

Wigtown & Bladnoch Community Initiative

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Notes of the Public Meeting regarding The Plough
On Thursday 17th December 2023



W&BCI Board Members Present: Pete Dobson, Matt Kitson, Frank Irvine

Public attendance: 37

Items Discussed:

- 1. W&BCI and the proposal regarding The Plough:** Matt opened the meeting by introducing the aims of the W&BCI and their existing projects: The Bunkhouse and the Church Hall.
- 2. The Proposal to purchase The Plough:** Matt outlined the proposal to purchase The Plough as a community asset, with the aim being to establish a new community company to lease the premises for an initial long term. 25+ years. The new company would be drawn from the community and all those at the meeting were invited to put their names forward to be a part of the new group. This group would then meet and take responsibility for the development of the plan to create a sustainable, commercial business that supports work opportunities, provides a bar/restaurant/hotel service, and compliments the existing provision within Wigtown. Pete outlined the funding opportunities for the capital purchase of the building, with potential for additional funding to support making it more energy efficient and providing initial kitchen equipment and fittings.
An initial show of hands showed significant support for a community purchase, with 3 people indicating that they were not in favour.
- 3. General discussion notes:** The Board opened up to general discussion the proposal.

Key points raised:

Impact on existing businesses: Outside of the Book Festival period and high season during the summer, there is limited tourist trade for overnight accommodation, so the Plough would impact the existing accommodation providers. There was also concern that the Plough would not be economically viable and would be unable to sustain itself during the quieter months of November to March. Alternatively, the view was that having the Plough open would attract more people into the town and encourage more people to stay longer therefore spend more in other businesses. It would also provide more opportunities for local people to eat, drink and socialise in Wigtown.

The Plough should be left to the open market to determine how it will be used. If there is no commercial interest in running it as a bar/restaurant/hotel then it should be sold for flats. There was concern that this would be a loss to the community, and that retaining it as a bar/hotel was more important.

Lessons should be learnt from the previous businesses that had run the Plough/Craft, to listen to the community and create a business that supports the local market for food and drink as well as tourists. Reasonably priced food that enable local people to socialise more frequently. There was discussion around whether all three of the previous tenants had

failed, with a view that under Carl it had been a thriving venue, with live music and quizzes. The pandemic had a significant impact on the last tenant.

What if it fails? If the business cannot survive then the lease would revert to W&BCI who would then have the option to sell it or consider converting it to affordable housing in the same vein as the former Bank of Scotland building. That way the community gets a say in what it becomes.

Would the business be subsidised and provide unfair competition? The funders will require that the business employs people at living wage levels as a minimum and that a robust business case must be presented before funding would be approved. The aim is that the business will be commercially self-sustaining. Funding will only be for capital purchase and initial revenue support during the first few months as the business has been closed for over a year and has no good will to trade on. After that, it will have to pay its way. W&BCI will not subsidise the running costs and all prices will have to reflect local market levels.

Could the Post Office be run from the pub? The Community council are working with the County Council and Post Office Counters Ltd with a view to putting the Post Office in County Buildings. Putting a Post Office in the pub would only be considered if that plan does not come to fruition.

The consensus in the room was positive to W&BCI purchasing the Plough. People were invited to put their names forward to form the management group and at the meeting four people came forward. Two more would think about it.