

## **Duke of Marlborough, Somersham**

### **Update for Somersham Parish Council, May 2023**

#### **Introduction**

The Duke of Marlborough reopened in April 2017, having been bought by the local Community; we have therefore now been trading for more than 6 years. While the pub is increasingly popular, we are still not back to the pre-Covid turnover, and we are still losing money, albeit at a much reduced rate.

We had to go back to Shareholders just before Christmas and raised about £14k in new Share Capital which enabled us to get through the Winter. We are very grateful for the continuing support of the Parish Council and have submitted a bid for some CIL money which focuses on reducing our energy consumption.

#### **Opening Hours and Service Offer**

We are currently open 5 days a week. Wednesday-Sunday.

- There is a drinks-only service on Wednesday.
- Food is available on Thursday quiz nights, and there is a monthly food truck on the third Thursday of the month. Other Thursdays are drinks-only.
- Food is available Friday, Saturday and Sunday
  - Friday – open from 4pm with a 6-7pm Happy Hour. Dinner service 6-8:30pm
  - Saturday – open 12-11pm but with breakfast on the first Saturday of the month. We offer lunch every Saturday from 12-2:30pm. (9-11am).
  - Sunday - open from 12-8pm with roasts available between 12 and 4pm.
- We have continued with the Friday/Saturday takeaway service.
- Kids eat for £1 is offered at the Friday and Saturday Dinner Service

We would like to open more, but this is constrained by staffing costs and lack of proven demand.

#### **Activities and Events**

We continue to offer an extensive programme of regular events as well as one-offs.

The regular events include:

- Wednesday Darts Night. This is very popular, we have 2 teams in a local league and host various competitions.
- A Monthly Book Club
- A wide variety of music
- Quizzes – now very popular, booking is essential.
- Film/Music quizzes
- Cocktail evenings (in the Birch Bar)
- Games night (Thursday) – slow to take-off

Special events such as:

- Beer Festivals
- Wine tasting
- Art Courses
- Discos

- Whisky tasting
- Halloween Party
- Valentine's Weekend
- Mothers Day
- St. George's weekend
- Themed food nights
- Wakes – a sad but important part of our role as a Community pub.

There are also major special events such as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee (for which we acknowledge financial support from the Parish Council) and the Coronation weekend, both of which were very successful. We are also breaking new ground with a Eurovision party on the 13<sup>th</sup> May.

While we enjoy putting on events they involve a lot of work, and we really need to increase our core revenue so that events are just the icing on the financial cake.

Our Loyalty Scheme is still running but has been slow to take off.

### **Staffing**

We continue to provide significant local employment with ~8 full and part-time staff. We regard providing a first employment/training opportunity for local young people an important part of our role.

We have a loyal band of Volunteers but are always on the lookout for a few more.

### **Challenges**

Neither we nor are customers are immune from the cost of living increases. Our input food costs have gone up significantly, and our electricity costs will go up dramatically in July which is why we are bidding for some CIL money.

We need to:

- reduce our electricity consumption
- improve profitability, especially the food margins
- increase turnover
- increase footfall
- reduce Staff costs.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

We think we have done well just to still be here, unlike many pubs, although we will face some increased local competition from the revamped Limeburners and the Barking Fox reopening. The long-term survival of the pub will depend on our shareholders, and the wider local community, patronising the pub on a more regular basis.

We feel that the pub is increasingly the centre of the local community, and Somersham would be a lesser place without it. The sense of Community during the Coronation Weekend was palpable.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the following people:

- The Chef and Manager, Aaron and April Douglas

- The rest of the loyal staff
- Our Volunteers
- Our Customers
- Our Shareholders
- The Management Committee

We are very grateful for financial support from the following:

- Somersham Parish Council
- Mid Suffolk District Council
- Power to Change
- The Plunkett Foundation

**David Thorne**

MC Chairman, Somersham Community Pub Ltd.