

Fund closes, but village pub group still confident

A VILLAGE group which is trying to save a pub has said it is confident of success, despite the closure of a national fund set up to support such initiatives.

Members of Skeeby Community Pub Society have been working for several months to negotiate a lease or buy the Travellers' Rest from a developer who bought the building earlier this year.

The Travellers' Rest is the only pub in the village and, after also losing the village shop, the society hopes that it will become a community hub, with shop, library and internet facilities available for residents to use.

by Vicki Henderson

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But, following an announcement by the Coalition Government that a £3.3m fund to support community projects, set up by the last Labour Government, would be scrapped, many had feared that the project would fail.

Marie Church, one of the directors of the society, said that idea could not be further from the truth.

"We know there is no Government funding any more but that does not mean we will stop," she said. "It

means the fight goes on. It is down to investors or breweries who might step in to save pubs like ours. We certainly don't want to give the impression that it is all over."

The society is already well ahead with its plans and expects to receive official confirmation shortly that it has been given status as a co-operative, the same as the owners of the George and Dragon, in Hudswell.

More than 40 people have signed statements of intent to invest in the scheme, while another 100 people have expressed an interest in supporting the group.

Negotiations with the developer to either lease the pub or buy it outright are going well, although no final agreement has been reached.

The society has been supported by the Plunkett Foundation, a rural charity, which would have allocated the grants from the Government fund.

Despite the loss of the grants, the foundation, which pioneered community co-operatives, and in particular community shops, could still provide practical support.

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Mike Perry, from the foundation, said: "The Skeeby initiative is nationally one of the furthest down the road in terms of organisation – we hope that it will still become the UK's next community pub.

"We will certainly not be giving up on community-owned pubs. We have seen the demand and the problems that communities are facing. We have a list of 50 projects that would have received funding that we will continue to monitor and support."

For more information on Skeeby Community Pub Society, visit www.travellersrestskeeby.co.uk.