



# Village Shop Public Meeting

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023**  
**Notes from the meeting**

- **Welcome and introduction.**

Paul Stevens, opened the meeting to welcome the 49 people in attendance. Thanks were given in advance to Councillor Dominic Muns, Wiltshire Council for his support in facilitating the meeting and Bill and Anthea Donald, Chairman and Manager of Urchfont Village shop for attending to give details of their experience in running a village shop.

Paul outlined that there was a basic agenda, which would start by gathering local views regarding the shop. Everyone would have a chance to speak, and put their views. It was not planned to make any firm decisions tonight, but gather facts before deciding how to move forward.

- **Views of the village**

Dominic Muns opened this session, saying “what a great turnout for the meeting. He didn’t know where we were all going with this subject, but it was an opportunity to share views and feelings. Village shops are very topical around the county at the moment.” He shared with everyone, details of an email from a local resident:

“Having lived in the village for more than forty years, I became used to a lively village life with centres of friendly information at the shop, post office, pub, school and church.

Due to the tragedy of the Pandemic, life is different for us all, but slowly we are beginning to work on the things we need to make village life normal again. Thanks to those energetic people who love this village we now have an excellent school, an open church and the beginnings of a public house. But without the shop we are getting in the car and only driving through the village and out - not stopping to talk in the High Street, not looking at the notice board for Parish affairs, not having fresh bread or donuts three times a week and not

being able to buy milk regularly. I have very kind neighbours who shopped for me during the Pandemic but now I would like to be able to go down to the High Street, talk to people and belong to a village again.

- “ We have a village shop but it is currently closed. Can we put a Community Asset Order on the pub and shop?
- There was a unanimous view that a post office was required.
- “Up to 12 months ago I was able to get all my shopping there, even delivered and we managed all through Covid.”
- The chemist in Market Lavington used to drop off prescriptions to the shop which were then ready for pick up. It is believed this could continue.
- Missed a paper round delivery service. 12 people had papers delivered and some people collected, approximately 10.

- **Q & A's**

Q What plans are in place for the space where the village shop is situated?

A It is believed that the current landlord is interested in getting a commercial rental and payment of utilities. This is likely to be £320 per month plus utilities.

Q Could the storage unit owned by the Parish Council and attached to the pavilion be converted into a shop?

A No, a condition of the transfer to the Parish Council.

Q Did the village shop work for you?

A Too small but it did provide the essentials.

Q What produce was missing?

A Space for a post office

Bill Donald got up to speak and gave clear and detailed information regarding the facility at Urchfont and how they approached the set-up, which had taken them nearly 5 years initially:

Bill got involved two years ago, but Anthea has worked in the shop for 14 years. It takes a lot of effort, there used to have 40 volunteers, but they are down to 30, and need fill 25 work slots every week. It advised to dampen down enthusiasm, it worked well in the first year, but got harder in the second and third years.

We wanted to offer quality goods but at a good price. We use a variety of suppliers, such as Booker, who are at the lower end but not the cheapest. Try not to be too low market.

You will need paid employees; we have two and they are paid for 50 hours each per month.

Sickness management can be challenging but ringing round to find last minutes volunteers does seem to get covered.

You will need to register for VAT, run PAYE for your employees and have someone to do your accounts.

Jobs involved would be running the shop, stacking shelves. We have five duty managers who can open and close, cash up the takings. We need two volunteers in the shop at any one time.

Hours of opening at 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday.

Saturday 9-12.

Sunday 9-30am -10-30am.

Annual turnover is £100K and they approximately £25K profit. Take off running costs and wages, this is reduced to £3-5K. We lost £2K last year but this year we are likely to make £2K. All profits are ploughed back into the business.

At our recent stocktake, we had £8K of stock.

We have a committee, Chairman and treasurer. The feeling is now a shop run by the community for the community. There is a danger that the committee is seen as a clique, but it should be proactive and listening.

Our rental is less than £50 per month. It is a peppercorn rent in a building owned by Wadworth. We are exempt from council tax. We do have some of our storage space in outside sheds which are not totally secure and we would like to improve this.

We don't hold an alcohol licence. It is a condition of our lease that we don't sell alcohol. It would also make our security more difficult.

Items needed for a start-up would include:

Pos Till - £4k

2/3 fridges £2K each

2 Freezers £2K each

Toilet facilities for staff

Air con and/or heating

Stock – value?

80% of our business is local.

Having a post office is great but you will need a postmaster/mistress. Those present felt that Cheverell Magna was too small in terms of population to support a post office. Urchfont gained extra business with Market Lavington closing.

Supply links should be established.

We use a baker in Devizes and have a 20% margin.

However, we have bought sliced bread from Morrisons and sold on.

Tinned soup for instance is likely to be at least 50p more expensive than supermarkets.

Newspapers – from an administrative point of view, it is highly complicated. You pay a delivery charge to get the papers, they need sorting, and there is likely to be only a 10% margin.

There has been a 30% decline in the sale of papers. They hardly make a penny on the provision of newspapers. If customer collect, they are likely to buy other products.

They offer a dry-cleaning service, and it is easy.

We have started growing a sandwich business and monitor footfall. We sell about 30 per week.

Coffee is available – cyclists and walkers particularly pick one up.

Community produce produced in the village are duck eggs, tomatoes and courgettes. Selling fresh veg is difficult, not much money in it. It requires a daily order.

Jams and chutneys are not sold, it would be a good idea, but you have to get around the legals. Same with local cake making, it requires lists of ingredients and suitable labelling especially for allergy issues.

- **Next Steps**

Find premises – there is a potential opportunity (Ridout) for new premises and negotiation would need to be started. It would require fully fitting out. The space would be bigger and yes the location was supported. It also had parking. Paul Stevens would begin discussions with the owners.

Dominic Muns would speak to the current owner, not the lease holder, of the pub to see if there was any movement in opening the existing shop space.

Research required on the options for a community asset transfer.

It would likely take 12-18 months to set up a new shop. Would it be viable?

The current space at the end of the pub was not accessible.

Capital required for stock, premises and staffing

Sponsors required and grant funding applied for. Suggestions were Wiltshire community foundation for grant. Peter Carr would investigate opportunities. Consider offering shares – have members with a £10 annual fee. They would have a right to vote on the business. The attendees would support paying an annual subscription.

The Plunkett Foundation for information

20 people potentially indicated they would be interested in volunteering, set up a register

- **Meeting Closure**

All attendees were encouraged to talk to their neighbours and drum up support. We need people to be committed in the long term. Consider the products you want to sell. Only open a few hours and build up. Offer the basics initially, milk bread, freezer ready meals. See if you can grow from there.

Could all those interested in getting involved with the project, please email the Parish Council at [parishcouncil@greatcheverell.org](mailto:parishcouncil@greatcheverell.org).

Meeting closed at 8.45pm