

Pub is the Hub Case Study

The Fleece Inn, Chapel Lane, Hillesley, Gloucestershire GL12 7RD



The Fleece is the only pub in the village of Hillesley, in the parish of Hillesley and Tresham which has a population of some 590 and is located some 15 minutes' drive north of the M4/J18 off the A46.

The pub closed for trading after being acquired in a package from a major pub company. Residents in the village came together to see what they could do to retain the pub in the future for the village. At the time the building was under threat of redevelopment for a possible alternative use. Pub is The Hub gave the village general advice on the acquisition which included buying the property through an Enterprise Investment Scheme. Five families underwrote the purchase and 120 members of the community contributed to the funding and became shareholders in Hillesley Pub Company Ltd.

The freehold purchase was completed in June 2012 and with overwhelming local support from the village, the pub was refurbished and redecorated in order to reopen its doors again as a free house, all within five weeks. Furniture and new kitchen equipment was sourced where possible via ebay. The whole village helped with the building work and with tidying up the beer garden. A consultant was appointed with experience of the brewery trade. He assisted with the appointment of a manager for the pub and gave investors advice on the future trading potential of the pub, its cash flow forecasts and potential sources of all liquor and food products.

As a result the pub now offers a range of traditional draught beers, sourced mainly from local brewers, together with a choice of national lagers. The food is home cooked using locally sourced produce, based on a printed menu of competitively priced meals and snacks supplemented by a daily specials board. Business has been brisk since the pub reopened on 27th July 2012. The pub trades as a traditional local with a loyal customer base sourced from the village and the immediate surrounding area. Two darts teams have been formed as well as a golf society, and the pub is well used by the local football, tennis, bridge and cricket teams. On a Sunday volunteers organise an activity evening which includes quiz competitions, vinyl evenings or a live acoustic music event. The pub caters for local shoots, attracts walkers off the Cotswold Way as well as real ale enthusiasts seeking a glass or two of traditional draught beer. Coffee mornings are also offered for the villagers.

The interests of the 120 shareholders are looked after by a small board appointed by the investors who together with the trade consultant are responsible for the day to day running of the business.

The Fleece plays an important role as the hub of the community following the recent closure of the village shop and the local bakery. It provides local jobs for village residents providing important business experience for young people. The board have already identified a number of initiatives for consideration to develop the business further in the future. The shareholders are not motivated by profit and operate the pub to see that the business covers its running costs to make a small profit and above all to ensure that the pub is retained long into the future for the benefit of the local community as a hub for all the family to enjoy.

2018 Update:

After the initial excitement around the launch, the business became very challenging. Although the pub was open and well supported, there were lots of ups and downs; in four years the group had three managers and five chefs, and the revenues were falling. They made a decisive switch of business model, deciding to appoint tenants on a leasehold basis.

Rod Undy and Karen McGeoch had been running a hugely successful ale house in Mumbles, and became the tenant licensees in late 2016. Karen and Rod had a vision for The Fleece Inn that matched closely that of HCPL, and they forged a strong bond. In the short time that Karen and Rod have been in charge they have transformed the fortunes of the pub, which is now thriving. The beer is fantastic, the food is excellent, but best of all the welcome is always warm. CAMRA has recognised their achievements with successive awards as the Pub of the Year for the district, the county, and now the entire South West region.

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In keeping with the original aims, they use many great local suppliers for their produce. These include Unloved Eggs from Sherston Farm, Beer from Arbor Ales in Bristol, and bread from Walkers Bakery.

A key ingredient throughout has been the involvement of the community. Whether it is organising charity fundraisers, hosting volunteer events or simply holding their clubs' meetings in the pub, the Hillesley & Tresham community has remained actively involved. Saving the pub has had a huge, positive impact on the village, and today The Fleece Inn sits at the heart of the community, a hub for local clubs and societies, and working closely with the church, the school and the Parish Council.

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