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Press Release

£360,000 Boost to Village Aiming to Acquire Community Pub

Ashton Hayes, Chester, Cheshire, 22 December 2023

Following an application to the UK Government's Community Ownership Fund (CoF) a grant of £360,000 has been awarded to the village community of Ashton Hayes in Cheshire

The vibrant community of Ashton Hayes is aiming to purchase its village's only pub, The Golden Lion, and reopen it as a community owned village pub & hub enterprise. The campaign has been underway for a number of years and is pleased now to be in direct contract negotiations with a willing seller. As part of the funding strategy for the project the Committee of the Community Benefit Society (CBS) submitted an application for grant funding to the CoF and we are delighted to announce that the CBS has secured grants totalling £360,000 as a very significant contribution towards the purchase, restoration and fit out of the building and the initial overheads of the new business. This is a huge boost to the project's finances and now makes the acquisition of the Golden Lion a truly viable proposition for the community.

Background

After a long and often challenging journey we are now in the position of having a willing seller engaged in negotiating contract terms, confirmed funding and clear and very real opportunity to acquire, restore and re-open the Golden Lion as a community asset thanks to the support being provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the award of this grant.

Building on the success of our previous community ventures such as the Going Carbon Neutral project and Village Community Shop, a Community Benefit Society was formed to drive the project forwards to acquire and reopen the long-closed Golden Lion pub for community benefit.

While this tremendous news moves the project ever closer to our ambitious goal, we are still some ways from our total project funding which will be needed to cover substantial refurbishment and reopening costs. To raise these additional funds the next critical step will be to garner local community, business and individual support through a community share offer which is due to be launched soon. Residents and investors will be invited to invest in the community enterprise which will ensure this vital village asset reopens and remains as a functioning pub and hub for generations to come.

Commenting on the success of the Community Ownership Fund Bid, Committee Chairman Hugo Deynem said:

"What a welcome Christmas Present to the community this news is, the whole CBS team is thrilled with today's announcement and the success of the bid to the CoF. The Golden Lion is the only pub in Ashton Hayes and historically has outstanding track record going back many years. The Golden Lion has always been a highly valued village institution, it was one of the very first to be listed as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2012. In January 2013, the pub ceased trading and since then the community and CBS project team have worked tirelessly to acquire the pub in order to retain it and protect it as an essential community asset. Earlier this year the owner agreed in principle, subject to agreeing detailed terms, to sell the pub to the community. We as a community desperately want our treasured Golden Lion back open and once again serving its community and thanks to this tremendous news, we are now even closer to achieving this following the successful application to the Community Ownership Fund being announced today."

David Wilson, Treasurer, said:

“A successful grant application like this brings the community one step closer to ensuring the success of the project and providing a truly local enterprise, serving and benefitting the community. While this grant is fantastic news as Treasurer I would now encourage as many supporters who are willing to think about supporting the project further through the subsequent funding and the community share offer which I hope to be able to release more information about in the New Year.”

Linda Peppin, Communications Officer, said;

“This successful application is a substantial step in the journey towards re-opening the Golden Lion for the long-term benefit of the community. Future support and engagement with the local community will be crucial during our continued programme of fundraising. I would encourage everyone who is willing and able to support the project to do so at the earliest opportunity. Please look out for our upcoming announcements.”

John Hirst, Vice Chair, said:

“The project has taken a giant step forward in securing this grant funding. The success of the application to the CoF is testament to the continuous hard work and dedication put in by the CBS team and the support of the Community, Parish and Borough Councils. We very much look forward to working with the owner to bring the purchase to a successful conclusion in the New Year”

Lisa Allman, Secretary of the CBS said:

“This grant represents a fantastic opportunity for residents of Ashton Hayes to strengthen the vibrancy and sustainability of our community. A pub and hub will provide an opportunity for local people, residents of neighbouring villages and visitors to be able to meet and interact in a way that hasn't been available for many years in Ashton Hayes since the Golden Lion closed its doors.”

Kate Harrison, Funding Lead, said:

“This is tremendous news and we are extremely grateful for the support and guidance provided by the Community Ownership Fund team both during our initial Expression of Interest and the subsequent full Grant Application. We have also received considerable support and advice from The Plunkett Foundation; our thanks go out to them for their continued work in supporting communities to retain important assets such as pubs under threat of closure. We would also like to thank those community pub groups who have shared their experience with us. Congratulations also to all the community groups that have received their funding news today.”



Picture: The launch of the Save the Golden Lion project, Ashton Hayes, Chester

Further information is available at <https://goldenlionashtonhayes.co.uk>, our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/TheGoldenLionAshtonHayes> or via email at goldenlionashtonhayes@btinternet.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

Further information from:

Hugo Deynem
Kate Harrison
John Hirst
Lisa Allman

Other recent Community ventures in Ashton Hayes:

Community Shop: <https://ourvillageshop.org.uk/>
Going Carbon Neutral and Ashton Hayes Community Energy Company: <https://www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk/>
Ashton Hayes Sports and Recreation Association: <https://ashtonhayespc.co.uk/community-info/ahsra-ashton-hayes-sports-and-recreation-association/>