

TONY KELLY, MD

THE ASPINALL FOUNDATION



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PORT LYMPNE HOTEL & RESERVE



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- We are owned by The Aspinall Foundation, a charity dedicated to the breeding and rewilding of endangered species. As well as owning the parks where the animals are kept we also operate in the Gabon and Congo, Madagascar, Indonesia, Java and South Africa.
- We run a luxury resort within a 600 acre estate and wildlife reserve based on the Kent coast, comprising of 81 units of accommodation, extensive event and wedding facilities, 3 restaurants and a day visitor attraction, which accommodates up to 150,000 people per annum.
- The 81 units of accommodation are made up of 13 different styles. Our premium lodges, Lion, Tiger, Wolf & Rhino sell for up to £1800 per night.
- Our sister park, Howletts Wild Animal Park near Canterbury is a more traditional wildlife park open to day visitors only but also hosts up to 200,000 people per annum.
- Prior to lockdown 1 we were looking forward to a strong year, occupancy was budgeted at 70.0% and AARR was expected to be £325 per night. We had 70 weddings booked and we were about to launch a day visitor revitalisation plan.



IMPACT OF COVID-19



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- As with all businesses the lockdown came as a seismic shock.
- We immediately looked at our cashflow and worked out what we had left to survive on, came up with worst case scenarios and looked to our bank to support us. All capital projects were halted.
- Whilst I and the FD secured the business through making use of furlough schemes and a CBIL Loan our teams got on with managing our forward bookings.
- With Easter looming, strong forward reservations and a panicked customer base, our reservations teams were overloaded with calls. Whilst our events teams were completely swamped with brides and grooms trying to get their head around what was happening to their big day.
- We took the decision to not 'go dark' on these people and instead drafted from within the business more people to deal with the fallout and proactively reach out to people. We later heard that many businesses simply went silent on their customers, (British Airways!!), we believe this approach later helped us recover quicker.
- Our estimate at this point was that the crisis would cost us £5.0m in lost profits in 2020 and 18 months to recover, assuming a phased return to operations from 1st July onwards.



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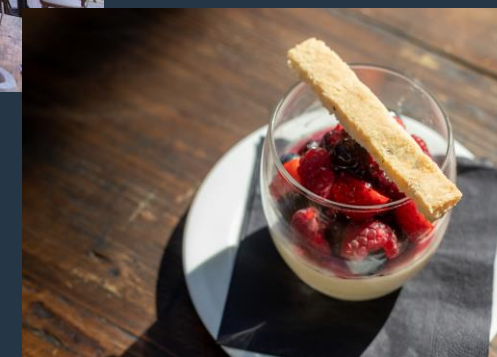


HOW WE COPED & DIVERSIFIED OUR BUSINESS



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- The initial 4-6 weeks were all about managing the customers and securing the business.
- Once we had settled into a pattern we began preparing for re-opening, not from an operational perspective as that was unknown, but from a PR and marketing perspective.
- Our initial approach was to create awareness of the plight of the charity – the instruction was – become spokespeople, stay in the news and make people aware of our plight as a charity. We succeeded and were on TV and radio constantly through lockdown.
- Our marketing teams were not furloughed and took the chance to build campaigns and continue with a large social media presence.
- We continued to proactively reach out to customers as and when the lockdown continued. The strategy was not only to maintain their confidence but to keep their money. We needed to keep their cash – by contacting them and proactively offering new dates, credits etc we retained 80% of forward booked cash.





HOW WE COPED & DIVERSIFIED OUR BUSINESS



- Once an opening date (15th June for day visitors & 4th July for accommodation) became clear we did a number of things.
- We launched the marketing plans prior to opening, focussed on our ability to offer a safe environment and the obvious staycation boom that was coming.
- We reached out to local people to volunteer to help get the parks back ready to receive visitors. We were swamped with offers and had 600 people volunteer to paint, cut grass, sweep, clean etc.
- We communicated endlessly with our customers directly and on line about how covid was impacting their stay and what we were doing to manage it.
- We launched a wet weather policy where if it rained for 2 hours in your pre booked visit you could come back for free.
- We converted our function space that had been refurbished for weddings and was now redundant, into a fine dining restaurant – The Garden Room. This was also helpful to expand the number of covers we could serve as social distancing had reduced our capacity.
- On the back of this we built a bespoke luxury Christmas package of 3 days and 2 nights to maximise on people not going skiing.
- We launched a take away service from our restaurants - DeliverZoo ©



RESULTS



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- The reaction from the public was stunning, in terms of day visitors we doubled our budgeted figures every month from the date of reopening.
- Occupancy in our accommodation never dropped below 90% through to the most recent lockdown. Occupancy in August was 99.7%.
- We held firm on rates and didn't discount, we didn't panic in the lockdown period. AARR for the year will now be £450. Demand meant we could maximise rate.
- Our Garden Room doubled our original budgeted turnover.
- Our Christmas package sold out in 4 days raising £125k.
- Of the forecast £5.0m loss we recovered £4.0m in 4 months.



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LOCKDOWN 2 AND THE FUTURE



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- The strong summer rebuilt our cashflow and has given us the ability to plan ahead through what is a quieter time for us anyway.
- The loss of November will cost us £0.4m, losing December would be a similar impact.
- During lockdown 1 we managed to secure planning permission for our most ambitious project to date. The conversion of a 15th Century building into a boutique 15 bedroom hotel and ancillary restaurant facilities - Giraffe Hall.
- That project together with the completion of Leopard Creek have now commenced. Giraffe Hall will open in 2022 and Leopard Creek in March 2021.
- We also recommenced a number of smaller projects – by March 2021 room stock will number 93 units.
- We are not complacent but believe we have coped as well as we could. As long as we can trade we think our approach will be successful and we will continue to benefit from what will undoubtedly be a stronger staycation market for a number of years.



THANK YOU



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HOWLETTS
ASPINALL WILD ANIMAL PARK



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