



ROADWATER VILLAGE SHOP COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY NINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

2025/26 ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Despite a challenging national financial environment, in which we are seeing a spiralling cost of living and closure of many small businesses, as people have less disposable income, our business has had a good year. This is largely due to a clear focus on stock management and appropriate pricing in order to ensure a realistic mark-up on the goods we sell, while keeping prices at a level that customers are able and willing to afford. We also continue to expand the range of local produce and gifts in order to increase trade, particularly among visitors. Customer loyalty and the hard work of staff and volunteers in going the extra mile to maintain a friendly and helpful service are also hugely important.

The role of the shop, post office and café as a part of the community is important and we are pleased to have been able to donate vouchers to the Roadwater, Luxborough and Old Cleeve First School summer fetes and to contribute to the fundraising for the village hall roof. An additional aspect of this role is our continuing support for young people through the opportunity for paid work experience on Saturday mornings and Duke of Edinburgh volunteering. It is a source of great satisfaction to see the increased confidence and enthusiasm of these young people as they learn more about work practices and feel engaged with the business. We benefit from their input and hope they will continue to feel a loyalty for the shop.

FINANCIAL STATUS

Financial report

The shop and café both saw an increase in sales for the year compared to last year, with café sales increasing by nearly 14% reflecting popular additions to the menu and an increase in visitors. The overall gross profit margin has remained consistent with last year which reflects the focus on stock management and realistic mark-ups.

The Post Office continues to be a valuable resource for the community with the income it generates increasing very marginally over last year.

The flat also continues to provide a very useful income stream even though some electrical work was required to be undertaken in the year.

Total administrative expenses have however increased over the previous year and there are two reasons for this, the incurring of legal fees in respect of advice taken to progress the Post Office compensation claim and, an increase in repair and maintenance work to the shop and café. In addition to minor running repairs, both the shop and café were treated to a complete repaint in the Spring, a new work top was installed in the café and some refrigeration units were repaired or replaced.

Taking everything into account, the shop and cafe made a profit for the year of £15,601 which, whilst not at the level of last year, increases our retained reserves which now stand at a very solid £415,070.

Post Office compensation

Along with many other branch post offices, we were invited to apply for compensation from the Post Office related to the Horizon affair. This is a recognition that most post offices suffered financial losses as a result of this scandal. In order to qualify, we had to refloat the original company that first took over the business as a community venture in 2015. John Allen and Tony White have worked on this process over a number of months, and we are optimistic that it will have a successful outcome.

THE BUSINESS

Shop: During the year we have added to our range of gifts, including tea towels, pens and boxed chocolates. The range of greetings cards has also been increased, as new suppliers are providing a full range of colourful cards for all events, complementing our existing range of cards by local artists. Cold meats, smoked bacon and fresh chicken are now being ordered from Somerset Farm House, Williton to add to our range from Kendle Farm, Exmoor Ham and Hawkridge.

Post Office: On the Post Office our PCD (Portable Counter Device) as well as dealing with electric keys can now handle pre-paid mail returns for various retailers including Amazon and Vinted, enabling us to deal with these packages outside of Post Office opening hours. Click and Collect services have increased this year. The National Lottery have slightly changed the gaming format in the Lotto draw and you now get two chances of winning. They have also introduced the Powerball Lottery which offers a very large payout and is linked to the USA, although sales have been quite slow so far.

Café: The Café menu has been expanded, with new bacon butties very popular and of course cream teas an ongoing favourite through the summer months. Soups are also popular as a healthy light lunch. The latest addition to the menu is jacket potatoes with a range of fillings. There has been a noticeable increase in visitors from outside the area, indicating that word is getting around that the Roadwater café is a good place for lunch or morning coffee.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

Marketing and events

The marketing team has run a number of successful events that have increased our profile and brought in more customers, and which we plan to repeat this year. These include:

- A “coffee experience” evening, which provided insights into how to make and enjoy really good coffee.
- Our first “Christmas extravaganza” with local suppliers displaying their wares and offering samples and the opportunity to place orders. Despite dreadful weather this was much enjoyed by all who came and benefited the shop, customers and the local suppliers.
- An Easter egg hunt for children on the recreation ground, which was well attended and appreciated by children and parents – the café benefited from hugely increased trading.

However, we do need more input to marketing, in particular on the social media side, since this is now the reality for business development and marketing.

Volunteer tea

Once again, we organised an afternoon tea as a gesture of thanks to all our volunteers and staff, who contribute in so many different ways and without whom our business would not be the success it is. It was a very enjoyable event, with Jen's Pantry providing mountains of delicious food. Jennifer Duke, Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Somerset, joined us and expressed her appreciation for the work that volunteers do.

Staffing

There have been a few changes to our staffing. For the café we welcomed Alex Clark to work with Lynne and the volunteer team. In the shop, Alison Hardman resigned from her position as evening and weekend worker, but we are very grateful that she continues to support us in a voluntary role. She was replaced by Juliette Argent for just a few months over the summer, and we have now taken on William Phillips.

Updating of society rules

This exercise was undertaken on the recommendation of the Plunkett Foundation, the charity that is deeply invested in supporting community businesses, of which we have been members since we first began planning our community shop. We have greatly benefited from their support and advice over the years, and continue to do so through a range of webinars and meetings. Plunkett staff spent several years working with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), with whom we are registered as a community business, to develop an enhanced set of model society rules, which provide improved legal compliance with new legislation, and therefore give added protection. Our committee reviewed and made small adjustments to the model in order to fit in with our existing situation while ensuring the compliance and protections on offer. Our version has been approved by Plunkett and we are awaiting confirmation from the FCA.

Liaising with other community shops

We have continued to liaise with other community shops in Somerset through email and two in-person meetings, one in Brent Knoll and the other in Seavington. These provide excellent opportunities for us to learn from each other and share ideas about enhancing our businesses. We also benefit greatly from the inputs of the representative from the Plunkett Foundation. In addition, three of our committee attended a meeting organised by Plunkett in Devon which looked at ways to sustain and grow our businesses.

THE FUTURE

Last year we said we would:

- Grow the business to increase profitability in order to deal with the challenges of inflation. *We have continued to improve stock management and review pricing, which has helped us to maintain and improve profitability this year.*
- Increase marketing initiatives to encourage more residents to shop locally, through merchandise, events and our social media profile. *A number of events have been successfully run which has brought in more customers and increased our profile.*
- Look for and implement further measures to attract tourists visiting or staying in the area. *Staff report increasing numbers of tourists visiting the shop and café, largely through word-of-mouth recommendations.*

- Identify opportunities for young people to become more involved in the business. *While we continue to employ Saturday young workers in the shop, with a good turnover as the young people reach age 18 years and move on, this has not yet translated into longer term involvement of younger people.*

This year we intend to:

- Improve our social media profile as an aid to marketing and increasing our customer footfall.
- Look at ways to encourage more younger people to become involved in the shop.
- Organise more events that raise our profile locally.
- Review and update our business plan which was developed for the five years from 2022 to 2027.

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

Bruce Freeman, Mary Coles, Cherry Bird, (Tony White), Di Binding, Karl Toth, Sheila Robertson, Helen Eggar.

ANNEXES

1. THE TEAM

- The CBS business, comprising shop, PO, café and flat tenancy, is managed by the **management committee**, which comprises up to eight elected members. Currently there are seven members, as Tony White stepped down in June.
- A staff team of eight part-timers (equivalent to 2.5 full time staff) is responsible for day to day running of the **shop and PO**, supported by 20 volunteers who assist with various tasks in the shop and on the till, especially at busy times.
- The **café** has a paid manager, one paid worker, a paid young worker and team of 16 café volunteers, with five trained as baristas.
- **Finances** are managed by the Treasurer and a contracted book-keeper, with payroll services and examination of accounts by John Allen.
- We continue to employ three **young people** (under 18 years of age) on Saturdays one in the café each week, two in the shop working the shift alternate weeks. They receive training on work related tasks, use of the till, and other procedures They are a great help to staff, while also gaining valuable work experience and confidence.
- In total, including shop and café volunteers, the garden team and other helpers, over 50 people give time as **volunteers** to keep the shop running. Without them it would not be possible to offer the service we do.

Management Committee

Chair: Bruce Freeman

Vice Chair: Mary Coles

Secretary: Cherry Bird

Treasurer: Helen Eggar (from June)

Members: Di Binding, Karl Toth, Sheila Robertson

Co-opted treasurer: Tony White (until June)

Shop, PO and café staff

Julia Eggar: Buying Coordinator, evening/ weekend staff

Ann Lawton: Shop and PO staff

Sarah Cole: Shop and PO staff

Lynne Toms: Café Manager and shop and PO staff

Mary Coles: Shop and PO staff

Steve Eggar: Shop and PO staff and PO liaison

Alison Hardman: Evening/ weekend staff (until April)

Juliette Argent: Evening/ weekend staff (from May to September)

Bev Emmett: Evening/ weekend staff

Alex Gower: Café staff

2. THE MEMBERSHIP

- Currently there are 321 members, compared with 326 a year ago, due to five shareholders deceased and awaiting executors' instructions. In total, since 2019 there are 12 known deceased shareholders whose dispersal of shares are still awaiting written instruction from their estates.
- The total amount held in shares stands at £140,490, compared with £141,425 a year ago.
- Minimum investment for new members is £25. Existing shareholders may also increase their shareholding if they so wish

Forms for purchase of shares are available in the shop folder or from Mary Coles via cbsroadwater@gmail.com. Any shareholders wishing to withdraw their shares should also contact Mary Coles.

