

## 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT FROM VERITY, FOUNDER OF BAA RAM EWE

Ten years is a long time to be in business in this day and age. I opened baa ram ewe back in 2009 with the exact same purpose that we have now: to put Yorkshire's unique and often undervalued wool heritage back on the world map. At that time acrylic yarns were still dominating the industry here and even historic Yorkshire brands such as Rowan, Sirdar, King Cole and Ramsdens were largely spinning abroad. The common view was that 'British Wool is only good for carpets' and choosing to work with local or breed specific wool and blends was seen as being only for a very niche market. Ravelry had only just been launched and buying yarn on the internet was just starting to take hold.

A decade on and the hand knitting world is a very different one. In many ways its development has been hugely inspirational: independent, female led businesses hold their own alongside established yarn brands, accessing worldwide audiences and markets via Ravelry, blogs and ecommerce platforms. Knitters themselves have a wonderful array of yarn choices from around the globe and there has been a huge increase in appetite for natural fibre yarns made with provenance and purpose. Yorkshire woollen mills and dye houses have expanded and doubled their shifts: some relocated back to Yorkshire after operating abroad. I am proud of the contribution- however small- baa ram ewe has made to promoting the quality and beauty of Yorkshire spun yarns as well as the increase in popularity of its sheep breeds such as the Wensleydale and Masham. These yarns and wool connects the community back to our local heritage and preserves a crucial part of this region's history. As a result we have also increased access to sustainable yarns and products and ploughed tens of thousands of pounds back into our local economy.

Anyone who has run a business over these past few years will, however, acknowledge there are massive challenges. It's no secret that many High Street retailers both inside and outside our industry are struggling to make things work in the current retail environment. The amazing choice, range and convenience of online shopping is something that opens up tantalising new worlds of creativity and possibility for consumers, but often with catastrophic effect to bricks and mortar stores. We are no exception. We know our shop is a welcoming, safe space for knitters and non-knitters to come together, share, learn and be inspired. Its role in the community has meant that for a number of years we have been steadfast in remaining open, despite adding to our debts. This in turn has increased pressure on the business to be profitable, and I know there have been times where I have felt we have had no option but to put our margins before our mission. I do not want this to continue.

The time I have had away from the business recently has given me a chance to think in more depth about how we can best achieve our purpose of sharing and celebrating Yorkshire's wool heritage. I have come to some significant and difficult decisions, but ones which I feel are essential if we are to survive, grow and stay true to our beliefs. We have begun the process of converting the business in to a CIC or Community Interest Company (aka a social enterprise or not-for-profit organisation). We will continue to make and sell our wonderful Yorkshire yarns both to trade and via our ecommerce store and yarn shows but in addition to this we hope to fund more events and experiences aimed at sharing the beauty and importance of this region's wool heritage. Being able to reach out to others rather than relying on visitors coming to our store feels like the most powerful and effective way to achieve this, and we will therefore be closing our retail store at the end of trading on **Saturday 21st September**. We know this news will be upsetting for many of our customers both past and present but I hope you can understand how we feel we have done all we can to make things work in this difficult trading environment.

Our new non-profit organisation and direction can only succeed with the support of you, the amazing community of knitters around the world. We hope we will continue to earn your support as we continue to share our passion for Yorkshire Wool for at least another 10 years or so. Please see the details below/overleaf if you have any specific questions about these changes.

*Verity*

## GOT SOME QUESTIONS? HERE ARE A FEW ANSWERS!

### **When will the shop close?**

The shop will close once and for all at 5pm on **Saturday 21st September**

### **Will I still be able to buy yarns from you direct?**

Yes! Our online shop will remain open for business, selling our baa ram ewe yarns, books, patterns and products. We'll also continue to attend our usual calendar of yarn shows- sign up to the newsletter to find out when & where.

### **Will there be a sale?**

For sure! Our in-store only sale starts tomorrow (Weds 28th August) at 10am and there will be some huge bargains to be had. Pop in for a visit!

### **I have a gift voucher- will I still be able to use it?**

Yes, don't worry. We are not going out of business, just closing the shop. Online gift vouchers are valid as usual, and we'll convert any in-date in-store vouchers in to online ones for you to spend. If you can't pop in to the shop to do this, just email us at [info@baaramewe.co.uk](mailto:info@baaramewe.co.uk)

### **What about in-store loyalty points?**

Without a store, there can be no more in-store loyalty points! From tomorrow (28th August) we'll stop adding points to any purchases. The good news is you have until 21st September to redeem your existing points on any products- including sale items!

### **Will there still be a knit night?**

Yes! Jane will continue to run these, and we are working on finding an appropriate venue- get in touch with us if you have suggestions :-)

### **Where are you moving to?**

We will be moving to a lovely rural office on the edge of Wetherby. Once we are settled we are even thinking of throwing a bit of a party.....details to follow!

### **Are there any team changes?**

As many of you will know from first hand experience, the lovely Jane is an amazing, warm and supportive human being. She is central to our plans for our funded work spreading the Yorkshire wool love in our community and beyond.

Sadly the incredible woman that is Katherine has decided to move back nearer home to Derbyshire....we are going to miss her so much! Verity will be returning to run things day-to-day from September along with the addition of Sarah, our new Marketing Coordinator alongside Graeme and Alison.

### **Are you still selling to trade customers?**

We certainly are. Becoming a baa ram ewe retailer will be a key part of supporting our social enterprise work. If you would like to discuss this further, drop a note to our Graeme: [sales@baaramewe.co.uk](mailto:sales@baaramewe.co.uk)

### **How does a CIC / social enterprise work?**

Fundamentally CICs are normal companies. However, they have some unique and important additional features to safeguard their social mission. A CIC has to carry out activities which fulfil a community purpose- the so-called "community interest test". A CIC also has a "lock" on its assets. This prevents profits from being distributed to its members or shareholders other than in certain limited circumstances. It also means that all assets must be used for the community purpose or, if they are sold, open market value must be obtained for them and the proceeds used for the community purpose.

### **How can I support your new social enterprise?**

We are just getting things sorted out right now, but soon we hope to be running exciting projects and events that we'll be eager to recruit volunteers and helpers for- if you're interested in helping out in the future, do let us know via [info@baaramewe.co.uk](mailto:info@baaramewe.co.uk). Thanks!