

STEVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the village meeting held on 15th Feb 14 at 10am
in the Church Rooms, Church Road, Stevington,
regarding the future of the Red Lion Public House**

Present:

Parish Councillors

Sarah Bush (SB); Paul O’Flynn (POF); Keith Parkinson (KP); Brian Stammers (BS)
Jane Thomas (JT)

Admin. Assistant, Planning Matters, Stevington Parish Council,

Mary Murzyn (MM)

Borough Councillors

Pat Olney (PO)

Additional Attendees: Nigel Bailey (Current owner of the Red Lion)
80 Local Residents (approx.)

Acting Chair: Paul O’Flynn (POF)

Minute Taker: Mary Murzyn (MM)

POF opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and introducing the Parish Councillors. He outlined the purpose and format of the meeting, advising that it would be split into two parts with a ten minute break.

Part 1: Inform the village of the current position regarding the Red Lion and review Taylor’s independent survey/report.

Part 2: A question and answer session.

For the purposes of efficiency, POF asked attendees not to interrupt speakers during Part 1.

KP began his presentation by outlining the timeline and history of the Red Lion (RL) since it had last traded.

1. Mar 2010 – Admiral Taverns sell pub as part of block sale to GPS Estates
2. Oct 2010 – GPS Estates closed pub promising to refurbish/re-open it in early 2011. It was never refurbished.
3. Dec 2010 – Village consulted on two 4bed houses, pub car park access off Church Road.
4. Aug 2011 - An application was submitted for two 4bed houses, retaining the pub.

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5. Jan 2012 - A separate application was submitted for the pub to be converted to a house. The Parish Council (PC) complained to Bedford Borough Council (BBC) that these 2 applications were conflicting, so they were withdrawn.
6. March 2012 - A new application was submitted for two 4bed houses plus the conversion of the pub into a 3rd house.
7. May 2012 - This new application was refused.
8. Nov 2012 - The Inspector dismissed an appeal by the owner.
9. Jan 2013 - Nigel Bailey (NB) purchased the RL site and informal talks began with him. His original plans were to build two 4bed houses and re-open the pub.
10. May 2013 - On-site meeting with NB, with discussions of 1 large 4bed house on the car park and 1 smaller 3bed house along the back of the site, plus the refurbishment and re-opening of the pub. Car park and pub driveway to take about 40-50% of "open space"
11. Oct 2013 - NB submitted a pre-application to the BBC, which was the same as above. The PC told NB that they could not support these plans. On 28th Oct NB put the RL up for sale.

KP stated that the PC had registered the RL as a Community Asset and added that the RL had been the first asset on the BBC's register of community assets.

He explained what this meant and spoke of the 6 week moratorium period to register with BBC and invoke the right to bid, and 6 months in total (until 5th May 2014 as sale notified to BBC 5th Nov 2013) to put a business plan and finances together and notify the BBC & NB, should the consensus of the village be to bid for the RL.

KP reminded all of the constraints on the site, such as the TPOs (tree preservation orders) on 3 trees and the need to re-plant a walnut tree cut down illegally; and the garden designated 'Open Space'. He noted that whilst the RL is not a listed building, it is in the conservation area.

BS advised that he would do his best to provide his summary of the independent survey report from Taylors, and its 4 basic conclusions:

1. The RL is in a poor decorative state.
2. £50-75,000 would be required to re-fit the cellar and kitchen before the RL could be re-opened as a food and drinks pub, or £20-30,000 to re-open it as just a wet pub (serving drinks only).
3. Retention of both the garden and car park were necessary for its viability.
4. Its current market valuation in Taylor's professional opinion is £270,000.

The report alleges that the RL will not attract any commercial bids in its current state of disrepair and with no toilet facilities/access for the disabled. The pub needs refurbishing

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throughout, and new fixtures and fittings. As it has been shut since 2010, there are some signs of damp; and the demolition of a garage in the car park has left contaminated asbestos, which needs to be professionally removed.

Typical sales figures from the last tenant John O’Grady were based on 60% drinks and 40% food sales. With an average of £145,000 annual turnover, the RL could yield a gross profit of 60% on this figure for an un-tied tenant, but the report did not factor in any investment or refurbishment costs. The viability depends on food being served, and the retention of both the garden and the car park.

BS pointed out that the report looked at a total of 8 pubs in North Bedfordshire that have been recently sold. The sale prices realised have ranged from £202-300,000; an average of £250,000. Taylor’s report puts a transfer price of only £200,000 on the RL because of the refurbishment costs needed prior to re-opening it as a pub. The report considers that the current asking price is well above the market rate.

JT then outlined 5 generic options for the RL site, as shown in the table below. She emphasised that these are just suggestions from the PC and not definitive - other options are welcome from residents during the second half of the meeting.

Generic Options for The Red Lion

<p>1. Re-open the Red Lion with Existing Garden and car park</p>	<p><u>How?</u></p> <p>a) A Community group put together the Finance & Business Plan ready to submit to the Borough before the deadline of 6th April 2014. (If appropriate this could be supported by the Parish Council)</p> <p>b) Current owner re-opens the pub in its previous form</p>
<p>2. Re-open the Red Lion with smaller garden and rear car park, PLUS 1 detached house in the existing car park space</p>	<p><u>How?</u></p> <p>a) A Community group put together the Finance & Business Plan ready to submit to the Borough before the deadline of 6th April 2014. (If appropriate this could be supported by the Parish Council)</p> <p>b) Parish Council continue to meet with owner to press for the opening of the pub and 1 detached house</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><u>How?</u></p>

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<p>Demolish the Red Lion and replace with a residential development</p>	<p>Village support the Parish Council to influence the developer on the development of the site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Row of stone cottages • Detached housing
<p>4. Conversion of the Red Lion into flats and the construction of 2 houses/cottages</p>	<p><u>How?</u></p> <p>Village support the Parish Council to influence the developer on the development of the site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion of existing building: appearance • Row of stone cottage • Detached housing
<p>5. Conversion of the Red Lion into offices, or other non-residential</p>	<p><u>How?</u></p> <p>Potential purchaser needs to be identified. If plans look suitable the might be supported by Parish Council</p>

10min break

The second half of the meeting resumed, with questions and answers. POF asked attendees if they could introduce themselves before speaking.

Chris Atkins

Q) If the RL had been viable, would it not still be open? Why isn't it? Is it because of malevolent speculators or is it that running it was tougher than John O'Grady (JOG) made out?

A) BS agreed. He stated that he felt that the village cannot sustain 2 pubs and that the RL is not viable as a wet pub. He expressed his concern about viability.

KP countered that the RL had been a tied house when JOG was tenant, and his food offering diminished towards the end, but that does not mean that it would not be viable now.

Vicki Barrett

Initially VB explained her qualifications and experience in the evaluation and viability of pubs. She then said that the figures presented to the Appeal Inspector by the consultant for GPS were completely in line with those in this independent report by Taylors.

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She explained that Admiral Taverns was a company set up by 2 property speculators with little relevant knowledge. They took advantage of the decline in the property market to buy up pubs, mainly community pubs in London. They sold the RL as part of a bulk lot of 3 properties as it did not fit with their portfolio. They were on the verge of bankruptcy, and in fact have since been taken over in a debt for equity deal. Therefore she concluded that this is not proof of the pub's non-viability.

Chris Atkins

Q) Do the people agree to its viability? Would they back the RL with their own money? We need to establish this.

A) SB said that the figures in the report are not based on JOG's figures.

Vicki Barrett

VB remarked that she thought that the figures were in line with hers. She added that there is no problem with the RL regarding catchment area.

Peter Hart

PH stated that he lived opposite the RL and he thanked the PC for an advance copy of the report. KP had correctly stated that the RL was not a listed building, but being in the conservation area meant that the RL enjoys virtually the same protection; and the 1990 Planning Act states that buildings cannot be left to decay.

PH stated that he found the report very disappointing, for example:

- On other working pubs, the report had included the Royal George (RG) and treated it the same as those in other villages; but the RG is a direct competitor of the RL.
- JOG had received a reduced rent at the RL.
- The report has not broken the deadlock.

He believed that the PC have significant leverage and a resolution would be to invoke a S106 agreement to bind the owner to develop the site as the PC sees fit.

He added that there is a lack of conservation area plans as the BBC has failed to produce these, despite having over 20 years to do so.

PH concluded that there is no basis for the PC to buy the property.

Roger Penny

RP said that JOG had wanted to buy the RL and he had helped him put forward a business plan. JOG had made no profit. We have the RG pub, which is viable. The RG tenancy is now up for sale - we could spoil that and end up with no pub.

Helen Prentice

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HP stated that the RL is for sale at £425,000, but is viable at £272,000. NB will not sell for half the asking price, and he is not obliged to accept our bid. NB needs to do a deal or we cannot go forward.

POF agreed that Helen was quite right. The PC needs feedback from the village, and other options to add to JT's.

Doreen Pendlington

DP agrees with Peter Hart in that the PC should not consider buying the RL. The village rates precept would have to go up, and there are many residents in the village on pensions/fixed incomes who cannot afford an increase.

David Warburton

DW pointed out that the figures in the report do not include directors' remuneration etc.

Q) He questioned whether the RL is viable as the report says?

A) BS agreed with DW and added that the report does not cover the cost of refurbishing the first floor accommodation.

DW does not believe that the RL would generate any profit.

Sally MacDonald

SMD suggested that we move on from the viability and ask what we would like to see on the site? The RL to open again and a small development on the site? The RL to open, but as a restaurant that would not be in direct competition with the RG (as the RG does very little in the way of food)? She is happy to development on Car Park, despite living across road.

Barbara Cattermole

BC stated that she would like anything on the RL site, for example, the RL gone and a row of cottages (round of applause), but if it does not sell, the site cannot be left in the state of disrepair as it is now. The PC must stop it looking like a building site within the conservation area.

Mark Jackson

MJ gave a brief history of amenities that had closed in the village – the village school, the shop, the post-office and an off-license. The village cannot support two pubs. Things have to change so the RL site should be developed sympathetically.

Chrissie Fitch

CF stated her belief that the RG is a good pub. The tenancy is coming up for renewal so her question was

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Q) How certain is the future of the RG?

A) POF said that the current tenant is selling the lease, believed to have 15 years to run. He could effectively stay there for 15 years. The RG roof needs serious work doing on it, which the owner should undertake. The tenant cannot afford to repair the roof, and it does not make sense for him to put any of his money into it.

POF added that the worse-case scenario would be if the owner bought the lease, shut the RG and tried to turn it into 2 houses.

PO said that the BBC would fight hard to retain the RG if it was the only pub in Stevington. It would not necessarily be lost. The Local Plan until 2021 states that BBC will do everything it can to retain the pub.

Someone interjected and called out that the BBC did not retain the only pub in Radwell.

Helen Prentice pointed out that the Radwell pub was lost before the change of rules/policy. Pubs in Felmersham and Riseley have since been retained.

Siobhan Atkins

SA expressed concern about parking. She said that if there was no pub car park, then parking is still going to be a problem.

Pauline Inge

PI stated that she has lived in West End Stevington for 28 years and loves the village. She is not averse to building cottages on the RL site but asked

Q) Where are the occupants of those cottages going to park? She considers that 2-3 parking spaces would be required per cottage, depending on the ages of the occupants.

A) KP said that the BBC has guidelines for the number of car parking spaces required.

Daz King remarked on the number of cars that are parked there now.

Laurence Kaye

LK advised that he has 35 years' experience in the catering business and a viable restaurant requires 100 covers. This could mean up to 50 cars, meaning the site is unviable because of the parking restrictions.

POF asked if there were any options to add to JT's list. They must be something for the community. JT read out the list of options again.

Tricia Lennie

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TL suggested sheltered housing be added as another option.

Margaret Jackson

MJ stated that she had lived in the village for 56 years and has seen the closure of 2 shops, the post office and the school. She felt that the RL should be a shop where people could collect their pensions, prescriptions etc. She said that there were many people in the village who do not drive.

SB disagreed as there are 3 community centres already.

Joan Hart

JH stated that she was not concerned whether the RL remained a pub or not, but rather whether the RL building stays and looks good. She believes that the scale of proposed development has not been in keeping with its setting.

Bob Hart

BH agreed with JH.

Heather Robinson

HR feels that the wall in Church Road would be likely to stay, based on KP comments on conservation area. She said that scale is important and we need smaller, more affordable houses for elderly villagers who want to downsize whilst staying in Stevington, or for grown-up village children who want their own homes within the village.

BS responded with reference to the Old Bakery site on Silver Street that offers small residential housing built around a big open space. He agreed that the demographics of the village means that we have older people wishing to downsize and grown up children wanting to stay in the village.

Janet Day

JD lives on Park Road and she accepts that the RL is unviable. She feels that there is room on the site for houses geared for both young and old people. She dislikes the current state of the RL site and asked if it could be cleared?

Chris Atkins

Q. Why can't the roof be fixed on the RG if it is a listed building?

Helen Prentice

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HP thinks that the S106 agreement would a great idea and said that as NB was present, he could sit down with the PC after the meeting and discuss how he could work together with the village, bearing in mind that the BBC planners still have to be convinced of any plans. POF told her that the PC are meeting with NB's new planning consultants very soon. He added that the PC could not make a decision of this magnitude and need to revitalise a Red Lion community working group; and find out who wants to join this group.

Gareth King

Q) GK asked if we could not give a show of hands now, to give NB some idea.

A) POF stated that we could not and we did not need it at this stage.

Linda Penny

LP observed that no-one present was under 40 and so the majority of people were a niche group. Many younger villagers with schoolchildren have gone away as it is the start of the half-term holiday,

Q) She asked if consultation should not be wider than the attendees present?

A) POF responded that the PC would be sending out the options to all villagers via a flyer, asking for a response.

Malcolm MacDonald

MMD remarked that if the RL site was looking scruffy, it should be cleared up. He added that he has cut back protruding shrubs as necessary, with access permission from NB.

Vicki Barrett

Q) VB asked whether the community right to bid could apply to other community uses of the site that did not include a pub.

A) PO said 'Yes', a group who wish to do that could, but they would need to meet and produce a business plan before 5th May, taking into consideration the constraints. Then they need the PC to back their plan.

Roger Day

Q) RD asked what option NB would be prepared to consider?

A) POF responded that the PC would be meeting with NB's planning consultants very soon and that it is not as case of the PC/village against NB. He added that the PC is conscious that NB is a businessman, who cannot do anything at the moment.

Peter Hart

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Q) With regard to the PC's preferred options, PH asked what are the guidelines for development on the RL site?

A) PO answered that the community can come up with ideas, bearing in mind that the BBC will need to approve them, so that is another process to consider. Also, parking is a constraint. PO agreed with the S106 resolution. There is much work to be done, and it is the village's decision not hers; but as Ward Councillor, she will support us in anyway she can.

Q) POF asked NB if he wanted to contribute to the meeting.

A)_NB answered that it had been very interesting, and that he had heard new things. His intention was only to listen at the meeting but indicated there was an intention to meet again.

POF informed all that the next stage is the meeting with NB and his new planning consultants in 4 weeks' time to find out NB's provisional thoughts. The minutes of today's meeting and a matrix will be posted on the village website within 2 weeks, and a flyer/questionnaire will be distributed within the village by 1st March,

Mark Sim

Q) MS asked why the PC doesn't have a Face Book page?

Richard Galley responded by asking if Mark would do it, as he is suggesting it?

POF said that anyone wanting a copy of the report should email the Parish Clerk, and KP added that the clerk's email address always appears in the village magazine.

The meeting finished at 12noon

Chair -----

Date -----