

Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Parish Council Volunteer of the Year

On Thursday 2nd March Purbeck Parish Councils were invited to a ceremony at the Offices of Purbeck District Council to introduce representatives of their Volunteer of the Year Awards.

Nick Gore introduced the recipients of the Parish Councils nomination and outlined their considerable achievements over a number of years. His address is reproduced below.

“Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Parish Council are very proud to present Betty, Graham and Ken, a small section of the volunteers who manage and staff the Briantspuddle Post Office and Shop.

In 1997 Briantspuddle lost the commercial shop and post office, the only one serving the communities within the parish with the premises being converted into a dwelling.

A number of residents with the support of the Parish Council considered it was essential to retain these services for the benefit of the community and as such the granary located within the village hall complex was fitted out for the purpose. Initially attempts were made to run a similar service on a commercial basis. This proved difficult and eventually the idea to establish a non-profit making amenity was established in 2002, managed and staffed by volunteers.

This in itself was a major undertaking but equally so is the continuous provision and this is the focus of the presentation of the award this evening. The Management Committee of 8 enjoys the support of some 30 other volunteers from our small rural parish and together they ensure that the shop remains open for a few hours every day of the year with the exception of Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The team works on the basis of each volunteer taking personal responsibility for a specific duty, spreading the load thinly in such a way that no volunteer is expected to give more than 3 hours a week to the enterprise. In addition to manning the Post Office and shop counters, volunteers undertake stock management, cleaning and maintenance and all the myriad of management issues needed to keep the endeavour afloat.

Over the years the range of products has expanded and includes fresh produce, stationary and greetings cards (many of which are by local artists), daily newspapers and magazines and the majority of post office services. The Post Office and Shop has gone from strength to strength and is especially useful to those with transport difficulties ensuring that all residents can purchase day to day basics without needing to leave the parish and at reasonable prices. Importantly this tiny facility also provides a warm and friendly social hub particularly for some of the older residents and is held with affection and in the highest regard by our small community. Younger folk of student age benefit from the opportunity to gain valuable work experience at weekends and from being able to meet and get to know older residents. In 2002 the Village Shop was accepted by Sainsbury's to enter its SAVE (Sainsbury's Assisted Village Enterprise) initiative. Although this Scheme has now ceased the relationship with Sainsbury's continues which means that the Shop can offer Sainsbury's branded groceries at very competitive prices. In 2010 the considerable and ongoing achievements of the Post Office and Shop were recognised by being the first recipient of the prestigious Annual Dorset Peoples Project Award within the Best Kept Village competition. Over the years there have been threats to the survival of small post offices as part of plans to streamline services and cut costs. So far the Post Office's position in the community has been vigorously defended and it lives on offering almost a full range of services. This was recognised in 2012 by an award by Post Office Services recognising 10 years of "excellent service".

As I mentioned earlier, there are nearly forty volunteers keeping this rural gem operating on a daily basis. Unfortunately there is not room for all of them here this evening but this award is for them all. The enterprise would not be the success it is today without the commitment of these volunteers; and so we have Betty representing the shop, Graham from the Post Office and Ken who leads the management committee. Without them, Briantspuddle and the other communities within our parish would be a lot less sustainable so it is with great honour that I commend all the volunteers of the Friends of Briantspuddle Post Office and Shop Association as the Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Volunteers of the Year!"