

The Friends of Briantspuddle Post Office and Village Shop Association Ltd

Annual report to the Parish Meeting 5 May 2021

Who'd ever have thought you'd hear the words "do you have Avocado's or Aubergines" in the village shop?

Well what a year!

First, we didn't really get a chance last year to recognise the contribution Ken Kilbank had made to the shop over the years of service as chair. Managing and encouraging the team of volunteers, making sure the shop opened and served our community every day except Christmas year after year – we owe our thanks and appreciation.

Taking up the chair at the beginning of March, I thought would involve chairing the meetings each month and making a few decisions.

Within a couple of weeks, it became clear that covid was going to affect the way we all lived our lives, for a period of time, and we realised the shop had a big part to play.

Many of the existing, experienced volunteers had to step down and isolate and new volunteers stepped forward.

Obtaining delivery slots from Sainsbury's became impossible and resulted in many trips to "click and Collect" or a "shopping trolley dash" for Leonora. On the whole we managed to keep the shelves stocked. After early shortages of toilet rolls the strangest items were hard to get hold of – tinned fish or prunes.

The biggest change for the shop came when we talked to Bridget's at Wareham market and asked if we could use her to supply the shop with fresh fruit and veg twice weekly. We quickly re organised the shop so we could display the produce – "if tomatoes are on the shelf behind customers when they come in they won't sell".

Meat from Curtis', Bread from the Italian baker quickly followed providing everyone who could not get out or get a delivery slot with a healthy diet and no more expensive than going to a supermarket.

One of my other favourite quotes of the year "Better quality than "Waitrose" and cheaper than "Lidl"

With Mike, who usually delivers papers in the parish, having to isolate we quickly picked up the orders and two of the many heroes of the pandemic emerged in the guise of Zak and Theo who between them volunteered and delivered papers 7 days a week from March through to September when they had to go back to school.

As a shop and community, we are indebted to the Village Hall committee who have supported by opening the hall every day to allow us to operate a one-way system, social distancing, and shelter when the weather is bad. We were pleased as a committee to be able to return some of that support by sponsoring the Village Hall Café's Christmas lunch. The shop not only provided for the community practically it also became a social support for those who might not see anyone else all day. Throughout the first lock down we had a team of volunteers marshalling outside the shop making sure there was only one in at a time but also ensuring those waiting had someone to pass the time of day with. How important for our mental health this became.

In the bank – we saw sales increase to just over £50,000 for the year ending Oct 2020 and a profit of £3,000. In addition, in response to covid there were several grants we were successful in applying for.

One of these allowed us to install a connection to the internet, which we have made available to the Village Hall and Social Club, and purchase the equipment we needed to enable card payments. With covid advice being to reduce the use of cash being able to take card payments has proved very successful and now 60% of takings are on card. We have purchased a new till system which enables us to track our sales and stock.

Did you know since October we have sold 763kg of bananas that's an average of 25kg per week! and 430 kg of tomatoes. We have sold 250 jam doughnuts and 845 satsumas. We can see ¼ of our sales are Sainsbury's products, ¼ are fruit and veg from the market. Early fears of using a computer were quickly allayed and it does take out a lot of time for those placing orders for stock and taking in the Sainsbury's delivery.

Roger who held the role of Treasurer stood down in October to concentrate on his accountancy exams. We very much appreciated the work Roger had done to ensure our accounts were being correctly pulled together from previously very manual records and holding us as a committee to account. Good luck with the exams Roger!

We currently have a good team of volunteers and appreciate those who give up their time to serve in the shop, place orders, collect stock and take in deliveries, marshal at the weekends to enable the youngsters to work in the shop, do the cleaning, get rid of the rubbish and do the paperwork. Each role is important. We look forward to welcoming back those who have had to step down over the last year. And we are always on the look out for new volunteers – there is literally a job to suit everyone.

As we look to the future and hope that life returns to something that we might recall as “more normal” my hope is that the shop is “Not just for Covid”.

We will continue to provide the fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, and bread as long as our community continue to purchase it. Our fresh produce continues to be “better quality than Waitrose and cheaper than Lidl” and it is very possible to buy a balanced diet from the shop. All we need is for you to continue to come in and use the shop.

Ali Chorley

Chair

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