

## **Abbotts Ann Village Shop Association**

### **AGM Report 2023**

Good evening and welcome to the AGM of our village shop association.

Thank you for your support in coming here and of course your support for the shop throughout the year.

I hope you have sight of the agenda.

Our first item is:-

1. Approval of the minutes of last year's AGM..

There has been a copy available in the Shop, and also on our website, and some are available here. Could I have a Proposer; Secunder. Those in favour, any against; any abstentions?

2. Chair's Report

As usual our accounts presented here tonight are for the financial year ending last December.

I think it's fair to say that this has been a good year for the shop.

We celebrated our twenty years in business at the Fete last year with a wonderful cake made by Polly, handbell ringers led by Dee; and tastings of our own unique Abbott's Ann gin specially distilled. On a separate occasion we also had a guided walk around the Watercress beds.

These celebrations were largely inspired by our talented and enthusiastic deputy manager Judeth.

As our shop continues year in year out it has become increasingly clear how much we are indebted to those who right at the beginning of this venture in 1999 -2002 so carefully and persistently planned the purchase of the site for the shop, master minded and oversaw the building of the premises as well as thinking through the employment model with the central role of volunteers.

Our great community here continues to provide those volunteers, (predominantly you guys here I'm so proud to say!) who day in day out work as bakers; man the till; make coffee; and bring in the deliveries, etc.

However, you might, just for a moment, like to hear a little bit more about the concept of community shops.

How many can you think of ?

They're not as plentiful as you might think.

Goodworth Clatford and Broughton are not so far away, but then you might have to go as far as

Broadchalke, beyond Salisbury or Chieveley, just north of Newbury, or Minstead in the New Forest before you can name any more. If you have the chance do call in and see how others are managing similar challenges to our own.

Each shop is quite unique but here are some statistics provided by the Plunkett Foundation who are a national charity supporting and encouraging community ventures such as shops or pubs. In 2021 (the last year of their survey) there were 407 community shops trading nationally.

The south west of England having many more than any other region, and there are fewer shops the further north you go, and none in London.

There are new ones opening regularly and 12 new ones began in that year.

The average turnover was £184,000 (our turnover is just above this figure at £198,000 last year).

Over half of the community shops provide Post Office Services.

About a third of the Community Shops operate a cafe.

Volunteers are central to their running with an average of 18 per shop, but a wide variation from community to community.

Sourcing products locally, and reducing environmental damage by recycling or minimal packaging is seen as a very important value for most of these ventures.

However some community shops do struggle and for a variety of reasons fall on hard times.

This year we were approached by committee members from Clatford Village Shop who were keen to learn from us anything that would enable them to continue trading successfully, after key members of the committee had resigned and I understand there were staffing issues. We had a zoom meeting with them and Julia also had a follow up meeting.

### **Back to our own shop.**

This year the Association made a modest profit which helps us to build up our reserves. The accumulating money in the bank is looking better than it has ever been before, which even Mike our careful treasurer can I think admit some satisfaction over!

Whilst there are always items of equipment that need renewing, our electrical equipment in the shop has largely been replaced with more energy efficient models, the most recent being a smaller and more efficient oven, but we have also replaced the large upright freezer in the back room.

I am happy to say the Shop received a 5 star rating for health and hygiene this year.

## **Trading**

I say that the Association has made a profit, as a key part of our business model is the flat above the shop which provides rental income. But without this rent the shop would continue to be trading at a loss.

Our turnover is a little down on last year but we have increased our profits.

What are our best sellers? Eggs, wine?

In terms of value it's meat and fish.

In terms of quantity it's bread

The change to our new supplier of frozen ready meals 'By Ruby' has been a big success with good feedback from customers about their quality.

We have now sold 90 bottles of our Abbott's Ann Gin.

## **Improvements**

This year as you know Broadband is being upgraded throughout the village.

The shop has been struggling with poor Wi-Fi connectivity for some years now.

This has all changed as we now have a new full fast fibre connection, meaning that both the Shop and the Post Office have a speedy response and all the problems with the card reader at the till have now been solved.

For this major improvement we are hugely indebted to Keith Saunders who together with Maureen has advised and guided staff and the committee in purchasing the best package for our business.

Frankly without Keith I think we would still be struggling. Not only has he advised on the broadband in the shop but also the streamlining and updating of our online presence, which I'm sure you have all noticed is now accessed via the village website.

Very many thanks Keith.

This is a good example of how of our community shop is regularly strengthened and supported through people with outstanding individual skills and the devotion of village residents to our cause.

Having mentioned the critical role the flat above the shop performs for our overall business model, I can report that maintenance and small works have been continuing, overseen by Steve who liaises with our tenant Richard on a regular basis. Although we had planned to have a complete

kitchen makeover, this has been delayed as the tenant prefers to continue with it as it is, with some of his own white goods in place. When the tenant moves on we plan to have the kitchen upgraded and money for this has been put aside. In the bathroom we have installed a new thermostatically controlled shower, together with a new floor.

The new double glazing units installed in the front rooms of the flat were found not to open fully so that in the event of a fire people could not escape through them. The windows have now been modified by the installers.

Thank you Steve for overseeing all this.

Another improvement is our two smart tables for outside thanks to Dee's research and purchase.

## **Staff**

We have enjoyed great service from Julia and Judeth over the year, both going above and beyond their employment contracts . They have fitted their hours around each other wherever this has been needed resulting in the smooth running of the shop.

After some discussion with the committee and an unsuccessful request for a volunteer to take on making Pizzas it has been agreed that Pizza night will cease. A minimum of six pizzas had to be sold for the venture to break even and this was not occurring every month.

The good news though is that Cheese Scones will continue!

Judeth continues to balance her commitments to both the shop and the Post Office.

However it is with great sadness that we face losing Julia (albeit a promotion!) who in October will move on to higher service in the Wirral where she will be applying her considerable skills in stock purchasing and people management to grandparent duties!

Julia has been a huge asset to the shop since she started here in 2018 and has applied her exceptional skills much to the appreciation of volunteers and customers alike. She has been efficient and adept at managing the daily demands of people management and also keeping the committee up to speed with the daily issues of the shop.

My view is that during lockdown Julia's adjustment to a totally new and to some extent unknown threat of Covid was quite exceptional. So the shop, under her direction made considerable adjustments to ensure that services continued to be available and also reach the most vulnerable in the community.

So a very big thank you Julia for your amazing contribution. We wish you all the very best!

(Flowers)

Another key person in the running of the shop has been our Post Mistress Maureen who is I think becoming a village institution, ever present and helping at every level from advice about parcels to finding support for the shop at Test Valley council level. Virtually never away for a holiday or a break.

We are very lucky to have her.

Thank you Maureen. We look forward to hearing your report shortly.

### **Volunteers**

Well what can I say!?

So many examples of people who put themselves out.

It has been really encouraging to see new volunteers such as David Hobbs and Mary Williams come forward. We are always in need of more , particularly in the summer months when people go on holiday.

We said goodbye to Susan Mkiver a few weeks ago, back to the wilds of Canada. Someone who happily got stuck in and ably served the community with commitment and enthusiasm.

There are four volunteer managers who closely assist and sometimes deputise for our paid staff.

Their extra skills are another key part of keeping the show on the road. So a special thank you to

Margaret Veale

Polly

Jill Tayler and

Ann Emerson

I should also thank Alan Rowling for his continued support and commitment.

Thank you all.

But we must also salute those who have given their time year in year out. In particular I would like to mention Elizabeth who has volunteered from the inception of the shop, not only regularly behind the counter, but as a committee member, sometimes as deputy chair; producing eats for volunteer get togethers; and writing the entry for the Parish Magazine each month.

Thank you Elizabeth.

(Flowers)

I must also thank the committee who have consistently applied themselves to the regular challenges that we have faced.

Our secretary Paula who herself works in the wholesale sector.

Mike who puts in so much time as our treasurer and gets the accounts in order at the end of the year.

Steve doing all things flat related and other maintenance work such as checking out our shed store.

Vivien who links us with the Fete Committee;

Margaret who is also a volunteer manager in the shop;

Dee who organises volunteer meetings;

and of course Elizabeth.

I would also like to record our thanks to Martin Startup, a local accountant who checks through our figures annually with no fee, and saves the expense of having our accounts audited.

### **What of the future?**

We will be upgrading the flat kitchen.

We will hope to have a smooth transition to a new shop manager in October.

We must look to reducing our carbon footprint wherever possible.

### **In Conclusion**

Our shop undoubtedly improves the quality of life here in the village, whether by providing products, services or offering a social centre for those who visit or who work there.

In tough times the shop has proven to add resilience to the community.

The Shop Association is in a strong financial position with no debts.

We have modern and well equipped premises.

We have an excellent and well motivated band of volunteers.

While we face a change in management with Julia moving on we have very able staff with Judeth and Maureen.

Many thanks.

Chris Davis

Chair