



START Community Trust

Minutes of the 2021 annual general meeting held on Thursday 23rd September 2021 in Rogate village hall

Directors present: Max Harwood, Charlotte Homan, Lucy Petrie, Mairi Rennie, Neil Ryder, Simon Ward

Other attendees: 37 members and 3 non-members

1. Welcome and chairman's introduction

As chairman, Neil Ryder welcomed the excellent turnout at this first physical AGM, including some new members and a few non-members, and he reported that there had been many very pleasant notes from those who were not able to attend. He proposed to deal with the legal requirements of the AGM first and then he and START's two vice-chairs would report on the year's activity, before moving onto the other two parts of the meeting – a guest presentation and a discussion about the White Horse pub in Rogate.

2. Audit exemption or auditor appointment

The board recommended continuing to claim exemption from audit under the relevant laws and FCA regulations for the current year. Members voted unanimously in favour.

3. Receive accounts

The annual report had included a summary of the accounts and the formal version had been made available via the START website. Members voted unanimously to accept the accounts for the year to 31 March 2021.

4. Resolutions proposed by members: There were no additional resolutions proposed.

5. Election of directors

In accordance with START's rules, one third of the directors (Neil Ryder and Mairi Rennie) stood down and offered themselves for re-election. Both were re-elected unanimously and there were no further nominations for the board, which therefore remained as follows:

- **Max Harwood**
- **Charlotte Homan, vice-chair**
- **Lucy Petrie, treasurer**
- **Mairi Rennie, secretary**
- **Neil Ryder, chairman**
- **Simon Ward, vice-chair**

6. Design and allocation policies

Neil Ryder summarised the board's activities for the previous year as being in two main areas: the White Horse pub (see below), and preparing START to be ready for when it found suitable sites for affordable housing. This latter work primarily involved choosing a development partner – Hastoe Housing Association - and agreeing design and development policies with it. These were covered in the annual report sent to all members, and had been spearheaded by START's two vice-chairmen, Charlotte Homan (CH) and Simon Ward (SW), so he introduced them to handle any questions about these and to introduce the next key preparatory step – agreeing an allocation policy.

- a. Design policy: SW, a retired chartered surveyor, land agent and rural estate manager, had initiated and developed 4 separate housing developments at West Dean in partnership with Hastoe and explained that one of the reasons for choosing to work with them was that they share START's determination that its housing designs provide a '*sense of place*', ie reflect the local vernacular, while meeting high, modern standards of energy and water efficiency. START's design policy was

therefore based on Hastoe's New-Build Standard and the SDNPA's design guide. One member asked if START might see a new affordable housing development as an opportunity to consider innovative design but SW responded that it would still need to work with the "grain" of the design guidance issued by the SDNPA and that Hastoe had a strong track record in designs that maximise energy performance and minimise environmental impact.

- b. Allocation policy and development site review: CH summarised the board's work in continuing to seek sites suitable for small numbers of affordable houses, and to talk to potential sellers (eg the developer hoping to build next to the Flying Bull in Rake) and she appealed for any possible help in locating opportunities, emphasising that START, as a community land trust, can look at smaller sites and rural "exception sites" not available to other developers, so that it could be a valuable partner to owners of small unused plots.

CH also summarised the need for an allocation policy to prioritise applicants for any sites that were developed. She referred to the allocation policy on Midhurst CLT's website as a good example, and invited members' thoughts on categories of people that might be prioritised.

Questions were answered as follows:

Q Has the board discussed with other local housing associations whether they have tenants looking for larger or more suitable homes, who could be given priority?

A No, and we will discuss that, but we will soon be planning a housing needs survey, probably to be conducted by Chichester District Council. This is a requirement before we go much further and should identify existing social housing tenants needing new homes. However, as explained, people already living in the three parishes would probably be the top priority.

Q Would only members be considered as potential tenants?

A Members would certainly be given priority and only members could become tenants, but it would not be essential to be a member to apply.

7. Any other business and member questions

There were no further questions or items of discussion so the formal part of the meeting was closed.

8. Date of next AGM: Friday 23rd September 2022 at 6pm

The formal AGM was followed by two further items, which are summarised in the attached article to appear in the November issue of R & T News.



R & T NEWS ARTICLE Sept 2021 issue

START's first physical AGM (and White Horse update!)

On 23rd September, just after R&T News was 'put to bed' for its October edition, START hosted an unusual meeting in the Rogate village hall – unusual not only because it was our first physical AGM (our very first AGM in 2020 had to be via Teams), but also because we had agreed to make it a public meeting to give an update on the White Horse. Given the number of apologies from people who had shot off on holiday as soon as the schools went back, some who were still shielding at home, etc we were please with the turnout: about 40 people came, including some non-members – of whom three joined on the spot! Let's make the point here: it only costs £1 to become a member for life (see our website address in the logo above)!

We got the formalities out of the way as quickly as possible, including the re-election of the directors and acceptance of the accounts (a small surplus of £360 for the year, giving us total funds of £1.868) we had a discussion about our design policy for any affordable houses we manage to build in time, and about how we would prioritise local people applying to live in them. We've sent a more detailed summary of these discussions to our members but the minutes of the meeting are also available on the downloads page of our website.

We were then honoured to have a presentation from, and discussion with, the chairman of our neighbouring Midhurst Community Land Trust, Adrian Moore. Incorporated a couple of years ahead of us, Midhurst CLT has gone through the same processes as we have to get underway – looking for sites where they could develop community-owned affordable houses for local residents. Like us, they have worked with the Chichester District Council (CDC) and others to identify possible plots, both inside the Midhurst town settlement boundary and in surrounding rural areas. They have the advantage, of course, that there are some housing sites being developed in Midhurst and, under national and SDNPA policies, these have to include a percentage of affordable 'units' – so Midhurst CLT managed, just a few months ago, to complete a purchase from Metis Homes, a developer, to take on two affordable houses included in their site in Lamberts Lane. They have now rented these out to local people at 70% of the going rate. They have also, though, had a recent disappointment: after extensive work on plans to build six one-bedroom flats on a garage site near Midhurst the fire station, they have had to withdraw their planning application as they were unable to meet the SDNPA's planning requirements without making the development too expensive for affordable housing. Adrian's team are still working on a possible large building conversion project and are still talking to owners of other properties, and his main message to our members was: don't lose hope; it can take a long time to find viable sites and some still fail to get going, but CLTs all over the country, as well as in Midhurst, are showing it can be done. In the meantime, the government, CDC, SDNPA and parish councils are all rooting for us - and lot of local people are hoping we can provide affordable homes for them or their offspring, as well as for essential workers. What we need most is for some local people with small surplus plots of land that we might be able to develop with them – to the benefit of both sides.

Finally, our meeting came to the part some people had particularly come to hear – our discussion about the community effort to buy the White Horse pub. It was, of course, disappointing that we were not able to report a stunning success and the renaissance of our community pub, but we were able to describe what had been going on in the background and where the project stands now.

As everyone must know by now, when Harvey's put the pub up for sale last November, as the parish council had registered it as an asset of community value, START was able to register an interest in bidding for it, and this delay the sale process by 6 months while the community considered a bid. START, R&T News, the PC, the village hall and others (notably Ann Arnold) financed the project and set up a joint steering committee to carry out a residents' survey, which received well over 250 responses. These made it very clear the community wanted the pub to survive, and what they wanted it to be like. A lot of people offered to help with the project, so we set up a 'White Horse working group (WHWG), who have worked tirelessly ever since, assessing the viability of this pub and trying to achieve a good outcome.

Basically, the group took extensive advice via START's membership of the Plunkett Foundation (the national charity for community businesses) and got a valuation report from them; spoke to various local pub operators and past management of the White Horse, visited the pub with local builders to assess its current state, spoke (many times) to other bidders, and spent a lot of time trying (in vain) to find potential managers for a community pub.

The valuations from the Plunkett study were a good guide: if it were still running and profitable, they felt it would be worth £450k; if it had recently closed but was still equipped & stocked, they valued it at £330k; but in its present state, not operating and stripped of equipment, they put its value at £295k.

Our working group concluded that the pub could be viable if it could be bought for up to £350k and the community raised £150,000 to refurbish as a community pub, but that operating management might be the sticking point for a full community bid. They talked to a local “angel investor” willing to invest a 6-figure sum in order for members of his family to take on the pub, but that wasn’t enough.

The working group concluded that the ideal would be to find a person / company with the skills and experience to buy and operate the pub competently, but prepared to give the community a significant share in (and influence over) the business in return for raising the money to refurbish / re-equip it.

Fleurets, the national pub agency specialist representing Harvey’s were known to have received bids from two bidders at the end-May deadline: one from a property developer wanting to convert the pub into residential property and thought to have bid about £400k. However, this bidder failed to provide proof of funding for his first bid and seemed to conclude (rightly in our view!) that there would be little chance of ‘change of use’ permission from the SDNPA, so he is thought to have withdrawn. Two other property developers interested in converting the property also concluded that, being in the national park – with change of use permission doubtful – and on the main road, with no garden and little space upstairs, it would not be viable.

A group who run a small group of pubs in Willesden, London and are looking to start a small chain of community-partnership rural pubs also started taking an interest (some of you might have met them at the popup pub). After some discussions, our WHWG agreed not to bid against them, if they were prepared to share control with the community. This was considered to be the optimal compromise between the community wanting control of the pub and not wanting the liability of managing it. The idea was that they would buy the pub and then invite the community to fund its refurbishment / improvement in exchange for a significant share in the business - the details were still under discussion and they were keen to test this community partnership model and then apply it elsewhere.

This group made several bids but Harveys turned them down – we think Harvey’s had been too tempted by the higher bid from the developers. So the Willesden group seem to have lost heart and are probably now looking elsewhere. At a steering group meeting in early September, we all agreed to seek a meeting with the SDNPA to discuss their stance, particularly over ‘change of use’ and the obligations of owners of listed buildings (which the White Horse is). We also agreed to seek a meeting with the Harvey’s directors to try to understand their position and see if we can help to find a solution. We probably need to make it clear that the community will block any attempt to get permission for change of use of the building; that we will endeavour to get the SDNPA to look at their obligation to maintain a listed building; and that, in the meantime, the building is deteriorating, which does their reputation and the community no good at all - this has surely been underlined by the recent break-in at the property!

One thing was clear at our meeting: there is still a strong interest in finding a way to keep a pub in the heart of the village and on the edge of the community recreation ground. As there seem to be no other bidders around, the urgency has diminished, but we all want to see this resolved as soon as possible. We hope our angel investor would still be there in the background; we have people interested in the upstairs for B&B accommodation, etc – but, at the end of the day, we now feel we know what it’s worth and we still haven’t persuaded Harveys to be realistic. We hope we might eventually end up coming back to the village with a proposition to raise at least some of the money to save the pub, but I’m afraid we are not yet able to present a clear proposal.

We’d like to finish with a few statistics from the Plunkett Foundation: over the last year, 13 new community pubs were opened across the country, making 133 in total so far; these new groups raised £2.7 million from 2,616 new community shareholders (60% of the money needed to finance the start-ups; the average cost of buying the pubs was £294,000, with an average of £160,384 spent on renovations.

Most impressively, the survival rate of community pubs stands at 99% (only one has closed) and 84% of the community pubs responding to the Plunkett survey are feeling confident or very confident about the coming months.

Again, don’t lose hope!