

White Hart - Parish Council Meeting Commentary

Nov 2021

58/09: WHITE HART INN CORFE BREWERY STATEMENT.

Cllr. C. Brown reported that he had contacted Stonegate Group, the owners of the White Hart Inn pub, on behalf of the Parish Council, for an official update regarding its continued closure and obvious physical decline despite the lifting of the majority of Covid restrictions. This followed concerns from a number of residents.

Since receiving this response Cllr. C. Brown has now had a verbal discussion with the current tenants regarding their position and it is with great regret, and with their permission, that he must report that they have now confirmed they are in the process of leaving the premises. The Parish Council intends to inform the Stonegate of this to ensure that they are fully aware of the situation, and we will also seek reassurances from them in due course on the future of the pub. The reply received by Cllr. C. Brown would suggest that Stonegate feel that no concern has been shown by residents about the pub decline, which we do not believe to be the case. We would, therefore, urge all residents to highlight to Stonegate the importance of our local pub to us and the need for a village amenity to continue to exist.

March 2022

68/09: WHITE HART INN CORFE SALE UPDATE.

Cllr. J. Harrison reported that the owner of the White Hart Inn (Stonegate Group PLC) now intends to sell the pub. The guide price is £325,000. For full details, contact Stonegate who can put you in contact with the selling agent.

The Parish Council had recently successfully applied for an Asset of Community Value on the pub to allow residents/backers in the village to put together a bid to buy the property, allowing them six weeks in which to place that bid with the sellers.

That 6-week period is already close to its expiry date, so a vote was taken to see if a bid could be put together by extending this application period until July. This option was rejected by the Parish Council who felt that such a bid would not materialise in this period if this option was taken up and would only delay any potential sale that would get the pub up and running.

The Parish Council encourages any potential interest in buying the pub to be forwarded to the estate agent responsible for the sale.

May 2022

83/09: WHITE HART INN CORFE UPDATE – The White Hart Inn in Corfe has now been sold subject to contract. No further information on the potential buyer was available. Once the purchase is complete, it is hoped further information will become available.

Sept 2022

06/10: ANY OTHER BUSINESS – It has been reported that the new owner of The White Hart Inn at Corfe is currently canvassing local businesses to help him decide how best to proceed with renovations and appeal to the local area with what he could eventually offer. It is his intention to come to Corfe in November and a meeting with the Parish Council and residents to help with this process has been suggested.

Nov 2022

13/10: WHITE HART INN - UPDATE.

Last week, Cllrs Brown and Jackson had a Zoom call with the new owner of The White Hart. This was an introductory conversation in which he set out his thoughts on the future of the building. He was very up-front about his main motivation: to make money.

If a vibrant and profitable pub is the best use of the asset, then he would look to invest in a refurbishment. What he doesn't want to do is spend a lot of money and then find a pub isn't a viable business. Furthermore, he does not want to open a pub or similar business if it meant ruining another business within the area or alienating the local community who he said are often opposed to change.

We highlighted that the pub has great potential given its location and historically was a successful business we stressed there is a lot of demand in the village for a good pub that could become the centre of the community.

Clearly, the accounts he has seen only cover a more recent (unsuccessful) period. He wants to do more due diligence before deciding how to proceed. At present, he believes the Taunton & Pickering Golf Club is a venue that is doing well at the expense of the White Hart.

His other option is to seek an alternative use – nursing home, Airbnb, and residential housing were all mentioned. He believed the pub hadn't been assigned ACV status – we have made him aware it has and sent him the council letter.

Overall, we sensed he is in no rush to decide and is happy to 'landbank' the property for now. He disclosed he has a large portfolio of properties, including six 'open' pubs and three 'closed' pubs. However, there are also examples of former pubs that have been converted to other uses, such as Airbnbs.

We have sent him some photos of the building and car park, highlighting the state of dis-repair, and asked him to remove the estate agent's signs.

Overall, a friendly meeting, at the end of which we agreed to speak again.

May 2023

50/10: ANY OTHER BUSINESS – The deteriorating situation of the White Hart Pub and lack of any progress in providing the village with an acceptable amenity was highlighted by Cllr. B Lenthall. It was agreed that a letter of concern asking for some much-needed action would be sent off to the owner.

July 2023

57/10: WHITE HART INN - UPDATE – Cllr J Harrison reported that the Asset of Community Value listing on the White Hart Inn had now been restored after appearing to have been removed. He also reported a telephone conversation with the owner following on from our concerns over the neglect at the property. The owner has now placed the property up for sale and has reported that plenty of interest has been shown but that 'silly' offers and time wasting has been an issue for his agent. He currently

plans to continue advertising it for sale for the next two months and will then approach the council to what could be done. Here are the sale details.

<https://www.corfevillagesomerset.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/For-Sale-July-2023.pdf>

A discussion then took place on how the village and its residents might be able to get involved to improve the situation. This centred around the pub appearance and in restoration of the asset as a public house or similar. The consensus was that what is urgently needed is a large financial injection and energy and drive from a willing person or group prepared to make it work. The success of the Queens Arms at Pitminster and how they turned that pub around plus other village resident-run projects in the area were also highlighted as success stories. We can only hope that someone will give it a go with our pub. Government grants to support such an enterprise especially in rural areas lacking in amenities and in danger of losing a village asset are available to apply for see:

<https://www.corfevillagesomerset.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Community-Asset-Funding.pdf>

Sept 2023

67/10: WHITE HART INN - UPDATE – Cllr J Harrison reminded those present that the Asset of Community Value (ACV) on the White Hart Inn had now been restored after appearing to have been removed. He also reported a telephone conversation with the owner following our concerns over the neglect of the property – a threat was made by the owner that he would remove the roof to avoid business rates. He said the plan was purely a residential project. Cllr J Harrison invited the owner to our meeting and asked for plans of the proposals but neither happened.

The owner has now placed the property up for sale and is looking for the ‘right offer’. However, he has made it clear he has no intention to run it as a pub himself despite the ACV being in force.

He currently plans to continue advertising it for sale for the next two months and will then approach the council to see what can be done. For details on the sale, follow this link and type in Taunton:

<https://www.fleurets.com/search.html>

A discussion then took place on how sad it was to see our pub so neglected and could we not do something to improve its appearance or put pressure on the owner to show duty of care. This concern centred around the pub appearance and in restoration of the asset as a public house or similar. The consensus was that what is urgently needed is a large financial injection with energy and drive from a willing person or group prepared to make it work. The success of the Queens Arms at Pitminster and other nearby establishments, plus other village resident run projects near our area, were again highlighted as success stories in the hope that someone might try to make a go of things. We can only hope that something or someone will give it a go. Government grants to support such an enterprise especially in rural areas that are lacking amenities and in danger of losing a village asset do exist and are available for anyone to apply for once a business plan is in place.

Jan 2024

87/10: - WHITE HART INN UPDATE – Cllr J Harrison gave us a brief update on the White Hart following reports of a break-in at the property. The property owners have yet to inform us of their intended plans and are aware the White Hart Inn has an Asset of Community Value Order on it. We believe the owner wants to sell the property and land for a profit; this is why the ‘for-sale’ sign remains. He has increased the asking price to achieve this goal to such a level that it is now an unrealistic price in the current climate to any potential purchasers. Voices from the floor questioned

if the pub was now a viable option and could it be run by a village consortium if enough public interest were to be shown for this to be a sincere consideration. However, it was felt this was unlikely now especially given the asking price had been so inflated scaring off any serious publican or similar investors. We await news from the property owner when and if he is prepared to share any plans and will relay this on to residents.

Ps – The owner is **Corfe Estates Ltd**, an active company incorporated on 28 March 2022 with the registered office located in Manchester, Greater Manchester. Corfe Estates Ltd has been running for 1 year 11 months. There is currently 1 active director according to the latest confirmation statement submitted on 27th March 2023.