

Chair report for Bladon Community Benefit Society (BCBS) 2022

Presented on 7th March 2023

Good evening everyone. For those that don't know me, my name is John Anson, and I'm the current Chair of the Bladon Community Benefit Society. I took over from the previous chair, Mike Edwards, in March 2022. Mike's job as an airline pilot was getting busy again post pandemic, and I was just on the cusp of retiring after working at a local Life Science company. I was expecting a nice gentle initiation as the pub was running effectively with Johnny Roberts as landlord, particularly since he had brought in Ben Bullen to run the kitchen. An Ox in A Box award for Best Newcomer in 2021 was evidence that things were on a promising footing.

One of the first things I received as the new Chair was a resignation letter from Mr Roberts. We agreed a notice period of 3 months, but during this time he left the day to day running of the pub to his partner Fran. This was a particularly challenging time all round, and everyone involved working in the pub and on the committee were under significant pressure to keep things running as smoothly as possible. Fran left in mid July, and we were delighted that Ben was interested in taking on the tenancy. Ben has done this in partnership with his friend Luke Buckle, who has over 20 years experience in the licensing trade. They form a strong management team between them and are committed to making a success of the business. In addition they have a great team behind them, with Charlie excelling in the kitchen, and Tor, Fin, Ellie and Kirstie all providing a professional and friendly front of house service.

Since July all involved have been busy reestablishing the reputation of the pub as a great place to eat and drink, as well as acting as a hub for the community to meet and share their varied interests and activities. Robin Jones has been instrumental in getting a pub Cribbage team together, which competes on Monday evenings in the local league. Justin Hyde has set up a games evening every other Tuesday, where folks of all ages can share their enjoyment of board games. There is a newly formed Make and Mend handicrafts group meeting on Wednesday afternoons. On Wednesday evening the pub hosts a very successful Quiz Night, with Richard Conway as the quizmaster, bringing a good amount of trade in from both inside and outside the village. On Thursday morning the pub is open for coffee and excellent cakes supplied by the Late Night Confections artisan baker. Friday lunchtime has been rebranded as Fish and Chip Friday, and the pub serves a wonderful brunch menu on Saturday morning to get the weekend off to a

good start. And to make sure the weekend ends well, the Sunday lunch at the White House is getting rave reviews (I'll come back to that!).

In addition, Ben and Charlie have been able to showcase their fine dining skills by offering occasional gourmet evenings, with preparation of a delicious themed 4 course meal paired with excellent wines. More of these are being planned in the coming months.

I will admit a slice of bias when it comes to appreciating the virtues of our community pub, so I thought it would be worth sharing a couple of recent independent reviews with you:

Most recent Google Review:

"Stumbled upon The White House after a trip to Blenheim. I can't remember the last time I walked into a pub and had such a warm welcome. The staff were beyond wonderful, food was delicious and the locals were warm and friendly. I wish I lived here, just for the pub!"

Ox in the Box, 1st Feb 2023:

"I'd forgotten how good Ben Bullen's cooking is! Enjoy a cracking Sunday lunch at the White House Community Pub in Bladon."

As a reminder we, the shareholders, own the building and grounds of The White House Pub. Ben and Luke are our tenants and pay us a monthly rent. Ben and Luke run the pub as a business and it is our job to keep the building and grounds in good order and make improvements. Behind the scenes the Committee have been working effectively to ensure that the building and facilities are maintained and that improvements are made where needed. Following the building of the new toilets and cellar, there is still some effort required on the finishing work to the exterior of the building. We have been able to get the gas meter moved, enabling the new gas boiler to be commissioned, enabling more efficient central heating in the pub. We have supplemented this by purchasing a new log burner for the snug area of the bar. We are grateful to the Bladon Parish Council for their contribution to the cost of this, which we successfully applied for under the Community Support scheme.

We have also made some improvements to the living accommodation, and we have been able to rent the space out under a short term let to three engineers engaged in project work at Kidlington airport.

There has also been significant investment in improving the commercial kitchen, which now has a new floor and dry store area. On a recent

unannounced inspection from WODC Environmental Health Ben and Charlie achieved a 5 star rating for Hygiene which is very confidence inspiring.

I'm sure everyone has noticed the improvements that have been made to the outside of the pub, and in particular the colourful flower boxes and the improved garden seating area. Elizabeth Owen has been the driving force for this, and she has a dedicated and hardworking crew of helpers that will be gearing up in again in the coming weeks to ensure that the outside space remains as welcoming as the inside of the pub. We are also planning to reintroduce an Aunt Sally throw so that the patrons can once again enjoy the delights of a proper Oxfordshire pub game in the summer evenings. Watch this space!

In terms of membership to our Society we now have 476 shareholders with 5 new shareholders buying shares in 2022. The share offer has been kept open and anyone can buy shares using the forms on our website bladoncommunitypub.org.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to all those that have given up their time and skills to support the pub over the past couple of years. We have had quite a turbulent journey, and as we all know the cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on the hospitality trade. Everyone's support is truly appreciated and valued, and I'm sure we have built a solid base to ensure that the pub can continue to develop into a superb asset for the village and surrounding communities.

Regarding the committee, Stuart Barclay has asked to stand down from the committee due to family commitments. I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to Stuart for his service, and also for the help with numerous electrical jobs around the pub. All the other 8 committee members have expressed a desire to continue to serve for a further 12 months.

Finally I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their time and commitment to the cause. They have selflessly provided us with all the help and support needed to make sure that the pub remains the community hub that we, the shareholders, can continue to enjoy and cherish.

Thank you.