

Good evening.

It's a little presumptuous of me to be presenting this report as Chair, when the election of Committee members comes later in the Agenda. But let's hope that doesn't become an issue!

I've met most of you, but just to introduce myself: my wife Veronica and I moved into 3, The Old Bakery at the bottom of Dunkirt Lane last October.

The warm welcome and delicious coffee that we received when we visited the shop before we'd even seen the house made us fall in love with the village.

Seeing that there was a vacancy for the Chair at the shop, and having had experience as Chair of two charities in London, I felt this was an opportunity for me to make a contribution to the village.

I would like to thank Chris Davis for his dedication and wise leadership over many years, including through some challenging times. It's great to still have Chris on the Committee.

Whilst I'm still getting familiar with many aspects of the shop, I do have the advantage of coming to things afresh. There's plenty that has already caught my eye.

It's remarkable how many people from a wide geographical area comment on the exceptional friendliness of the shop.

I also very quickly became aware just how important a service it provides for the community beyond the purely retail.

The shop provides a place where people can find company and companionship. Both in a more formal forum like the Thursday Men's Group, which has proved so popular that it has had to split into morning and afternoon sessions, as well as for individuals to drop in and sit for an hour and chat with the volunteers.

Speaking of volunteers, of course we couldn't operate without them. Many have been with us for many years, and they play a vital part in creating the unique ethos of the shop.

We always need more! I can say from personal experience that it's a great way to meet people, to become really familiar with the life of the village, and of course to catch up with gossip.

During the past year we lost two long-serving and much-loved volunteers. Elizabeth Howard passed away last November. She was on the Committee and served as a volunteer from the early days of the shop. Elizabeth and her husband Gordon went above and beyond by committing to run the shop on Bank Holidays.

Anne Kelly passed away in June. She also volunteered for many years, and made Sunday mornings her particular domain. The memorial you can see outside the Hall

erected by the Nursery School is evidence of the enormous affection in which Anne was held.

Both were working at the shop almost up until they died. They will be very greatly missed.

David will speak in more detail about the financial side, but just to say that we are in a healthy position, and looking to consolidate this position further.

We recently heard that we have been successful in a substantial grant application to Test Valley Borough Council, which will enable us to make some important capital purchases. Not least new freezers, which will both save energy, and make for more efficient use of the space, allowing us to smarten up the stationery shelves in front of the Post Office counter, amongst other things.

As ever, we are very grateful to Maureen for her invaluable advice on all matters pertaining to the Council.

And of course the Post Office is a vital part of our offering. There's no doubt that it helps draw people into the premises, many of whom then go on to buy from the shop.

We are very appreciative of the donation we received from the Fete Committee, which went towards purchasing our new coffee machine. We are gaining a growing reputation for the quality of the coffee we serve, with cycling groups and others contacting us to book in a stop at Abbots Ann.

Earlier this year we very reluctantly accepted Judeth's resignation as Shop Manager. Judeth was a constant source of energy and innovation, and we wish her all the very best for the future.

We are delighted that Beverley has stepped up as Manager, and to welcome Wendy as Assistant Manager.

I have really appreciated the knowledge and dedication of the Committee. We have a wide range of talents in the group, that makes for a very effective team.

We have plans to post much more regularly on the shop website, and to make more use of social media, especially our Facebook page.

The shop awning recently fell down, and is due to be reinstated in the next few weeks. We will also be installing blinds in the windows, to protect the chocolate and other stock from the afternoon sun.

We are continually looking at potential new lines to stock, and welcome suggestions about items we could try.

I'm sure that many of you are already members of the Association, but if you are not I would urge you to join. It only costs £10, and as well as demonstrating your support it entitles you to vote at the AGM as a shareholder.

You can also become a Friend of the Shop, donating an amount of your choosing every year.

But the best way to support the shop is by shopping there. There does sometimes seem to be a perception that doing so involves paying a premium. Whilst we stock a fair few treats, there are also plenty of everyday items at competitive prices, not to mention freshly-baked goodies every day. Do come and have a good look round.

Thank you for your support. The shop is a true community asset. We all, as members of the community, can help ensure that it thrives and prospers.

Thank you.