



## **Introduction**

This is our fifth 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 2021 to February 2022. During the year there was further disruption to the activities of our Society and our major asset, The Yew Tree pub, as a result of Covid restrictions.

The year was one of consolidation and recovery resulting in us making more limited progress than we had planned to achieve 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**

We approached the fourth full year of owning the pub, with significant concerns; Covid measures were still in place and, although the Government had announced the easing of certain restrictions, this did not include the hospitality industry. The Yew Tree pub remained closed for business and there was no central hub around which the community could interact.

We remained concerned about our ability to make progress against our short term objectives while our medium and longer term objectives seemed to get further away.

The Yew Tree was only allowed to reopen on 12 April, and it was not until July 2021 that most restrictions were lifted. Although there was an initial surge in business, many customers stayed away as they remained concerned for their health and wellbeing and that of others.

Over the whole year our finances recovered enough to allow us to pay interest on shares for the first time in four years; an action which we hope to be able to repeat and which we hope will attract more share sales to new and existing investors.

Our commitment to local businesses continues and our tenant has benefitted from the local provision of goods and services.



The clubs, societies and regular events that were well established, using the pub as their base are getting back to normal and there are positive indications that new groups will be formed.

We are hopeful that major events such as the Soapbox Derby, Open Gardens, The Dassett County Show and Pop-up Markets will return in the future, bringing hundreds of visitors into the village.

Our aim remains to have The Yew Tree at the centre of our village and the main hub for its activities. We support community led events and the pub as the base for many of them.

We have made good progress in working with our current tenant, without whom we would not have been able to function as effectively as we have done.

We are looking forward to a more stable trading period and being able to focus on development in the coming year.

## **DETAILED REPORT**

This section of our report details the specific progress that we made to our year-end, February 2022, 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.

Wherever possible, we have continued to use local tradespeople to undertake repair work and have encouraged our tenant to do the same. In the reporting year the garden was remodelled and a new lawn was laid and replanting undertaken. In addition, a stage was created to allow outdoor performances to take place. Repairs were carried out to the roof on the Shack (garden kiosk) and all minor repairs and maintenance have been carried out by local tradesmen. Our tenants have also used local farms and businesses to supply products for resale.

The Community Notice Board remains prominent in the entrance lobby at the pub, in view of all entering and leaving the pub by the front door. It publicises notices of events, advertises local clubs, societies and businesses and allows traders to display their business cards. We maintain a Social Impact Register which summarises these activities.

Restricted by lockdowns, we managed to hold only one of our planned quarterly Pop-Up Markets where local craftsmen and businesses could sell their products.



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
- logs and kindling are supplied to customers from contacts made in the pub
- Local producers of home-made desserts and ice-cream have continued to supply the pub

New examples include:

- Local beer and cider suppliers have secured new contracts at the pub
- A local farm shop now provides meat to the restaurant
- A new resident is a roofing contractor who has secured new orders from contacts made in 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 eg Bridge Club; young mothers group; walking group etc.

All of our clubs were forced to suspend their activities during periods of lockdown and these, together with people's caution about mixing with others has resulted in there being little to report.

The walking group met whenever it could, and walks took place over approximately half of the months of the year. However, we are pleased to report that a new group, The Strollers was created to accommodate those who were seeking less taxing challenges. The Sunday Morning dog walking group, continued to function, but with more limited numbers.

All of these village groups were organised by people 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.

As previously reported, we abandoned the idea of morning openings some years ago, due to the costs of operating and the limited custom that was created. However, The Shack has become a destination in its own right. It operates outside normal pub opening hours and continued to be very popular in serving refreshments to locals, cyclists, walkers and other visitors.

Feedback from customers of the Yew Tree was that the appearance was a lot brighter than a traditional pub, which they said gave them confidence that cleaning and hygiene measures were in place.

Many meetings and ad-hoc events that were usually held at the pub were cancelled due to Covid restrictions. However, the book exchange was able to operate and there was a pumpkin carving contest at Halloween, post-service drinks on Remembrance Day, a charity breakfast held in aid of Dogs for Good, and a Christmas Carol Sing-along. Unfortunately, major events such as the Soapbox Derby, the Dassett Country Show and many others were cancelled either due to lockdown restrictions or uncertainty at the planning stage of whether or not events would be allowed to be held.

In future years we hope to welcome all previous events and activities back to the pub now that restrictions have been lifted. We are pleased to report 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.

Although the Yew Tree was not allowed to be open as much as we had anticipated, we were pleased with the number of activities that drew visitors to the area. Successes included:

- The Shack has continued to draw in customers from far and wide.
- Pop-up Produce and Craft markets attract many from within and outside the village
- Charity events such as a ladies fashion night. The Dogs for Good breakfast and the Christmas Carol singalong attract a wider range of people to the pub
- In summary, the community identity remains strong and appears attractive to a wide range of customers.

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 limited. However, in the year, events we have been able to run some cut-down events for children, such as the pumpkin carving at Halloween, the Christmas Carol Service, when local children performed, playing instruments, singing solos and as a choir.

Our tenant reintroduced music nights, but these were reduced to monthly and then only when permitted. However, the fortnightly quiz has become popular and the introduction of Play Your Cards Right and music bingo has attracted people and groups who we had not previously seen.

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.

Our aim of setting up an IT Club did not materialise.

However, we are pleased that The Strollers use the Yew Tree as their meeting point and that occasional events such as the ladies fashion show and Northend Womens' Group use the pub as their location for events.

These activities are organised by members outside the Management Committee and at no cost to the Society.

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

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

With an uncertain trading year due to closures and restrictions we were unwilling to invest in the improvements necessary to increase accessibility. Our small bounce back loan of £5,000 became repayable within the year and we received no other grant monies or external assistance.

**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.



Our main priority has been to keep the pub functioning at the centre of the community. Within the year we have provided significant financial support to our tenant and sought to help existing societies and activities.

**Item No 9 - Enhance The Services. (Long Term).**

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

Although these have not been a priority in the first few years, we have put in place the administrative infrastructure to start to plan for development. We have created a Vision sub-committee to consider and advise on the medium to long term development of The Yew Tree as a community hub. To complement this we have also created a Finance sub-committee to work with the Vision group to consider the options for financing. We have also created a business development sub-committee which has been designed to work with external organisations which may look to the Community Benefit Society for the leadership of their projects.

**Item No 10 - Enhance The Services. (Long Term).**

Once again, as with item 9 above, we have made no progress on this item.

Our tenant still aims to establish a B&B business, but this will depend upon detailed plans being approved, planning permission and the Society having the funds to develop the main building.

**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 principal source of income is from rent from our tenant, but this was somewhat affected by the impact of Covid restrictions on the hospitality industry. However, by having an income from our tenant for most of the year we managed to rebalance our finances and were able to pay interest on shares for the first time. With Lockdown restrictions now removed we are confident that we will strengthen the Society in the coming year and renew our focus on meeting our Social Impact objectives.