

The Friends of Briantspuddle Post Office and Village Shop Association Ltd

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in

Briantspuddle Village Hall, Thursday 22 February 2024 at 19.00

The Chair, Peter Head, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He explained that he had been a member of the committee for some years and had taken over as Chair when Ali Chorley had resigned at the last AGM. He then introduced Peter Martin who had joined the committee during 2023 as the new Treasurer.

He explained that he wanted to deal with the formal business of the meeting first and then move to items for general discussion. There were pencils and papers on tables for people to note any thoughts or comments during the course of the meeting to help assist in discussions about the future of the shop and PO. It was important that the committee understood what members wanted in respect of the services provided by the shop and PO.

Attendance

There were 37 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 6 members of the community, Vivi Armitage, Jenny Beadle, Kate de Burgh, Sue Jones, Tasie Russell and Sue Taylor.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM of 14.4.23.

These had been seen and read by members present and when asked for comment, amendment or alteration nothing was raised. The Minutes were therefore deemed accurate.

3. Matters arising

All matters arising were dealt with later in the meeting.

4. Election of Management Committee members

The Association's constitution requires that all members of the Management Committee retire at the AGM. All current members of the Committee had indicated their willingness to stand for re-election. No nominations had been received and none were made from the floor.

The following were re-elected to form the new Committee:

Peter Head, Richard Killer, Peter Martin, Chris Miller, Jo Neudegg, Cindy Read and Lesley Wilcox.

5. Treasurer's Report

A summary of the accounts had been distributed. Peter Head said that it had been a tough year with sharp increases in utility prices. Despite this, the shop had managed to hold its own. The committee had made the decision to slightly increase prices. He added that the community was lucky to still have the Post Office which was largely due to volunteer effort; another local PO at Crossways was closing as had the one at Bere Regis.

Peter Martin, Treasurer, opened his report by thanking Jo Neudegg (previous Treasurer) for all her support during the year; coming on board during the year had been a challenge but Jo had been a great help with her knowledge of how the shop worked and she continued to make a valuable contribution in buying for the shop and keeping track of Square and all correspondence from our suppliers.

The accounts for the year to 31 October 2023;

Trading account

Sales of £68,365 were up by just under £6,000, or 10% on the previous year. There had been committee discussions over how sales might be increased.

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 partly due to higher consumption from the chillers purchased in the year. This had also increased the depreciation charge in the year.

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. Peter thanked all the volunteers and weekend staff for their efforts.

Statement of financial position and cash flows

Fixed assets had increased following the investment in new chillers in the year, which was the main reason for the £3,500 reduction in cash during the year. In terms of the day-to-day running of the shop, the cash flow had improved from an outflow of £2,894 to an outflow of £318 in the year.

In conclusion

It was Peter's hope that we could achieve around break-even for the current year (2023-24) although of course this depended on customers continuing to use the shop.

Approval of the accounts was proposed by Audrey Grindrod and seconded by Alec Armitage. The accounts and report were approved without dissent.

6. Decision on whether the accounts should be independently audited

Richard Killer explained that the committee discussed the accounts at every meeting and was firmly of the view that no independent auditing was needed but if 10% of the membership wished to have independent auditing then it would be arranged. There was no voice in support for independent auditing.

7. To agree a membership list and a zero annual membership subscription

Richard Killer explained that a list of members is required to be maintained (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, all volunteers who assist in supporting the Post Office and/or Shop and all supporters who attend the AGM. The list is maintained and used solely in relation to the conduct of the management of the Shop and PO.

The committee was not proposing anything other than a "nil fee". This was accepted by the meeting without objection. It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the annual membership subscription be maintained at zero.

8. Committee's Report

i. Volunteers (Lesley Wilcox)

There were currently about 40 volunteers all helping to keep the shop and PO running and the Committee wanted to thank them all. It was obvious, but worth saying again, that without them there would be no shop or PO.

As ever, some volunteers had left and others joined. The shop counter was now very well-staffed, there was a full team to collect the papers, and the Sainsbury's team was doing fine. There was currently a full complement of youngsters to work at weekends although at least a couple of those would probably leave soon at age 18. There was always a job for someone to do but the most pressing need was for more help with fetching supplies from both Wareham and Dorchester to relieve some of the most hard-pressed volunteers.

ii SQUARE (Lesley Wilcox): The long-running problems with Square during the summer months had been very trying both for the counter staff and for David Griffith and Campbell de Burgh but seemed now to be overcome. The cause of the issues was never firmly established but BT had 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.

iii. Environmental Health Officer (Lesley Wilcox): The EHO had visited in May. The visit was not planned as the EHO didn't know that the shop existed (because we had omitted to register with the Council) but she happened to be in the village for something else. We were delighted that her report gave us a 5* rating. We have since formally registered the shop with the Council so further visits must be expected.

iv. Maintenance (Chris Miller)

We had some electrical work completed, some of which was required for our insurance company. We asked if the Parish Council would contribute and they kindly agreed to pay for all the work for which we are grateful.

We purchased some new shelving and another chiller to keep the fruit and veg in, rather than it being out in the shop, which has helped reduce wastage.

The only outstanding issue at the moment is with the front shop window which has rot in the frame and window. We have a quote for repairing it and are in discussion with the council over the cost and the fact that the lease is not specific about who is responsible for exterior maintenance. David Neudegg (Vice Chair of the Parish Council) then said that the Council had now agreed to the cost of repairing the window.

v. Calendars (Jo Neudegg)

We had a fabulous response to our request for entries for the 2024 calendar so a huge thank you goes to all those who contributed - the parish is very fortunate to have so many amazingly talented people! The theme was 'A Scene of the Parish' in any creative medium of the artist's choice and we were really pleased to be able to include all the entries we received. There was a fantastic variety including pastels, watercolours, embroidery, pen and ink drawings, mixed media with ceramics, lino

cuts and a 3D model which featured on the front cover. Thanks to Leonora Sheppard for all her expertise and hard work in photographing all the pieces and putting the calendar together.

The calendars went on sale in October and we had a really positive response. We needed to sell 73 to cover the costs and to date have sold 92 so have made a small profit. A few calendars remain and are being sold at half price, so we may be able to sell a few more.

We would welcome any ideas for a theme for the 2025 calendar. We would prefer a theme that hasn't been used before or at least not for a while, as well as one that has the potential to engage people of all ages and talents. All ideas would be appreciated and would be considered at the next committee meeting planned for 20th March. The theme will be announced for next year's calendar shortly after that which will give people plenty of time to put their entries together.

vi. Email group (Jo Neudegg)

We are looking to set up an email group of customers for the shop. This will enable us to improve our communication by informing customers quickly and easily about matters relating to the shop. It may be the arrival of new stock items, or bargains that may be available, or confirmation of our opening hours around bank holidays, or any other shop-related issues that may be helpful to share or may be of interest. We are not expecting to be sending too many emails out - maybe one per week on average.

The first email will confirm that we have your e-mail address for this purpose and will allow you to opt out should you change your mind. We're hoping that this will work well and that more people will sign up to it as we go along.

Members are invited to provide their email address and also complete the form given out to let the committee know your views on the shop. This could be what you think works well, what you think needs improving, or any new ideas that may also contribute to the future success of the shop. Again, we would really welcome and appreciate your thoughts and ideas.

Peter Head then said that there were issues which were often raised at AGMs which had been considered by the committee during the year for discussion at this AGM with the aim of either taking them forward, or closing them down.

vii. Extended opening hours (Lesley Wilcox)

Previously some people have said that they would use the shop, or use it more, if the opening hours weren't so restricted. So we will trial opening on Saturday afternoons from noon until 4.00pm, starting on Saturday 30 March 2024, Easter Saturday. We chose Saturdays because it is the shop's busiest day. We will advertise this well in advance in the shop itself, the Parish magazine and on the website. Of course opening for longer is entirely dependent on volunteers being willing to man the shop as we cannot afford to pay the youngsters to work afternoons and they would need some adult supervision anyway. We will re-assess whether this has been worthwhile after about 10 weeks at the end of May and report back.

A member raised the idea of opening for a period one weekday evening in order to attract people just coming home from work. This could be trialled in the summer months.

viii. Access (Chris Miller)

Some customers find the steps up to the shop difficult so the committee has looked into options as to how access might be improved.

Firstly a ramp, a suggestion which has previously been looked at. However, as the shop entrance is so high the required angle for a ramp 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 was ruled out.

Another option was for a powered platform lift. This would have required the loss of some of the grassed area, installation of the platform, changes to the 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. This project is apparently not something that the Parish Council would help to finance. 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 will be more than happy to help anyone who has difficulty accessing the shop bringing out any purchases to them.

This item was discussed by the meeting and the view was that we should not proceed with a platform. However if any other ideas emerge the committee would be happy to look into them.

Following discussion other items will be taken forward ie;

- A non-slip surface will be added to the top step;
- The height of the top step might be raised in order to reduce the difference in height to the door threshold;
- A handle might be installed to help getting over the threshold.

ix. Delivery service (Richard Killer)

We did provide a delivery service to those self-isolating during the pandemic lockdowns and felt that there could still be a place for a delivery service. But the detail would need careful thought, eg how far and how often to offer deliveries, whether to charge, payment arrangements etc.

The feeling was that we would struggle to get volunteers to man this service and it would be difficult to manage. What we would not want to do would be to shift our counter sales to delivery sales with no overall increase in sales.

The shop is primarily here to serve the community. So, if someone is housebound, the shop will want to provide for them and a one-off delivery service can be set up as happens in an informal way now.

Following discussion it was agreed to look into offering a delivery service once a week.

x. Self-service (Richard Killer)

It is known that this works in a village shop in Wales and is supported there. We looked into it at committee. It would mean a change of entry system – a fob would be needed to gain entry via Maglock. The alarm would have to be substantially changed; at present it's linked to the PO so some arrangements would be needed and it's unlikely that PO HQ would agree to it. There would then need to be training on Square for system users. The committee thought that the costs would outweigh benefits.

Following a brief discussion it was agreed not to pursue this idea further.

Finally, a general word about the Post Office (Richard Killer).

The PO operates 9am till 12 noon Monday to Friday. 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) 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 unfolding 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 might be the operator's fault but given all that we know about the deficiencies of Horizon now 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.

9. Resolutions

No resolutions were proposed.

10. Any Other Business

The Chair of the Parish Council, Sue Jones, was unable to attend the meeting. On behalf of the Council the Vice Chair, David Neudegg, thanked all the volunteers who provide this valuable facility which, as well as providing a service to the community, encourages volunteers, provides employment opportunities for youngsters and social interaction. The shop and PO are a huge asset for the community and contributes to its sustainability. He mentioned those volunteers who are not so visible, collecting goods, dealing with the Sainsbury's deliveries and undertaking accounting and administration.

Peter Head thanked the Parish Council for its support.

Peter Head then closed the meeting by thanking all those present for attending and for their support for the shop and PO. He also thanked the committee for all their work, often undertaken behind the scenes.

The meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.

Lesley Wilcox

Secretary