

Pubs are a force for good

By Keith Bott MBE, President of PubAid

“My passion for pubs started early in life. As an 8-year-old I had a book that I took with me everywhere and wrote down the names of the pubs I saw, along with the name of the brewery who owned it.

“By the time I was 15, I was caught enjoying a pint whilst on a geography field trip. The teacher who disciplined me asked why I had chosen to go into the Church Inn, and when I explained it was the best free house in the 1983 Good Beer Guide, he laughed and pointed out that was why he had chosen it too! Times have changed and pubs would no longer countenance 15-year-olds drinking, but they still remain the place where we all come together.

“That same passion for pubs lies behind the foundation of PubAid 11 years ago, when a group of industry stalwarts came together with a common cause. Pubs were being portrayed as the problem in communities, particularly in town centres and they created PubAid and present a different image of pubs.

“PubAid continues to champion the pub as the beating heart of communities, recognising how they bring social cohesion, reduce loneliness, provide safe supervised environments, care about their neighbours and work tirelessly to support local charities and sports clubs. Our research indicates that pubs raise more than £100m every year for charity, and support grassroots sports to the tune of around £40m.

“No one could have foreseen what has happened to our industry over the last 12 months and we’re all glad to be, hopefully, out of lockdown permanently and able to start rebuilding our badly bruised sector. We wouldn’t want to live through those months of lockdown again, but they clearly demonstrated the pub’s role in helping local communities.

“Whether ‘pivoting’ to sell groceries so that vulnerable people could shop locally and safely, or providing hot meals to elderly residents, or keeping their customers connected through online quizzes or music, licensees across the land stepped up. And this despite frequently facing uncertainty and financial hardship themselves.

“So, when PubAid started planning its annual Charity Pub of the Year Awards, it changed the emphasis, and the name, to recognise not just the traditional fundraising by pubs – which by necessity had been curtailed during lockdown – but all this fantastic work that pubs were doing to support their communities. Hence the Community Pub Hero Awards were launched, with vital sponsorship from Matthew Clark, who have supported PubAid since the start, and working with the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group.

“This year’s 10 finalists were quite phenomenal, each in their own way highlighting the incredible care and selflessness that is displayed by our fabulous publicans across the United Kingdom. Reaching the finals was an achievement in itself, given the calibre of entries we received and I know judges found it a challenge to choose a shortlist, and then choose our two overall winners from it.

“We are grateful to the support of the Beer Group and its chairman Mike Wood for this year’s Awards. Its MPs nominated more than 60 pubs – a record which underlines their recognition of all that pubs mean to their communities. It was one of Mike’s predecessors, Graham Evans, who summed up exactly what the Community Pub Hero Awards are about when he declared: “Pubs are a force for good”!

Keith Bott became PubAid’s first President in 2020. He is the founder and MD of Titanic Brewery in Stoke-on-Trent and has served as Chairman of both the Society of Independent Brewers and the Midlands Section of the British Beer & Pub Association.