



# Community Pub

CASE STUDY



## The Swan at Gressenhall Norfolk



### KEY DETAILS

Community pub	Purchased 15 January 2021
Number of shareholders / members	420
Share offer	£50 minimum and £25K maximum investment per shareholder
Price for Freehold	£185K
Finances	Through the MTAP programme: £50K grant from Plunkett, £50k loan from The Key Fund.
Total raised in community shares	£260K
Opening date	August 2021
Population served	1000 population in village

## I About The Swan at Gressenhall

This rural pub at the heart of Gressenhall village in Norfolk was first licensed in 1795 and is the last remaining of 7 local pubs. Over recent years it was run as a tenanted model and then as a Free House, but in July 2018 it closed for good. Since then, the Gressenhall Community Enterprise group has campaigned tirelessly to bring it under community ownership, rounding off these efforts with a spectacularly successful community share offer in the middle of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. They completed their purchase in January 2021.

## I The long haul

Naturally during a long campaign of more than two years, energy ebbs and flows both within the committee and among the public. The group knew it was important to create a resilient culture that would endure. Having a very specific mission statement was hugely beneficial; they did lots of outreach, research, and documented their process closely. Very accurate Minutes of meetings were kept, and a tight meeting schedule, as well as lunch visits to other community pubs which gave the group a taste of what was possible and kept them inspired.

## I A representative group

Having a group of local men and women aged from mid-20s to mid-70s was massively beneficial and reflective of the population the pub will serve. Naturally, there were healthy differences of opinion, but an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility was always maintained. They were also energised by campaign projects, such as a 'Swan Soiree', with a live swing band, beer and food on the village green. Events were held every few months to maintain interest and enthusiasm.

## I And along came Covid-19

2020 didn't go the way anyone had expected and during the initial lockdown, the pub group pivoted, putting their energies behind launching a Mutual Aid Society for the benefit of all village residents to provide practical and emotional support. The Mutual Aid Society was very well supported by volunteers and used by many residents, and unexpectedly provided a very practical demonstration of the value of a community hub, enhancing the group's profile when it was able to later launch its community share offer to raise the needed funds. The group smashed through their target, raising £30K more than they had set out to do, through a sustained and energetic share offer run across social media, website, local press and word of mouth.







## More than a pub

The wider social impact potential of the pub has always been at the centre of the group's campaigning, and they found that even in the early stages, when success was uncertain, the benefits of the journey were fantastic: the group members got to know so many more people in the community by having the campaign, and established deeper relationships with people they already knew.

The group has plans to work with existing local groups such as Dementia Friendly, Chatty Café Scheme, an east Anglian project on depression and mental health in the agricultural sector, and many more. The pub will be open all day, used by all community groups that want to, doing fundraisers, repair cafes, a book club, a meeting space for parents and young children, and more. As with most community owned businesses, the ripples of what The Swan can do widen its impact beyond Gressenhall village itself.

## Looking to the future

Being empty for so long and neglected before it closed, the pub is undergoing a substantial £150K renovation project for which planning permission was approved. The pub group see this as an opportunity to design-in sustainability and accessibility from the start, with plans for green utilities and insulation and accessibility and dementia friendliness. Aids will be put in place for people with difficulty moving, and local company Norfolk Herbs will donate sensory plants for the pub garden, which has a volunteer team dedicated to looking after it, and the local Men's Shed will make the planters.

The group will employ a Manager and Chef, to be helped by a ready pool of local volunteers in the first few years, and the group is already divvying up tasks, particularly in establishing a Volunteer Coordinator role. And finally, the group will rename the pub The White Swan, which was its original name when it first opened so long ago.

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## Plunkett's role

In the words of Mary Turner-Jeong, the communications lynchpin for the group, “Plunkett has really been invaluable to us, its rural focus is really important and sets it apart. We had the reassurance of not having to reinvent the wheel: we used its business adviser support and all its brilliant resources, like its webinars and training. It also gave us solidarity through a long campaign and of course the amazing grant and loan package of £100K through the More Than A Pub programme, as well as sponsoring a study visit to our neighbouring community pub the King's Arms at Shouldham.”

“I loved the dementia training via Plunkett and plan to train as a dementia champion for the pub. I also love Plunkett's emphasis on sustainability and social impact, and its partners that it can signpost you to at the right time. Now the group is paying it forward – we were given a lot of support, so we're trying to do the same for other groups now.”



Wherever you are in the UK, if you are interested in starting or developing a community pub please contact the Plunkett Foundation - **01993 810730**, [info@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:info@plunkett.co.uk) or visit [www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk) to find out how we can support you.

The Plunkett Foundation helps rural communities UK-wide to tackle the issues they face by promoting and supporting community business. In addition to developing and safeguarding valuable assets and services, community businesses address a range of issues including isolation, loneliness, wellbeing, work and training.

If you share our vision for a vibrant rural economy with rural community business as its heart, why not join Plunkett as a member? Find out more about our membership packages [here](#).

This case study has been made possible through the More than a Pub programme, funded by Power to Change and the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government.



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