

The Friends of Briantspuddle Post Office and Village Shop Association Ltd

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in

Briantspuddle Village Hall, Thursday 27 February 2025 at 19.00

The Chair, Peter Head, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. As with last year, papers were provided for members 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 32 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 3 members of the community - Alec Armitage and Gill and David Harper.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM of 22.2.24.

These had been seen and read by those members present. No comment, amendment or alteration was raised. The Minutes were therefore deemed accurate.

3. Matters arising

All matters arising were dealt with later in the meeting.

4. Treasurer's Report

A summary of the accounts had been distributed. The Treasurer, Peter Martin, opened his report by outlining the year 2023/24 as having been an improvement on 2022/23 moving from a small loss to a modest profit. This was encouraging and pointed to a sustainable and secure future for the shop.

The accounts for the year to 31 October 2024;

Trading account

Sales of £72,015 were up by just under £4,000, or 7% on the previous year. Following Committee discussions over how sales might be increased prices had been raised.

The gross profit %, ie sales less the cost of buying everything we sell, also improved from 11.5% to 13.4%.

On overheads, the electricity bill increased by some £400 due to a full year of increased consumption by the chillers purchased in 2023. However, no funds had had to be spent on repairs.

Despite this the overall net result was some £1,400 better than the previous year giving a profit this year of £709; not a huge amount on sales of £70k but this met the aim to cover the Shop's costs and therefore to be a sustainable business.

Statement of financial position and cash flows

Fixed assets had fallen following no new investment in the year. In terms of the day-to-day running of the shop, the cash flow had improved from an outflow of £1,491 to an inflow of £709 in the year. Cash held in the bank had increased from approx £16k at the start of the year to approx £18k at the end. Overall, it had been a reassuring year with a return to profit following a loss in the previous year.

A question was raised about the cost of insurance - £67 in 2023/4 but £407 in £2024/5. Peter Martin thought that this was probably due to the timings of payments and Peter Head was confident that the shop was adequately insured and with a specialist company.

The accounts and report were approved without dissent.

5. 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. However, the rules of the Association stipulated that if 10% of the membership present (ie 4 people) wished to have independent auditing then that must be arranged. The likely costs of this could be £300-£500. There was no voice in support for independent auditing.

6. Committee's Report.

The Committee thanked the 40 volunteers supporting the operation of the shop and PO; without them there would be no shop or PO.

Volunteers: The position with shop volunteers this year has been quite stable. The shop counter is well-staffed, there is a full team to collect the papers and the bread and meat on Saturdays, and the Sainsbury's team is managing. There is currently a full complement of youngsters to work at weekends. Whilst there is always a job for someone to do, the most pressing need is for more help with fetching supplies from Dorchester on Wednesday morning to relieve some hard-pressed volunteers.

Extended opening: As stated at last year's AGM, we trialed opening the Shop on Saturday afternoons for 10 weeks in the summer. Generally speaking, trade was quite good in the early part of the afternoon but tailed off later. However, it was difficult to find volunteers to man the shop for a couple of hours and so we concluded that, without extra help, we could not open regularly on Saturday afternoons. We did open all day for the Open Gardens event in June and that was worthwhile with lots of positive comments from visitors.

Maintenance: The front window to the shop had been suffering from rot and needed refurbishment and re-painting. Our thanks go to the Parish Council for organising and funding the work. Discussions about responsibility for this led to a new maintenance agreement between the Shop and the Council (the landlord). This allows for the Shop to take responsibility for the maintenance work required within the shop and the Council for the exterior of the building. The plan is to agree a maintenance plan with the Council every year.

The other, and more difficult, task has been to improve access into the shop by installing some grab rails and altering the height of the top step as discussed at the last AGM. This required Listed Building Consent from Dorset Council. We were helped enormously by Adrienne Ridler-Lee of The Heritage Consultancy who prepared the Heritage Statement free of charge. Also Dorset Council was very helpful in advising how to prepare the application. Approval has now been received. The grab rails have been installed and we are awaiting a date for the start of work to the top step.

The chillers and freezer have had their annual service at a cost of £110.

2025 Calendar: There were an even greater number of entries for the 2025 Calendar. The theme was 'Animals and Pets of the Parish' and the Committee thanks all those who submitted entries. Thanks also go to Leonora Sheppard for putting it all together and ensuring that as many images as possible were featured by including a collage of entries not featured elsewhere. 120 calendars were sold resulting in an overall profit of just over £300 for the Shop. Suggestions for themes for the 2026 Calendar are invited, preferably a theme that hasn't been done before, or for a while at least. It is aimed to announce the theme by the end of April.

E-mail group: Over 70 people have signed up to receive e-mails from the shop. These e-mails concern shop-related matters that might be of interest, eg new products, changes in opening hours, special offers. Anybody wishing to receive such e-mails can be added to the group.

Local produce: The shop's range of Dorset-based products continues to be very popular. Products from The Wasabi Company have been added to the range.

Post Office: Our Postmistress, Eve Badcock, has decided to retire in September by which time she will have been in post for 24 years. Over that time she has kept the PO open for 5 days a week without fail and led her team with charm and direction; a significant achievement. The whole community is grateful for all her hard work over those many years. So, there is a need to find a replacement if the PO services are to continue as they are at present. We need to say a big 'thank you' to Eve for all her efforts over so many years but we also need to carry on and we cannot do that without a formal postholder. She will also be giving up two days a week behind the counter so additional volunteers are needed.

We have discussed this with the PO Area Manager and, although he was very informative and sympathetic, he confirmed that the PO will not help in finding a replacement. So, if we cannot find someone from the community our PO will be closed and the most we can expect is an Outreach service maybe once or twice a week for a few hours. The Committee had distributed a leaflet to each household explaining the current position and asking for a volunteer to become the next Postmaster. The PO will provide training and there is a supportive local team. The job carries a small payment.

The recent focus on the Horizon IT Enquiry might be a disincentive to applicants. The Horizon system is still in use but is now far more robust with no recent major problems and the PO's Helpdesk is extremely helpful. Given the small financial turnover that our PO has, the scope for problems is minimal as we only carry a relatively small amount of money.

The counter staff enjoy the range of services the PO provides; mostly personal banking – cash withdrawals, paying in cheques, cash deposits, paying bills eg water, phone and the like but also dealing with parcels and postage items.

Postman: Our local postman, Steve Smith, is also retiring in May and we wish him well. He has served our community exceptionally well over the years and will be much missed; there is a collection in the Shop for a retirement gift for him.

Working Group: We are participating in the Working Group set up by David Neudegg, Chair of the Parish Council, to explore ways that the various groups within the community might collaborate more. Leonora Sheppard is the representative for the Shop and PO. See also item 10i.

7. 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 indicated their willingness to stand for re-election. Peter Head explained that there was still one vacancy and said that a new member would be most welcome but 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.

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

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.

9. To consider any other resolutions

No resolutions were proposed.

10. Any Other Business

i. David Neudegg, Chair of the Parish Council, advised that the Group had met and had identified some areas which might be pursued collectively, either to reduce costs or for other mutual benefits.

ii. On behalf of the Parish Council he thanked the Committee and all the volunteers working to support the Shop and PO. Along with the Village Hall, the Community group and the Social Club these facilities and groups all encouraged people to want to live in our small community.

iii. Leonora Sheppard provided some statistics about the amount of fruit and vegetables sold by the shop. She said that she was always experimenting with new products but invited customers to suggest new items that the Shop might sell. She also aimed to continue to reduce packaging and hoped that with continued support, this would go some way to reducing the community's carbon footprint.

iv. Campbell de Burgh advised that, although he was happy to continue supporting the Shop with respect to Broadband and other IT issues as far as he could, he was not familiar with either Square or the use of I-pads and so often had to call for other help. David Griffith was continuing to help when he could but another volunteer would be useful. The Committee will see if someone can be identified.

v. Maggie Hoyle expressed her thanks to all the volunteers.

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Lesley Wilcox

Secretary