

Longparish Community Pub Limited

Chairman's Report for the Annual Members' Meeting on 25th October 2023

Chairman's Welcome

This is our fourth Annual Members Meeting, and this year has been our second full year of trading. It has been an eventful 12 months, during which we've faced some significant setbacks, but have also made some great progress.

Firstly, I'd like to say a very special thank you to the members who put themselves forward to stand for election to the committee.

Following the events earlier in the year, my fear was that members may have been put off from applying to be part of the management committee. It appears the opposite was the case, and there is now renewed interest in helping with the management and directly contributing to the success of the Society and the future of the Plough as a community hub and pub.

That so many members are willing to join the management committee is hugely encouraging. Having the support of members each year who are willing to serve on the committee will be essential to ensure the Society's success in the future.

Our thanks also go to Graeme Francis for acting as Society Secretary, and for his willingness to continue in the role.

Chairman's Report

In my report last year, I mentioned that we'd come a long way over the previous year, but that we still faced some key challenges. I don't think any of us could have predicted quite how challenging the next 12 months were going to be.

At last year's AMM we were heading into Christmas, unsure at the time if we had enough kitchen staff to manage, and hoping we could find a way to get the business open for customers 7 days a week.

I'd like to acknowledge, and say thank you, for the significant contribution that our former manager, Steve, together with his partner Lucy, played in helping us to get through that difficult period, and also for their help in managing the rapidly growing business through the first half of this year.

2023 has been, and continues to be, very challenging for all businesses operating in hospitality. The cost-of-living crisis, staff shortages and rising costs are each on their own significant challenges. Combined together they have led to two pubs permanently closing across the UK every day.

After the necessary changes made to the business at the start of July, the committee has needed to step-in to actively support and manage the business day-to-day, while also preparing to search for our new long-term manager.

We are all acutely aware of the divisions created within our small community over this period. Rebuilding the spirit and sense of community, and engaging with everyone who wants to be part of making this pub & hub an enduring success will be a top priority for the new committee during the next year.

This year has also had its share of successes. The Plough has become a destination pub of choice for customers coming from far and wide. In our original business plan, we recognised that the Plough could not succeed if it only relied on business from our local community. For the pub business to succeed, it would also need to become a successful destination venue, and in the business plan we aimed to attract customers from up to 10 miles away. Today, many of our customers come from much further afield. It's not unusual to welcome groups of friends meeting up from as far away as London, Bristol, Portsmouth and Oxford. The Plough offers a great and convenient central meeting place, and one worth making the journey for. Our customers continue to leave us positive reviews on Google and sites like TripAdvisor, who recently awarded us with their "Traveller's Choice" awarded to the top 10% of businesses worldwide. Thank you to all our dedicated staff for their hard work, extra hours, and commitment they've put in to making the pub business a success.

You may be aware that we offer stop-over parking for passing camper van users. As customers of the pub they provide additional business, help to build our reputation to a wider area, and quite often need to book well in advance, looking to return again and again whenever they are passing. Our popular Sunday lunches are regularly filled to capacity, and on the other days we are open, we have continued to maintain healthy levels of turnover.

Finding staff, and managing our staff costs are still our two biggest challenges. Without enough staff we can't open 7 days a week. After the cost of the products we sell, our staff costs are the next most significant cost, dwarfing even our eye-wateringly high energy costs. However, through working closely with our temporary manager Mark, we now plan to be open 7 days a week starting from November.

I'm also pleased to be able to advise that initial interviews are underway for recruiting our next full-time manager.

Of course, our aim is for the Plough to be much "more than a pub". Community is at the heart of the Society, and the community hub is an integral part. "Success" means establishing not only a successful commercial business, but also fulfilling the promises of creating a true community hub.

Our business has evolved from a start-up to a maturing enterprise. To reflect this change our mission statement has been updated from seeking to "Save the Plough" to *"Aiming to be a thriving, welcoming community-owned pub and hub, providing a great place for meeting, eating, drinking, working and socialising, with broader community benefits"*.

The community benefits, and the wider community-based aspirations of the Society, can only happen if we have a sustainable and successful commercial business to financially support this. Consequently, the priority and focus for the Management Committee will always be to ensure the success of the underlying commercial business.

That doesn't mean the community hub aspects will be ignored. But another major challenge, and one that I don't think is very often recognised, is time, or rather the lack of time. Your committee are all volunteers, many of whom also have busy day jobs. There are so many areas to focus on, that it is simply impossible to do everything we'd all like to. Over the last 3 months, just managing the day-to-day issues facing the pub business have become all consuming, and the time commitments required have become unsustainable. The community aspects of the project, from local community engagement, providing hub facilities and resources have unfortunately suffered. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to say please talk to me, or anyone else on the committee, if you think you may be able to help support this important area of our mission.

Interest payments on investments:

We will not be making any interest payments on investments for the last financial year. Shares need to be held for a minimum of three years and no interest is payable during those first three years. After that, interest is payable at the discretion of the Management Committee and will be reviewed each year.

Membership and Membership Strategy:

We now have 310 members, who have invested a total of £438,030 in the Society. In the next few months, the Society will open a new open-ended community-shares offer to welcome additional members.

Summary & Thank You:

Thank you to all our volunteers who have contributed their time and energy over the last year working in the gardens, or helping to build fences, carrying out repairs, or diving in at short notice when the kitchen needed urgent help with the washing up, or even organising and hosting wakes.

Thank you to my fellow committee members for their dedication and support, without whom I'm sure we would not have got through the last few months.

Plus again, a huge thank you to all of our staff, both past and present, for their commitment and hard work through last year.

Thank you also to our Parish Council for their continued support and understanding.

This last year has been far more challenging than any of us could have imagined. However, we now have a great foundation and strong underlying business which has proved to be very resilient.

Your Committee remain confident that the Plough can run as a profitable business. Our focus heading into the next year will be to continue to build on the things we are doing well, and continue to improve wherever we can. I'm often asked by members how can we best help? Right now, you can help most by supporting your pub. Please use The Plough, bring your friends, and enjoy what it has to offer.

We have all built a fantastic community asset in the Plough, and one that we can all be proud of.