



Diversification creates local community champions in rural pubs

A Suffolk pub landlord spoke yesterday about how diversification has boosted his rural business through the recession.

Stephen Thurlow, owner of the White Lion in Lower Ufford, explained how a series of annual events, a farm shop and a micro brewery have ensured that his pub is at the heart of his village community by providing essential services.

He was speaking yesterday to a group of pub operators, community groups and local partner organisations from Suffolk in an event hosted by the Pub is the Hub at The Anchor at Warbleswick near Southwold.

Having run, what is thought to be the third smallest pub in Suffolk, since 2003, Stephen Thurlow and his wife Gaynor realised that the only way they were going to develop their business in the East Suffolk village was by expanding it into the two acres of land surrounding the pub. A bonfire party, a Bentley car rally, a village sports day and beer festivals were just some of the annual events that the couple established with great success. Earlier this year the couple added a farm shop and microbrewery in an adjacent outbuilding. Much of the produce in the shop is from the couples' own pigs, cattle, chicken and bees with vegetables supplied by a neighbouring farm. Meanwhile, the micro brewery brews cask ale for the pub to Stephen's own recipes.

The key to the success of the expansion, according to Stephen, was to keep the Lower Ufford community onside. He explained: "We have only achieved what we have with the support from our villagers. We have, what I consider to be, a partnership with residents - from the village and beyond - and we have been careful to consult them in every respect along the way. In return they use the pub and put up with some of the larger events – we've seen 2,000 turn up to the Bentley car rally."

He also stressed that none of the recent development work would have been possible without the help of Pub is the Hub and the Suffolk Rural Economy Scheme. He added: "They have been instrumental in advising us and supporting our ideas for the scheme. They have even contributed a modest grant."

Also speaking at the meeting was Cllr Patricia O'Brien, Suffolk County Council's Chairman, who wholeheartedly supported the efforts of licensees such as Stephen and Gaynor Thurlow and she commented: "At a time of economic austerity it is even more important that we maintain local services for the benefit of the community. We have pledged to support pubs to become an integral part of their communities through our joint work with partners, the Rural Economy Scheme and the Pub is the Hub. We have identified two more pubs to join the scheme with a third in the pipeline and we want to work with even more."

Pub is the Hub is appealing to other landlords in rural pubs in the county to expand their services and facilities for the benefit of people in their communities through their Local Community Services Champions scheme. Their East Anglia Adviser, Terry Stork and his colleagues will now work closely with participants to facilitate the initiatives discussed. The meeting will be followed up by a support programme for licensees including half-day workshops, so that the priorities and ideas discussed can take shape over the coming weeks.

Guests also heard from Dr. Wil Gibson, the Chief Executive of Suffolk ACRE, a charity which supports sustainable rural community development and Jamie Conway from the Big Lottery Fund, which is funding the administration of the Local Community Services Champions initiative.

Gary and Sue Reader from the White Horse in Badingham commented: "We didn't know much about the support that was available until we were invited to this meeting. We were impressed by the presentations today and it's given us a lot to think about."

Any landlords who would like to know more about the scheme in Suffolk can go to www.communitychampions.org.uk or telephone 01423 546165 for more information.



1. Group photo caption (left to right): Jamie Conway from the Big Lottery Fund; Terry Stork from Pub is the Hub; John Longden from Pub is the Hub; Cllr. Patricia O'Brien from Suffolk County Council; Dr. Wil Gibson from Suffolk ACRE; Dawn Turpin from the Suffolk Rural Economy Scheme and Stephen Thurlow from the White Lion in Lower Ufford

2. Shows Stephen Thurlow from the White Lion in Lower Ufford

Notes to the editor:

- Pub is The Hub is a not-for-profit organisation initiated by HRH the Prince of Wales in 2001, which offers independent specialist advice on rural services diversification or community ownership of pubs, so they can provide viable local services at the heart of the community. With a solid track record of rural project development and delivery over that last ten years, Pub is The Hub aims to roll out the Local Community Services Champions scheme across other counties, including South Norfolk, Suffolk, North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Cornwall and Leicestershire over the next three years. For more information go to: www.communitychampions.org.uk and www.pubisthehub.org.uk
- The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) is responsible for delivering around half of all funds raised for good causes (14 pence of every pound spent on a Lottery Ticket) by The National Lottery. In May 2010, the big Lottery Fund awarded a grant over three years to Pub is the Hub, in order to support independent, specialist advice on community ownership and the diversification of pubs. The grant was part of the Reaching Communities programme, which is investing over £18.8 million across England to improve local communities and the lives of those most in need. For more information go to: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk.
- Jamie Conway, a Regional Officer for the Big Lottery Fund said 'We are delighted to have been able to support this initiative and look forward to seeing pub landlords across Suffolk champion greater social interaction within their communities.'

Press Enquiries:

Lisa Harlow
 Tel: 07917 757860
 Email: lisa@lisaharlow.co.uk

Pub is The Hub office: Tel: 01423 546165

