

The Maldon and Dengie branch of CAMRA are proud to announce that the Norton Community Pub in Essex has issued a prospectus for the sale of shares with a view to purchasing the freehold of the property to ensure the future of the pub.

The story of the Norton is a remarkable one. In 2007 it was threatened with closure, when planning applications were made to demolish the building and build a residential development in its place.

The local community, however, had other ideas. They started a vigorous campaign to oppose the planning proposals, and Paul Guppy, one of the local residents, came to a CAMRA branch meeting in September 2007 to appeal for support from the branch. As a result the branch sent a letter to the Planning department of Maldon District Council opposing the application, which was subsequently refused. Mike Woods, who was branch chairman at the time, offered advice and support to the villagers and at his suggestion the village committee were able to interest a TV production company in filming their activities in taking over the pub. The pub was reopened in 2009 after having been closed for business for 2 years, and the film about these events was screened on UKTV Blighty in 2009.

In April 2010 the Maldon and Dengie branch of CAMRA presented an award to the pub's committee chairperson at our Beer Festival as Community Pub of the Year, issuing a press release on the subject which resulted in local coverage.

The branch has kept a watchful eye on the pub since then and has been greatly impressed with progress and the quality and range of beers offered, so that they earned their place in the Good Beer Guide 2012 with a very respectable number of votes in their favour at the branch AGM. It is thought to be the first Community Pub in the Guide to issue a share flotation.

To ensure a sustainable future for the pub, an agreement was reached with the owner which has resulted in planning permission for the construction of some housing on part of the site along with improvements to the pub to be carried out by the current owners, with arrangements in place for the community to purchase the freehold. An Industrial Provident Society has therefore been formed and a share flotation has been issued with the intention of raising enough capital to provide a deposit of £75,000 on the total purchase price of £250,000, or ideally to raise the entire purchase price by this method to avoid the need to take on a mortgage.

Two meetings were held at the pub in mid-April to announce the proposed share flotation. The interest shown by the many villagers and other people who attended was very encouraging. Paul Guppy spoke at our branch meeting in May 2012 on the subject and the race is now on to sell enough shares by the end of August to raise the minimum amount required of £75,000.

The prospectus has been released. Shares will be sold at a minimum of £500 and a maximum of £20,000 per purchaser, and tax relief is available on the purchase of the shares so that out of £500 invested, the cost to the investor paying tax at standard rate would actually be £350 after tax relief (this is a one-off concession).

The prospectus and application forms are available for download by going to www.savethenorton.org. Any questions relating to the share issue can be addressed to cliff.brown3@btinternet.com or Debbie.guppy@btinternet.com. Alternatively, you can drop into the pub and pick up a paper version of the prospectus. The full address of the pub is 54 Latchingdon Road, Cold Norton, Essex CM3 6JB (01621 826948).

Chris Harvey, pub liaison officer of Maldon and Dengie CAMRA, (who recently attended a Saving Pubs workshop arranged by CAMRA which he found extremely helpful), said: 'Maldon and Dengie CAMRA are very fortunate in that we are based in a stronghold of real ale and good pubs, but the story of the Norton is an exceptional example of a village pub, which could have been lost forever, were it not for the huge amount of voluntary effort which has been made by the local community. The Norton is a credit to the area, well worth supporting by purchasing shares, and certainly well worth a visit!'