

Ashendon Community Pub Society Report 2025

A year ago, we received confirmation that we'd secured £250,000 from the government's Community Ownership Fund to purchase the pub, along with an additional £50,000 to cover initial running costs. This gave us the foundation to launch a share sale to raise the remaining funds needed. With support from the Plunkett Foundation, we developed a revised business plan to present to prospective investors. Lots of people contributed to this effort, but I'd particularly like to thank Sue Moldenado, Andy Theobald, Ashey Holbrook, Teresa Payne, Simon Blackburn and everyone on the committee that posted letters, arranged events, shared details of the share sale on line and having conversations with friends and neighbours. Over 200 people responded, purchasing shares ranging from £100 to thousands of pounds. The process to sell the shares and create a register of members was handled diligently by Martin Saunders, Andy Howes and Sue. Thank you.

We raised enough money to buy the pub.

We followed a thorough due diligence process while finalising the pub purchase, led by Roger Coplestone, Paul De Lusignan, James Morris, Andy Howes and me. We are very grateful to Sue and Michael Rand for accommodating surveys on electrics, wood rot, the kitchen, fire alarms, plumbing and the building itself.

However, we're especially thankful that Michael and Sue chose to sell their pub to their community. They didn't have to. They chose to sell it to us, and the deal was completed by the end of October 2024.

It took about six weeks to prepare the building ready for opening. Andy Theobald and Ashley Holbrook led this work, but they'd be the first to say it wouldn't have been possible without the support of a dedicated group of builders and tradespeople, some of whom generously donated their time. They have ensured the building is safe, legal, warm, has non-leaky plumbing. They have overseen painting projects, improvements to fire safety, and the refurbishment of three of five bathrooms to name just a few of the improvements accomplished.

As part being ready to open, Sian led an open day, and Paul Horwood organised a working party day.

We carried out a democratic process to rename the pub, led by Sally Dorling, who is also spearheading a branding exercise. The result is a new name: The Ash Tree. And some excellent branding that will be unveiled soon. A group is currently preparing signs, marketing materials, and a dedicated pub website. Thanks to Sally, Julian, Sian, Paul de Lusignan, and Sue for their efforts.

We opened the pub just before Christmas. Using funds from the government revenue grant, we employed Sue Cummings, and we are incredibly grateful to Liam, who, despite his full-time job, voluntarily set up the bar, negotiated with suppliers, and handled all the practical details of bringing a mothballed pub back to life for a thirsty community. They created a warm and welcoming place for us and was a very significant and, I imagine, exhausting undertaking. Congratulation to Liam and Sue and thank you.

The efforts to raise the grant, sell shares, and work out what the heck to do, once the community received the keys, was overseen by the steering committee, which met every month during 2024, with about 15 people in the loop and some very regular attendees. Thank you, David and

Suzy Crwys-Williams, for hosting us. That committee has shifted legal and financial responsibilities to a small Management Team consisting of Paul de Lusignan, James Morris, Andy Theobald, Andy Howes, and myself. We've taken on the management of The Ashendon Community Pub Society Limited, making important decisions about formalising our strategy and ensuring everything we do complies with regulations and represents the community. The management team meets monthly.

I'd like to highlight Andy Howes. Andy has managed our finances. It's a critical role with significant responsibility and often goes unnoticed. Thank you, Andy, for your diligent work.

Sally, Andy Howes, and I have been working to find a long-term tenant, as this is the plan for the pub's future. We've received several applications, but so far, they've either been declined by us or haven't progressed to a signed contract. For now, we're pleased to have recently employed Brett Sewell, who's living at the pub and ensuring the bar is open Thursday to Sunday. Andy Howes, me, Sue M, and Andy Theobald provide support. We're planning to open the B&B and kitchen by the 1st May with trial events are being planned and will be publicised soon. Brett is working on the compliance, and regulations associate to the kitchen, and Andy Theobald has lead renovations of the bedrooms and bathrooms. Ieva has supported us through the interior design decisions and has defined a high quality, consistent and warm feeling for the pub's decorations. Thank you.

Additional funds came from government Community Ownership Fund support grants, Nether Winchendon Village Council, Ashendon Parish Council, and several individuals. We've also benefited from work donated by Chris Rand, John Curtis, Stuart Barr of Barr Kitchens, and Chris Craggs of MCFT kitchen equipment services. Thank you. Donations and money from fund raising events regularly arrive in our bank account. Thank you to everyone who continues to support the pub financially.

Finally, I want to thank everyone that has come to the pub to breath life into it again. There are times when it's quiet of course, but equally when there are events or when a food truck arrives the place is rammed.

I hope this gives a clear picture of what Ashendon and our surrounding villages of Nether Winchendon, Upper Winchendon, Wotton Underwood, Westcott, Dorton and Chilton have achieved. I've mentioned many names, but as is often the case, I may have missed some—not because their contributions were any less important, but because so many people have been involved. I believe our community is truly grateful for everyone's vision and hard work.