CHAIRMAN REPORT

Welcome everyone to a normal AGM. Our last normal AGM was August 2019, the last time we covered a full year’s trading. Even last year, due to Covid restrictions we didn’t start trading until April 12th, for outside service only and with waitress service. Restrictions eased and on May 19th hospitality could open inside with a rule of six and face masks until July 19th when we were allowed to open normally, with restrictions lifted.

During these many changes the committee worked closely with Katie as we needed to constantly adapt our systems and employ more staff to enable us to give a safe environment while offering a professional service to customers.

We spent a lot of time getting things ready starting with the outside being professionally painted and it still looks bright and cheerful. As the garden is our best asset, we invested in new outside furniture to increase capacity for the garden and new parasols for the terraced area. The Boot Bar had a revamp, painted in new colours with canvases of the village submitted by locals, new bar stools and window blinds completed the room. The hallway, bar, lounge, and restaurant were also painted to freshen up the pub. As storage is an issue, we built a concrete base and purchased a large shed, with space for a second one if needed.

All that seems a long time ago.

Trade over the rest of the summer could have been better if the sun managed to shine occasionally but we were open and at last were making a small profit.

Autumn and winter were good, Halloween and the launch of the Village Advent Calendar are now a successful fixed events in the calendar. The garden Christmas display is enjoyed by villagers and from further afield, thanks to the Manor Farm and Leasingham Parish Council we have been able to expand our lighting display.

Volunteers have grappled with decorating a huge Christmas tree, with many strings of lights that sometimes appear to fight back plus all the other standalone displays.

Burns Night has become popular and last year sold out within 48 hours. Quiz night on Tuesdays is almost to capacity each week. We now also run a Quizzical lunch on the 1st Thursday every month, which is growing in popularity. Open Mic night is also held monthly on the 2nd Wednesday, no two nights have been the same with wide performances of different music genres.

We have several local groups meeting at The Duke, such as a Book Group, School PTA, Leasingham Golf Society play monthly and enjoy a post-match meal. The pool team have been promoted to Division Three in the local league. If you are interested in any of the above, including the pool team, please contact Katie.

Several local groups have enjoyed a meal and social event during the year, including Leasingham WI and Ladies Group.

We have been honoured to host several funeral wakes for local villagers, plus happier events for weddings and christenings.

LCBS and Katie are also proud to work closely with the Village Hall, we are very pleased that the Duke runs the bar at the hall and also we appreciate the loan of marquees and tables for our events.

All hospitality has suffered during the pandemic, many have closed and sold for other purposes or changed the way they operate, for example many pubs are opening reduced hours or serving food weekends only. Reasons for this are staff shortages, and rising costs to keep their businesses open. We are constantly reviewing costs and practises, but price increases are out of our control.

We had a rise from our brewery, which was quite steep but due to our rise in purchasing beer etc from them we managed to negotiate a better deal which will help over the next 3 years. Unfortunately, that doesn’t apply to utilities as commercial companies are not price capped. Our gas prices have already gone up 3-fold for the next 2 years. We are in the process of negotiating with the electric companies to try and get a deal in place for September. At the moment it looks like there will be an increase of around £12,000 to £14,000 per year.

This new financial year we are doing well with increased trade and controlling cost etc and look forward to at last to be able to pay interest on your shares. This of course relies on your continued support and that the world sorts out the war in the Ukraine which appears to be causing most of the financial problems and shortages around the world.

As you can see from the published accounts, we have made minimal profit, so regretfully we will not be paying interest on shares this year, but as I have just said we hope to pay interest on shares next year if trade carries on roughly in the way it has been so far this financial year.

The rule for paying interest is that we can only pay interest on profit made in the last financial year, if enough profit has been made it will then be the board’s decision to recommend paying an interest payment to the shareholders this will be put to the shareholders next year and it will be the shareholders decision next AGM to approve or change the proposal of the board.

As with all businesses we need customers. The pub aims to cater for all, with the variety of events, offering a venue for groups and clubs and family occasions. The pub needs you all to come along and enjoy the pub you own, the village pub you invested in.

Katie and the team are working hard to give you a great village pub. We have worked with Grantham College to offer work experience to catering students and now employ Lucy as Kitchen Assistant working with Simon in the kitchen. We are proud to employ 12 local people and to offer employment to local young people. Katie and Simon are developing a new menu and planning more events. Please support her in her efforts on your behalf.

Thank you everyone who has contributed to the pub during the last year, the many volunteers who garden, paint, repair, revamp. To Katie, Simon and all of the staff and of course, the committee who have worked harder than ever on your behalf. Please join us today for a free drink at the bar at end of the meeting. You can also buy more drinks if you want.