

ILMINGTON COMMUNITY SHOP * CAFE

CHAIR REPORT YEAR TO SEPTEMBER 2022

It is my great pleasure to report that our Community Shop & Café has had another wonderful and successful year. For the first time for three years, we have been able to open the café for the whole year and shop sales continue to stay at a very strong level. We have also grown the uses of the Café for activities and events which have been well supported by our Community and we have been supported brilliantly by our existing and many new volunteers.



Officially, this report covers the financial year from October 2021 to September 2022 (2021/22), but in reality it covers that period plus the months since September. I would like to take the opportunity this year to shine a red glowing light on three aspects of the Community Shop & Café that we, the Management Committee, hope you agree are success stories.

Firstly, we believe we have reached financial stability and equilibrium that gives us very firm foundations

on which we can run the shop and café in a sustainable and prosperous way.

Secondly, we have developed uses of the café that bring together many different groups across our Community and, we believe, is giving a great deal of pleasure to many within Ilmington and its surrounding villages, the Community this co-operative is here to serve.

Thirdly, over the last three years, we have developed our communications in such a way as to be informative, fun and inclusive so that our customers, volunteers and shareholders are getting updates in a format that is right for them and hopefully makes them smile.

I have also included a section on the areas that we are yet to achieve and require further attention.





FINANCIAL STABILITY & EQUILIBRIUM

The reason the Committee believe we have reached a happy equilibrium between our sales and costs is because we are now generating enough cash from the operations of the enterprise to give us an annual buffer. This buffer means that, if something goes wrong, we can fix it without the need for fundraising. As Table 1 below shows, there are two main aspects that have changed either side of the pandemic. Firstly, shop sales are 50% higher than before, and although the café sales are lower, the resultant combination of sales gives an increase in Margin (the money we make after paying for products we sell) of 21% or about £19,000. We now believe that shop sales will continue at a higher healthy level as people want to support us – thank you all for the part you play. Running the café with primarily volunteers for shorter hours has meant a reduction in the café sales but it has been more profitable.

<u>Table 1</u>	2017-18	2018-19	2021-22	% Change
Sales: Shop	£ 210,045	£ 209,363	£ 326,099	56%
Sales: Café & Events	£ 52,997	£ 60,145	£ 41,322	-31%
Sales Total	£ 263,042	£ 269,508	£ 367,421	36%
Stock Costs	-£ 183,858	-£ 178,867	-£ 258,138	44%
Margin	£ 79,184	£ 90,641	£ 109,283	21%
Margin %	30.1%	33.6%	29.7%	-12%
Staff Costs	-£ 56,224	-£ 65,606	-£ 45,354	-31%
Overheads	-£ 23,075	-£ 24,152	-£ 36,345	50%
Cash generated from our operations	-£ 115	£ 883	£ 27,584	31 times
Other Income (Grants, Donations. etc.)	£ 7,860	£ 4,580	£ 3,555	
Depreciation	-£ 25,444	-£ 25,526	-£ 18,098	
Profit	-£ 17,699	-£ 20,063	£ 13,041	

The other big change we have made is the reduction in paid staffing costs. Having a shop manager and a part-time assistant manager is nearly a third less expensive than the previous staffing arrangements. This level of paid support means that, in the main, volunteers in the shop and café get the support they need when they need it. There is also a fantastic benefit in that Laura and Michele cover each other's holidays avoiding the need for the committee or other paid staff to step in. We feel that Laura has slotted in brilliantly working with Michele and are delighted at how they cover the operation and support us volunteers. We are grateful to have found such a good combination of skills and personalities in Michele and Laura.

Despite a hefty increase in general overheads, due to factors like electricity price increases and so many more purchases being on card rather than cash, resulting in a doubling of bank charges, we are still generating enough to cash to be able to cover all eventualities (so far). This was illustrated when our freezer broke down this year and we were able to replace it with a shiny new one as illustrated here





OUR COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF THE SHOP & CAFÉ

Over the last 18 months, we have developed and run numerous different groups and events offering different activities that have brought together people who live in our Community. This would not be possible without volunteer help running these events; we are very grateful to them and to Michele for her tireless organisation and enthusiasm. A special mention to Sheila Lowe and Mary Brain for taking on the organisation and running of The Monday Lunch Club, a new group run once a month (on a Monday in the café!) that is a meal and a get together for people who value the opportunity and a little help to meet up with their friends and neighbours.



We are very proud of the list of different friendly groups that are now up and running. Daytime groups include:

1. The Monday Lunch Club
2. Book Group
3. Parent & Baby Group (meet weekly)
4. Knit & Natter Group

They all mostly meet monthly in the café. We tried a games club which did not have enough take-up, but we are open to trying again if we get a core of interest. Indeed, we are willing to try other themes if anyone has any suggestions – please contact Michele (01608 682 838) if you have the inspiration!

We have also started evening events in the café.

5. “Pop up wine bar” – see page one for picture
6. Evening that has a presentation element as well as drinks (due to start in March)
7. Evening suppers which have proved very popular

We are planning to have six suppers in the coming year. **Undoubtedly, we could try to run more but the committee are trying to balance the community demand for more against the added workload on our wonderful group of volunteers who are already gainfully engaged. We cannot afford for volunteers to drop out of shop/café shifts to do events. We want to explore the options of how we square this circle at the AGM – your ideas are welcome.**

We have also run larger events like:

8. Street party for the Jubilee celebration [watch this space for the Coronation version]
9. BBQ/picnics on Upper Green
10. Farmers’ markets in the village hall

A spin-off of the farmer’s market has been our





Marketplace events: the chance for suppliers to display their wares in the café on a Saturday (11) or having a tasing evening (12) and there are other appropriate groups that use the café or terrace to communicate their cause (13).

Just to finish off the list:

14. We also are happy to allow villagers to use the café (when it is free) to run their own events, again where appropriate. There have been a few very successful charity fundraisers run on a Monday or Sunday when the café is closed.
15. We have also worked with the Village Hall to provide the venue for their Warm Hub.

And add in some of our old favourites:

16. Turning on the Christmas lights
17. Volunteers thank you BBQ
18. Volunteers thank you dinner and knees up in the village hall

A massive thank you to everyone who has supported these activities in any way.



In addition to the new activities and events, we have, where feasible, tried to improve the Shop & Café in response to feedback. A small change to the Café menu was the introduction of soup, welcomed by many. I recognise that the Café does not have the breadth of menu it used to have, but I hope it makes up for it with a friendly welcoming service and that the list above gives you a flavour of how we are using the Café space to serve our Community in a different

way. Please feedback if you are happy or unhappy with the direction we are going in and give us your suggestions of anything further we can do.

DO YOU FEEL WELL INFORMED?

I don't get very involved in this area, so I feel like I can give an objective view of my fellow committee members who do most of the work. The communications that we do via social media, the Ilmington Circulation, parish magazine and newsletter email are as complete and extensive as we can manage.

In my view, Debbie Sarjant, ably assisted by Michele, does an amazing job of keeping our social media and weekly communications so fresh, interesting and fun. She never misses an opportunity to share what has been happening in the Shop & Café and she helps us develop themes, activities and competitions that are great fun in their own right but also spawn stories that can be shared on social media. I wish everyone in the village was on social media and could be part of it. Michele does summarise what goes out on social media and we do print the stories on traditional old paper for you to read when you're in the café. The reach of the communication is far and wide.



We have had numerous features of our volunteers that can lead to spin offs. A great example of this was when BBC CWR picked up on the story of our very own Lindsay Martin and her sister Angy working in the café before going to London to see the Queen's funeral procession. Michele has the link to the interview if you want to hear it. A nice example of the positive consequences of interesting social media content.

Some of our favourite Facebook posts this year include the fake Neighbourhood Watch report of Santa's visit in December, volunteers seen raving at the recent Village Hall disco, the arrival of the Easter bunny, the over-use of pancake puns on Pancake Day and anything that includes our lovely volunteers and the work you do. I believe we post over 100 articles a year, so well done to Debbie for her brilliant work.

The other major communication commitment we have made as a committee is to send you, our members, a Monthly Newsletter that gives an update on how things are going in the co-operative. In addition to the more obvious items we share with everyone, the newsletter tries to be more informative about the inner workings of the co-operative so you really know what is going on. Please let me know if it is giving you what you want to know or whether there is any other aspect of the business you'd like to read about. My thanks to Sarah Tremellen for doing the Newsletter for the last 3 years and to Becky Harvey for picking it up from now on.

Just as a bit of fun. Can you guess which item of social media had the greatest reach on Instagram in the past two years?

- Was it Natalie from the Cottage Garden Forest bringing armfuls of flowers to the shop?
- Or customer Angela Groves showing the range of unusual items we sell, from beeswax to cornichons, tennis balls to bamboo socks?
- Or was it Diana and Jeremy Snowden standing on the terrace, bringing a homemade cake and about to work a couple's shift in the shop and café?

All will be revealed at the AGM.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

At the AGM last year, we said that we would look to install solar panels on the roof of the Shop/Café and to improve the surface of the car park to make it easier for wheelchair, pushchair and delivery access to the Shop & Café. A fair amount of research and getting input from experts and suppliers has been done into both projects, but we are not yet in a position to move forward with these larger projects. We will endeavour to get both projects completed in the next year.

The other aspect of the running of the Shop that has snuck up on us and is now not at an acceptable level is the amount of waste that is created. It seems to be a combination of not predicting the demand well enough and/or over buying on certain items. The total money lost because we are



writing off stock, or selling under the purchase value, is £6,602 (2% of Shop sales) for the 2021-22 year, up from £4,878 (1.3% of Shop sales) in the previous year. We will refocus on this area from now on and try to improve.

On a more positive note, we did manage to rearrange the shop to accommodate a new veg chiller, and install acoustic panels in the Café that have made it easier to hear when the room is full.

CHANGES ON THE COMMITTEE

The Management Committee has been a pleasure to lead and to be part of – thank you all so much for your contributions.

Sarah Tremellen has reached the end of her three-year term on the Committee and is not putting herself forward for re-election. Julie Jones has just started a new business and cannot commit the time she wants to her Committee work and is standing down as well. A special thanks to Sarah and Julie for their amazing contributions over the last 3 years.



I am going to continue as Chair, Becky Harvey is now Vice-Chair, Fiona Dakin is continuing as Treasurer and Debbie is continuing doing Marketing, Community Communications and Engagement. There are other roles on the Committee though and we would welcome anyone who has some time to put into the Committee and who wants to give something back to our Community. We take our responsibilities towards running the Shop & Café seriously but we try to have as much fun doing it as we can along the way – as illustrated (maybe) by the above picture of (from left to right) Fiona, Becky, Michele, Laura, Mike, Sarah, Julie and Debbie at a Committee meeting just before Christmas.

PLEASE GIVE US FEEDBACK

I say it every year and please take me up on the offer. If you have any questions on this report or about anything we are doing, please contact me on the details below or contact any other member of the Committee. Please keep feeding back whether we are moving forward in the way that you want.

THANK YOU for reading this far and thanks for playing your part in making the Community Shop & Café a great success.

Take care everyone

Mike Tremellen

Chair - Ilmington Community Shop & Café

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