

# **Longparish Community Pub Limited**

## ***Chairman's Report for the Annual Members' Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021***

When we received the keys to the Plough from our Parish Council we already had great plans, as were laid out in our business plan which supported the community share offer to which all our members had so generously subscribed. As soon as we gained full access to the property, we were able to take stock of what we had, establish exactly what we needed to do, and identify where we should prioritise spending our budget for the refurbishment works.

There were several key decisions that needed to be made in those early days. The first of which was to focus as much resource as possible on the area known as 'Front of House' to create something very special. This is the part of the building that our customers would see once the Plough was reopened. A particular challenge was an area just in front of the bar that previously created an unwelcoming bottleneck as soon as customers walked into the building. We decided to fix this issue while we could, and after taking advice from our structural engineer, called in our volunteer demolition squad.

We also recognised early on that we needed to address accessibility challenges elsewhere in the building. This was particularly necessary in the public washrooms, where there was no possibility for wheelchair access. This involved some significant remodelling of the layout, and was another job quickly taken up by our volunteer demolition squad.

As our refurbishment budget was being reshaped by these unanticipated works, there were some other key decisions we needed to make. The practicalities of preparing for the two large rooms at the front of the building, which we'd hoped could potentially be used later for bed & breakfast accommodation, would be very complex and expensive. So, we decided to use this space to create a spacious manager's flat without needing a huge budget. Something we felt would give us a competitive edge when it came to recruiting our future manager.

Another early priority was to get some heat into the building. That required a new boiler, and as soon as the plumbing works for the central heating were started, it became clear that the existing plumbing in the older parts of the building was no longer fit for purpose. Pipework had been added to and changed over the years, and then with the building left empty for five years, many of the pipes had frozen and split. The only solution was to tear down all the ceilings on the ground floor – another job tackled with enthusiasm by our volunteer demolition squad! – and that in turn also gave us an opportunity to have most of the old electricity cables replaced and to redesign the lighting while we had access.

However, it wasn't all about demolition and destruction in those early days. A new boundary fence was erected by volunteers over a single weekend, and the overgrown gardens were soon starting to be tamed.

Having torn the place apart, the time soon arrived to replace ceilings, rebuild walls, install a replacement bar, new toilets and so on. Again, much of this was carried out by our teams of hard-working volunteers. However, it also became very clear that relying almost entirely on volunteers was going to take a huge amount of time, and that volunteer fatigue and school holidays were starting to impact on the level of help we were able to call upon. There was also a growing impatience from many of our supporters to see results and to get the pub reopened. With this in mind, and in the knowledge we'd need to secure some additional

funding to cover additional expenses, we took the decision to call in professionals to help get things finished. On Sept 16<sup>th</sup> the doors were opened for customers.

The trade kitchen at that point was still being rebuilt. We'd discovered that the extraction and ventilation system would need to be replaced if we wanted to use any gas appliances in the kitchen, and to do this would be both time consuming and require significant funds that we didn't have. The solution was to go all electric in the trade kitchen. We believe this is the way forward, modern electric induction hobs are far more energy efficient than gas, and by switching from gas to electric it will help to reduce our carbon footprint.

Of course, nothing is ever quite that simple, and to support the new electric kitchen equipment means we'll need to double the capacity of our electric supply. Until we can do that, Dean our chef is juggling with the equipment he has switched on at any one time, to avoid blowing a main fuse! We're currently in negotiation with the electricity network operator as to how the extra supply can be delivered.

Throughout the project our priorities have been guided by something called the 'MOSCOW' principle. This guides where we spend our limited resources into 'Must do' and 'Should do', while things we'd perhaps like to have or 'Could do', and things that could 'Wait' would be deferred to a later date when we had the time and money needed. Only the things that would directly support our reopening, or required for health and safety, were completed in this first phase.

There are still works to complete in the grounds; we have planning permission to expand the car park area, and install electric charging points; there is more fencing to complete, surfaces to repair and lawns to reseed. Some of the outbuildings are in a poor state and will need some significant works. The potential state of the pub's roof has been a source of much conjecture and concern. We made it a priority to carry out the initial works identified in the original building survey, including clearing moss and loose tiles, and the addition of tile guards over the entrance. We and the Parish Council (as the building's owners) have now taken further professional advice and are reassured that the roof appears to be structurally sound and needs little immediate attention. However, we recognise that we still need to plan for a programme of future work to the roof in general, and will need to allocate funding for this purpose.

Our Treasurer's report outlines the budgets needed and how we hope to finance these works.

***Interest payments on investments:***

We will not be making any interest payments on investments for the last financial year. Members will be aware that the basis of shareholding is that shares need to be held for a minimum of three years and that no interest is payable for the first three years of holding shares. After that, interest is payable at the discretion of the Management Committee.

Once three years have elapsed since our first share issue, the ability to make an interest payment will be reviewed each year.

***Membership and Membership Strategy:*** We gained 229 new shareholders through our community shares offer to new investors and we now have 237 members, who have invested £330,400 in the Society. Our opening share offer closed in December last year, and since then it has not been possible for new members to join. However, it is the intention for the Society

to include new members, who will be able to purchase the minimum shares required either via further community share offers seeking to raise additional funding for specific projects, or via a membership only share application. More details on both of these are planned very soon.

**Governance:** The Society is committed to respecting the philosophy with which it was established (to benefit the community, to operate based on one member-one vote), to fulfil the aims for which share capital was raised, and to ensure the Plough Inn 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.

***“More than a pub” activities:***

The support we've received from all our local councils, and indeed a significant factor in the wider support given to this whole project, has been based on the broader benefits that community ownership of this key village asset can bring to our community. The £100k grant & loan package we received under the 'More than a pub' program, which was supported by the Plunkett Foundation, Power to Change and Key Fund, were also instrumental in enabling this project to go ahead.

The Plough is intended to be both a pub and a community hub. Our funding organisations, require that we demonstrate how our pub is central to the social wellbeing of our community. We will soon submit our first annual reports to these organisations, setting out the good progress we have made towards this aim. Although the pub has been open for only a short time, a new village club has been formed and meets in the pub on Monday evenings (Longparish Poker Club); the LCA's coffee morning was held in the Plough earlier this month; and the refurbished community room opened this week – known as The River Room, this space is already being used for meetings, and Longparish Choir will be using it as a regular rehearsal venue from tomorrow.

***Management Committee:***

During this year the Committee agreed that one seat on the Committee should be reserved for a representative from the Parish Council (the property's owners). One new member also joined the Management Committee within the year. The ten Committee Members have met, as necessary, to take decisions on behalf of Shareholders and to protect their interests.

***Summary:***

The last year's activities have required much more time and effort than I think any of us had anticipated. However, we have managed to lease, refurbish, and reopen the pub for trading while protecting shareholder's interests.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members for their dedication and support, without which we could not have achieved our current position. We are in a healthy position going ahead and the new committee look forward to supporting our management team, Steve and Lucy, in running the pub.

Finally, we have made a fantastic start and it is in all our hands now to continue to build a community asset that we can all be proud of, and I look forward to doing this with you.