

STRAP supporters' letters to Uttlesford District Council

Dear

I am writing as Chair of the Save The Railway Arms Pub (STRAP) group in support of Saffron Walden Town Council's (SWTC) nomination of the Railway Arms as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). As you know there has been a long history of ACV nominations in respect of the Railway Arms dating from 2013 which has mirrored the pubs decline from a thriving local to its current condition; closed, for sale to the highest bidder, in danger of development and of joining the ever expanding list of public houses, throughout the country, now lost to their communities.

Residents of Saffron Walden have, on two previous occasions, during this period, sought to nominate the Railway Arms as an ACV - whilst it was clearly struggling and starved of resources, but before its eventual closure in January this year. These nominations were not taken forward on the basis of technicalities concerning eligibility to nominate under the Community Right to Bid. The current SWTC nomination would appear to have addressed all these concerns and is, I believe, a valid nomination made at a crucial point in the life of the Railway Arms.

The Railway Arms dates from 1865 and the arrival in the town of the Audley End to Bartlow branch line. Built in the same style and with the same materials as the station building itself, it was clearly intended to serve travellers and traders using the station. Though historic, it is not listed and, without its broader landscape of line, warehouses, sheds etc., advice suggests it is not listable as being of national importance. It is however clearly of local significance and, were there a Local List in Uttlesford, it would surely have been added to it before now and would benefit from some protection in planning terms.

In the current circumstances though it is unprotected, whilst its owners recognise and have advertised its development potential. At present only the ACV nomination secures it against permitted development rights and its possible change of use to a shop, supermarket, cafe or to certain classes of office space, as we have seen elsewhere in the town over recent years. Such a change of use, or indeed one won through an application for planning permission, would leave the town poorer in terms of the public domain and the south side of the town with only one public house to serve its expanding population and developing sense of community.

As I understand it the council has to decide 3 points in considering whether to register the Railway Arms as an Asset of Community Value: 1. Is the Railway Arms in Uttlesford? 2. Is it of Community Value, in that it furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community? 3. If so, is this Community Value non-ancillary. The first test is clearly passed and, in essence UDC must register the Railway Arms as an ACV if, in their opinion: (a) there is a time in the recent past when an actual use of the building or other land that was not an ancillary use, furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community, and (b) it is realistic to think that there is a time in the next five years when there could be non- ancillary use of the building or other land that would further (whether or not in the same way as before) the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

In terms of the recent past the actual use of the building as a public house clearly furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community in that it attracted people from different social and professional backgrounds, providing a space for interaction between people who might not otherwise meet and in so doing it benefitted social cohesion and wellbeing. It has been a place of celebration, often at times of local, national, and international significance, and as such it has been part of the social fabric of the town. These are not ancillary uses.

Turning to the next five years it is clear that Saffron Walden could benefit enormously from a community owned pub, with a strong community ethos. It could be more successful than a pub

focussed solely on food and drink. In support of this argument I have only to point to the George and Dragon in Hudswell, Yorkshire which was closed for two years before it was bought by the local community in 2008. The community there went on to develop a range of services for the community, over and above food and alcoholic drinks, including a pick and return library, a shop and a community allotment. Early this month it was named CAMRA Pub of the Year 2017, no doubt in recognition of its integral, non ancillary community value.

The recent STRAP AGM mandated the expanded committee to investigate putting in place a legal entity (possibly a Community Benefit Society or Community Interest Company) with the ability to put in a bid for the Railway, to put together a business case and explore the level of interest within the wider community. Should we proceed we will seek to ensure that any re-opened pub would be family-friendly and attractive to all parts of the community, with good quality food and drinks priced to suit all pockets. Thus it is clear that the second and third tests are passed. In the few weeks since then we have seen coverage in the local press and our membership numbers have soared, reaching close to 100.

We have been accepted onto the Plunkett Foundation's 'More Than A Pub' programme and have completed the associated Action Plan. We are now in contention for a bursary of £2500 to meet early set up costs. We plan to keep working over the coming weeks and to report back to a general meeting on 5th April. It would be great if we could also report that the Railway Arms has been registered as an Asset of Community Value by Uttlesford District Council.

Kind Regards

Dave Kenny

Dear

I am writing in support of the 'Railway Arms' being so designated for several reasons, which I enumerate below.

1. The public house, when open, is a place not just where alcohol is consumed but as its title implies is a venue in which the public can meet on a social basis and interact with their fellow neighbours.
2. I can categorically vouch for this point being true as a vice president of the Saffron Walden Musical Theatre Co., that after every rehearsal, many of this group's members would meet there to relax and enjoy each other's company, As the rehearsals last from early September to the show in mid March this happens on a weekly basis and latterly a twice weekly occasion. Often after the show we would have our final party there also.
3. The pub has a real value in our society by virtue of the community cohesion it can create. In the old days each pub had its darts team and I recall the 'Railway' putting up a Tug – of – War team and a five a side football team for the Saffron Walden Carnival on more than one occasion. With the right attitude and proper dedication this sort of philosophy can once again be engendered in a family pub which has a catchment area of the entire southern part of the town,
4. The area in the immediate vicinity of the 'Railway' is one in which many residents could benefit from, for example, a bring and take book exchange, sociable subsidised coffee mornings and afternoon tea parties designed for seniors groups. These sorts of activities bind the community together, combat boredom and loneliness and enhance a sense of well being in our society.

For the above reasons and many more not stated here, I would urge you to recommend to Cabinet what I believe and what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his budget speech last week – “we recognise the value of pubs as community assets”, - and grant the 'Railway Arms' ACV status.

Yours sincerely
Robert Eastham

To whom it may concern,

I would like to lend my support for the application for the Railway Arms in Station Street, Saffron Walden to become ACV status. I moved into Saffron Court opposite the pub in June 2008 and, being new to the town, the Railway was my first port of call.

In those days the pub was very well run and supported, I became a member of Saffron Walden Rugby Club by meeting their vets team who used to meet in the pub every Wednesday. Aside from the rugby club, Saffron Striders, Walden Tri, the Walden Am Dram group and many other clubs used the pub.

Sadly the pub was taken over by Charles Wells approx 5 years ago and their sole intent was to sell tenancy agreements to incompetent licensees over the past few years and the pub went into decline. I along with many other locals feel that if the pub was run by people who cared about the pub and the local community, rather than greedy corporations demanding extortionate profits that the pub would not only survive but thrive.

The fact that there is a campaign group set up to save the pub supports this argument. I hope you consider favourably the application and give the local community the opportunity to save this much-loved pub

Best regards
Steve Langford

Dear

I believe that you are working on behalf of Uttlesford District Council in deciding whether the The Railway Arms should be given status of an Asset of Community Value.

As a local businessman I have seen the decline in the number of Public Houses over the past number of years, not only in the town of Saffron Walden but in the surrounding villages within the Uttlesford area. With the closure of these "Public" Houses, we have lost the facility of places where people can meet to discuss the days events and forge relationships.

Places such as these are not just full of character, in this instance the Railway Arms used to serve the people using the old Railway Station itself, but are a meeting place for members of the local community, not somewhere you would choose to meet up if it were permanently closed and turned into a Tesco Express or something similar.

I personally have made lots of long standing friends both of social and business nature which I would not have done if places like The Railway Arms did not exist. In this respect I would strongly suggest that The Railway Arms is a place of character and in being so is an Asset of Community Value, and its status should be protected as such so that the next generation have the same opportunity to have such a facility to relax, develop acquaintances, both social and business on which our community thrives.

Once these places are gone they are gone forever and so is the characters that go with them. I would strongly urge therefore that the Uttlesford District Council within its powers, protects such a worthy Asset, one of a rapidly declining number of Public Houses in the town of Saffron Walden.

Yours sincerely,
Adrian Pretlove

Good evening, I wanted to take a few moments to write and ask you to consider helping us to save the Railway Arms in Saffron Walden by designating it of Community Value. All public houses, as places of communal gathering, meeting, socialising, celebration, commiseration etc are of value to their communities, and we are running desperately low on them at the present time.

Things are looking bleak for 'society', for drinking and socialising in public, with friends, neighbours and strangers. It feels as though governments would rather we sat at home and drank ourselves into a stupor on subsidised supermarket alcohol.

Well, I don't want to drink alone, I don't want to drink myself into a stupor, and I don't want to feed the voracious supermarket machine any more than I need to. I do not even want to drink at home. Drinking a beer or two, in the company of whosoever may be in the pub that evening, is as good a way to stay connected, to stay sane, and to stay caring about your community as any I know of.

What happens to community, to the people and the places you serve, when no-one meets anyone else anymore, when no-one knows their neighbours or cares who does what to who? Pubs help police the community, they bring things out into the open, they are talking shops for local people. What is left of our society needs them. Please help. Do not hammer one more nail into the coffin of British society.

Thank you. Save the Railway Arms.
Richard Mortimer

FAO

In response to the bid to make the Railway Public House a ACV I would like to add my support for keeping the Railway as a viable community centre.

We moved to Saffron Walden 10 years ago and as older parents didn't have the natural advantages of meeting new people at the school gate so for some time struggled to feel part of the local community. Our visits to the Railway public house allowed us to get to know local residents.

We started a book club with a few like minded people ,we have done several social activities together, playing Mah Jong, sharing celebratory meals and over time have been made to feel part of the local community. This meeting place has not only been a place of social entertainment but due to circumstances for some of the users, it has been a life line.

Several bereavements, which have been isolating to some of the regular users, provides them with the knowledge and confidence that they can meet friendly faces and feel comfortable in a familiar place surrounded by neighbours Saffron Walden is expanding and the small local community hubs that cement a feeling of belonging are so important I would urge you to support this motion because in a world dominated by the Internet we should not forget the benefits of meeting with our neighbours and forging friendships.

Anonymous

Dear

I would like to add my full support for the proposal to register The Railway Arms an Asset of Community Value and would urge the Council to recognise what an important facility this is to the residents of Saffron Walden and the wider community.

It would be a tragedy if the Town were to lose yet another public house. As a local resident and regular customer of one of the many sporting, theatrical and social clubs that need and have used the Railway it's survival is hugely significant.

Yours faithfully
Andrew Frostick

Dear

Please accept this email as support for making the Railway Arms public house in saffron Walden, an Asset of Community Value (ACV). Public houses are one of the focal points of a towns life and soul and Saffron Walden is no different. Many pubs have now been lost in this town and whilst the town and it's population are growing, the diversity in social opportunity appears to be shrinking.

Losing this beautiful community public house would be a significant blow to the town as a whole. This particular pub is of historical interest being the public house attached to the now defunct railway station, although the town still bears much of the railway architecture when sought out. It has become a classic community pub based in streets of residential homes and with a sizeable garden for patrons to use and socialise in.

The pub has a reputation for being a home of real ale and with a local brewery nearby (Saffron Brewery) such a link could be developed to build a tremendous local resource. Saffron Walden suffers from a lack of choice when socialising and removing one more opportunity to meet one's neighbours and share community plans and spirit will only serve to further stifle what is a great place to live.

Many would agree that what this town does not need is : - another small development for housing, another coffee shop, another supermarket (large or small) for example. What it would hugely benefit from is a strong, characterful community pub that serves great beer and good food that enables the residents on this side of Saffron Walden to meet one another and nurture idea's and actions that benefit the immediate local community and the town as a whole. Many small towns and villages are recalled after visiting them by a memory of a good public house or restaurant and the chance to meet local people and friends.

Rarely (if ever) are they recalled by the memory of a housing development or convenience store. As someone representing the best interest of Saffron Walden and Uttlesford, I sincerely hope that you agree and would want people to think of the town as a great place to visit and plan return trips that would boost the local economy and help the town continue to thrive.

Yours faithfully,
Martin Purbrick

Dear

I hope you are well. I am writing in support of the campaign started by an organisation known as STRAP that aims to turn the Railway Arms pub into something of a community hub in Saffron Walden.

It is my understanding that you are currently undertaking an assessment regarding whether the Railway Arms should be registered as an Asset of Community Value. As such I would like to make the following representation in support of such a registration. There are many reasons I believe the Railway Arms has been and can be of community value, but I'll keep this brief as I'm sure you have plenty of other information to consider.

Uses of the pub - Basically, no other pub in Saffron Walden is equipped with the same quality or size of beer garden that is enjoyed by the Railway Arms. When the garden was kitted out with a trampoline, games for kids, a sand pit and occasionally a paddling pool, it was a fantastic place for families to come together to enjoy a weekend afternoon of relaxation.

The garden – and the pub itself – lends itself to be used for many community events such as Battle of the Band competitions and other talent shows or small scale music festivals that could be used by local musicians, poets and artist to showcase their talents. The pub itself has also been used in the past to showcase the art and photography of local artists (indeed I purchased a fine photo of when the Tour De France passed through these parts after seeing the picture in the Railway).

Looking to the future and it is clear from examples from around the country that when a community gets behind a pub in order to save it, they invest in its success. This can be by visiting regularly but also by being proactive when it comes to planning and running events that can benefit the whole community (e.g. trying to include sections of the community who might not otherwise utilise the pub and its beer garden – such as running events specifically aimed at elderly people, carers and disabled people, and indeed trying to bring all parts of the community together for events).

Location of the pub - The second point I wish to mention is about the pub's location. Since the Tesco Express replaced another pub at that end of Saffron Walden there are few options outside of the centre of town. With the likelihood of more housing being built near the Lord Butler Leisure Centre, the Railway Arms is well placed to service a growing community at that side of town.

Of course a pub must be commercially successful to remain open, but I am of the opinion that the very fact that there is an enthusiastic (and growing) range of people interested in saving this pub will be the main factor in helping it thrive in the future. I hope you are able to recommend that the Railway Arms is classified as an Asset of Community Value and I thank you for your time.

Best wishes,
David Hanson

Dear

I am writing to add my support to the campaign to nominate the Railway Arms in Saffron Walden as an Asset of Community Value. The location of the Railway and its ready-made catchment area makes it an invaluable resource to the community.

Over the years, it has provided an excellent venue of local events: from the Walden Buskers to beer festivals a couple of times each year. These have always been well attended and if restored and publicised, I am sure a new Railway would enjoy success once more. As a pub with a car park, it also offers a beautifully fenced garden which provides a good environment for families with young children.

Backed with a good kitchen, the Railway has always had a good reputation in the town to go the extra few yards in order to enjoy good hospitality and interesting people to meet. It even led my wife and I to learn dominoes from some older “regulars”, a game which we now take around other pubs in the town, sad that we may never be able to return to a vibrant Railway sometime in the future. It is a venue that is an asset to Saffron Walden.

With the granting of ACV status, there are folks like my wife and I who are determined to put the Railway Arms back on the map. I do hope you and your committee will consider your decision very carefully and come down on the side of granting ACV status.

Kind regards
Jezz Leckenby