

The Friends of Briantspuddle Post Office and Village Shop Association Ltd

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in

Briantspuddle Village Hall, Friday 29 April 2022 at 19.00

The Chair, Ali Chorley, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and for their support over the past two years. She said that she had been looking forward to holding an AGM, not only to deal with the necessary items of business, but also to celebrate the continuing success of the Shop and Post Office.

Attendance

There were 35 members in attendance. Copies of the agenda, the accounts and the minutes of the last AGM were distributed.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from 4 members of the community.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM of 31 January 2020 (no AGM was held in 2021).

Ali thanked the (then) outgoing Chairman, Ken Kilbank, for all he had done for the shop (see also item 4). The Minutes were accepted as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

- i. A member of the community asked how the increase in turnover and profit could be maintained. Ali replied that the next 12 months would show the extent to which the community wanted to use the shop.
- ii. In response to another question, Ali said that we could consider extending opening hours but this would depend on having the necessary volunteers and that it produced a commensurate increase in business.
- iii. A member of the community asked about the possibility of installing a lift to improve access to the shop. Ali replied that this had been considered but the practicalities were very difficult and a costly. However, this would be considered as part of the long-term plans for the shop.

4. Chairman's Report

Ali welcomed everyone present. She acknowledged that it was 2 years since the last AGM, and again thanked Ken Kilbank, but admitted that she couldn't compete with his jokes.

A precis of her report follows.

Very shortly after she took over as Chair Covid struck which presented a number of immediate problems. Volunteers who were officially classed as 'vulnerable' had to step down and new volunteers found. When Sainsbury's deliveries were not available we had to go to Sainsbury's and try to avoid critical eyes when buying more than one pack of toilet rolls. We also had to assess how to help the community more during this time. When we couldn't go to the supermarkets the shop stepped up and bought more fresh fruit and veg, meat and bread to us – but not just the essentials – avocados, aubergines, fresh ginger.....

The shop became a place of sanctuary where you might get to spend 10 minutes with someone else queuing across the hall or waiting in the garden. It became a place of generosity, often sending 2 boxes of food across to the Food Bank each week.

We ordered, we delivered, we picked up the paper round from the usual delivery agent who was unable to work and the stars of this activity were, without doubt, the two paper boys who voluntarily delivered papers 7 days a week, come rain or shine.

During this time we successfully applied for COVID grants from Dorset Council and our Parish Council which enabled us to install the screens and then the new till system. We also received a general £10,000 COVID grant.

Regarding the till system – there was of course lots of nervousness – will I be able to use it? will I break it? why do we need it? We did some training, let everyone have a go before we put it in the shop and, of course, there were some teething issues. But it has helped a great deal with the ordering from Sainsbury's and with producing the accounts. Lots of people have appreciated being able to pay by card; in fact 60% of our sales are now by card. The ability to invoice was invaluable during lockdown for home deliveries and is on-going with invoices for newspapers.

At Christmas we ran our first 'pop up' shop in the village hall. This provided the opportunity to buy small gifts and lots of chocolate and satsumas and we facilitated the village hall's month long Xmas Fayre by taking the sales through the shop.

We were pleased to be able to donate £300 to the village hall's Christmas lunch – the shop is, after all, for the benefit of the community.

Throughout the pandemic we were pleased to be able to work with the village hall to facilitate the one-way system; somewhere to keep dry when the weather was bad and somewhere to sort and deliver the papers from.

I will forever be very proud of what we, as a community, achieved during this time through the work of our village shop.

During this time my strap line in the parish magazine was 'Briantspuddle Village Shop – Not just for COVID' and now, as we emerge from the restrictions, I really hope that is true. It is really important to me that we are not just a little village shop for the odd forgotten pint of milk or where the tin of soup has dust on the top from being on the shelf so long. We are really pleased that as lockdown restrictions have been lifted and people are able to start shopping more freely at the large supermarkets, we have not immediately seen our customer base or turnover drop. We are very keen to continue with the wide range of fresh produce we are able to sell but this is only possible if we achieve the turnover.

We continue to see the mix of sales at broadly: 20% fresh fruit and veg, 23% meat and cheeses, 20% Sainsbury's non-perishables, 23% newspapers and magazines and 14% 'other'.

The greatest achievement has to be in the number and mix of the volunteers involved. We have been thrilled to see some of those who had to step down due to COVID restrictions come back and pick up their old or new roles. We've also added new volunteers; some who have lived in the parish for a while and some who have moved in more recently. It really is a great way to meet people. Stuart (Chorley) was appointed Shop Manager and works closely with those who lead the teams of currently circa 40 people involved in everything from placing orders and collecting stock and keeping the shop open 7 days a week.

We continue to give the youngsters in the village the opportunity to have their first experience of the world of work employing them on weekends to run the shop and we have kept paper boys and girls on to deliver at the weekend. For insurance purposes we do need to have an adult at the shop at weekends where they are under 16 and I really appreciate those who stand in wind and rain to enable us to continue employing the youngsters.

As a Community Benefit Society, I believe the shop is run for the benefit of our parish in 3 ways.

- **For the benefit of those who use the shop.**

It is important to us that the shop is not just for the forgotten tin of beans or because you've run out of milk, but to provide the means to buy a fresh and healthy diet from within the village. Of course most of us need to use the supermarkets and shops in town but for those that can't or don't want to travel into town it's great that we can provide the wide range we do. I believe our fresh fruit and veg is often better quality than the supermarkets too. The shop also plays an important role in providing a place to go and meet people, to share good news or bad.

- **For the benefit of the volunteers.**

Being part of the community, having the opportunity to do something for others, having a reason to get up – all the reasons people give for why they volunteer.

- **For the benefit of the wider community.**

The shop has few fixed costs which we need to cover. This enables us to set our prices as low as possible. We do then have the opportunity to support parish activity with any profit made. Ideas are always welcome.

2022 brings the 20th anniversary of the shop opening and we will certainly be looking forward to celebrating with the whole parish the success of the shop to date and looking forward to the future.

Thank you for coming along tonight – I personally appreciate your support both as volunteers and customers.

No comments or questions were forthcoming from the Chairman's report.

5. Treasurer's Report

A summary of the accounts was distributed. Ali then explained that, towards the end of 2020, the (then) Treasurer, Roger Stayte, had decided to step down in order to continue his studies. She had taken over as Treasurer but this situation was obviously not sustainable and it was hoped to find an alternative. A precis of her report (as Treasurer) follows.

Over the last two years we have seen our sales increase from £31k to £48k in 2019/20 and £71k in 2020/21; this includes the newspapers which are sold via tokens which accounts for just under £10k pa. The split of sales across the key categories is:

- Newspapers and magazines – 23%
 - Fruit and veg – 20%
 - Sainsbury's – 20%
 - Bread & cakes, milk, cheese, eggs and butchers 23%
- Some interesting facts – we sold:

- 1,273 kg of bananas
- 1,116 litres of milk
- 390 dozen eggs
- 617 kg of carrots
- 103 aubergines and 142 avocados
- we have 1,342 stock lines on the system
- and 8 local artists selling 450 cards between them.

In 2019/2020 we received £12k grants from Dorset Council. This has been used to purchase the Square (till) system and we are looking to purchase a fridge to store the fruit and veg in.

Our Gross Margin %, which represents the profit we make by adding a mark- up to the cost of stock, was slightly higher in 2019/20. We sold a higher proportion of fruit and veg, which has a higher profit to cover waste, in this year. We are managing to keep waste to a minimum and Leonora (Sheppard) and the team monitor what we are buying and what's not selling. It is important to remember we can only stock the wide array of both common and exotic fresh fruit and veg if it is purchased as it does not keep.

We have seen an increase in our overheads. We started paying the paper deliverers at the weekend which costs £500 per year. We do this because the business the papers bring into the shop, either via the profit on the papers or the additional shopping people do, is one of the key ways we cover our fixed overheads.

Whilst we do have the running costs of WiFi and Square, over 60% of our sales are now on cards.

We have seen increases in insurance and electricity costs just as we all have in our own homes.

We appreciated the rent holiday awarded by the Parish Council during Covid.

We generated £4,172 profit before depreciation in 2020 and £4,685 in 2021. The depreciation relates to writing-off the shop refit.

At the end of 2021 we had £23,000 in the bank.

There were two comments from the floor.

a. Does the Post Office remain viable? Ali said that it was difficult to obtain any hard evidence with no feedback from PO management. Anecdotal evidence is that business is steady and that there was no threat to the PO. Richard Killer agreed that the usual business of selling stamps, processing parcels, paying cash in and out was steady – he had once even been asked to sell a fishing licence! He added that all credit must be given to Eve Badcock, the Post Mistress, who always managed to resolve any problems and the meeting showed its appreciation to her for all her work over many years.

b. One resident said that it was fantastic to see how far the shop had come since being set up 20 years ago and expressed thanks to everyone involved. Ali said that this couldn't have been achieved without the bedrock established over the previous 18 years.

6. Election of Management Committee

The Association's constitution requires that all members of the Management Committee retire at the AGM. Membership of the Committee had changed since the previous AGM. All current members of the Committee had indicated their willingness to stand for re-election with the exception of Eve Badcock, although she would continue as Post Mistress. All present showed their appreciation for all that she had done whilst serving on the Committee.

There was therefore one vacancy. No nominations had been received before the meeting. However, Jo Neudegg was willing to stand.

The following were elected to form the new Committee:

Ali Chorley, Meghan Harvey, Peter Head, Richard Killer, Chris Miller, Jo Neudegg, Cindy Read and Lesley Wilcox.

7. Annual Subscription

Richard Killer explained that a list of members is required to be maintained under the terms of the Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. Membership confers the right to vote at the AGM but imposes no liabilities. Members are defined as all Committee members (as appointed at the AGM), all volunteers who assist in working in the Post Office and/or Shop and all supporters who attend the AGM. Richard would compile the list. The list will not be used for marketing or advertising or disclosed to a third party save the FCA upon their request.

It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the annual membership subscription be maintained at zero.

8. Resolutions

No resolutions were proposed.

9. Any Other Business

i. Sue Jones, Chair of Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Parish Council, made the following statement:

'This year, as we have heard tonight, our community will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Village Shop and Post Office. The idea in 2002 to establish a community shop run by volunteers was truly pioneering.

Sadly, some of those who did so much not only to ensure the idea came to life, but would blossom, won't be here to join the celebrations in the autumn. However, I am confident in saying they would all be very proud of what has been achieved over two decades and how our treasured amenity has taken its place at the very heart of our community.

There can be no greater testament to continued pioneering spirit of the Village Shop and Post Office Committee and its army of volunteers than its response to the pandemic. It is such a pleasure to be able to meet again face-to-face tonight but it has taken two long, difficult years to get to this moment.

The combined response from committee members and volunteers alike to the challenge of Covid was immediate and sure footed. There were many problems to overcome but the same determination and innovation that accompanied the establishment of the Village shop and Post Office came to the fore once again.

The achievement that has ensued has been nothing short of Herculean. It seems it was not enough to simply continue serving the community as before. The crisis has been a catalyst for expansion and modernisation.

However, as always, the success of any enterprise rests on the shoulders of those who work to support it. More volunteers took a step forward and it was particularly heart warming to see so many young people eager to play their part. On behalf of the Parish, I would like to take this time to thank them for the contribution they made and their considerable efforts.

As we have heard tonight the Village Shop and Post Office is a vibrant hub of our community. We can look to its flourishing future with confidence and for this Parishioners are very grateful.

In closing I would like to thank both the committee and volunteers on behalf of the entire Parish for all they have done to serve our community so very well.

Hip Hip hooray!’

ii. Leonora Sheppard said: ‘Bridget is our supplier of fruit and vegetables for the village shop. She has generously purchased an ex-NHS ambulance to send to Ukraine to help those fleeing the conflict. In response to the generous donations she has received from parishioners, she sent the following message for Leonora to read out at the Village Shop AGM.

Bridget and her team are working closely with UK Med (a UK medical charity). The ambulance will be delivered to Kharkiv (Eastern Ukraine c. 2 miles from the frontline) to the Ukrainian Ambulance Service, who has lost many ambulances because they have been shot at or bombed. The ambulance will be of great benefit and is much needed to move the injured from the East to the West of Ukraine for further medical attention.

Bridget's team are in close contact with the CEO of UK Med and his team and also with the UK surgeon in Ukraine who is there to attempt to (i) perform surgery to save limbs where possible and (ii) to instruct the Ukrainian surgeons. UK Med and the Ukrainian Ambulance Service have requested that we bring high grade trauma kits and orthopaedic surgical 'metal wear' where possible. Other items required include clothing/blankets/lower grade medical supplies such as paracetamol.

Two extraordinary people have come forward to take the ambulance to Ukraine. Maria Wichell, veteran of eight polar expeditions, one of the few women to serve as an operative in the United Kingdom Special Forces and also a professional kidnap ransom negotiator. Vincent Colliard, one of our most accomplished polar explorers, who created the project Icelegacy, who have an ongoing series of expeditions crossing the 20 largest ice caps on the planet, to raise awareness of conservation of these eco systems. Maria and Vincent plan to stay in Ukraine and provide help and support on the ground.

Bridget sends special thanks to everyone who has donated. She has been overwhelmed with the generosity from Briantspuddle and surrounding villages for all the money that has been donated as well as for giving so many of the items which are desperately needed.

The meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.

Lesley Wilcox

Secretary