

Chair report for Bladon Community Benefit Society (BCBS) 2021

Presented on 1st March 2022

The year 2021 started with the pub shut due to lockdown. The lockdown had begun just before Christmas meaning a significant loss of trade for our tenant landlord, Johnny Roberts.

Pubs were allowed to reopen, outside only, in April 2021. The day started with a significant snow fall but that didn't stop our hardened customers making the most of the reopening.

However, the community had not been idle in this period. The volunteers once again came out in force. The transformation to the garden was amazing with the willow weave fencing making a real feature as well as being a safety requirement. The front dry-stone wall was repaired over 2 days of freezing weather. We paid for the wooden pagoda in the garden and there are plans to encourage plant growth, so it becomes a natural form of shade in the future.

May saw the start of the biggest improvement to The White House in decades. The toilets have always been an issue in the pub, so we embarked on building new toilets including disabled access toilet and baby changing facilities for the first time in the history of the pub. The beer cellar was the site for these new toilets. This meant the beer cellar was moved to the side of the building requiring a new extension that you can see at the front of the building.

We are very grateful to Blenheim Palace who funded the new toilets and the extension to the new cellar. Bladon Community Benefit Society (BCBS) was responsible for the costs involved in moving, then fitting out the new cellar.

The new toilets are now in operation and are a huge improvement to the pub. We are still awaiting the relocation of the main gas meter at the front of the building. This will allow the builders to then return and finish the extension, render, and paint it. We will then fund a new fence to be built next to the cellar which will be used to store the empty barrels behind and so keep them out of sight. With the gas meter moved we will also be able to commission the new boiler dedicated to the heating of the pub.

For all of you who used the pub during the summer, a big thanks for putting up with our temporary toilets that became the bane of our lives. The sight of the temporary toilet trailer wobbling off into the distance brought untold joy.

With the arrival of our celebrity Chef, Ben Bullen, it became clear there was a desperate need to increase the cold storage to allow him to keep up with demand and to expand his menu. BCBS funded the stand-alone cold room that now sits at the rear of the pub. It was commissioned in time for the Christmas trade.

Unfortunately, last summer we were a victim of an online scam during August when the committee were scattered on holiday. We have put measures in place to ensure this does not happen again.

During the year we had an attempted robbery, but the masked intruders had massively misjudged their target and were chased through Bladon by Johnny and Harry. The pursuit was stopped when the intruders pulled knives on Johnny and Harry but the criminals knew it was best to leave our pub and staff well alone.

In terms of membership to our Society we now have 471 shareholders with 5 new shareholders buying shares in 2021. The share offer has been kept open and anyone can buy shares using the forms on our website bladoncommunitypub.org. The majority of potential shareholder enquiries come through Johnny with shareholders having visited the pub and wanting to make an investment. He then refers them to our gmail account.

During the year of 2022 the committee have discussed increasing membership to the society by having dedicated information on the notice board about buying shares. It has also been discussed whether information about the Society could be on display around the village and especially at the church to push the Churchill link between the village and the pub. It is expected that these shareholding would be small but a dedicated share certificate could be developed to cater for this market, targeting domestic and international visitors.

As a reminder we, the shareholders, own the building and grounds of The White House Pub. Johnny is our tenant and pays us a monthly rent. In year 4 that will also include a percentage of the profits. Johnny runs the pub as a

business and it is our job to keep the building and grounds in good order and make improvements. In the coming months we will solve the longstanding issues of the lights in the pub that refuse to work. We also need to make improvements in the kitchen to be able to maintain the very high standards already achieved in terms of cleanliness and durability. A long-term goal is to upgrade the present single-phase electrics to the usual 3 phase that is required for a commercial operation like ours. This will be an expensive undertaking but with the expected increase of trade the old electric system will not cope. We welcome any assistance from the community in forming a working group with us to achieve this goal.

2021 has seen a great deal of investment in the pub that has brought it up to a high standard and become one of the best pubs in the area. This is already recognised with Johnny and his staff winning the best newcomer from the prestigious Ox-in-a-box.

The improvements in the structure and fabric of the building have been brought about by the hard work of the committee. John and Stuart were co-opted on to the committee during 2020 with Linda, Liz and Gwyn being new in post from last year's AGM. Nolan was co-opted on during last year with only Robin and myself existing from our original group. Clare stepped down from the committee but once again worked tirelessly as our secretary. A huge thank you to them all and their unending efforts during the year. All members of the 8 strong present committee have elected to remain in post for another year. If anyone is interested in taking an active role in our committee for the coming year please do speak to one of us.

I would like to extend that heart-felt thanks to all the volunteers who have been involved with the pub and especially with the never-ending task of providing the pub with the beautiful gardens.

We, the shareholders, saved the pub in 2020 from certain redevelopment. We have now moved significantly forward to improve the pub and make it not just fit for purpose but as one of the best pubs in the area. I would like to end by thanking you all but also a plea. The reputation of Johnny and his team is bringing people from afar to make the most of our fantastic pub here in Bladon, but we need the village to back the pub to ensure we have a great future. Pass the word within our community that this is a great place to come

and to bring ideas to Johnny to help him become not just a great destination pub but also to be the heart of the Bladon Community.

Thank you.