



Introduction

This is our fourth report of our progress against the items identified in our Social Impact Plan (SIP) which we prepared as a condition of our grant support and loan financing received.

The report covers the year from March 2020 to February 2021. During the year there was unprecedented disruption to the activities of our Society and our major asset, The Yew Tree pub.

There have been significant highs and lows in our activities during our year, which have resulted in us making very little progress in achieving our Social Impact Objectives.

Avon Dassett remains a very small village located in rural south Warwickshire, with less than 100 houses, a population of 210, of whom 166 are of voting age. Nevertheless, the creation of our Community Benefit Society which purchased the Yew Tree pub on behalf of the community, has established a focal point for the community to socialise and the impact is immeasurable. Without the pub the village would not function, and rural and social isolation and deprivation would become a reality

Management Summary

As we approached the third full year of having the pub open for community use, we were optimistic about our ability to make further progress against our short term, objectives and begin to achieve some of our medium and longer term objectives.

However, our overall objective of keeping the pub open as the central hub of our community, was dashed when the Yew Tree was forced to close, two weeks into our reporting year. Our tenant had given us notice to terminate their lease (as reported last year) and left before reopening was permitted in July.

During the reporting period The Yew Tree has only been allowed to open for 18 weeks and we spent five months of the year without a tenant. However, we managed to bring parts of the community together as we refurbished the interior of the premises during lockdown and ran the pub ourselves for a two-month period.

We faced severe financial hardship during the year. Not only did we have to deal with a period of no income, we were also unsuccessful in obtaining any government backed grants or loan funding, as we were not the business rates payer on a designated date and our business activities were deemed as non-qualifying. Although our bank agreed to offer us a Bounce Back loan this was limited to 25% of turnover so we were only awarded £5,000.

Key Fund allowed us to defer payments of principal on our loan, which provided us with some help to manage our cash flow, and we did not have to pay business rates while we ran the pub. We found that we qualified for no other help, which we found astonishing and hugely disappointing.

Our relationships with local businesses continue but have been disrupted during the year and the new beauty salon created within the pub, to offer healthcare and beauty services to the community, has been closed for most of the year.



The clubs, societies and regular events that were well established and used the pub as their central focus were suspended as they could not meet due to lockdown rules.

Major events such as the Soapbox Derby had to be cancelled. As a result, we did not have the opportunity to bring together several hundred people including spectators, competitors, and volunteers to the village.

With the Yew Tree aiming to be at the centre of this and other village activities, we hope that the community-based events will be able to be reintroduced to help the pub to rebuild its business and provide a community hub once again.

Although we have had another change in tenant we are hopeful that we have made the right choice this time and that by working together with them, we can make mutually beneficial progress in future years.

For the year ahead, we face the task of helping our tenant to reopen the pub to allow the Society to stabilize our operations. We only just managed to survive the last year, but we anticipate a period of stability in the coming year.

Detailed Report

This section of our report details the specific progress that we made to our year-end, February 2021, against the objectives that we set out in our SIP. For ease of understanding we cross refer to our Social Impact Matrix and repeat the context of each objective.

Item No 1 - The Avon (now The Yew Tree) as The Network for local employment and knowledge about village and nearby services. (Short Term).

We aimed to create opportunities for networking for employment, and community businesses.

We have continued to use local tradesmen to undertake repairs and remedial work and have encouraged our tenants to do the same. We have had new hardwood windows manufactured and painted by a local carpenter, double glazed by a local specialist, and fitted by the two companies working together. All minor repairs and maintenance have been carried out by local tradesmen and our tenants have also used local farms, businesses, and suppliers to support their venture.

The Community Notice Board within the Yew Tree has been relocated to the entrance lobby at the pub and can now be seen by all entering and leaving the pub. It publicises notices of events, advertisements from local clubs, societies and businesses and allows traders to display their business cards. We maintain a Social Impact Register which summarises these activities.

In between lockdowns, we managed to hold one Pop-Up Market where local craftsmen and businesses could sell their products and hope to make these more regular events once restrictions are fully lifted.

The beneficiaries of this service are residents in the local community who may be seeking a service as well as those in the local business community who generate contract opportunities directly from the advertising and referrals.

In the year we have few new successes to report, but previous examples are:



- kitchen and bathroom installations have arisen after discussions in the pub with the principal of a local company, who is a regular customer
- contracts for carpeting and flooring have arisen as a result of discussions in the pub between prospective customers and a specialist sole trader who is also a regular in the pub
- a young tree surgeon has been able to build a regular customer base for the supply of logs from contacts made in the pub and the quality of his service.
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New examples include:

- two new local suppliers of home-made desserts and ice-cream have secured contracts with the pub

We continue to monitor progress through discussion and feedback generated at our Management Committee meetings.

Item No 2 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Hub for village groups. (Short Term).

We aimed to enable greater community cohesion through connecting better to existing groups and supporting the creation of new clubs e.g., Bridge Club; young mothers group; walking group etc.

All of our clubs were forced to suspend their activities during lockdown and, apart from one walk between lockdowns there were no opportunities to meet.

However, the Sunday Morning dog walking group, which grew out of the main group, continued to function, but within socially distanced guidelines, which limited the participation and interaction. Prior to lockdown there was a regular turnout of six to eight walkers and around five dogs.

All of the organisers of village groups come from outside the Management Committee and require no funding to operate.

Item No 3 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Café. (Short Term).

We aimed to reduce social isolation by opening the pub in the mornings for residents to drop in for coffee, to use wifi and exchange books.

Previous attempts to open the pub in the morning were abandoned due to the costs of operating and the limited custom that was created. However, during the first lockdown and prior to reopening the pub in July, one of our local residents suggested that if we cleaned up the smoking shed and installed a suitable power supply and equipment, then she would run it as a catering “shack” to ensure that there was a service open to the public outside pub opening hours.

The initiative proved hugely popular, particularly amongst walkers and cyclists who were encouraged to get out and exercise during the pandemic but found that many of their traditional refreshment stops were closed. The Shack began to generate its own custom and became a go-to destination, particularly for its home-made cakes and ice-creams.

During the first lockdown we took the opportunity to restyle the Yew Tree to make it more appealing to a wider range of clientele and to give it a consistent look and feel to customers. Using the café theme dark wood surfaces were sanded and finished in lighter shades, walls and ceilings were painted, brickwork was covered over with painted panelling and furniture was painted in keeping with the décor. New lighting was installed, reupholstery undertaken, soft furnishings introduced, and paintings

Registered with The Financial Conduct Authority under the Co-operative and Communities Benefit Societies

Act 2014 as a Benefit Society

Registration Number:7489

VAT Registration Number: 272 5990 71



hung. Stools were removed from around the bar and, as table service became the norm the Yew Tree functioned much more like a café than a traditional pub.

Previous meetings and ad-hoc events that used to be held at the pub throughout the year, including a Halloween party for children, Remembrance Day, a Christmas Carol Service, the Soapbox Derby, the Dassett Country Show, and many others were cancelled either due to the pub being closed or lockdown restrictions.

We hope to welcome all previous events and activities back to the pub when restrictions are lifted and note that there have been no set up, or running costs so far and we don't anticipate facing any in the foreseeable future

Item No 4 - The Avon (now the Yew Tree) as The Focus for visitors to the Area. (Short to Medium Term)

We aim to grow community pride and involvement by bringing visitors to the area.

As the Yew Tree was closed for the majority of the year, the number of activities that drew visitors to the area was limited. However, there were some successes:

- as already reported, the opening of the Shack has been hugely successful and draws in customers from far and wide.
- although the Shack was created as a result an idea from a local resident who then opened it as a volunteer, when our new tenant took over responsibility for its operation new jobs were created
- we opened the pub as soon as we were able after the first lockdown (04 July 2020) and, again at the suggestion of a local resident, we offered a simple food menu based on modern tapas which we branded "Aperitivo." We found that we could offer this without having to rely on a fully functioning kitchen and, as we were largely using volunteers didn't have to make a significant profit so could offer quality food at attractive prices. As there was nothing comparable in the area we found that word of mouth spread about Aperitivo, and customers were drawn to visit the pub and the area.
- In summary, the community developed a stronger sense of identity when we ran the pub between lockdown periods and presented both the pub and the community in a very positive light to competitors and visitors alike, during what were very difficult times

As already reported, we managed to hold one Pop-Up Produce and Craft Market, providing community businesses and individuals to share surplus produce (local honey, vegetables, fruit, eggs etc) either to sell or for a donation to charity. This was very popular amongst suppliers, but visitor numbers were lower than before lockdown restrictions applied, probably due to customer caution and uncertainty about their safety in attending the event

To date there has been no cost to the Society resulting from the above activities and we do not anticipate facing any in the future.

Item No 5 - Extend the Hub by setting up new community led groups/activities. (Short to Medium Term).

The aim here is to reduce social isolation and encourage community interaction.



Events which enable volunteers to work with the tenant and use the pub have been restricted by lockdown. In the year, events that we anticipated would become a regular feature in our calendar such as a Halloween party for local children, the Christmas Carol Service, and Sing-along-with-Sally had to be cancelled.

Our tenant reintroduced music nights, but these only occurred twice before the pub was locked down in November.

To date there has been no cost to the Society as a result of the above activities and when we are able to reintroduce them we do not anticipate their being any costs to us.

Item No 6 - Extend the Hub by setting up new community led groups/activities. (Short to Medium Term).

The aim here is to improve health and wellbeing.

We have made no progress so far in setting up an IT Club. Despite having identified IT hardware that could be loaned to the Society to enable community use for courses and on-line access, we have been unable to make any progress on the objective.

Item No 7 - Increase accessibility to The Building. (Medium Term).

The aim here is to improve accessibility to the pub, for all.

We have had a poor trading year due to closures and restrictions imposed as a result of lockdowns and have been unable to raise funds to enable us to embark on new projects. We received no extra grant or significant loan funding so had to manage our finances accordingly. All of our attention was therefore focused on keeping the pub open at those times that we were permitted to do so.

Item No 8 - Offer extra community benefits to increase The Services. (Medium Term).

We aim to enable greater community cohesion through the provision of additional services. However, we need to ensure that the pub is fully functioning, and new societies and activities are bedded in before we embark on new projects to offer any additional services.

Prior to the start of our reporting year our third tenant had already given us notice to terminate their lease and once lockdown was introduced they negotiated with us to leave early which they did at the end of April 2020.

Without a tenant our attentions focused on finding a new one (a significant challenge at the best of times and even greater as a result of the uncertainty about when lockdown would be lifted and what life would be like afterwards} while preparing to open the Yew Tree as soon as we were able and operate it ourselves. This decision resulted in a huge volume of work which involved one of our Committee Members having to qualify for and obtain a Licence, putting in place supply contracts, registering as an employer with HMRC, budgeting for costs and pricing products and services, preparing staff rosters (including paid staff and volunteers), transferring utility contracts to the Society, purchasing and installing cash and credit handling systems, putting in place cashing up and reconciliation processes and many more activities. Without the efforts of volunteers putting in many hundreds of hours we could not have achieved what we did.



Although we realised some benefit from people coming together around a common cause, to keep the pub open, we did not make any progress in generating extra community benefits.

Item No 9 - Enhance the Services. (Long Term).

Our outline plans to add a microbrewery and possibly other services in the outbuildings remain unaddressed.

These have not been a priority in the first few years of operation and will require a further injection of capital to achieve. The disruption caused by the pandemic has wiped a year out of our development calendar and we only just managed to remain as a going concern in the year.

In our last report we said that in this year's report we hoped to be able to describe a flourishing new beauty salon business created at the pub by a local businesswoman, but we cannot. Like many personal services businesses, the beauty salon has had to close during periods of lockdown.

Item No 10 - Enhance the Services. (Long Term).

Similarly, to item 9 above, we have made no progress on this item.

In our last report we mentioned that our tenant was trying to establish a B&B business. However, this did not take off before our tenant left, it wasn't a service that we felt that the community could offer while we were running the pub and our new tenant has made the pub his home so cannot offer this service.

Enhancing the services is something that we plan to address in the future once we have the Yew Tree open and fully functional with no restrictions.

Item No 11 - Market the pub to visitors. (Medium to Long Term).

As previously reported this item is now merged with Item 4 above.

Conclusion

Our plans and operations were subject to major setbacks as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. However, we are relieved that, as a Society, we were able to galvanise volunteers from the community to rally round to refurbish the pub, run it ourselves and find a new tenant.

Having just managed to remain solvent in the last year, despite having limited external assistance, we are confident that we can stabilize and strengthen the Society in the coming year and get back on track with our Social Impact objectives.