

Wigmore Village Shop Association

Chairman's Report – 8th May 2024

At last year's annual members' meeting I noted that our hope for a return to calmer times post lockdown had been somewhat disrupted by events at both a local, national, and international level. Whilst it would be inaccurate to say that the last twelve months have been 'plain sailing' for our small retail business, our shop continues to trade successfully despite some hiccoughs along the way.

To better explain what I mean here are the Ups and Downs we've encountered in the last year. Starting with the downs – we had another break-in in October 2023. In the early hours of the morning the miscreants used our neighbour's plant pot to smash the glass in the front door and stole tobacco and cigarettes. Now you may think it strange at this point to talk about the positive side effect of this crime. It so happened that a few months earlier we had upgraded our security and CCTV with the result that our neighbour heard our new audible alarm go off and called the police and our CCTV captured a good picture of the thieves and their car registration number. The glass in the door was replaced in hours and we were back and open for business by lunchtime. The thieves were caught and are awaiting trial.

The biggest shock to the business came when in January when we received our new electricity bill which was a significant increase on previous quarters. We had anticipated that there would be an increase, but the reality was an unwelcome surprise, nevertheless. This has caused us to do a major review of our outgoings which because of the nature of our business electricity usage is a major component – chillers, freezers and heating are big users of energy. To mitigate our usage some equipment has been temporarily turned off i.e. the ice cream freezer in winter, and couple of chillers have had their settings increased slightly. The warmer months will be more of a challenge as we need to keep produce fresh and fit for sale.

Bookers remain our main wholesale supplier and though the problem with deliveries from Wolverhampton have settled down we still have issues with some items ordered but not being supplied. A few customers have noted that several products have references to Bookers owner's Tesco. This and other issues with the supermarket's relationship with small independent grocers has recently been taken up by the Guardian and the BBC. Alternative wholesalers have been looked at, but Bookers remain the best option for us at present.

But enough of this negativity. We have many pluses to count over the past twelve months. We did the village proud with our colourful display and merchandise for the King's Coronation. New equipment was bought for the shop – a coffee machine and a grab-and-go food chiller. Both items have been well received by customers. Our merchandise continues to attract customers and we get many compliments on the variety of items we sell. Once again this is down to the efficient business management of our manager, Alison.

We have finally moved into the 21st century and engaging with the digital age by having our own website, Facebook and Instagram accounts. Many thanks to Debs for the fantastic website that is now live.

Moving on to the management committee, our treasurer Loraine Atkins resigned in January after having done sterling work sorting out the accounts and setting up a new VAT payment system. Lesley Pollacco has taken on this role for which I personally thank her. Anita Smith was co-opted onto the board and together with another committee member Steve Lloyd they are overseeing and improving our internet presence.

Of course, without our volunteers there would be no village shop. And in the past year five new volunteers have joined our team, so I am very pleased to say that we now have a full complement of people to fill the rota so that the shop can open seven days a week.

A word of thanks to our very understanding landlord Steve Mundy. He really is the best landlord that a shop could ask for. Also thanks to our accountants Lisa Southwell and Andrew Grey who manage our financial matters.

Finally, despite the challenges that running a business in the current economic climate presents, your local village shop remains open, welcoming, full of interesting stock, competitively priced and more pleasant than driving to a supermarket.