

Chair report for Bladon Community Benefit Society (BCBS) 2024 Presented on 11th March 2025

Good evening everyone. Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Bladon Community Benefit Society. As is now customary, I will provide a quick overview of what we have been up to as a committee over the past 12 months, as well as highlight some of the changes we have seen over the year.

Starting with those changes, the main one has been the change in tenancy from L&B Hospitality Limited to Skinner Hospitality Limited. In practical terms that has meant that the running of the pub business has passed from Ben Bullen to Nicola Smith. This happened in September last year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ben and his team again for their tenure at the White House.

During his tenure Ben showed significant commitment to continue to support and build on the various community led activities held at the White House. When he decided to step down from the tenancy, the committee was keen to identify a successor that held the same views. We were therefore looking for someone who saw the White House as a viable business opportunity as well as a community resource that has the interests of the local people at heart.

When we advertised the tenancy opportunity, one applicant stood out as having the right balance of experience in the pub trade, coupled with a track record of initiating and running community facing facilities. Since taking over the tenancy of the White House, Nicola Smith has willingly supported the existing community activities centred around the pub, as well as exploring new opportunities to attract local people into the pub.

Of particular note was her initiative to start a loyalty card scheme for shareholders, offering them a 10% discount on both food and drink purchases. This has proved a significant success, and has enabled us to achieve the biggest rise in new share subscriptions we have experienced since taking ownership of the pub. In terms of membership to our Society we now have 503 shareholders with 33 new shareholders welcomed since Nicola took over the tenancy. The share offer is obviously being kept open and anyone can buy shares using the forms on our website (bladoncommunitypub.org).

This increase in shareholder funds certainly helps to bolster our financial position. We are still very much in reinvestment mode when it comes to the use of the income we receive from this and other sources. The major project we undertook this year was the conversion of the building electricity supply from single phase to three phase. The demand on the electricity supply, particularly from the commercial kitchen, was causing problems with the lighting in particular. Robin Jones from the committee took the lead in liaising with SSEB to establish the feasibility of the transfer to a 3 phase supply, and then the project became a juggling act between three separate contractors to complete the work just before the end of the year. We were fortunate to be awarded a grant to cover half of the costs of this work from the Parish Council, as well as support from two of our WODC councillors, for which we are very grateful.

The other major project undertaken was the replacement of the old and unreliable gas boiler that provided hot water to pub and kitchen. This was replaced with a new boiler and hot water water tank.

The internal redecoration was funded by Nicola herself, and we are appreciative of her contribution to the upkeep of the pub. Our Treasurer Linda will outline some of the general improvement projects we are considering for 2025. One of the significant monthly costs we have to cover is the repayment of the loan that was secured to help buy the pub. The committee has agreed a to repay a portion of the loan plus a moderate increase to our monthly repayments to help reduce the term of the loan, and therefore decrease the amount of interest we will ultimately have to pay. We believe this is fiscally responsible as the interest rate on the loan is well above the BOE base rate.

As in previous years, the pub has hosted various ad-hoc events events such as live music nights, guest mobile food offerings, and also numerous parties for local events and celebrations. A popular addition to these this year has been the Rock and Roll Bingo nights, which attracts a good following for a fun night out. Recently we saw the return of the gourmet dinner evening, where ex-landlord and chef Ben Bullen made a guest return to the kitchen to work with Tash (our current chef). The standard of the food and accompanying wine was excellent, and much enjoyed by those present.

Work on the outside areas also remains a priority for the committee, and we are lucky to have Liz Owen and her extended family and friends who help to tend the garden seating areas. We are also fortunate to have the services of Nolan Richmond for his metal fabrication skills and general expertise on various minor building projects.

Thanks also go to our secretary Gwyn Bevan for his support with the committee meetings and for keeping tabs on our shareholder register; Linda Oliver for her diligence on her duties as Treasurer; Robin Jones for his liaison role with the pub tenants; Andrea Main for her expertise on digital marketing; Clare Edwards for her knowledge and support as Vice Chair, and Mike Edwards for his willingness and skills at tackling a wide range of odd jobs that continually present themselves when you are least expecting them.

All of the current nine committee members have expressed a desire to continue to serve for a further 12 months, and we have had no new expressions of interest to join the committee. We will allocate specific roles and responsibilities at our next committee meeting in April.

There are also a great number of people who are not on the committee who provide their time and skills to help support the pub. I would be on my feet for too long if I mentioned everyone, but their are a few I would like to pick out as examples. Nicky Rogan has been a fantastic advocate for the White House both personally and officially through her position as Chair of the Wake Up to Woodstock group. Richard Conway has created a great following for his weekly quiz, and also comperes the bingo nights. Michael Parker leads a group of green fingered horticulturists who provide fresh fruit and vegetables for the pub kitchen from the Bladon allotments, and David Elvidge has been very helpful in sorting out some of the electrical issues that have plagued us over the past year.

On a final note, it would be remiss of me not to mention the incident that recently occurred in the pub car park, causing substantial damage to the wall and the BT comms cabinet that abutted it. I was on holiday at the time, so really appreciate the efforts of those that agreed to appear on the headline Meridian News feature to publicise the plight of the village. We have put the matter in the hands of our insurance company, who have confirmed that our commercial buildings insurance covers the cost of the repairs required. I have just received quotes for the repair work and will be submitting them to the insurance company for approval. Our insurance company will then recover these costs from the driver's insurance on our behalf. Compensation for the business impact due to loss of internet access will be dealt with by Nicola's insurance.

Once again I would like to express my thanks to all the members of the Committee for their time and unwavering commitment. I would also like to thank all you shareholders for your continued support in helping us ensure that the White House continues to thrive.

Thank you.