

## **PARISH MEETING 10.4.24**

### **POST OFFICE AND SHOP**

It has been a tough year for the shop with sharp increases in utility prices and continual price increases in other commodities. Despite this, the shop has managed to hold its own but we made the decision to slightly increase prices.

Sales of approx £70,000 were up by just under £6,000, or 10% on the previous year. The gross profit %, ie sales less the cost of buying everything we sell, also improved from 9.2% to 11.51%. This might not sound much but it was a credit to the staff in the shop, and the people supporting the running of the shop, that this had been achieved.

On overheads the story was less good with the electricity bill almost doubling to £289 pm, partly due to higher consumption from the chillers purchased in the year; this is a significant cost to bear every month. Despite this the overall net result was nearly £200 better than the previous year, although still a modest loss of £1,491 on sales of £68,365, ie 2% of sales. We hope that we will achieve around break-even for the current year, although of course this depends on customers continuing to use the shop.

There are currently about 40 volunteers all helping to keep the shop and PO running. It is obvious, but worth saying again, that without them there would be no shop or PO. As ever, some volunteers have left and others joined but we are well-staffed at present. We also have a full complement of youngsters to work at weekends although at least a couple of those will probably leave soon at age 18. However, there is always a job for someone to do so more volunteers would be most welcome.

The long-running problems with Square during the summer months were very trying both for the counter staff and for David Griffith and Campbell de Burgh but seem now to be overcome. The cause of the issues was never firmly established but BT visited twice and increased the broadband download speed to 35-40 Mbps which must have helped. The shop shares the broadband line with the village hall and the social club but the hall reports that the service is patchy and unreliable. Interestingly, other local businesses who use Square had reported similar issues.

The Environmental Health Officer paid a surprise visit in May. We were delighted that her report gave us a 5\* rating.

We had some electrical work completed, some of which was required for our insurance company and the Parish Council agreed to meet these costs. The Council has also agreed to meet the cost of repairs to the front window; we are most grateful for both these contributions. We purchased some new shelving and another chiller to keep the fruit and veg in which has helped reduce wastage.

We had a good response to our request for entries for the 2024 calendar and we were really pleased to be able to include all the entries received. The calendars sold well and made a small profit. The theme for the 2025 Calendar will be announced shortly to give people plenty of time to put their entries together.

The committee has looked into options as to how access to the shop might be improved. Unfortunately, a ramp would not be practicable as the required angle would mean it would have to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way across the grass in front of the Jubilee room doors. Losing that amenity would not be acceptable so that option has been ruled out.

Another option was for a powered platform lift. This would require the loss of some of the grassed area, installation of the platform, changes to the shop door area and electrical work. The cost would be £10-15k. There would also be on-going servicing, maintenance and energy costs. In addition, the building is listed and so it's unlikely that approval would be given to fix anything to the structure. The different widths of wheelchairs would probably require the door to be widened and the threshold altered which would also be unlikely to be approved. Whilst we would really like to be able to improve access we don't feel these costs could be justified.

There is an assistance bell at the bottom of the steps and the counter staff are happy to help anyone who has difficulty accessing the shop by bringing out any purchases to them.

Ideas that will be considered further are:

- Adding a non-slip surface to the top step;
- Raising the top step in order to reduce the difference in height to the door threshold;
- Installing a handle to help with getting over the threshold.

We have started trialling opening on Saturday afternoons to see if this would be supported by the community; the shop will remain open until 4.00pm on Saturdays. We will re-assess whether this has been worthwhile after about 10 weeks at the end of May.

Last, but not least, the PO. There is a dedicated team and all the usual services of a small PO are available. Unfortunately we can no longer offer foreign exchange over the counter (not our choice) but currency can be ordered online to be collected. But the usual business of parcels, stamps, cash withdrawals and deposits are all good. With respect to the Horizon scandal thankfully it's unlikely there will ever be a discrepancy of £50,000 here because we just don't carry that amount of money. But there can be small discrepancies which, although might be the operator's fault, given all that we now know about the deficiencies of Horizon it might sometimes not be our fault and we could be, no doubt like all POs in the country, to some degree victims of this gigantic fiasco.

Finally, we hope that the community will continue to support the shop and the Post Office, both as customers and as volunteers. We aim to provide a convenient way of buying day-to-day items but, just as importantly, the shop and PO provide a social hub which is valued, particularly by our more elderly residents. By using the shop now you help to ensure that it remains open in the future.