

RIDSDALE COMMUNITY GROUP LTD

Chairmans Report 2021

Good evening Ladies & Gentleman, Shareholders, Residents and Friends of The Gun at Ridsdale.

Where do we start on the inaugural Annual General Meeting of the Ridsdale Community Group?

We must go back to July 2019 when the word went round that the Gun Inn was going to close and a “Change of Use” had been applied for; it would have left the village with no amenities. A public meeting was called and held at Lower Chesterhope Farm. 38 locals attended and it was agreed that all efforts should be made to keep the pub open.

Within weeks a committee was formed and a village survey carried out. A purchase price was agreed with the owners and discussions began on how those monies might be raised. Meanwhile an initial grant from the Ray Wind Fund and the Ridsdale Village Hall Trust allowed building reports to be completed, as well as covering the initial administration costs.

In November 2019 a website was built and a prospectus published to attract shareholders. At the start only modest amounts of monies were raised, but following support on Twitter from best-selling crime writers such as Ann Cleeves and Ian Rankin, there was a significant spike in interest. This flurry of social media interest was picked up by The Observer’s northern correspondent and when his article about the pub was published on the second weekend of December 2019 over £100,000

was pledged. We were well on our way to reaching our target.

The Ridsdale Community Group had their offer accepted on the 21st December 2019. At this point the real business began studying and assessing the building survey; planning future building works and refurbishment schedules; setting the objectives and targets for the pub finding ways to fulfil the commitment to be a community hub.

While the work was daunting, the aim was simple: to provide a warm, friendly and happy environment where both locals and visitors could come together to relax, enjoy the ambience, and partake of good food and drink.

The sale of the pub to the Ridsdale Community Group was not realised until 27th May 2020, by which time - of course - we found ourselves in the first lockdown of the current COVID 19 pandemic (23rd March 2020 to July 2020). However, on the 28th of May, the committee began an ambitious refurbishment programme. The first item to go was the old bar, taking care to recover the old pennies that adorned it. Special mention to Stephen Jackson for the rebuild of the bar and to Becky Short for her stripping of the old pennies from the old bar, cleaning them and effectively re-mounting them in areas around the pub.

It was envisaged - before the purchase went through - that refurbishment would be a formality, a clean-up, a lick of paint, some minor repairs ... but it soon became apparent that there would need to be substantial works to bring the building up to the standard that you all would expect.

The bar area, kitchen and toilets were all hastily cleaned and re-decorated, but this was not possible in the bedrooms, where bowing ceilings and walls called for the whole of the first floor to be gutted, taking it back to a clean canvas, which allowed for a new letting room layout to be drawn up. With local tradesman employed under the watchful eye of Janice Smith and Kerry Scott the first floor was transformed into four ensuite rooms finished to a very high standard. Given the difficulties we've all faced over the last 18 months the rooms were not available until the end of the second COVID lockdown, but over the summer there was more than a 90% occupancy rate and all the feedback we've had nothing but praise for the standard of the rooms from our many guests.

Eventually the pub was able to open at the end of August 2020 and traded until the start of the second COVID lockdown in November 2020. Sandy and Dougie Armstrong - with a wealth of experience - kindly assisted as caretaker managers. Then in October 2020 Alan Reid was appointed Manager with Dave Thompson as Chef.

Alongside the refurbishment and opening of the pub, grants and loans were being successfully sought for an ambitious plan to build a new toilet block and cellar, with a new kitchen going where the old toilets and rear entrance used to be situated. The plan was to carry out the new build over a twelve-month period starting in the spring of 2021. But the committee, frustrated by the lockdown, took the calculated risk of commencing the work in January 2021 with a target date for completion of April 2021. Thanks to the co-operation of local tradesman and all the volunteers - apart from the rendering of the walls - the whole building was

finished by the beginning of May: the new additions to the old building, the accommodation upstairs and, outside, the transformation of the garden, patio, and car park. The garden and its surrounds has proved to be a great asset to the business, with the magnificent view appreciated by many of our clients and locals alike.

There are many people to thank for their support throughout this whole project, people who have dedicated time and effort particularly through the difficult period we've faced over the last 18 months, so on behalf of the committee I thank you all.

I have a special thanks to the committee who from the very start of this project have given many hours of their time in making this business something very special. I'm sure their dedication will be appreciated by every shareholder, resident of Ridsdale and friend of The Gun

.
Concluding, we now have a community unit that we can all feel proud of. We have fulfilled most of the objectives of the original business plans, with only a few to complete. It's not all gone smoothly, as with all new businesses, we have experienced a number of teething problems and there have been some disagreements along the way ... however, the business now feels settled with a new manageress - Louise - at the helm, supported by a new chef Sarah, and we can now, hopefully, look forward to a period of stability and sustainability.

But we can't take our foot off the pedal: with winter approaching now is the time that the continuing success of the business will be tested ... so I

ask you all for your continuing support.

Thanks.

John Bassett