

Wilstone Community Shop Limited: Annual Members' Meeting

16th January 2023

Chairman's Report

A very warm welcome to you all to this year's Annual Members' Meeting. We have both shareholders and non-shareholders present so just a quick reminder that when we come to vote on the accounts its only shareholders who can vote.

After my report Jonathan will then present his Treasurer's Report and answer any questions you may have before we ask you to vote to approve the annual accounts for 2021/22.

There are no changes to the current Management Committee this year so no actions required on that account.

Progress to Date

Well life doesn't exactly get any easier does it! At the beginning of the year we were hopeful of a straightforward year with nothing major to do for the shop, apart from the frontage. However as the year has progressed the economic situation has increasingly presented us with many challenges.

Product supply in particular has been difficult for Ali as some usual products become no longer available, then sometimes reappear and sourcing replacement products is not easy; plus costs go up almost every time, or so it feels. All of this has made Ali's job in this area challenging and, as you can imagine, very frustrating. Our thanks to Ali and everyone else seeking out essential items for everything they've done to ensure the shop has remained as well stocked as it has. Sadly it does not look like this situation will change any time soon but we will continue to do the very best that we can in the months to come.

Our gradual acceptance of the situation with regard to COVID saw us all more mobile in both going out to shop and also getting away for much needed breaks, so initially our footfall and turnover saw a slight decrease. However, as we could hardly fail to notice, a number of building projects started up locally and as these have progressed we have benefitted from the custom of many of

the workforce. Indeed this has become so marked that we refocused our food offer to take maximum advantage of our new customers. The increasing workload at some parts of the day led to us setting up the role of Shift Supervisor for at least a year to not only provide some much needed back up for Ali but also be on hand at these times. We were delighted that Anna Swannell accepted the role and having her as a member of the team has been a real boost.

This seems a good moment to once again to say thank you to everyone who contributes to the shop. With so much voluntary contribution and local support 'thank you' seems hardly enough because without it our lovely shop would not exist. Over the years we have all come to recognise that a shop in the village provides a beating heart from which so many other important community activities flow.

So firstly to our magnificent volunteers, they are the true lifeblood of the shop and without their contribution we would simply not be here. Then to all the members of the Management Committee whose work largely goes on behind the scenes. To Doug and Jonathan who ensure all the legalities and finances are kept in order; to Chris who coordinates the Shop page in the Newsletter; to Anna for the vast amount of bookkeeping she undertakes, and to Abby, Susan, Kath, Deb, James, Ali & myself who take on board all the various other tasks that are required. And not forgetting Keith who uncomplainingly keeps us on track with newspaper vouchers and Tara & Anne who deep clean the shop twice a week.

We were blessed to have some new volunteers during the year, some brand new and some returning after a period away: a very warm welcome to Alla, Marcus, Chrissie, Sheena, Mel, Gerry, Blake, Jo and Helen Savage - having you with us been a pleasure plus helping to ensure a much more stable rota which has been a real relief! We were also fortunate to get some new students volunteering to help at the weekend for Duke of Edinburgh or other reasons; so welcome to James, Ned and Sam.

We were very sad to say goodbye though to Jenny, Helen Clay, Lucas, Matthew & Jim. Thank you for all your contributions and good luck in your future endeavours.

November 1st saw us celebrate our 10th birthday. It's hard to believe we have been operating that long, sometimes it also feels like forever!! We celebrated the event with volunteers past and present with a delicious vintage cream tea down the village hall. It was a very happy occasion indeed. We have certainly faced challenges in those 10 years but teamwork and community support has seen us deal with them and we are truly proud of the business we have become.

The 11th December saw us once again host a Christmas lunch for the more mature members of our community co-ordinated by Gail Short. With a magnificent meal produced from food donated by local business and volunteers and entertainment in the form of a quiz, singing from Anna Swannell and lively music provided by Ian Mackay & friends it was a great afternoon much enjoyed by everyone who was there. Our thanks go to everyone who contributed the delicious food and to the team of volunteers, ably led by Susan, who set the hall up, cooked & served and then cleaned up afterwards. Certainly a lot of hard work but such a lovely event to be a part of.

We held a raffle at the lunch and the money from this and from the Christmas raffle in the shop raised a total of £300 which has gone to Rare Dementia Support, an organisation that has really helped my sister over the last 9 months.

After a lot of thought we managed to agree on a design for the outside of the shop and secured a contractor to carry it out. Work began just before Christmas and the fundamental shape of it is now in place. We are awaiting the new wrought iron railings and then the final resin coating before we can work on new seating and making it all look as attractive as possible. Feedback on the work so far has been very positive and we look forward to completion in the coming weeks which will see the end to all the work that began in May 2018.

The new outside space will definitely provide a pleasant area for customers to sit and enjoy some refreshment once the warmer weather comes. That will be such a help as, with Covid restrictions, lifting we have certainly seen our inside seating area come into play. This in turn has changed the vibe of the shop and

really added a big positive to the service we provide, widening our appeal with regular bird watchers and walkers, as well as providing our locals with a safer change of scene.

On the subject of Covid we continue to have a very tight policy on it within our volunteer family and are very proud of the fact that we have had no linked cases within it and have remained vigilant and thorough throughout.

On a related topic we had our first inspection from Environmental Health since we refurbished the premises, receiving a lot of verbal praise and another 5* gold rating from them. If Hertfordshire adopted the same scheme as many other councils we would have been awarded special recognition, sadly they don't but we are truly proud of our record.

We have also been delighted to display paintings from a number of very talented local artists resulting in a lot of sales. It's so satisfying to be able to promote local talent in this way.

I look back on everything we have achieved as a community for the shop with such pride. The time spent on working out the best route for the shop for the future, all the fundraising activities that took place, the work that went into establishing our new lease and then the actual refurbishment itself. It felt almost impossible back at the beginning but with everyone's input and support we've made it. We are truly a-ma-zing!!!

The challenge now is get us through the current economic situation. Our energy costs, as for all of us, are huge and we are thankful for the extra income from the building sites which may prove to be a saving grace. We will continue to try and ensure we provide a good range of supplies at as affordable prices as we can so we can remain at the heart of our wonderful community.

I'll hand over now to Jonathan for his Treasurer's Report before we vote on the Annual Accounts.

Jonathan

Vote on Accounts