

Chittlehamholt Community Shop Committee Report 2022 – 2023

I'd like to welcome our shareholders, committee members, volunteers and ladies and gentlemen to this, our ninth Annual General Meeting. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of the shop.

With that in mind, I'd like to recognise Ron & Anne Thorne who provided the initial impetus for a community shop and a very big thankyou to all the volunteers who have contributed their time and effort, in whatever capacity, to ensure that the shop has provided a valuable service to the community for all that time.

Now that the operation of the shop has settled down following the turmoil induced by COVID, the management committee has been focused on efforts to standardise the way the shop operates. We now have a volunteer manual which documents the various operations involved in running the shop, from ordering from suppliers to dealing with age-restricted products. The intention is that this should result in a more consistent level of service to our customers and an easier time for our volunteers. A copy of the manual is in the shop for all volunteers to refer to when needed. Thanks to Dave Ball for putting the manual together.

In a similar vein, we ran a briefing session for volunteers in April. The aim of the meeting was twofold: to ensure that all the volunteers are up to speed on the various procedures; and to thank them for contributing their time to the shop – we are well aware that without the efforts and goodwill of the volunteers, there is no shop. The session was well received by those who attended, perhaps because of the drinks and nibbles organised by Lin and Bernadette.

This year has had its own set of challenges, most notably in terms of increasing energy and product costs. We do our best to keep our costs down, but unfortunately some price rises can't be avoided. Our move to smaller freezers and the introduction of air conditioning has helped us to lessen the impact of steep rises in electricity costs. Other similar enterprises are feeling the same pressures - the vice chair and I attended a meeting of North Devon community shops earlier in the year and it was interesting to hear other shops' perspectives; they are all encountering similar challenges to ourselves, but it was interesting to find that we were the only shop attending that is entirely run by volunteers. All of the other shops employed some paid staff, usually a manager. Not only that, but some of them were making a small loss each year, relying on fundraising activities to make up the shortfall. I think we can give ourselves a collective pat on the back for our performance!

We have taken on more local suppliers during the year, notable Farris Farm for their excellent cream and butter. Sadly, we recently learned of a death in the family that owns Chulmleigh Bakery, one of our long-term suppliers. Unsurprisingly this led to some disruption in our bread deliveries as the family dealt with their bereavement, and has resulted in a change to our regular delivery days. We thank our customers bearing with us and our volunteers for coping admirably as things rapidly changed. Our condolences go to the grieving family.

On a more positive note, the planning application for the shop extension project has now been submitted and we await the decision of the North Devon Council planning department. Assuming the application is approved, the extension will increase the shop's floor area by approximately 25%, extend the social area and stockroom, and allow us to add handwashing facilities for volunteers and customers. The extension will be entirely funded by the Public Open Spaces contribution from the Highbullen development. Thanks to Dave Ball for preparing and submitting the planning application.

Finally, and as usual, we've seen some volunteers retire from the shop and some new faces come on board. As always, we thank those leaving us for their support. We're always looking for more volunteers so if you have some spare time and would like to contribute to the community, please let a member of the management committee know. There are a variety of ways to help – not all are behind the till. We sadly say goodbye this year to Paul Sopp, who has done an excellent job as our secretary for the past few years. If any of you fancy stepping into his shoes, please let us know.

Andrew Coupe

Chair

Chittlehamholt Community Shop Management Committee