

Villagers band together to buy their local pub

By Nicky Hines

A STURVEY pub which was being closed because of the recession has been saved after villagers banded together to buy it.

The historic George and Dragon Inn, which has stood for centuries in Burgham near Arundel, was struggling for many in the declining fortunes of the hospitality industry until a group of local villagers to secure its future pulled together to raise the funds to buy the freehold.

The pub, built opposite the town village church, is thought to have originally opened in 1726. It has served the village continuously throughout the centuries but faced an uncertain way with increasing costs, rising operational costs and fuel price hikes.

Villagers were determined to keep it going. Three local businessmen - David King, Bill Tustin and Simon Leg, all pub regulars, raised the funds needed to buy the freehold.

But it didn't stop there. After buying the property this spring, plans were offered to the wider local village community of Burgham, Wigham and Warmingcamp.

And the response was amazing with a significant number of other villagers becoming shareholders in their local pub. Two of the major shareholders later lived in the village and knew the pub for over 25 years.

Chairman of the newly formed Burgham and Warmingcamp Pub Company, David King, said: "It was important to see this pub as it is a significant part of the local community and contributor to village cohesion.

"It is also a great place to have a drink and eat fabulous food, bringing the community together as it has done for nearly thirty decades. It was, is, and will now continue to be at the heart of this beautiful area."

Travels first started for the George and

Dragon as with many rural pubs, a number of years ago when the freehold was bought by a company who owned many other licensed premises.

New business and layout plans were abandoned Simon Leg said. "Sadly this 'new local' business model did not work. In protest at the end of a quiet week, next to the village cricket ground, they decided to host the pub as a night struggle to raise the funds everyone tried. The pub is permitted to be a long way off the beaten track when in fact it is only a mile from Arundel town centre."

The new local was a wonderful success but slipping progressively slow business despite the fantastic efforts and hard work of the incumbent business owners. It would have been another devastating loss of a local pub.

The recession has hit the hospitality industry hard. The Closed Pub Project reports that 2,000 pubs had closed by May 2013, up to 10,000, leaving just 10,000 remaining across the whole of the UK.

But the future is now looking bright for the George and Dragon Inn. It is looking for a month in June and when it will throw a big party for the locals.

The pub will then be refurbished with plans to include a new chill out area, improved bar and bar area amongst other changes already introduced such as live and new daily menus.

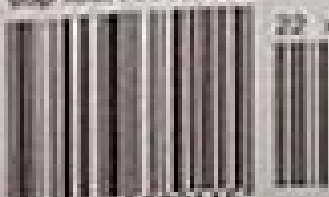
On re-opening in early July, there will be extended opening hours on summer weekends to offer early morning coffee and croissants plus the introduction of traditional homemade afternoon cream teas.

Joint Managers Sara and Michael Cheney, "At the core of our plans is a determination that this will remain a great country pub, which will continue to be known for excellent beer, wine and food, whilst maintaining its offering. We are passionate about maintaining the heritage of country pubs here for the locals and those visiting the area, serving great British produce."

As part of their commitment to being locally involved, the pub is now Corporate Vice President of the local Cricket Club and has asked local people to nominate their favourite charities as the pub-run pick one to support with various events and fund raises this year.

They are also hoping to put together a pub to help their first cricket game against a pub from here

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22