



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



power to
change

business in
community
hands



The Duke of Marlborough Pub, Suffolk

Location

Somersham
Suffolk
IP8 4QA



www.savetheduke.net



[@marlboroughsomersham](https://www.facebook.com/marlboroughsomersham)



[@DukeofMarl](https://twitter.com/DukeofMarl)

About the Duke of Marlborough Pub

The Duke of Marlborough is a 500 year-old inn and a Grade II listed historic building located in the attractive Suffolk village of Somersham, some 5½ miles north west of the Suffolk county town of Ipswich. The village is in a rural area but has good communication links via the nearby A14 and A12 and there are also several local villages.

The owners had done a great job of restoring and running the pub, and it was operating successfully, however, they were ready to retire and wanted to sell the business. Trading ceased on 24th December 2014.

Threatened with the prospect of the pub being de-licensed and sold as a private residence, Sarah Caston, a local doctor, took action and set about saving this vital community asset. She was dismayed and saddened at the possibility of losing the last pub in the village and her actions heralded the start of the 'Save the Duke' campaign.

Following a successful campaign the Pub was purchased in March 2017 and it re-opened in late spring 2017.



First Steps

The first step was to organise a public meeting to discuss the closure of the Duke of Marlborough. At that meeting, a campaign was vigorously embraced and supported by local people.

Next a steering group was set up, comprised of local people with a wide range of expertise, to direct and run the campaign. A host of additional volunteers also came forward and offered to be involved in many different activities - ranging from leafleting and fund-raising - to event management, gardening, refurbishment and DIY.

The steering group then approached the Plunkett Foundation for guidance and support. The group received Specialist Advice and a funded study visit was made to The Case is Altered, another community-owned pub, that continued to offer support and provide mentoring after the study visit. Several other community-owned pubs also provided invaluable advice and guidance alongside:

- Somersham Parish Council
- Councillor Julia Truelove (Suffolk County Council)
- Mid Suffolk District Council.
- <http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk>

Legal Model

The Somersham Community Pub Ltd was registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as a Community Benefit Society (CBS) in 2015. The shareholders own the pub and the management committee run it on their behalf.

The management committee is democratically elected by members of the Community Benefit Society (the shareholders) with one vote per member regardless of investment size.

All shareholders are members of the Society, providing them with access to information, a voice in the society and an opportunity to be elected to the Management Committee.

Vision

Somersham Community Pub Ltd agreed on the following objectives:

- To get the pub re-opened as a priority!
- To buy the Duke of Marlborough and its grounds, via a share issue
- To conduct a fast, efficient refurbishment in order to reposition the pub, and enhance the offer so that it provides a warm welcome to drinkers as well as diners
- To carry out any remedial work that will reduce its carbon footprint and keep bills as low as possible
- To make improvements to the grounds to provide a larger trading area and to help attract passing trade
- To run a viable, thriving and sustainable pub business with a friendly, welcoming, community focus, and a food and drink offer that is of good enough quality to attract people from a 10 mile radius
- To be in a position to pay back loans as well as annual interest to investors after 2 years and to invest in further improvements in the pub, especially any that helps to build community engagement

"The Duke is a beautiful, historic pub; a central feature of village life. We wanted it to stay that way. Quite simply we refused to accept that 500 years' of local hospitality should come to an end."

"The Duke of Marlborough is in many ways a national as well as a local treasure. It symbolises all pubs that have been the lifeblood of communities for centuries but are now under threat of being turned into residential properties. When we raised our voices about the Duke, we were raising them for all rural pubs at risk."

Sarah Caston, led on the Duke of Marlborough Campaign for over a year

Fundraising

The value of the property was professionally and independently valued in the region of £300,000, and a pro-active crowd-funding campaign was launched. After two long years' of fundraising and campaigning enough money was raised from community shares and loans for the group to put in an offer.

Funding applications were also made and granted from:

- £1550 (Suffolk County Council)
- £1000 (Somersham Parish Council)
- £1000 (Suffolk Empowering Communities Fund)

Social Impact

Community ownership is not a new concept in Somersham: a community-owned shop already exists in the village and that was also set up with help from the Plunkett Foundation.

The local community is predominantly rural and consists of eight parishes within a 5 mile radius with 2440 residents. Statistically vulnerable people comprise 20-30% of the local community depending on their social situation – age, income, social isolation, health and mobility, and there is a higher level of unemployment, a higher ageing population and poor access to transport.

Somersham and the surrounding villages have a very limited bus service, so there is limited opportunity for local residents without transport to socialise in the evening.

The Society has written a Social Impact Plan:

- To ensure that the community is involved in developing activities of their choice by engaging with them and organising consultations, meetings, coffee mornings and opportunities to feed back
- To recruit local volunteers to manage regular activities and to encourage others in the community to instigate and run social events such as lunch clubs for the elderly, quiz nights for families, music evenings and interest groups for all ages
- To source any grant funding and organise fundraising activities to help with providing IT equipment and training sessions, speakers for talks, items for use by the community, setting up lunch clubs etc.
- To promote and publicise activities within the parishes with posters and regular newsletters and via website
- To liaise with other community pubs in Suffolk and share knowledge and advice on management of the pub and social activities which make a difference to the lives of the local residents
- To look at issues of transport i.e. organising a local minibus or cars in order that residents can travel to enjoy visiting the pub for a meal and drink and to socialise and take part in events and activities
- To organise regular events and meetings to ensure the community is being heard and to ensure monitoring and evaluation of events is put in place i.e. recording numbers of visits and those joining groups and attending activities



Social Impact Outcomes

- The pub provides a venue to help loneliness and isolation. For anyone living alone, the village pub is always friendly and welcoming.
- Volunteering opportunities and work placements improve community engagement as people are asked to offer up skills and improve their employability. Not only are people encouraged to indicate what they might like to do - i.e. bar work, catering, financial, management, social activities and event organisation, there are opportunities to meet other people who have life skills in employment and can offer mentoring.
- Increasing trust and familiarity amongst local people – if you know your neighbours you feel safer in your home and crime prevention is enhanced.
- Pubs provide a meeting point for people from different walks of life in a way that no other social environment does.
- Quality of life and wellbeing is being improved by access to a range of activities, events, clubs and societies. As well as improving general health it also reduced the need for long term care and support in homes and hospitals.
- Providing a luncheon club service for the elderly and disadvantaged decreases isolation and ensures older people in the village are not lonely and/or neglected.
- The pub provides local services to more people who may not otherwise have access to such amenities as Wi-Fi, free advertising on our notice boards, book exchanges, general advice on local trusted traders (such as plumbers, gardeners, electricians etc) and information on support groups.
- The pub is bringing a 'heart' back into the village and it is reinvigorating the community as has happened elsewhere.

Key Strengths

- A number of commercially astute committee members run the project - people who have the time to devote to the project, and are prepared to do so in a volunteer capacity. The management committee comprises a team of motivated people with a wide of range of knowledge and expertise
- A front of house manager, who is entrepreneurial, reliable and "really great at his job" - was appointed. A talented, dependable and ambitious chef was also recruited. These key people have high standards in all aspects of the business, and they are motivated by the desire to create a really special pub that is treasured by the whole community
- The chef sources and uses high quality local ingredients to create an appetising menu of freshly cooked food

"People really want a vibrant social hub serving fresh food and quality drinks from the region.

By offering an enticing menu, creating a great atmosphere and putting on the right events, custom will be attracted from far and wide."

Sarah Caston, Duke of Marlborough

Further information

To find out more information about the More Than a Pub Programme visit www.plunkett.co.uk/more-than-a-pub.

If you would like to contact us about support under the programme please fill out our initial contact form at www.plunkett.co.uk/initial-contact-form, email info@plunkett.co.uk or call the Advice Line on 01993 810730.