

## **CODDENHAM HUB/PUB WORKING GROUP**

### **Notes from inaugural meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September at the Coddendam Centre**

**Present** : Andrew MacPherson (TCC), Robin Collins (CCC), Ian Galbraith (ST M), Bliss Marshall (CCC), Paul Norris (CCS), Elaine Thomas, John Whitehead .

It was agreed that Andrew would chair the meeting and John volunteered to take secretarial notes. All agreed a regular rotation of chairs (and secretariat) was desirable.

The purpose of the group was discussed. The 2022 Community Survey had raised a number of key areas of concern and need for longer term action.

The 'Pub and Hub' workstream that emerged focussed on the loss of the Dukes Head and importance of a co-ordinated role for the existing community 'hubs'. These had subsequently been identified as the Coddendam Centre, the Community Shop, the Country Club and St Mary's Church.

This meeting was the first of a shared collaborative approach to the needs of the community, its gathering points, the future challenges and opportunities this presented.

All committed to the development of a joint 'position statement' to form part of the Coddendam Community Plan. The statement to summarise individual and shared actions between now and 2030.

The various community 'hubs' were addressed in turn, starting with "The Pub".

#### **"The Pub"**

Elaine gave background information on the Dukes Head which closed its doors in 2014 when it was placed on the market. The submission of an 'Asset of Community Value' and the owners made an early planning application for change of use which was rejected by the local planning authority and that rejection was subsequently upheld on appeal. As time progressed community focus shifted to the shop and saving the shop took precedence. A new planning application for change of the use for the pub to a residential dwelling was submitted in 2019 and approved in 2020. Little physical work on the site appears to have happened since then with the Grade II listed building remaining empty and possibly deteriorating. John advised that behind the scenes a lot of 'pre-condition' work required prior to any physical work being undertaken was being actioned between the owners and the planning authority. Also, within the last week, a further planning application for various work within the grounds of the building has been submitted. All this activity suggests that the owners are still intent on the conversion of the pub to a residential dwelling. Accordingly, there seems no scope for this site to revert back to a public house in the foreseeable future. It was agreed by all that any options for a 'Hub/Pub' put forward by this working group must recognise that reality.

#### **"The Shop"**

Paul gave background information on the shop launch and all concluded that it had been very successful. The shop incorporates a popular café offering for the community. The shop is heavily reliant on volunteers to support the manager, Bliss Marshall, in its operations. These volunteers work both 'front of shop' and behind the scenes. The shop provides an important service to the local community as well as passing trade, but it has little scope for further expansion on its site.

#### **"The Church"**

Ian explained that the village was blessed with a big church, but a small congregation. As a beautiful historic building it was very much on the Suffolk tourist trade and brought in many visitors from both within the UK and overseas. Coffee mornings, music events and festivals were held in the building making it potentially a great facility for the wider community as well as those that used it as a place of worship. In terms of finance, the building was a 'bottomless pit' with significant urgent work needed to its fabric. The launch of a new repair fund, will require a fresh engagement and communication with the community. Of note, was that the current North Bosmere vicar was retiring soon and a replacement may take some time.

### **“The Country Club”**

Bliss and Robin advised that the club is run by a committee of eight, but has had some staffing issues. It now has earlier opening hours and the visiting pizza van via the Coddendam Centre, has encouraged more usage. The snooker room is very much a bespoke offering. There is a large room downstairs that could potentially be converted. The club may be regarded as a private members' club, but all of the community are welcomed. A discussion was had on the catering offering, or rather lack of it. The facility was seen as a drinking establishment that could improve its catering offering perhaps along the lines of some simple staple lines being available, rather than as a full-offer restaurant. Andrew asked what sort of body the Club constituted and whether it had a charitable status (or similar) by which to raise grant funding.

### **“The Coddendam Centre”**

Andrew highlighted how the Centre had historically (and often anecdotally) been perceived as a burden on the parish precept, but with its move to a CIO it had now stabilised, with the precept more than halved and operating on a more commercial footing. Emphasis had been put on its environmental credentials, its economic sustainability and to provide a better return to the community it served. In 2022 it was awarded regional Community Centre of the Year and 'Most Active Community'. Storage capacity was in the process of being extended, along with the new meeting room for greater flexibility. The bowling green was (competitively) life expired and this useful outdoor space had scope for significant diversification of activities. Outline plans and quantity surveying had been prepared in 2021, but there had until now been other priorities, not least a significant legacy of repairs and maintenance issues. Development of the site could involve significant, six-figure expenditure and while CC Trustees have ambitious plans for the facility, they remained flexible as to the role the site might take. For example, were the shop at any point to lose its premises, the fall back might be new dedicated and expanded facilities on the Centre site. This would of course be exceptional circumstances, and all recognised the optimal location of the shop's current site.

### **General Discussion**

With all of the above facilities highlighted within the 'Hub/Pub' offering, John expressed the view, as a newcomer into the village, that we should not underestimate the extent of all these facilities given the relatively small size of the village. John felt that greater marketing of these village facilities was needed. As an incomer he had relied on the 'Ten Village News' to find out about local events and was surprised at the low subscription uptake within the village and contrasted it with the free 'In Touch' magazines being distributed monthly to every household in many other Suffolk villages.

Andrew pointed out the community website, established initially to communicate during the COVID19 pandemic was firmly established and had done much to raise the profile of Coddenham, locally, regionally and even internationally! All organisations had their own landing page and were encouraged to make greater use of the facility. Current viewing was circa 1500 pages a month.

All agreed that there needs to be an investigation of further offerings from the excellent facilities set out above. More publicity is needed so that more residents may know what is going on.

The position paper on initiatives needs to be circulated to invite villagers' view. Another meeting of this group then needs to be convened in early January (9/1/24 suggested) to look at that response.

Next step, Andrew & John to circulate meeting notes and then prepare a framework for a position statement, for all to contribute to and agree electronically by end of November latest.

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