

Bladon Community Benefit Society Annual Members Meeting

Opening Remarks

Welcome to the first Annual Members meeting of the Bladon Community Benefit Society, hopefully this will be the first and last that has to be held virtually.

It is great to see so many people joining us this evening, let's hope Bladon's internet connection can cope! If it can't, we will be releasing the Chairpersons, Treasurers and Secretary's Reports on the website later this week but fingers crossed we can make it through the evening.

The reports will hopefully convey that challenges and successes of the pub project so far but please do raise questions using the chat function. If you have a question at a later date please don't hesitate to contact us through our webpage, email address, Facebook or twitter accounts. This is your society and your views are important to the management committee.

Chair's Report to the Annual Members' Meeting, 23rd February 2021

This is the first annual report of the Bladon Community Benefit Society which was incorporated on 2nd December 2019. This covers our financial year December 2nd 2019 to December 31st 2020 however for the purposes of this report, I have included the period from May 2019 in order to fully capture our momentous journey.

The story so far....

At a Parish Council Meeting in May 2019, there was a vote in favour of applying to list The White House as an Asset of Community Value, and in June the Parish Council made a formal application. At this point a small number of inquisitive and passionate locals formed a working group to investigate how to save the pub and presented its findings at the first of four, community consultation sessions in July.

In September 2019, the White House was formally approved as an Asset of Community Value by the West Oxfordshire District Council and in the same month Greene King placed the pub for sale on the open market.

Shortly after the pub was placed on the market, the working group triggered the 6-month moratorium period in October 2019, giving us time to organise a credible bid and formed the Bladon Community Benefit Society.

Over the following 2 months an in-depth business plan was written and our share offer formally launched on December 13th 2019.

In May 2020, after months of delay due to the Coronavirus, the community offer for the White House was accepted after a best and final bidding process.

In July 2020 we got the keys to Bladon's new Community Pub, making it Oxfordshire's 10th community pub and one of over 100 across the UK.

Throughout August and September 2020 volunteers worked tirelessly to bring a very old, tired and unloved building back to life. Some major structural works were also required and who could forget the sight of workmen dangling 100ft in the air to remove the 4 unsafe trees from the garden.

In October 2020 our tenant, Johnny Roberts, and his team re-opened The White House. We haven't yet had a chance to really celebrate this moment as community but we will one day, and what a party it will be! After a great start The White House was forced to close again in November due to the Coronavirus pandemic and has been opened and closed repeatedly since.

We have achieved so much against the most challenging of backdrops. In the last 22 months we have experienced the highs of a successful bid to save The White House, the subsequent gargantuan community effort to breathe new life in to the building and the lows of Covid with its impact on the pubs ability to trade, our community and our lives in general. They have been 22 demanding months and I extend my thanks to all of my fellow committee members, our shareholders, volunteers and all the local businesses that have supported the project thus far. It would have been impossible to achieve so much without every single contribution.

The Society's purpose was, and remains to be, to buy The White House for the benefit of the community and to secure its future as a thriving community pub. In our business plan we set out our aims and values, many of which we believe we have achieved, and some that we need to keep working on after the COVID restrictions are eased later in the year.

An update on our vision and aims

Secure the future of the White House for the benefit of Bladon, the wider community and visiting tourists

Through our share offer, a "More Than A Pub" grant and loan, and a commercial loan we raised enough to buy The White House. Our fundraising activities were in line with our business plan and more detail will be provided within the Treasurers report.

Give the community a say in setting the direction and values of the pub

Prior to the purchase of The White House, we conducted a survey, distributed to every house in Bladon, and at our village briefing sessions provided a further opportunity for members of the community to let us know what was important to them. The outcomes of this market research have guided our recruitment and the operating guidelines for the tenant. The full data is included in our business plan and available on request.

In the next couple of weeks, we will launch a new community survey to assess if the direction of the pub is the right one and to better understand the needs and wants of the local community.

As was set out in our business plan, we have opted to lease the property to an experienced tenant who runs The White House independently of the Bladon Community Benefit Society (save for the operating guidelines they must adhere to). The Committee ruled out operating models such as the community directly running the pub on either a volunteer basis or by employing a manager. On investigation, these models are impracticable and unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term due to the high level of day-to-day operational involvement they would require from the community. Based on research, and advice received from other community pubs, it was decided that a tenant model is the operating model that is most likely to be successful and which will expose the community to the least risk.

A thriving community pub which is financially viable for the long term

Since opening in October The White House has not had a single day of trading without restrictions, despite this the trading levels when open have been good and very much viable. Incomes would have been viable for both the tenant and the Bladon Community Benefit Society. However, the

global Coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on our tenant and the Bladon Community Benefit Society and with both having had lower than expected income levels. Despite the reduced income the Society's finances remain in a strong position and further detail will be provided in the Treasurers report.

An offering which is attractive and accessible to all

Making The White House truly accessible to all was always going to be one of our toughest challenges, both from a financial and logistically perspective. However, I am pleased to announce that Blenheim Palace and Pye Homes have committed to funding the next phase of development work.

This development will see a new toilet block being built at the rear of the pub and providing new female, male and disabled toilets with baby changing facilities. This development will also allow access to the beer garden through the pub and will also see the current male toilets re-purposed to create a new cellar.

Our intention had always been to achieve this phase of development some years down the line through grant funding and so our heartfelt thanks go to all at Blenheim Palace and Pye Homes for offering such generous support.

A planning application has already been submitted and we hope to start work in the next couple of months, inevitably this will have an impact on the pub but other than having to hire some temporary toilet facilities it should not have any impact on the pub's ability to trade as soon as the restrictions are eased.

We will of course need your understanding and patience during the building works but we are absolutely sure that they future benefits far outweigh the short-term disruption.

Although the initial decision to remove the trees to the rear of the property was forced upon us due to safety concerns, it has been great to hear so many positive comments about the resulting outdoor space. The larger, sunnier garden will now be a much nicer place to be when the weather is good. The garden as it stands is a temporary measure to make the space useable and safe but we plan to develop it further in 2021. The exact timing will be impacted by the development work to create the accessible toilet and baby change area as this has the potential to create some disruption to the ground at the rear of the property.

When the time is right, we will once again call on our willing band of volunteers to help further develop the garden space to make it more inviting, more useable and fully accessible. The plans for the garden are still in development but it is definitely going to include a space to socialise, a small children's play area, an Aunt Sally court (or is it an alley, I've never known) and there is some talk of an outside bar and BBQ area.

Promote social inclusion

This is the aim that has been most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic with social distancing, shielding and restrictions on household mixing making it impossible to hold many of the groups we had planned. It is still very much in the plans of the committee and still a central aim of the Bladon Community Benefit Society. The following were included in our original business plan and will be a focus for the new committee in the next 12 months (fingers crossed we see the relaxation of the current restrictions and can all enjoy our community pub together).

- Provide a venue for families and the wider community to meet during the day. A regular toddler group and drop in for the elderly members of our community will be held helping to reduce the isolation felt by young families and our more vulnerable residents. We also plan to hold a monthly dementia sufferers and carers support group.
- A venue that fosters participation in local activities such as pub games, quizzes, talks, book clubs etc. It will also host a noticeboard for local exercise groups to advertise their activities and provide a meeting place for the start and end of group exercise sessions.
- A venue to host a small, community shop where members of our community can purchase basic essentials without having to rely on our infrequent public transport. This will reduce traffic through the village, improving our local environment, and improve access to basic services for our less mobile residents.
- A venue that attracts parents to visit when dropping off and picking up children from Bladon C of E School – we have made some progress here by ensuring the pub car park is accessible to anyone doing the school run and hopefully in normal times parents, grandparents and carers will have the opportunity to stop for a tea or coffee and a catch up with friends.

Although our social inclusion aims have been the most impacted the Society and Johnny Roberts have still found opportunities to support people in our community and through The Whitehouse Community Kitchen initiative are currently providing up to 10 meals a day to those that need our help. Whilst the Bladon Community Benefit Society has been the conduit for this project, the recognition must go to our tenant, Johnny, who suggested the idea in the first place and has been instrumental in getting the service up and running.

Looking to the future

We are far from the end of this journey but we are at the end of the beginning and I would like to thank the following who have served on the committee over the last 22 months, it has been a pleasure to work with them all:

Mike Edwards (Vice Chair), Julie Bignone (Treasurer), Clare Edwards (Secretary), Henry Webster, Robin Jones, Rachel Guest (Resigned July 2020), Ruth Chaloner (Resigned August 2020), Tom Davidson (Resigned September 2020), Vicki Davison (Resigned September 2020), John Anson (Co-opted December 2020) and Stuart Barclay (Co-opted December 2020).

As is required by our society's rules, all those that served on the first management committee are obliged to stand-down at our first Annual Members meeting, they are however able to stand for re-election. Mike Edwards and Robin Jones have gallantly agreed to continue to serve on the committee and I have no doubt this will provide continuity as a new committee is formed. To facilitate succession planning and to comply with the Society's Rules members in the first election will be elected to the committee for one, two or three years on the basis of the numbers of votes cast (at all future elections members will be elected for three years). At the first meeting of the new Management Committee, the elected committee will select four officers, namely Secretary, Treasurer, Chair and Vice Chair. This brings me to final duty as Chair, to announce the outcome of our recent ballot.

A new committee

Our elections were held virtually and in advance of our members meeting, the results are as follows:

Name	Votes	Maximum length of term
John Anson	40	3 Years
Mike Edwards	39	
Robin Jones	28	2 Years
Gwyn Bevan	21	
Stuart Barclay	16	1 Year
Linda Oliver	11	
Liz Owen	6	

My thanks go to all those that have put themselves forward to be part of the new committee, and I wish them every success in what is hopefully a brighter future.

Governance

The Society is committed to respecting the philosophy on which the Society was established to benefit the community; to operate on the basis of one member, one vote, to fulfilling the aims for which share capital was raised and The White House was purchased for the community, and to ensuring the asset is protected and developed to benefit the community now and for the future. The Management Committee is responsible for this programme, and is fully accountable to the Society's members, and the wider community.

James Mallick, Chair, Bladon Community Benefit Society, February 2021