

Intro.

Here at Woodstock Social Club we have a micro-culture of the Woodstock community, (extremely micro). Maybe more than one micro-culture.

But this micro-culture, culture is not enough to sustain this club long term.

What the last 4 or 5 years has shown us, is that this club simply cannot survive with the limited support of these few small groups of 5 or 6 people who are the only regular attendees. Just selling beer to this dozen or so regular members does not make sense and certainly does not make a profit, especially when the beer is £4 a pint to members, simply the maths does not work!

We believe this club now needs the support and backing of the wider Woodstock community, other social groups, local clubs, associations, businesses and community organisations.

We had to identify and act upon what is important.

The committee knows the most important thing that we have is this fantastic building in a great location, without that there is nothing for any of us to be a member of. Furthermore, if we lose this asset now, we will never, ever find anywhere else like this place with such a great area in the centre of Woodstock.

After securing the building, our next priority has to be towards our members, to give them a nice space to enjoy, a good community vibe, social atmosphere and something which offers value for money as both a member or any other stakeholder in the club.

Finally, whatever we think, what we need to do as an organisation in any form is to make an operating profit so that we can continue to improve the building and the customer offering we can provide to the Woodstock community.

Dissolution

There have been many rumours circulating around saying the club is going to be sold, I want to tell you that this is categorically NOT the truth.

There is also a misconception that if the club is sold then the members stand to gain a windfall from the sale once any debts have been settled off, this is also NOT the case. As long as there is money in the bank and any asset of value to trade with, this committee is 100% agreed and committed to keep it here and available for the Woodstock community.

The committee has already started the registration process to register the building as an Asset of Community Value with West Oxfordshire District Council.

Please refer to the document provides on Assets of Community Value for further details.

This one is from Nottingham Council, but the principal is just the same with WODC, this was the easiest one to understand I could find.

This application is in progress and is intended to protect the building at a district council / planning department level against closure and particularly sale of the building for another purpose. This asset lock lasts for 5 years per application. This is a level of protection that prevents our members from its own committee, should they ever intend to sell the building. The wider community would be given first refusal to re-purchase the building to operate with a similar purpose. This is how many community pubs are protected from say, change of use.

So, to this affect and without further ado, we are also proposing the following dissolution clause to be added to the club rules to further protect the future assets, members and interests of other stakeholders. I would expect that any man Jack of you will want to agree with this amendment – and every woman Jill, and anyone else in between.

Proposal of Appendix1

If at any Annual General or Extraordinary General meeting of the club, a resolution be passed calling for the dissolution of the club, the Vice President/Secretary shall immediately convene a Special General Meeting of the club to be held not less than one month thereafter to discuss and vote on the resolution. If at the Special General Meeting, the resolution is carried by at least three quarters of the Full Members present at the meeting, the General Committee shall thereupon, or at such date as shall have been specified in the resolution, proceed to realise the assets of the club and discharge all debts and liabilities of the club. After discharging all debts and liabilities of the club, the remaining assets shall not be paid or redistributed amongst the Full Members of the club, but shall be given or transferred to some other local voluntary organisation or charity, having objects similar to those of Woodstock Social Club.

Members may be invited at any Special General Meeting and at the discretion of the committee to suggest any suitable beneficiaries and upon resolution, the committee will thereupon decide upon not more than three suitable beneficiaries.

[HOLD VOTE]

Emails and Questions from Members, Received prior to 6th October 2024.

I received a quantity of emails from members and other concerned persons regarding the closure of the social club. Many of these were offers of support from local community champions and business operators. These included some other publicans in town, operators of We Love Woodstock, Wake up to Woodstock and Woodstock and Bladon News, so thank you those persons involved for your help and offers of assistance.

Our own team captains and the regular singalong group although disappointed, were all very supportive and understanding of our reasons. A few people from Bladon and involved with saving the White House also offered assistance and suggest making contact with Plunkett UK. One of our existing members has been a former trustee of Plunkett UK. Secretaries of other clubs, notably Heading Conservative Club and The Windrush Club, Witney offered any assistance should we need it. Thank you also to those persons.

Only one concerned member proposed any questions, this was received shortly after we closed. As we were not in a position to provide answers to questions based upon rumours and speculation at that time, I will try to provide answers as best as I can now.

Member writes: (M)

- ***(M) Can I please ask why the members have not been consulted or had a chance to have a say in whether the club closes its doors?***

The first question I will answer in 2 parts.

1/ The committee is placed in a position of trust by the members to protect the assets and funds of the club (our money is your money). When the club is losing between £100 and £200 in money EVERY DAY by staying open, it makes no commercial sense to anyone to remain open.

2/ Part of the reason the club model no longer works is exactly for this reason, if the committee are required to consult the members on every single stage just to make operational decisions, nothing would get done, the decision process has to be more agile than that to avoid wasting more time and money.

- ***Also, we were told that the selling of the flat was meant to "save the club" from closing why is this not the case anymore?***

2/ Selling off the flat was meant to save the club, it has saved the club and it still is, that is why we are all here now and with money in the bank.

People easily or conveniently forget that in December 2022, when we had NO money. The then steward approached me with concerns that there was no money in the bank to trade through Christmas and pay the staff in December. I offered my own money to pay the staff wages that month, but only on the basis that was guaranteed by the sale of one or more assets. We are still here 2 years later. We have not closed permanently as we have explained, and the money has been made safe.

- ***(M) Why are the committee discussing plans to change the club completely without consulting members?***

3/ The committee have discussed as many options as possible with as many people and have not yet made any changes; we have decided on proposing what we think is the best and arguably only course of action on these matters and the members are being consulted now.

- ***(M) Surely if you're thinking of changing the whole dynamic of the club including its name it's no longer going to be Woodstock social club so what then happens to the members that have supported it over the years?***

4/ We are committed to providing some kind a long-term benefit for our loyal members, but clubs and associations are failing all over the country. The club model simply does not work these days, especially in a town like Woodstock. We don't have enough paid-up members to support it for one thing!

The fact that there is a dirty brass plaque on the front stops many people from coming in. Either they think it is a private member only club, or they think it will be full of hairy-arsed bricklayers, smelly farmers or dirty coal miners! (I stereotype of course), not all bricklayers have hairy errrrmm, and farmers are some of the richest people I know (especially around here) and well, I haven't seen any miners around here for ages! I am from a farming family by the way.

But seriously, we now operate in a transient, diverse commuter and tourist town, so as an operation, we have to compete actually with some world class bars, restaurants and hotels, otherwise we are missing out on precious customers, the membership alone is not enough to support a club this size, it hasn't been for years. A practical example of this is Morris Motors / BMC (many of our members or relatives would have worked there back in the day), 1970 to 1975 when this very building was founded, Morris and Pressed Steel Fisher directly employed over 28,000 workers at Cowley and produced around 300,000 cars per year. BMW Mini made over 300,000 cars last year and they have 4500 employees, the signs of progress!

- ***(M) And as it is a member club, I don't think what you are doing is in the best interests of the club or its members.***

5/ If we don't do something now and urgently, there will be no chance of having anything left for the member.

Actions taken by the committee so far.

Over the last 2 to 3 months, supported by our committee, Colin and I have worked tirelessly to determine and secure the best future for this club. We have consulted 100's of members, particularly former members regarding why they do not use the club. We have also spoken to many business leaders around town, other landlords, community champions, consultants, charities and members of the general public with genuine concerns, who want to offer any support they can to preserve this asset for the long-term benefit of the whole Woodstock community.

None of us are doing this for personal legacy, we are doing it out of concern, for you the members, the future members, the former members who invested so much time, hard work and effort in founding this place, for your children and grandchildren, so that everyone can be lucky enough to share this unique space for years to come, just as you have done.

So, what else have we done.

Firstly, we spoke to Blenheim to ask them whether they have any other spaces available for sale, which would be suitable for a social club in Woodstock. Unfortunately, they have nothing available that they're not currently turning into flats.

We also spoke to Neil Roberts (a builder and a former trustee) about possible future changes if needed to our building, but also about the possibility of merging assets with the football club. Suffice to say they also rent that space from Blenheim, and actually Blenheim want it back, I can only guess what for?

We have looked into putting solar panels on the roof, at a cost of £28000 which would generate all of our electric plus a surplus which we could then sell for a small income. Payback period on this is approximately 8 years, if we consumed the same amount of electric as we did over the last 2 to 3 years.

We have considered leasing some of the space to a third party, say a gymnasium or a coffee shop (or both) to raise some income. Potentially leasing or subcontracting the bar operation out to another publican or somebody who already runs a successful, professional catering or commercial operation, would allow us (them), to put on a food offering for our members. This not only generates an income from rent, it means we don't have the expenses of having stock or employees and it gives our members and customers a more varied bar and food offering. Obviously, we would need to negotiate a satisfactory deal for our members if we were going to appoint any such a person.

We are also in consultation with number 42 next door, regarding buying, leasing or even being donated part of their garden to share with their tenants. They are an HMO (house of multiple occupation) and none of their residents use their garden. Most of their residents seemed keen for us to improve and use this space. This is a work in progress.

In reality, we are certainly going to some of nearly all these things, certainly in the short term in order to make the place successful and ensure its long-term survival.

All of these things, however, currently need both not only approval from the members but also a change of legal structure in order for us to implement them. This committee and especially the officers are not willing to risk our own livelihoods by entering into such contracts without any legal protection. At this point, I should add that in making these changes now to save us, there is nothing that cannot be un-done in future if we wanted to review the status of the organisation in say 3 years' time.

Trustees

So onto the trustees, for the reasons highlighted above I have to advise you that we've now also received formal notification of resignation from both of our current trustees, Charles Jocelyn Rush and from Simon Newton stating that unless the members are willing to support substantially changing the organisational structure of the club in order to limit their liabilities, the club then will be left without any standing trustees or you have to find new trustees.

Conversely on this one, of our former secretaries Mr. Paul Thomas (who's here today, thank you Paul) has kindly offered to stand in as a third trustee IF and ONLY IF the members can agree to change the structure and he will work with Jos and Simon to help facilitate the change and get this place open and moving again, as soon as possible

About us now

As we are, a social club is an unincorporated association, a society like a cooperative, it does not have any legal standing of its own whatsoever. We don't legally have the ability to enter into contracts for building works, or other liabilities, even employing people. If anything were to go wrong with these contracts, then every committee member and every Woodstock social club member are jointly and severally liable for the debts of the club. Say an employee fell down the stairs or a customer fell down the stairs and gained a life-changing injury, rehabilitation and ongoing care costs are more than our insurers are willing to pay out or the insurers turn around and say actually you don't have a legal leg to stand on because your contract with us is invalid, it has to apply to all of your members individually, what happens then?

Well, the insurers then sue the club, or the third party sue the club, but the club doesn't exist as a legal entity, so they start first by suing the officers, then the committee, then the members. No-one on this committee or the trustees are willing to risk their houses and livelihoods on entering into contracts whereby we don't know the ultimate legal outcome or unforeseen liabilities.

This scenario that I've outlined has actually happened, it's happened within Colin's experience at a club he previously dealt with on behalf of the rugby union and the Welsh rugby union association, and the bill was 10's of millions of pounds.

Furthermore, the process of running by committee and membership means it is virtually impossible to make rational and effective business decisions. A different legal structure would allow a more agile process, meaning better and faster commercial decisions being made, more reactive and adaptive to the needs of our customers (you) to current market pressures. Basically, we need to be able operate like a business, the delays we currently have in making decisions is not only losing us money it's also prevented us from maintaining and renovating the building effectively.

Community steering group

Finally, and I will come on to different legal structures very shortly.

We have to invest any money that we have, whether or not we consider the need to raise more money, we need to spend very wisely indeed and that is the main reason we are closed now – to preserve the funds we have. But, we have to make this building an attractive, bright, modern place for people to come and enjoy and we have to at least, put in a commercial kitchen.

I wanted to say also at this point, it is the plan of the committee, when we get this change agreed, we will immediately crack on with getting it done and open again, but we are not spending a single penny or changing a single brick until there is a proper plan!

We will create a sub-committee (steering group, if you will) of people from around town, members, non-members, business leaders and community influencers, to assist the committee and feed ideas back to us regarding what you all want and what is best for the town. To utilise their resources, business contacts, suppliers and offers of help.

Not making the decisions, but to feed ideas for what is best practice for what we want to do.

You will definitely not be losing a club; indeed, you will be saving the club, but it will also be the future hub of the community!

Preferable legal structures

- Unincorporated association
- Limited company
- Co-operative and community benefit societies (registered societies)