



Sproughton Community Shop report for SPC Annual Meeting 2023

I took on the role of manager for the shop in August 2022. On my first tentative visit to the shop to meet the outgoing manager I was impressed. I'm not sure what I expected to find but I was amazed by the wide and varied range of stock, I can remember remarking on how reasonable the prices were and was taken by how friendly everyone involved was.

Since starting in the role I have become aware of how valuable the volunteers are to the shop, they serve customers with a smile and take on a huge range of tasks within the shop to keep it running smoothly. This includes the team of directors who have the responsibility of actually running the business and I think it is sometimes forgotten they do this on a voluntary basis. Most of them also take shifts serving in the shop. The shop and its volunteers is clearly a great asset for the community.

At interview I was told that the part-time job was advertised as permanent but that the future of the shop was uncertain and that there was no guarantee that the post would be for very long. The shop has experienced difficult times since the post-COVID return to normality. Customers who had frequented the shop during lockdown returned to supermarket shopping and with Aldi opening a new store just next to Morrisons on Sproughton road the competition has increased.

The shop has been running at a loss for some time now. However, the Directors have been working hard to reduce outgoing costs as much as possible and improve business practices. The shop has benefitted from the generosity of Sproughton Parish Council in subsidising energy costs and rent, and a grant from the beer festival fund provided a new, more efficient, alarm system. The donation of our coffee machine from La Doria has brought in additional income. The losses at the end of 2022 were much much lower than in 2021 and we were very close to breaking even. The shop now appears to be safe for, at least, the near future and we'll continue to work with the volunteers and the community to provide a service that you want. However, the most important part of any business is it's customers and we need customers to continue supporting the shop as much as possible. New customers, or those who haven't been into the shop for some time, are often surprised, as I was, at the range of stock and the reasonable pricing. Some of our stock is cheaper than can be found elsewhere. This is certainly true of our speciality cheese. Baron Bigod is almost £1 cheaper than at the Suffolk Food Hall and almost £2 less than it retails for at Jimmy's farm!

The shop has continued to stock seasonal ranges throughout the year. We had a wide range of Halloween then Christmas goods, quickly followed by Valentines cards and gifts, Mother's Day, Easter, and now the Coronation.

Throughout the year we stock a wide range of reasonably priced greetings cards. We have regular new stock of jewellery and accessories from Zor Boutique which make ideal gifts at any time of the year. The beautiful plants from Katie's Garden centre continue to be popular and provide a colourful display outside the shop especially in springtime. Throughout the season last summer we stocked local fresh strawberries from Lindsey's farm. There are weekly deliveries of fresh local pies, cakes and eggs each week and fresh bread daily. We have also increased our gluten free and vegan/dairy free/egg free ranges to cater for those with food intolerances.

The shop is not only a place to buy your stamps or a pint of milk but it is a hub for the community. Many customers pop in for a chat as they know they'll find a friendly face. Hot meal deliveries from the George which were organised for villagers during lockdown by our volunteers have evolved into meals out at the George which have happened regularly through the year. Many of our volunteers also support other community activities, they have helped at the Halloween and Valentine's discos and are involved in the Beer Festival as well as the ever popular 'Meet up Monday' sessions and the soup shack. Due to the financial difficulties the shop has not been able to provide funding to other community groups as it has in the past but has still managed to support a wide range of community activities.

In Spring 2022 the shop increased its opening hours for an additional 2 hours each weekday afternoon in response to requests from the community. It had also, earlier in the year, started opening on a Sunday morning meaning that it is open 7 days a week. This is a real achievement as it is manned entirely by volunteers. It isn't always easy to ensure all shifts are covered and we always welcome new volunteers. With continued support from the community I hope that the shop can remain a valuable resource within the village for many years to come.

Stacey Palmer
Shop Manager