

Somersham and District Community Shop April 2021 – April 2022

Like many others, Somersham and District Community Shop has experienced a great deal of change in the last twelve months. April 2021 marked the end of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, and all involved with the shop were very proud to receive a certificate from the Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk Award in recognition of outstanding services to the community during the pandemic.

Thankfully, 2021 has seen the return of some of the more sociable activities which our volunteers and customers enjoy. Our regular Meet up Mondays group reconvened, with a core group of six to eight local residents meeting each Monday afternoon for a cup of tea and a chat. Then in July we held a 'birthday party' on the playing field to celebrate the 9th year of the shop with games, raffle, and of course cake, to celebrate this achievement.

Throughout the summer we were able once again to engage with the wider community through our support of – and this time participation in – the Friends of Somersham School Scarecrow Trail, with Fantastic Mr Fox taking pride of place outside the shop for the six-week holiday. The shop is very much a community hub, and we are pleased to support local events and activities, advertising through our recently reinstated events diary, our noticeboards, and our social media presence, as well as being a ticket sales point for some local events too.

We have remained active in charitable fundraising throughout the year, hosting our annual coffee morning for Macmillan Cancer Support in September, acting as a collection point for Christian Aid Week and for the annual Poppy Appeal, and selling Easter chicks (kindly made and donated by several of our volunteers) for Cancer Research.

In autumn 2021, we were very pleased to reach our fundraising target which enabled us to purchase two new chiller and freezer units, replacing our old, uneconomical units with smart new, efficient ones. Special thanks must go to all our generous funders, and also to Anne MacFadyen, whose hard work facilitated this improvement.

At the end of 2021 there were a number of changes in the Management team at the shop; Lucy Barrett found new employment elsewhere and left her role as Manager at the end of November, and then in mid-December Anne MacFadyen and Janet Hodge decided to take a well-earned rest and step back from both committee and volunteering duties. All three remain involved and supportive of the shop, with Lucy still volunteering regularly and Anne and Janet continuing in their roles as Directors. Following Lucy's departure, Jennie Hutchinson joined the team as the new Manager, and shortly afterwards Pat Woolhouse and Gloria Sherwood joined Kate Dines, Tom Robinson and Jennie to form the new management committee.

The new team are keen to continue to support local producers and suppliers as much as possible, with products such as eggs and honey from the immediate local area, and lots of other Suffolk based produce on offer too. They are also exploring options regarding potential new suppliers and products that could be introduced in future.

The customer base has proved steady and reliable, but it does still need to grow to ensure the shop remains viable. Monthly Performance Reports show the difficulty we have in making sufficient profit to cover our overheads - utility, maintenance and insurance costs, card charges and wages (although we have reduced the manager's hours to help with this). A questionnaire has been prepared for distribution with the current issue of the Link magazine to understand what would bring new and existing residents into the shop. Also, new initiatives such as the recent agreement to be a sales point for Hadleigh Show tickets are being trialled.

Finally, the opening hours for the shop have been gradually increasing over the past year and we are pleased to be open for longer (Monday 8am – 4pm, Tuesday 9am – 4pm, Wednesday 9am – 1pm, Thursday 8am – 6pm, Friday 9.30am – 4pm, Saturday 9am – 1pm). The aim is to also open until 4pm on a Wednesday. We have a reliable volunteer base, but it is still a stretch to confidently cover the hours we currently open. The management committee are considering other ways of attracting new help, and new volunteers are being regularly approached and encouraged.

We are looking forward to seeing what else 2022 will bring, and of course to celebrating our 10th birthday this summer!