



ROADWATER VILLAGE SHOP COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

2020/21 ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

It is good to be able to report that we have largely maintained the increased level of takings in the shop this year, compared with pre-Covid lockdown levels. It seems that many people have absorbed the messages about shopping locally to stay safe during the Covid pandemic and appreciate the service RVCS provides in the longer term. Our positive response to special requests has certainly helped, and customers, staff and volunteers have made every effort to comply with the measures put in place to reduce the possibility of spreading infection. The committee recognises and appreciates the extra demands this has placed on everyone, especially during cold winter weather, when doors and windows had to remain open and customers queued outside.

Also very good news is that finally the café has been able to open fully, both inside and out on the patio, offering an increasing range of light foods and drinks, with cream teas as the latest addition. As well as loyal local residents, over the summer we have picked up a significant amount of business from holiday lets in the area, as more people “staycation” in the UK, plus groups of walkers and cyclists passing through.

One of our high spots was a visit from the High Sheriff of Somerset, as part of a tour of charitable projects arranged by the Somerset Community Foundation, who provided a loan and grant for the shop rebuilding and who have indicated they consider Roadwater as one of their success stories. The Sheriff, Thomas Sheppard, was impressed, particularly by our focus on using local suppliers and the map displaying where they are located.

Becoming an ally to “Plastic Free Exmoor” is another recent positive development, which is in keeping with our policy of being a model for environmentally friendly practice. This is an initiative of Surfers Against Sewage, which aims to reduce and ultimately eliminate the single use plastics that have become such a scourge for the environment. As part of this we are registered as a water refill site on the national App, so that anyone touring the area knows they can refill their water bottles free of charge at the shop instead of buying plastic bottles of water. Similarly, anyone visiting the shop will have seen that we now have two milk refill stations.

1. Membership and Shares

- There are currently 333 members, down from 337 a year ago, as four new members have joined, seven shareholdings have been gifted from deceased members to existing family shareholders and one shareholder has withdrawn.
- The amount held in shares stands at £150,565 (£4,500 withdrawn and £200 purchased in the last year).

As announced at the 2018 AGM, new people wishing to become members can purchase shares at any time, on request. Existing shareholders may also increase their shareholding if they so wish. In both cases SISR (Social Investment Tax Relief) is not applicable. Forms for purchase of shares are available in the shop or from Mary Coles. Forms for purchase of shares are available in the shop or from Mary Coles. Any shareholders wishing to withdraw their shares should also contact Mary Coles.

2. Finance

As mentioned earlier, shop sales have increased substantially, with turnover up by £107,000 (30%). Post Office income has also increased, by about 15%. On the expense side, payroll and interest costs have increased from last year. Payroll is due to the shop entering a more mature phase of operation and will, in all likelihood, continue. Interest will reduce as the loan has been repaid in full, almost five years early. This, coupled with an increase in net rent (fewer repairs necessary), should mean an increase in profit for next year (2021/22).

We are also pursuing a reduction in tax, including a repayment, due to a little-known tax case back in the 1940s. We are extremely grateful to Plunkett for making us aware of this “loophole” and it really justifies our membership of the organisation.

See accounts for further details.

3. Management Items

Management structures

- *Management Committee:* As the main decision-making body, the committee has continued to meet monthly. Through the winter lockdown period we used the Zoom conference calling facility, but have since been able to revert to physical meetings in the village hall. In February Rob Wetheridge stepped down as Chair, with immediate effect and Mary Coles, as Vice-Chair, took on the role of Acting Chair for the rest of the year, while also continuing as Membership Secretary. Cherry Bird has continued as Secretary and human resource representative, and Debbie Dennis as Treasurer. Becky Millar continued as member. We were joined by Di Binding, Karl Toth and Kieren Berry, elected at the 2020 AGM. Kieren stepped down in April.
- *Shop operational team:* In October, Sarah Wetheridge stepped down as Shop Coordinator. She worked with us through a transition period until the beginning of January, during which time individual consultations were undertaken with the staff team about the best way forward. What has evolved, and is still developing, is a staff run model, with day-to-day decisions taken within the staff team through twice-monthly staff meetings and WhatsApp. This has also entailed more hands-on involvement of the Management Committee, with the human resource representative attending staff meetings and other ad hoc meetings as needed. Debbie Dennis, as Financial Coordinator, took on additional responsibilities within the team, but has given notice to end her shop shifts from October (she will continue to support the accounts work for the time being); Julia Eggar continues as Buying Coordinator; Ann Lawton as Post Office Manager; Lynne Toms as Café Coordinator in addition to her hours as shop and post office worker; and Hazel Benson remains as Finance Officer. Sarah has continued to cover some shifts as shop and post office worker, as has Mary Coles. We have welcomed Alison Hardman and Jackie Lynn as weekend and evening shop workers and Steve Eggar as Post Office and shop worker. This means that currently there are nine paid part time staff, approximately equivalent to three full-time positions, of

whom six are trained to work in the post office. Two paid youth also work in the shop on Saturday mornings, gaining work experience under supervision.

- *Staff contracts* and job descriptions have been revised to take into account new management arrangements. All staff members have had the opportunity of at least one personal review discussion with the HR representative. They are also able to request additional discussions if they feel the need. Staff receive health and safety training in lifting and handling, plus fire safety. They have also undertaken food hygiene training.

Documentation

- The procedures & policies document was updated in May. It is available on the website and in the shop and comprises six sections:
 1. Financial Procedures including Tendering for Supply of Goods and Services
 2. Health & Safety
 3. Data Protection (GDPR)
 4. Environmental Impact
 5. Equity and Protection of Vulnerable Adults and Children
 6. Human Resource Management
- The staff grievance procedure has been revised and updated and is available in the shop office, as is information about health and safety.
- A pack has been produced and distributed to all volunteers in order to support new volunteers, to provide all volunteers with a quick summary of the legal rules governing the sale of tobacco, alcohol and lottery tickets and to remind everyone of the health and safety regulations governing our business.

Volunteers

Key volunteer roles are covered by Nancy Marshall (volunteer rota); Steve Eggar (health & safety); Andrew Benson (maintenance & repairs); Angela Fine and Jen Hudson (garden team leads); Ann Bernard (website and home delivery service); Les Haworth (Facebook) and Alison Hardman (newspapers). In addition, around 50 volunteers help in the shop and café in various capacities. Covid restrictions meant some stepped back for a period but most have now returned and a number of new people have joined. Volunteers working in the shop and café receive basic health and safety training in lifting and handling, plus fire safety. Café volunteers also undertake a food hygiene online training course. The contribution of so many volunteers is an important factor in the success of the business, enabling us to deal with the increased volume of trade and a wide range of local suppliers.

4. Shop, Café and Post Office Activities

- **Covid** has continued to present its challenges, but we were able to maintain the required safety precautions throughout the winter lockdown months, which meant keeping doors and windows open as much as possible, asking customers to queue outside in order to limit numbers in the shop and requiring wearing of masks and hand-sanitising. Through the summer, as national restrictions have gradually been lifted, we have continued to request (though not mandate) wearing of masks but allowed more people in the shop at a time.

- **Customer flow:** To date we appear to have retained much of the increased level of business generated by the lockdown, so the “shop locally and stay safer” message has translated into the habit of people doing more of their shopping in the village. Customer footfall has also been enhanced by a significant increase in the number of holiday makers in the area over the summer, which has been greater than in previous years because of the “staycation” recommendations.
- **Home delivery service:** This has been an important part of our support to the more vulnerable members of our community. During the winter lockdown three levels of home delivery service were in place: (1) full home delivery of goods ordered by phone and packed at the shop, (2) “personal shopper”, whereby the customer sends their order to their shopper, who does the shopping and delivers it (3) “phone and collect”, whereby the customer phones and collects their order, which is packed by the shop. Since the ending of lockdown, we have continued to deliver to a few vulnerable customers in Torre and Washford, but the main model for those who need the service is now the personal shopper, since this does not require space in the shop or staff/volunteer time for packing.
- **Post Office:** This continues to be an important part of our enterprise, greatly appreciated by local businesses. It provides an essential service to many, acting as a bank for paying bills and accessing cash. It is also a point for recharging electricity supply keys. This was especially important during lockdown when many large bank branches reduced their opening hours considerably, customers were not confident travelling far from home and people were unable to see relatives and friends, particularly over the Christmas period. Consequently, the postal and banking services were in high demand and our Post Office was constantly busy.
- **Café:** Lockdown has been a difficult time for the café, but finally we have been able to offer the kind of service we always hoped for and sales are increasing. Through winter, the takeaway service was much appreciated by customers, especially the range of hot home-made soups. As lockdown eased, we were able to offer sit-down service on the patio, with an increasing range of light foods, cakes, pies etc, the latest addition being cream teas, which have proved very popular. The hot spell in July prompted the trial of an awning, kindly loaned by Clare Sawatski, and we are currently looking at options for something suitable as a more permanent yet flexible arrangement that is in keeping with the environment and the overall look of the shop.

5. The Flat

Following the fitting of a new bathroom, carpets and repainting, a new tenant moved in on 1st December 2020. Apart from the demise of the washing machine, which we replaced, all has gone smoothly thanks to the co-operation of the tenant.

6. Development Work

Final invoices have been paid to Ware and other contractors for the building work. Other external works, such as the shed have now been completed.

In May we were able to install a beautiful new roadside sign. Made and donated by local artist Ann Farley, its colourful, contemporary metalwork design is in the tradition of Rachel Reckett, whose work is so much associated with the area. West Country Blacksmiths at Allerford Forge made the framework and fitted the whole structure into a planter.

7. Review of Last Year's Plans

In the 2020 annual report we listed five points under plans for the next year, most of which we have been able to meet, at least partially, as follows:

1. *Celebration of the new premises:* As Covid restrictions have continued, this has not been possible and it now feels too late.
2. *Enhancement of the role of the café as a community social and information hub:* Progress has been made, although Covid restrictions have delayed and limited plans.
3. *New member/ shareholders:* We continue to make contact with new people moving into the village and encourage existing residents to become involved in the shop and café. This has resulted in a number of new volunteers coming forward.
4. *Reduction of environmental impact:* We have signed up and been accepted as an ally of Plastic Free Exmoor and in a further step have also achieved the status of Business Champions under the scheme in our own right. Among the initiatives that helped us were the installation of two milk refill stations that use glass bottles instead of plastic, registration as a water refill station on the national App, sale of re-useable shopping bags (money goes to Surfers Against Sewage, South West branch). We had already substituted paper bags (instead of plastic) for loose items and are encouraging our suppliers to reduce the amount of plastic packaging they use. We also benefit from electricity generated by the solar panels installed in 2019, as well as a small feed-in tariff.
5. *Documentation of the social impact of the shop improvements:* Staff maintain a diary of any social services provided. The home delivery service has also been an important part of our support to vulnerable people in the community. We are in the process of drafting a report on this for the Lottery grant.

8. Plans for the next year

- As we settle into a more predictable routine in the new premises, we will continue to refine and improve systems to ensure staff safety and customer convenience. An important aspect of this is good communications within the staff team and with the management committee.
- Documentation of the social impact of the shop and café/ hub is a priority, both for reporting to our donors (chiefly The Lottery) and in helping us to see ways in which we can improve further.
- Also as a priority, we will continue to seek out and work on ways in which to reduce our environmental impact, to provide information and to act as a model for good practice.
- As a Community Benefit Society, this year we are aiming to identify at least two village level projects to which we can offer support.

9. Thanks

Many thanks to the shop staff and volunteers, including our gardening, maintenance, media and delivery helpers, and all the people who help in so many ways. We are grateful for continuing advice and support of the Plunkett Foundation. Above all, we thank our loyal customers and CBS member/ shareholders for their support.

Mary Coles, Cherry Bird, Debbie Dennis, Becky Millar, Di Binding, Karl Toth