

Stoke-Sub-Hamdon Community Shop Ltd

Community Benefit Society (CBS)

Report to Members for the year ending 28 February 2021

1. Executive summary

This report covers the activities of Stoke-sub-Hamdon Community Shop Ltd (SSHCSL) during the financial year from 1 March 2020 to 28 February 2021, our first full year of operation.

We are pleased to report a good year in which we have cemented the foundations of our community organisation and supported the village shop – now known as Stoke Community Shop – to continue trading and to expand the services it offers to Stoke and surrounding villages

Key features of the year

- Shop sales totalled £203,767
- Profit before tax for SSHCSL £58,467
- Total of 36 active volunteers at end of February 2021
- Total of 223 Members at end of February 2021
- Acquisition of electronic point of sale (ePOS) (May 2020)
- Acquisition of air conditioning for main shop area (August 2020)

2. Profit and loss account

The Financial Statement Summary for the year has been made available by email to Members, in Stoke Community shop and at the Annual General Meeting. These show a promising first year of trading for Stoke Community Shop, the main income generator for SSHCSL. Shop sales totalled £203,767 with additional income including rental income from the out-reach Post Office, grants (of close to £12,000), donations and Membership fees. Our profit for the year, before tax, was £58,467.

3. Balance sheet

The value of our fixed assets was set at £3,758, which reflects our inheritance from the Shop at the Cross of their existing fixtures and fittings plus essential capital expenditure made by SSHCSL during our first year. This includes the purchase of an electronic point of sale (ePOS) and the installation of air conditioning in the shop area, the cost of which was covered by grant funding.

4. Shop staffing

We have one paid member of staff. All other members of staff, including Volunteers and Committee Members, are unpaid. Each shift is covered by one Supervisor and at least one Volunteer. Two Volunteers are required during busier periods.

The paid Manager/Supervisor post is part-time, 22 hours a week. The rest of the time the shop is supervised by a Committee Member. We are fortunate in having been able to employ an experienced shop manager, Ann Davidson, who previously worked at the Shop at the Cross.

5. Shop Volunteers

Emma Herrod has run the Shop Volunteer rota since we started. We are all grateful to her for carrying out this very important task so efficiently.

We had an excellent response to our call for shop Volunteers in January 2020 and by the time we opened Stoke Community Shop in March 2020, we had 50 Volunteers on our rota.

However, many of our initial volunteers then had to pull out due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, which came 20 days after we opened. This left a huge gap in our rota and our ability to run the shop, so the Management Committee decided to reduce the opening hours, bringing forward the closing time to 4pm (from 6pm).

Our Volunteer numbers were then boosted by people on furlough, and this uplift continued till September 2020. Since then, many have returned to work to be replaced by those who have ceased shielding as well as others who want to get involved in the community – including people newly moved to the village. As at 28 February 2021, we had 36 active Volunteers doing shifts.

Although we were able to provide full training to the initial group of Volunteers, the pandemic left us unable to provide the planned level of training to new recruits and training is currently very much 'on the job'. We hope in the next few months, restrictions allowing, we will be able to restart Volunteer training sessions.

To show our thanks, all Volunteers who were available for work as at Christmas 2020 were given a £10 shop gift voucher. Again, once pandemic restrictions have eased we hope to run events for Volunteers as a reward for their help.

The value of our Volunteers cannot be underestimated. They have done tens of thousands of pounds of work for the shop – and our community – for free since it opened. Without them, we would have to increase prices to support more paid employment. They also enable us to provide services seven days a week, which many community shops do not.

The Committee would welcome Members suggestions on how we can ensure that we can continue to attract and retain Volunteers.

6. Marketing and communications

The main aims of our marketing and communications are to: inform local people about our services and goods; increase shop footfall, both from Stoke sub Hamdon and surrounding villages; attract new Members and attract new Volunteers.

We regularly advertise in Stoke village newsletter, the Hambook and via occasional direct mail fliers which we distribute by hand to all homes in Stoke. We also have:

- a website – <https://stokeshop.co.uk/>
- a Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/stokecommunityshop/>
- a Google business page; and
- a Neighbourly page – <https://www.neighbourly.com/project/5e776175c7ac8e1938d4118b/>

We have appeared in the Western Gazette and its online edition:

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/village-shop-near-yeovil-supported-5068120>

During the year, we also carried out a customer satisfaction survey by questionnaire sent to every home in Stoke, to find out whether we were meeting shoppers' needs and expectations. The number of completed questionnaires was small but on the whole the response was very positive.

We have produced promotional shop-branded jute bags, pens and thermal mugs.

7. Shop products and services

We provide a full range of core products, from bread, tinned and frozen goods to home cleaning products. In our first year of operating the shop we have gradually expanded the range of goods and services we offer.

Additions of note, many at customer request, include Bio-D eco refills for a range of household uses, Wholefoods, Gluten free foods, Vegetarian/vegan foods and personal products, Meats from Kevin McAdam, Fresh milk from Bruton Dairy, Crafts by local artists and crafters, Local beers and ciders, Dog treats and biscuits, Loose sweets, Herbs and Spices.

- **Post Office:** We retain the out-reach services of the Post Office, provided by Paul from Queen Camel. This provides us with a small income per session, three times a week.
- **Payzone:** We switched to Payzone from Paypoint because the former stopped supporting British Gas bill payment. Payzone also enables people without internet access to pay a wide range of bills and do mobile phone top-ups. This service provides the shop with a fractional direct income but benefits our customer base and attracts them to use the shop.
- **Newsagents:** We used Martock Newsagents as a wholesaler on startup because WHSmith required a deposit of c£800. Last summer we decided we needed a service that better met our needs and by then could afford the WHSmith deposit. We now order newspapers and magazines via WHSmith's online hub and have recently received our deposit back. There isn't a large margin but it attracts customers who then buy other goods. We are one of the few community shops locally to sell newspapers and magazines seven days a week.
- **Fruit and veg:** We first sourced fresh fruit and veg from local supermarkets. We also tried to establish a relationship with the fruit and veg shop that briefly traded on the High Street. We then, on customer recommendation, approached local supplier The Veg Shed. We

established a good trading relationship, including the supply of a wide range of fresh produce six days a week at the same price as The Veg Shed charges in its own outlets.

- **Bread:** We have developed the ordering service for Bakery Roy-Al. This means that our customers can order fresh bread that's delivered direct to the shop six days a week.
- **UPS:** We discontinued provision of UPS parcel drop-off and pickup as it didn't constitute a core service. UPS was little used and took up valuable Volunteer time for virtually no return.

8. Customer experience

Since we opened the shop, we have worked to enhance the shopping experience, from painting walls and removing old signage, to moving shelves around and introducing new displays. We will continue to look at ways to make the store feel more spacious and an inviting and easy place in which to shop.

9. SSCSL Community Hub

One of the key aims of SSHCSL is to provide a community hub with the shop at its centre. We work with other organisations and businesses locally to promote community engagement.

During the first lockdown in spring 2020, Stoke Community Shop worked with other groups and individuals to set up Stoke Community Help Project, using the shop's phone line and Stoke Charity Shop's premises as a base, and staffed wholly by volunteers. This was a major effort by the village to help support those shielding or isolating. It provided shop and prescription deliveries, lifts to the GP and hospital, and dog walking services. Importantly, it offered many people with little human contact the chance to speak to someone on the phone for both physical and mental support. For several months Stoke Community Help Project became an integral part of the shop.

While there is now less demand and its activities have been scaled back, SSHCSL and the Community Shop continue to offer help and support to those in need on a daily basis. This includes deliveries – the shop has made more than 800 free deliveries to villagers who were unable to get out and about over the past year – and help with prescriptions and access to medical/healthcare.

Thank you to the many individuals and organisations who freely gave their time – and are still helping – to provide this vital service.

10. Community engagement

In keeping with our aim of maintaining community spirit, we've worked with local organisations on several events. Due to Covid social distancing rules, these were held outdoors. Events included:

- **VE Day celebrations, May 2020:** we issued special shop ration vouchers to our customers on VE Day to exchange for free cake and refreshments at Priory Coffee. Cakes were baked and donated by local people.
- **Children's Treasure Hunt, August 2020:** we worked with Priory Coffee on a fancy dress event which took children on a pirate treasure hunt trail around the village to seek clues and complete a quiz. Their reward was a bag of gold coins and sweets.

- **Spooky Walk, October 2020:** ghostly trail around the village with 'live' performances by spirits and ghouls. Organised by Moira Hullett and SPAG with SSHCSL, Priors Coffee and the Fleur de Lis.
- **BBC Children in Need, November 2020:** with the support of Stoke Charity Shop we raised £1116 in just two days through home-baked cake sales for this annual charity event.
- **Scarecrow Trail, December 2020/January 2021:** we supported this family event organised by Kath Smith which saw villagers displaying fun scarecrows around Stoke for some walking winter cheer.

11. Fundraising and grants

Sue Wright has been working hard on grant applications over the past year and has been successful in winning:

- a micro-grant of £400 from the Neighbourly Community Fund to support our response to Covid-19 used to buy resources needed to keep the shop Covid safe over the past year
- a grant of £1,500 from the Somerset Community Foundation. This was put towards the cost of essential air conditioning for the shop area to prevent a repeat of our great chocolate meltdown of summer 2020!

We also received a £10,000 South Somerset Rural business grant from SSDC to help support us through difficult trading conditions during the first lock down in spring 2020. This includes part-funding the air conditioning that became essential to keeping the shop operational and buying the electronic point of sale (ePOS), which has enabled us to barcode stock, speed up till sales and improve sight of stock, and also allows us to produce reports and analyse sales trends.

12. Our Members

As at 28 February 2021 we had 223 Members, many of whom have supported SSHCSL from the very start. We continue to encourage people to become Members and support their local community. Member events such as new product sampling were abandoned due to Covid-19 but we hope to introduce them as soon as they become practicable when pandemic restrictions ease.

13. Our Committee

The Management Committee remains unchanged since our Special General Meeting of 30 June 2021. As required by our Rules, three existing Committee Members – Emma Herrod, Lyn Foley and Katherine Rake – have stood down from the Board and are seeking re-election at this AGM. Sue Menzies stepped aside as Secretary in May 2021 but remains a Director of SSHCSL. She has been replaced by another Director, Katherine Rake. Thank you to Sue for carrying out this important role since the start of SSHCSL