

The King William Inne - meeting held at Catcott School, Thursday 31 July 2025

Present

Jim Jones (Trade Director, Palmers)

Rick Dykes (The White Lion, Broadwindsor)

Two representatives of the Parish Council

c30 villagers

The Parish Council reminded attendees that the Parish Council would not be facilitating meetings after this one. Mark Adamson offered to take and circulate notes from the discussion that followed.

The meeting took the form of a series of questions and answers posed to Jim and Rick. The notes below attempt to summarise the key points discussed – these are grouped together under appropriate headings, rather than in the order in which they were discussed.

Introductions

Rick introduced himself as Chair of the Management Committee of The White Lion in Broadwindsor, which converted to a community pub in 2022, using the same model being proposed by Palmers for the King William Inne. Coincidentally, Rick is also Chair of the Parish Council for Broadwindsor.

Jim introduced himself again as Trade Director at Palmers with responsibility for The King William and summarised the business model in place between Palmers and The White Lion (this is covered in the notes from the previous meeting).

The White Lion – aims and background

Rick explained that the pub was the last one in the village and that there was a strong community feeling that it was important to save the pub.

Consideration was given briefly to purchasing the pub, but not seriously and it was decided quite quickly to pursue the model proposed by Palmers. The local trade “loves the beer!” so there was no desire to create a free house and Palmers were (and are) committed to The White Lion for historical reasons.

From a financial point of view the aim was to achieve break-even (which has been achieved in each year of operation), whilst creating a village hub to complement the village hall and community shop. Local competition included several pubs within a few miles.

It was understood that the pub trade had become difficult because of financial challenges (wages, inflation, energy costs etc) and cultural issues (people drinking at home), but it was felt that the commitment and support shown by Palmers and the desire of the community to save the pub were sufficient enablers to reach the decision to go ahead.

The strong local community spirit has been key to getting the pub off the ground and supporting it subsequently. The fact that the village already had a community shop meant that the model was already successful in the village, although it hasn't played a significant role in the development of the pub operation.

The local Parish Council provides a small annual grant to the pub and there is a good relationship with the village hall, including a recent agreement that the green space at the village hall can be used for pub events as the pub itself has limited external space.

The White Lion – initial steps taken and role of the Management Committee

A Management Committee was formed, initially of nine people but now reduced to seven. Two of the members had experience in the pub trade.

During the setup phase, the commitment needed by the Management Committee was very significant - for example, Rick considered it was virtually a full-time job for him - although once set up and running, the commitment reduced. Nevertheless, the Management Committee still has an important role to play and so needs to be a permanent feature.

Considerable renovation was needed and the community generated £60,000 to enable renovation (2/3^{rds}) and provide working capital (1/3rd).

Some of the money generated came from small grants, some from Crowdfunder, some from investment by villagers and the rest from general fundraising activities (the latter was the majority). Individual villager investments ranged from £5 to £1,000+, with the average somewhere over £100. Advice and guidance was and is available from an organisation called Plunkett, a charity working with communities who wish to run pub or shop facilities.

The business was set up as a Company limited by guarantee, with shares issued to investors but with a clear statement that there was no expectation of providing dividends to all other financial returns to the investors. Should the business cease to operate, there would be a nominal return to investors.

It was decided at the outset to employ a management team of two to run the pub day-to-day and to organise other support required, including paid help and volunteers from the village to work shifts in the bar, waiting on tables and helping in the kitchen.

The White Lion – running the pub

Since inception as a community pub, there have been two sets of managers. The first was in place for a year and the current managers have been in place for 2 1/2 years. It had been disappointing to lose the first set of managers, but they had worked hard to get things running and the second set has been very effective at helping to grow turnover, bringing new ideas. One of the managers is front of house and one is the chef. They are a couple and live in, which helps from a financial point of view as accommodation forms part of their remuneration as well as meeting insurance requirements.

The pub is open Tuesday to Sunday, providing food Wednesday to Saturday evenings, as well as Friday to Sunday lunchtimes. In addition to the couple who are now the managers, there is some paid help and 20 regular local unpaid volunteers. This combination has always ensured that there are sufficient staff to deliver services.

The general downturn in the hospitality trade has meant that there are many managers available. The big challenge was not in finding candidates (they sourced candidates through online advertising, agencies and word-of-mouth) but in selecting from those available. The managers are on three months' notice and Rick said this was sufficient when the first managers left and he would be confident that it would be sufficient time to find a replacement if necessary.

Some clientele use the pub as a drinking pub, but the food is an extremely important feature. Gradually, the pub has developed as a 'destination' pub - in other words, a place that people from outside the area go to for dinner.

The White Lion – financial performance

The initial working capital of £20,000 went towards stock, wages and other expenses. Palmers supported on preparing the pub for business and have kept rents at discounted levels up to the present day to help financial outcomes.

Prior to converting to be a community pub, The White Lion had been turning over £90,000 per annum. It is now turning over £200,000 per annum and in each of the three complete years of business has broken even or made a small profit, which has been reinvested in the pub.

Approximately 60% of the revenue comes from wet sales (drink) and 40% from dry sales (food). The longer-term aim of the Management Committee is to reverse those percentages.

Financial performance has enabled the creation and maintenance of a small reserve fund to pay for unexpected expenses and is something the Management Committee views as important.

The White Lion – lessons learned

- Because of competition, it is important to differentiate in some way - currently, the key differentiator is that Friday night is rib night, something no other local pub provides - The pub is packed every Friday and does very well for Sunday lunch
- It is important to communicate with the villagers to outline developments and ideas - this is quite hard to do and a monthly paper newsletter is now being created as digital communication doesn't work for all of the population
- One of the big challenges at the outset was differences of opinion between members of the Management Committee – over time, however, members came to realise that they needed to consider what the public wants, rather than what they themselves might prefer

Relationship between Palmers and The White Lion

- Rick said that the relationship is excellent and that Palmers has been very supportive, both through the setup period and subsequently. Jim has been involved throughout, having championed the model at Palmers, and has been personally very important to the whole process for The White Lion
- Jim reiterated his personal commitment and Palmers' corporate commitment to implementing the same model at The King William, should the village wish to proceed

How does The White Lion compare with The King William?

- The King William is approximately twice the size of The White Lion in terms of internal space and covers
- The King William outside seating area is approximately twice the size of that at The White Lion
- The White Lion has no car park

Catcott's experience of The White Lion!

Paul Mott said that he had visited it recently on a Sunday afternoon and had had a very positive experience; it was busy, food was good and the team members engaged with him well.

In addition, another villager has subsequently provided this review (thank you!):

We decided to do a bit of undercover work and had lunch in Broadwindsor today. Lovely little pub in a charming village. The lady that does front of house was very nice, and without prompting told us a bit of the history about it being a community pub etc.

A few 'takeaways' that may be of interest. They have only just started doing Friday lunches for this summer and would expect to keep those going until September when the demand will drop. There were only 2 or 3 tables busy today, although this evening was fully booked for food (27 covers and they keep around 20 available for walk ins). They struggle to get locals eating there, so most are travelling in. The lady said it was a struggle running the place, but that they had been there 2 & half years.

The beer was good, I had a '200', IPA was not available as the locals don't want it. The community provided the labour when renovating the place and did a great job. Whilst the pub is half the size of the KW, the village is apparently 3 times larger than Catcott.

The King William – Palmers' commitment

Jim stressed that Palmers is very keen to retain The King William and believes the best option is for it to be run on the same model as deployed for The White Lion. Some of the detail of how Palmers would help would depend on the nature of the proposal from the village, but Jim stated that Palmers would provide help in a range of ways, including:

- Advice and guidance
- Preparing the pub for reopening
- Financial support through measures such as reduced rent to enable the pub to become established

The King William – why has it not been successful with tenants?

Jim said:

- There is no specific apparent reason
- The last tenants focused on wet rather than dry, which cannot be successful

The King William – other points of discussion

- What revenue is needed? Jim has provided a spreadsheet to complement the work that Richard Strode has already carried out – these have been circulated with these notes
- Is there any flexibility to source non-Palmers ales? No – Jim has provided a link to the Palmers catalogue of what can be accessed through Palmers ('Trade List 2025') – [Click here for the April 2025 Palmers Trade portfolio](#)
- Would a soft drinks mix-tap be available? Yes, Palmers has recently signed an agreement with Coca Cola to provide these at its pubs.

- How is the beer best kept and served? *I missed the detail of this, I'm afraid, but it is clearly important and will be addressed further if it is felt that we should go to next steps*

The King William – headline set-up needs

- Creation of a Management Committee
- Internal furnishing
- Provision of any missing/sub-standard bar and catering equipment
- Acceptable accommodation for the managers
- Outside furnishing
- Tidying-up of the outside of the building and the outside areas
- Perhaps opening of the garden
- Recruitment of live-in manager/chef
- Sourcing of other staff
- Commitment of village volunteers

Suggested next steps (these are my personal thoughts – not discussed at the meeting)

1. Set up a Management Committee to carry out further investigation (this could be an interim group, with a permanent group formed later) and:
 - Consider the value of/need for formal interaction with the Catcott Village Association and the Village Hall Association
 - Consider whether/how to communicate with villagers other than those whose email addresses we have access to
2. Visit the King William with Jim in order to, amongst other things:
 - View the state of the building and its contents
 - Understand from Jim the general support that Palmers would provide to enable renovation work and kitting-out
 - Consider practical options for use of the upstairs accommodation
 - Consider whether the garden could be opened to pub users
 - Consider how the pub's facilities could be used to provide other means of generating revenue
3. Visit the White Lion with Rick in order to, amongst other things:
 - View the way in which the pub is organised and how it is used
 - Meet the managers and hear about the arrangements from their point of view
 - Understand in more detail the commitment needed from the community to enable day-to-day running of the pub
4. Reflect on all of the above and decide on any further steps

Notes prepared by Mark Adamson, 3 August 2025