

BLURRED BOUNDARIES IN BROMPTON REGIS

COMMERCIAL OR COMMUNITY? SKITTLE ALLEY OR SHOP? LANDLADY OR SHOPKEEPER?

Village shops in pubs are not uncommon – pubs have unused space, they often need extra income to survive and it makes sense to combine overheads. However, the George Inn at Brompton Regis in Somerset has two particular slants on providing the community with a shop within a pub.



The closure of the sub post office in the village a couple of years ago caused the shop to close as well. The landlady at the George offered to set up a new shop and approached the villagers for help in running it. Volunteers flooded to the cause and later, further help was forthcoming with the creation of the “George Shop Support Group”, an unincorporated body that crucially has both a written constitution and a bank account – both needed when it comes to applying for grants. This very well organised and active group has done two things – it has fund-raised to help equip the new shop, and it helps to pay for the time the landlady spends managing the business – thus indirectly also supporting their local pub. Their latest success has been to obtain Lottery funding for a computer setup, new chiller and new storage units.



All of the large equipment is on wheels, because the other extraordinary aspect of this shop is that it is located in the pub's skittle alley. The long narrow shape presents its own challenge, but a more basic problem is that this skittle alley is in regular use in the evenings. The chiller is tucked against the wall, the display shelves are all on wheels so they can be moved easily back out of the way, the bar doubles as the shop counter and the tables that hold the beer and cider in the evening display newspapers and fresh bread and cakes during the day. A remarkable transformation that apparently takes one person ten minutes to

carry out.

The other remarkable aspect is that it all works as a shop. This is not a few people playing at it, this is a real shop serving real customers with real products. It also meets a real community need at the same time

The RSA view

In our last edition we wrote about a shop in a church - this is another example of lateral thinking in action, establishing a shop in a most unlikely space. The Support Group is an excellent example of how a village can ensure it retains its shop without going fully down the community ownership route. This really is an approach that we hope could inspire other villages where a commercial shop would not be fully viable.

