

Chair report for Bladon Community Benefit Society (BCBS) 2025

Presented on 10th March 2026

Good evening everyone, and thank you for coming along tonight. It's great to see so many familiar faces, and I'd like to welcome you all to the Annual General Meeting of the Bladon Community Benefit Society. As Chair, I'll give a brief overview of the past year and highlight some of the key developments at the White House.

As most of you here are probably aware, Nicola Smith left the White House in May, having taken on the tenancy at the end of summer 2024. I'd like to thank Nicola and her team for their hard work and for their commitment to the community ethos of the pub during her time with us.

Following our search for a new tenant, we decided to appoint Mev Karaj. Mev owns and runs Brothertons, a popular local restaurant, and also has other business interests in Woodstock. Having previously run the Back Lane in Woodstock for a number of years, he was keen to get back to running a local pub. His vision for the type of establishment he wanted to run aligned well with ours. His track record of success in the local hospitality sector was also a significant factor.

Since June Mev and his team have worked really hard to build on the efforts of our previous tenants, but to also to put their own stamp on things. Akil has enviable practical skills and boundless energy and enthusiasm. His work to remodel the garden area is a testament to this, and we are all really looking forward to enjoying this outdoor space as the weather improves. Sally and Rob have brought in lots of local pub experience in front of house and the kitchen respectively. The pub is also providing valuable hospitality experience for some of our local younger folks.

The reintroduction of Aunt Sally to the White House has been a big success. This was initiated during Ben Bullen's tenancy, and has continued ever since. The pub has teams playing in the local leagues, and this contributes to a busy and lively atmosphere during the warmer months on match evenings.

One of the issues we encountered when searching for a new tenant was the use of the car park by non-customers such as visitors to Blenheim. This obviously impacts on the parking spaces available for actual trade, and was a major turn off for prospective tenants. Nicola Smith initiated parking control measures, but these were not particularly effective. We therefore

agreed that the new tenancy team could instigate stricter parking control measures that use automated licence plate recognition. The official signposts warning of parking control are clearly visible, and an additional notice have been put up to alert customers who use the car park of their requirement to lodge their licence plate when entering the pub. However, we also appreciated the difficulty parents had finding somewhere to park to drop off and collect their children from school, so the tenant has agreed to set up 30 minute free parking windows in the morning and afternoon to support them.

The 10% discount on both food and drink purchases that was introduced by Nicola Smith has been continued under the new management. We now have 525 shareholders with 13 new shareholders signing up since the last AGM. The share offer is still open and anyone can buy shares using the forms on our website (bladoncommunitypub.org).

As in previous years the committee has continued to prioritise reinvesting income received to improve and enhance the facilities. This year we funded repairs and redecoration of the exterior of the pub as well as redecoration of the living accommodation. As mentioned in last years report, the committee has committed to overpay monthly payments on an outstanding loan that was carrying a relatively high level of annual interest. I am pleased to report that the final instalment was paid this month, meaning that our most expensive debt is now cleared. Happily this will provide additional income for reinvestment in improving the facilities, such as funding the extensive works on the rear garden area.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the committee members for their time and commitment over the past year. This year we have also been joined by long term resident Steve Chipper. Steve has extensive work experience in the supply of beverages to licensed establishments, plus a useful working knowledge of the pub trade. He is a great addition to the team and his input very welcome.

All of the current ten 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 later this month.

Once again I would like to thank all of you who are not on the committee that contribute to the activities and events that make the White House a fantastic example of a thriving community pub. These weekly and one off special events provide a lot of enjoyment and a positive spirit that helps to cement old friendships and foster new ones.

Finally I would also like to thank all of you shareholders. Without your generous financial and moral support the White House would probably have been consigned to history along with the other numerous public houses that once were part of the fabric of the village. I am confident that the BCBS now has the financial resources and the right pub management team to continue on its path as a valuable community resource for the village of Bladon and the surrounding area.

Thank you.