

## **Wilstone Community Shop Limited: Annual Members' Meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

### **Chairman's Report**

Once again, I extend a very warm welcome to this year's Annual Members' Meeting.

After my update 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 2022/23.

This year we also have five Management Committee members up for renewal, Deborah Chalmers, Jonathan Tymms, Abby Fermont, Anna Evans and myself. We will come to this part of the process after the Treasurer's report and passing of the accounts.

### **Progress to Date**

Starting, as always, with progress over the last 12 months. Sufficient to say that business life continues to be very, very challenging. We all know from our personal experience that we are constantly looking for ways to get the most out of our income, and that is certainly very true for our shop too.

Energy costs continue to place a heavy strain on our outgoings, in fact our electricity bill alone has gone up 4 or 5 times. We are now hopeful of some improvement in this area as we have finally been able to renegotiate our contract. Product costs are also very volatile, requiring constant review and attention by Ali to ensure we are achieving sufficient margins whilst not pricing so high as to put customers off.

You will have seen from the financial reports, which we will review next, that 22/23 was a tough year. We are fortunate that we have sufficient reserves to ride this out so that we can continue to provide a much-needed service to our community. In the meantime, we hope for smoother times to come. When will that be? If anyone has a reliable crystal ball do please let us know!!

The completion of the new houses in Barton Close and the closure, albeit temporary, of the Rectory site saw a marked reduction in the number of

builders coming to the shop. On the plus side the completion of the new outside area has given us a very welcoming space for cyclists and walkers when the weather permits. We are hoping to see an increase in such customers which will certainly be a boost to footfall and income.

Sadly, one of the repercussions of fewer workmen coming in was that we were not in a position to consider extending the year's contract of our Shift Supervisor. It felt very sad to say goodbye to Anna at the end of October, we miss her cheery personality – and her singing! But thank you Anna for all that you contributed in that year.

We also said a sad farewell to Ned & Sam but wish them both all the very best in their new ventures. On the plus side we welcomed several new volunteers, so a very warm welcome to Flip, Jan, Will, Bea, Sophie and John. Also, a special mention to Doug who is now a fully fledged member of the volunteer team – and an excellent casher up!

We have so many people to once again say a very big thank you to. Firstly, to our amazing band of volunteers, it really does feel like being part of a very big, and sometimes noisy, family! It can be challenging at times but, speaking for myself, I know I get far more out of it than I put in.

Once again our thanks to all those who help ensure the efficient running of the shop: to all the members of the Management Committee, their work goes on largely unseen but is essential to our existence. Specifically, to Jonathan and Anna for all their work on the accounts and books, keeping suppliers paid and the authorities happy is no mean feat. To Doug who works hard to ensure we meet legal compliance and follow all the protocols required of us. To Chris for his hard work on ensuring the wider public know what we can offer. To Keith for managing all the work required to process newspaper vouchers and to Tara and Anne for deep cleaning the shop during the week. Lastly, but most definitely not least, to Ali for providing the leadership and dealing with all the detail that has to go in to make things function.

Our appreciation also to all our customers, we do all we do for you and it truly is a rewarding feeling when the shop comes to life with chatter and laughter.

December saw us host the Christmas lunch for the more mature members of our community, ably co-ordinated by Gail Short with backup from a magnificent band of helpers. Once again, all the food was donated by local business and volunteers, with entertainment in the form of a quiz, singing from Anna Swannell and lively music provided by Ian Mackay & friends. It was a lovely afternoon, very much enjoyed by everyone who was there. Our thanks as always to everyone who contributed the delicious food and to the team of volunteers, who set the hall up, cooked & served and then cleaned up afterwards.

We held a raffle at the lunch and the money from this and from the Christmas raffle in the shop raised a total of over £300 which has gone to Ian Rennie and St Francis Hospice in memory of Tony Short who was such a strong supporter of the shop and who we very much miss.

We had another visit from Environmental Health during the year, once again we achieved a 5\* rating plus a lot of very positive feedback. A huge amount of work goes into ensuring we have all the procedures and records in place to ensure full compliance. Thanks Ali it's that nitty gritty end of the business which you really do us proud on!

I think this last year more than any other we have seen people coming to the shop more as a social space. It has been lovely to see so many regulars pop in for coffee and a chat, some coming from far afield just for us! We have a couple from Bedford, plus some from High Wycombe, and a group of four from London plus our bird watchers and cyclists. It has been particularly lovely to hear how much they appreciate our friendliness and welcoming atmosphere and are loyal to us because of that.

We have been very proud of how the volunteer team have supported each other and our customers throughout the year through some personally challenging times. No two days are ever the same and between the volunteers and customers we could have sorted out most government & world issues!!

So, what for the future? If we look at our data, sales are actually going well with average spend increasing. Some of this is down to prices increasing but

much of it is that customers are actually buying more items. However, over the 11 years we have been operating footfall has fallen away slightly. So, if we can maintain our current average spend but increase the footfall, even by just a few more, then this will make a big difference. We are therefore now looking hard at how we can attract more customers. Clearly with limited parking we are not looking for a huge increase, but another 10-20 customers per day would make a huge difference.

This year we look forward to refreshing the shop front and then really making the most of our lovely outside space.

We also asked you a few days ago if you could give some thought to any ideas on how to attract more customers or to add extra interest to the shop. Any suggestions you may have would be most welcome so that we can develop plans to boost the business in the coming year. We have had some suggestions already and there are pads and pens available if you would like to add your own. No suggestion is a bad one, and it might give us the germ of idea that will make a real difference.

Moving now onto the more formal business of the evening, I'll hand over first to Jonathan for his Treasurer's Report before we vote on passing the Annual Accounts.