small village located in rural south Warwickshire, with less than 100 houses, a population of 210, of whom 166 are of voting age. The activities of the Community Benefit Society remain central to bringing the community together to socialise and the overall impact is immeasurable. During the year the Catholic Church closed its doors and removed the stations of the cross. Even though it only held a service once a month, this signalled the removal of the only other remaining social venue in the village. Without the pub the village would slowly die and rural and social isolation and deprivation would become a reality.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

We were optimistic as we entered our sixth full year of owning the pub, especially with a stable tenant in place running the Yew Tree. We believe that we have continued to make good progress in achieving our social impact objectives.

Our finances are in a strong position and our social groups and activities have flourished. We paid interest on shares and begun to invest in improving the premises.

Our commitment to serving the community, supporting local businesses and services continues and our tenant has benefitted from being served by locally provided goods and services.

Major events such as the Soapbox Derby, Open Gardens, The Dassett County Show and Pop-up Markets continue to be well supported and have generated funds for charities while attracting hundreds of visitors into the village.

We believe that we have established The Yew Tree as the hub at the centre of our village and have arrangements in place that will keep it that way. We are keen to make even more progress as and when funds allow but we are confident that in the long run we will achieve our objectives.

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DETAILED REPORT

This section of our report details the specific progress that we made to our year-end, February 2024, against the objectives that we set out in our SIP. For ease of understanding we cross refer to our Social Impact Matrix and repeat the context of each objective.

Item No 1 - The Avon (now The Yew Tree) as The Network for local employment and knowledge about village and nearby services. (Short Term).

We aimed to create opportunities for networking for employment, and community businesses.

During the year we were continued our commitment to use local tradespeople. We had a feature stone wall rebuilt by a local stonemason, had plans drawn up locally for the creation of a disabled toilet and baby changing facilities and agreed a contract with a local builder to carry out the work.

Our tenants have made a virtue of using local farms and suppliers to source products for sale in the bars and restaurant. In addition, our tenant employs local staff and during the year has employed a trainee chef, two new kitchen porters and several bar staff. Outside the pub, the garden has been landscaped and maintained by a local company.

The Community Notice Board remains prominent in the entrance lobby at the pub, in view of all entering and leaving the pub by the front door. It publicises notices of events, advertises local clubs, societies and businesses and allows traders to display their business cards. We maintain a Social Impact Register which summarises these activities.

We were able to hold two Pop-Up market events allowing local businesses and traders to show and sell their products. Surplus proceeds were donated to local charities and groups.

The beneficiaries of this service are residents in the local community who may be seeking a service as well as those in the local business community who generate contract opportunities directly from the advertising and referrals.

In the year we have new successes to report including:

- Major plumbing and drainage work at the pub have been carried out by a resident plumber.
- Drainage and groundwork contracts have been awarded to a local business.
- Stone masonry work has been undertaken by a local craftsman.
- Building contracts have been awarded to a local business which drew on local electricians, plasterers, painters and carpet suppliers and fitters.

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- contracts for carpeting and flooring have arisen as a result of introductions made by customers using the pub.
- logs and kindling are supplied to customers from contacts made in the pub.
- Local producers of home-made desserts and ice-cream have continued to supply the pub.
- Beer and cider suppliers are local.
- A local farm shop provides meat to the restaurant.
- A local artisan bakery supplies bread and pastries to the Yew Tree and there is a pre-order service where these items are made available every Saturday for collection.

Objective achieved. However, we continue to monitor progress through discussion and feedback generated at our Management Committee meetings.

Item No 2 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Hub for village groups. (Short Term).

We aimed to enable greater community cohesion through connecting better to existing groups and supporting the creation of new clubs eg Bridge Club; young mothers' group; walking group etc.

All of our established clubs continued their activities, and we were pleased to support the creation of some new ones.

The walking group had a good turnout of regular attendees for its monthly outings. Each walk ended with lunch at the pub and others who were unable to join the walks were encouraged to attend. A joint footpaths group was formally created in the year and successful projects included mending stiles, repairing and extending a railway sleeper bridge and the installation of a kissing gate to replace a stile and improve access. This group has brought volunteers together to form new relationships creating closer ties with other villages. Members of the Walking Group undertook a twelve mile charity walk as part of the Walk for Plunkett event and the Sunday Morning dog walking group continues to meet.

The Bridge Club met fortnightly with around twelve people meeting for cards followed by dinner.

The Book Club holds monthly meetings followed by lunch.

In 2023, the pub hosted the teas and cakes for the Open Gardens event as there was no suitable garden in the village to hold this and made a donation to the National Gardens Scheme from the proceeds.

The Local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme hosted a drop-in information event in the Yew Tree in November 2023.

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We received grant funding again this year from Warwickshire Rural Community Council, in partnership with Cadent Gas which allowed us to offer Warm Hub facilities at the pub from January 2024. The funding allowed us to offer free hot drinks, biscuits, to guests of the warm hub on a Friday lunchtime. Outside of the Warm Hub funding a “Friday Group” has been formed by people who had benefited from the operation of the warm Hub but wanted to continue to meet.

Objective achieved. All of these village groups were organised by people from outside the Management Committee and require no funding from the Society to operate.

Item No 3 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Café. (Short Term).

We aimed to reduce social isolation by opening the pub in the mornings for residents to drop in for coffee, to use wifi and exchange books.

The Yew Tree now opens its doors on a Friday for the Breakfast Club and this has proved to be popular with residents from Avon Dassett and surrounding villages. In addition in liaison with a local artisan bread and pastries are provided through The Yew Tree and there is a pre-order service where these items are made available every Saturday for collection.

As we have reported for several years, we abandoned the idea of morning openings some time ago, due to the costs of operating and the limited custom that was created. However, during the summer months The Shack continues to be a destination in its own right. It operates outside normal pub opening hours and has continued to be very popular in serving homemade ice-cream and refreshments to locals, cyclists, walkers and other visitors.

Meetings and ad-hoc events have continued to be held at the pub. These included a Dogs for Good charity breakfast, Halloween, post event drinks on Remembrance Sunday and the Christmas Carol Service.

The popular Soapbox Derby and Dassett Country Show also introduced a wide range of customers to the Yew Tree.

The Walking Group hosted a Christmas Lunch which, in addition to the walkers, invited a small number of residents from the village who were treated to a lunch partly subsidised by the funding received for the Warm Hub.

The pub hosted a group of Morgan car enthusiasts for a lunch as they held a rally which passed through the village.

Objective achieved. We are pleased to report that there have been no set up or running costs so far and we don't anticipate facing any in the foreseeable future.

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Item No 4 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Focus for visitors to the Area. (Short to Medium Term)

We aim to grow community pride and involvement by bringing visitors to the area.

The Yew Tree remains the only major meeting place in the village and it's the point to which visitors are naturally drawn. It is worth noting that:

- The Shack continues to draw in customers from far and wide.
- The Soapbox derby brings in hundreds of visitors to the village.
- Pop-Up markets attract many from outside the village.
- The Yew Tree is mentioned in the National Garden Scheme entry for the Avon Dassett Open Gardens event and this attracts visitors to the pub during the event.
- The Dassett Country Show draws visitors to the pub.
- The outdoor stage allows music events to be held which also attract visitors.
- Several local B&B businesses refer their clients to the pub for meals and refreshments.
- Charity events such the Dogs for Good breakfast and the Christmas Carol singalong attract a wider range of people to the pub.
- In summary, the community identity remains strong and appears attractive to a wide range of customers.

Objective achieved. To date there has been no cost to the Society resulting from the above activities and we do not anticipate facing any in the future.

Item No 5 - Extend The Hub by setting up new community led social groups/activities. (Short to Medium Term).

The aim here is to reduce social isolation and encourage community interaction.

Once again, the pub is acting as the hub in the community. Events led by volunteers are welcomed and there is clear evidence that new groups have been formed. We have the return of the Christmas Carol Service and the Warm Hub and the formation of the Friday Club which meets for coffee and social interaction and the Footpaths Group which meets to plan its forthcoming activities.

Well established groups like the Walking Group, the Strollers, the Book Club and the Bridge Club have continued to use the pub as a focal point. The Gardening Club and Walking Group hold their Christmas lunches at the pub as well as at least one 'social event' meeting during the year.

A clothing bank has been provided in the pub car park in support of the Warwickshire Air Ambulance service.

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The tenant continues to host music nights, quiz nights, themed dinners such as Burns Night,

Objective achieved. To date there has been no cost to the Society as a result of the above activities and we do not expect this to change.

Item No 6 - Extend The Hub by setting up new community led groups to improve health and wellbeing (Short to Medium Term).

The aim here is to improve health and wellbeing.

Although some of the groups and activities that we envisaged did not materialise, we are pleased that the established groups continue to use the pub. Occasional events such as the ladies fashion show, meetings of the Northend Womens' Group have used the pub for events.

In 2023 the Society was able to obtain a small amount grant funding from Warwickshire County Council (and with additional funds made available by the Society), 12 local residents including two members of staff from the Yew Tree have been trained in basic first aid.

Those who have been trained have agreed to be available if required to support local charity and social events in the village.

There has been support for the Footpaths Group and the Friday Club as well as several gatherings of local field sports groups.

Objective achieved. These activities are organised by members outside the Management Committee and at no cost to the Society.

Item No 7 - Increase accessibility to The Building. (Medium Term).

The aim here is to improve accessibility to the pub, for all.

We submitted a Planning Application for the refurbishment of the toilets to include disabled access and baby changing facilities. The application was approved and we raised funds to allow the work to commence. At the time of writing the work is progressing and it is already noticeable that the access to the side of the pub from the car park is now wheelchair accessible.

We have improved the step access at the front of the pub by installing an additional step and a handrail.

Objective partially achieved.

Item No 8 - Offer extra community benefits to increase The Services. (Medium Term).

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We aim to enable greater community cohesion through the provision of additional services.

During the year we again were allocated grant funding to continue the Warm Hub facility to provide some support to people from our community.

The Footpaths Group is improving access to established routes and helping to make these more accessible with the replacement of stiles with gates.

Objective partially achieved.

Item No 9 - Enhance The Services. (Long Term).

Our outline plans to utilise the outbuildings to create new facilities remain on hold pending plans and funding.

As reported above, we have established a Yew Tree Development Group to consider the development of the premises. Through this group we have commissioned a site and building survey to provide a baseline understanding of the potential work that needs to be undertaken before major developments are considered.

In addition, we have in place a Finance Committee to work with the Yew Tree Development Group to consider the options for financing.

We have also created a Business Development Group which has been designed to work with external organisations which may look to the Community Benefit Society for the leadership of their projects.

These three groups are now part of the management infrastructure of the Society and have enabled us to be better equipped to take forward plans and projects in a structured manner.

Objective not yet achieved.

Item No 10 - Enhance The Services. (Long Term).

Once again, as with item 9 above, we have made limited progress on this item.

Our tenant still aims to establish a B&B business, but this will depend upon detailed plans being approved, planning permission and the Society having the funds to develop the main building. We want to extend the capacity of the kitchen to service more customers and utilise the outbuildings for kitchen related activities such as food preparation and storage.

Objective starting to be achieved

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Item No 11 - Market the pub to visitors. (Medium to Long Term).

As previously reported this item is now merged with Item 4 above.

Conclusion

We believe that we have made excellent progress towards the achievement of our Social Impact objectives and are proud to have a number of established community groups, activities and events. We are confident that these will continue, although the Management Committee will continue to monitor progress.

Our principal source of income continues to be from rent from our tenant and, after our financing costs, any surplus allows us to make progress against objectives that require financing, particularly the development of the premises.

We understand that we needed to put in place plans and arrangements to ensure that we were “more than a pub,” and believe that we have achieved this in a manner than can be sustained.

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