

Duke of Marlborough report | Somersham Annual Village Meeting, May 2026

Our opportunity to inform residents about the pub's activities as a local and economic hub, and community asset.



BACKGROUND

The Duke of Marlborough is community-owned and the shareholders are represented by a Community Benefit Society – and officially opened on 20th April 2017 – next year will be the 10th anniversary. Initially the CBS Committee formed a group of volunteers to run the pub, but this proved unsustainable. In 2024 they moved to having a Tenancy Agreement – and this continues. The local population of potential customers is circa 2,500.

INTRODUCTION

On becoming responsible for running the community-owned pub in Somersham, The Duke of Marlborough – we wish to do what we can to ensure that the pub continues to be cherished, and is a well-used, safe and welcoming community hub. We plan to reflect as much as possible the original aims of those who campaigned for so long and raised substantial funds in order to purchase the pub, and the over 250 people who became Shareholders.

To run a viable, thriving and sustainable pub with a friendly, welcoming, community focus, and a food and drink offer that is of good enough quality to attract people from a 10-mile radius.

- **Operational Overview:** *A summary of the year's progress, including key milestones.*
In December 2025, Claire Rees and Ann Fitzmaurice became Directors of the management company – with an instant leap into Christmas and New Year – both of which proved to be the most successful seasonal periods in recent years; both economically and socially.
- **Community Engagement & Role:** *How the pub has acted as a hub, supporting local events, groups, or acting as a community library or meeting spot.*
- The Duke of Marlborough presents or hosts monthly programmes of live music, quizzes, book club, darts league matches, social pool and other events.
- Live music and events take place weekly....and prove to be a great way to attract and retain a wide-range of customers and diners. Music includes pop, rock, soul, swing, boogie-woogie, jazz, rockabilly singer-songwriters and folk – as well as our monthly acoustic-music busking nights since January 2026. In the future, we plan to enhance this further by potentially having acoustic music on Sunday afternoons during the summer, out on the patio.
- Local musicians have a platform at the Duke of Marlborough.
- In January 2026, we hosted the village art & craft exhibition Winter Warmer, organised by Village Creative – including the Opening and Closing events – which further featured acoustic music, poetry readings and spoken-word.
- *Over recent years, our fundraising quiz nights have raised thousands of pounds for local charities, local offices of regional and national charities – and particularly, charities with a special meaning for those who live and work here.*
- Past Duke of Marlborough fundraising quiz beneficiaries include: Barking Pre-School, Bumblebee Children's Charity, Combat2Coffee, Stowupland Pre-School, Friends of Somersham School FOSS, Marie Curie End of Life charity, MND Association Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon, Somersham & District Community Association (inc Wheelie Fun Day), Somersham Youth Club, and many more.
- Villagers are encouraged to nominate charities – such future charities include Dogs for Autism and the Lighthouse Charity (support for construction workers and their families).

- We have held numerous events proposed or booked by local people - including birthdays, weddings and celebrations of life - all very successful and a pleasure for us to host.
 - Kind customers have donated rum, cordials and liqueurs to the bar.
 - The August Bank Holiday Weekend Beer Festival continues to be a great success, attracting large numbers of attendees - estimated to be over 800 across the weekend - Sunday is the busiest day.
 - Our Christmas Market also continues to flourish, we were particularly pleased with the stalls this year (circa 20) - the pub and outdoor market area were packed (estimated 250 attendees across the evening).
 - A new event is the Village Get Together - an informal night held to encourage community involvement and communication, we host these in collaboration with the Community Association, Community Shop and Parish Council. To boost knowledge of volunteering opportunities and engagement with activities and initiatives across the local community.
- *Financial & Business Performance: High-level summary of performance, including challenges (e.g., rising costs, cost-of-living crisis).*
 - Turnover has increased, but outgoings have risen sharply, including the costs of services and stock; but also various taxes and employments costs.
 - The Cost of Living Crisis has two fronts for The Duke - increasing customer-numbers as people stay local to socialise - but also belt-tightening means far fewer visits for many.
 - We have made some initial alterations to the menus - and there's the potential for sporadic long-table community meals to help our outgoings and our customers' pockets.
- *Future Outlook: Plans for the coming year, including any planned improvements to the building or services.*
 - We have carried out a deep clean, an inventory of stock and assets, the public rooms have been redecorated (met with great enthusiasm!), the outdoor has been cleared, cleaned with tables repainted.
 - Kind customers have built a new gate for the outdoor area - and a sandwich board for the entrance to the carpark.
 - Events-wise there are plans to host The Duke Talks, speakers on a wide range of subjects - the first is planned to be the Sutton Hoo Ship project, we collaborate with the Community Association for this programme.
 - Also villagers have proposed chess nights, jigsaw sessions, and we also have our new pool table - social pool for now.
 - There is interest in screening classic films (Flicks in the Sticks only presents new releases) - though this needs research regarding licences, equipment and costings.
 - The Community Benefit Society owning the pub is looking into replacing the boiler - currently oil-fired. At present the fuel consumption is high due to inefficiency of the boiler.
- *Volunteers & Staffing: Recognition of staff, volunteers, or changes in management, particularly relevant for community-owned pubs.*
 - Our staffing levels remain the same currently, Matthew Rees has joined the team as a manager - overseeing the day to day running of the pub, ensuring the orders go through smoothly, keeping things running behind the scenes and general maintenance, ensuring the pub is kept in tip top shape. We are well supported by our valuable volunteers who help paid staff provide impeccable customer service. Our volunteers enjoy the social aspect of the role and many have been with the pub since it first opened as a community owned pub.

- Events & Marketing: *A summary of social events hosted, marketing initiatives, and social media reach.*
- We have worked to improve the user navigation and clarity of our website, and our social media continues to inform and pull existing & new customers.
- The village website now increases the breath & depth of our reach.
- For some events we successfully produce and display printed posters.
- We have an advert in each issue of The Link Newsletter
- We ask customers how they found out about us, in order to qualify and quantify the success of our marketing in general terms.

SUMMARY FOR THE FUTURE

- Target Customers: Attract people with good quality, affordable events, food and drink.
- Community Engagement: Involve the community in developing activities through meetings, consultations and feedback - the Village Get Together events grew from this aim.
- Social Events: Encourage community members to organise social events like lunch clubs, talks, and games / music evenings. There's currently interest in afternoon events.

The 20th April 2027 will be the 10th Anniversary of the re-opening of our community-owned pub. Events will be held at The Duke of Marlborough, many in collaboration with local groups.

May I close with a great big thank-you to our fantastic staff team and volunteers – and the support from villagers and customers for The Duke of Marlborough. We have been made to feel so welcome in our new role over the last few months.

Thank you, Claire Rees