

## FITTLEWORTH COMMUNITY SHOP LTD

### 2020 THIRD AGM

#### REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2018 – 31 AUGUST 2019

1. We are reporting on the third accounting period of Fittleworth Community Shop Ltd - which is the period from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019. What a year! Our first year of trading and our turnover was well above the level we had anticipated. This was particularly encouraging given that, as you know, the Stores opened in October 2018 so we were only trading for 11 of the 12 months that the financial year covers.
2. We will also make brief mention of some of the activities that have taken place since the end of the formal accounting period (ie the period from 1 September 2019 to date).
3. Some of the key activities from the formal reporting period are as follows:
  - September 2018 saw a flurry of activity and a final push to get the Stores ready for our planned opening in October. There was a huge amount to get done during that month with all our fittings and fixtures and equipment installed. We spent much of the month unpacking boxes, unwrapping crockery, cutlery, equipment and, of course, a huge amount of stock. We opened with close to a thousand product lines on the shelves. Our paid staff team (very compact then – just two) started with us in September and stepped up to the challenge of getting us ready for opening within a two - week period. Volunteers were trained, shelves were stacked, our EPOS till system was installed and loaded up and a preview evening was held for you all to have an early look at the inside of the shop.
  - We had originally targeted 15 October for opening so we were all thrilled that we were able to open slightly ahead of schedule on 1 October. There was much excitement when we opened, together with a certain amount of nerves from our volunteer army. Some were a little nervous about getting to grips with the finer detail of the till. Many of us doubted whether we would ever quite perfect the correct cappuccino froth or remember what a mocha was, let alone how to make one.
  - The village turned out en masse that first week, everyone keen to see what had been created and many joining us at our launch party on 6 October. We were all a little overwhelmed by the support and enthusiasm of those who visited. Our first week of trading certainly set us off on the right foot – we took an incredible £7,883 in our first week. Stock flew off the shelves, we frantically restocked, everyone pitched in and we all learnt together how to run our new shop and café.
  - There were a certain number of finishing touches that we put in place over that first year of trading. We were fortunate to have been well supported by grant applications but the process of claiming grant payments is complex and many of our grants involved staged or deferred payments. This meant that not quite everything was in place for our opening and in addition we discovered all sorts of extra bits of equipment that we could make good use of. So, over the year we have added to our equipment with items like panini presses for our toasted sandwiches, an additional microwave and blenders for smoothies and undertaken further small projects, most

notably including the purchasing of our outdoor furniture to ensure that we could fully utilise our lovely terraces and outdoor space over the summer period. We also put up signage and a thank you plaque by the door to recognise all the support and donations from our village and beyond.

- Trading went from strength to strength (more of that later) and so staffing has been a key priority over the year. As the sales figures have grown, so has our staff team. The shop now employs 5 adults (including, since January of this year, me in my role as co-manager with Toni!). Sarah, our initial Manager, left us in January 2019 and Toni, stepped into the Manager role. Toni has worked her socks off since starting with us and has fast become, just like the shop, a much - loved village asset! The Stores would not be the same without her and her ever present cheery smile. We have had some other staff changes along the way with some joining and leaving within the last year and a half (such as Wendy who left us in the Autumn to move to Spain and Donna, our assistant manager who left before Christmas to work in a care home but who still comes regularly to volunteer for us). We currently have a strong, capable and close - knit staff team with Amanda, Kelly and Eva supporting Toni and myself. Eva is soon also to be leaving us as she and her husband move to Kent for new adventures.
- We also employ some local teenagers to work shifts over the weekend where we were finding it hard to get volunteers to fill shifts. Since opening we have taken on 9 local teenagers who are valued members of our team. Employing our local teenagers provides invaluable workplace skills and experience, along with a chance to build their confidence. In addition to our team of 9 paid teens we have also had 4 students who gained volunteering experience with us as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award schemes and provided a week of work experience to two village teenagers as part of their school work experience programme.
- Our post office opened in January 2019. It was one of the services villagers most wanted to see provided through the shop and it has certainly increased footfall to the Stores, especially with so many local banks closing their doors. Providing banking services alongside standard mail and posting services is of huge benefit and our Post Office is well used. Our post office is staffed by our paid team and a small number of our volunteers (primarily but not exclusively Committee members) who have been trained up especially. During December we had an almost permanent queue at the post office counter and were overrun with Christmas post. Running the post office does bring its own challenges – the fee we receive from the post office is not enough to cover even a part time member of staff and the reporting requirements are extensive but we are all in no doubt as to the value of this service to the village.
- Community remains at the heart of everything we do. As a community business we take the feedback we receive very seriously indeed. We carried out surveys last year of our shareholders and volunteers, we analysed the responses and took action to deal with the comments received. We have a suggestions box and are always happy to trial product lines or menu suggestions wherever its practicable to do so. We look after our community whenever we can, whether it's delivering shopping to those in the village who are ill or recovering from operations and cannot get to us, or giving a lift to someone who couldn't otherwise get to us or just giving a helping hand to our more elderly residents or carrying heavy shopping bags to the car.

- We support our wider community, with our foodbank donation point collecting on behalf of the Trussell Trust which distributes food parcels to those in need. Our collections are growing steadily and we are grateful to all who donate to this worthy cause
  - We value our regular shoppers and visitors (although its always lovely to see new faces too!). Our Stores really has achieved our aim of being a true community hub. There is something really special about it- a magic and buzz when the café is full with locals catching up or when the playground is full of children with parents and carers looking on from the terrace whilst enjoying a coffee.
  - Our volunteers! How can we thank you enough?! We couldn't operate without you and the place wouldn't be the same without you. Although our paid staff team are at the heart of the day to day running of the Stores we simply couldn't function without our trusty band of volunteers. We have around 50 volunteers on the books, although there is a core team of around 20 who work regular shifts with us, whether that is through working a regular fixed weekly slot or simply signing up on a weekly basis to a slot that is convenient to them. It's fair to say that we all have been on a steep learning curve – we all started out rather tentatively but what a skilled and efficient workforce we have become. We work hard but we also have fun along the way. It's difficult to define what is it that makes our shop such a special place but I believe that one of the key factors is the blend of characters and warmth and fun that our volunteers bring to the place.
  - Our trading figures have been absolutely astounding. Our initial Business Plan was prepared on the basis of a break - even position for year one and forecast a combined turnover for the shop and café for year 1 of £236,000. Mick will take you through the figures in detail in a moment but our turnover for year 1 was £362,000. And, of course, we were only trading for 11 months of our initial year.
  - To put the turnover figures into context it's useful to bear in mind some statistics for the community shop sector. From data released by the Plunkett Foundation we know that the average turnover for community shops is £153,000 per annum. Our turnover (which would be at over £400,000 for our first complete year of trading) puts us into the top 4% for community shops. Not bad at all for year 1!
  - As a community owned and run business we exist to serve the community and are a not for profit organisation. Any profits that are generated in future years will be reinvested back into the community. Again, Mick will take you through the figures for our first year. It is important to note that we are not looking to make significant profits – we have always given great consideration to our pricing. We aim to keep our pricing affordable so that we continue to function as a facility accessible to as many as possible.
4. We are very excited by the year ahead. Our first year of trading gives us a very strong basis from which to move forward. We have learnt so much from our first year and now have the benefit of a year's worth of data to help inform our decisions and operations for the next year. We hope that you will continue to support us as both customers and volunteers, to ensure that we continue to thrive and remain at the heart of our community.
  5. Finally, I must say a huge thank you to all the Committee for their hard work and dedication over the past year. I know that you are all well aware of the huge amount of time that the

Committee have put in to ensure that the Stores is such a success. They have contributed many hours volunteering on a day to day basis and allowed us to open on Sundays by providing through the Sunday team a supervising manager prior to us recruiting Eva to the role last Autumn. And, of course, they have also provided so much guidance, direction and support behind the scenes. Thanks all!

Alison Welterveden