

# Pub plans that alarmed villagers were 'a mistake'

FEARS that a property developer was trying to change a village pub into a house by "stealth" have been allayed after it was revealed that the proposed plans were submitted by mistake.

The Skeeby Community Pub Society is trying to save the village pub, the Travellers' Rest, which was bought by Hartlepool developer Jon Whitfield, who initially planned to change the building into a family home.

After several months of negotiations, the society and Mr Whitfield are close to agreeing a lease agreement to allow them to run the pub as a community co-operative.

However, the negotiations nearly came unstuck after a new planning application was submitted on behalf of Mr Whitfield which appeared to change the pub into a house, similar to previous plans, but without the change of use application.

Supporters of the society attacked the plans, saying it was a case of "closure by stealth", but Mr Whitfield said the plans were a genuine mistake by his architects.

"The negotiations are well

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under way for them to move in but work does still need to be done on the pub, such as a new roof at the back," he said. "The windows all need changing and I want to take off the render and bring it back to the original stonework.

"Unfortunately, when I rang my architect to tell him to submit the application, I just told him to take off the change of use and submit the previous plans, which showed the roof and window changes, and forgot about the rest of it.

"They went to the district council before I looked at them but they still had the changes to the interior on them, which everyone noticed and got upset about.

"The new plans for the exterior of the building have been sent to the council, so there is nothing to worry about."

Mr Whitfield said an agreement with the society was close to being signed, once a few minor details are ironed out.

The concerns about the new ap-

plication came just three weeks after the society found that the Coalition Government had scrapped a proposed grant scheme for community initiatives.

The society pledged to carry on with its fight despite the setback and said it was in a good position to make the pub a success.

Marie Church, a director of Skeeby Community Pub Society, said the group was still looking at the new plans but was happy that the contentious details had been removed.

"We always knew that Mr Whitfield was considering doing some structural work to the building and these plans show that," she said.

"The plans will enhance the pub and are in line with future plans to give the whole pub a facelift and make it a profitable venture for the community.

"Our investors are coming through and we are confident that the situation is very healthy and we will be moving forward soon."

For more information on the Skeeby Community Pub Society, visit [travellersrestskeeby.co.uk](http://travellersrestskeeby.co.uk).