

Queen's Award for Voluntary Service awarded to the Village Store

Back in May 2017, Findon residents awoke to a notice in the window of their village shop and Post Office announcing its permanent closure. Shocked but undaunted, villagers rose to the challenge of saving this much needed village asset. The Chairman of the Parish Council held an open meeting in a packed village hall where it was proposed that villagers and local people could buy "shares" in order to raise sufficient funds to bid for the property at auction. Astonishingly, in just over a week they raised over £400,000, enough to make a successful bid, re-furbish, and buy suitable stock to get started. Advice from the Plunkett Foundation proved useful in setting up this new Community Benefit Society and the new company was registered with the Financial Services Authority and Companies House. To the huge relief of the community, and thanks to the dedication and expertise of the volunteer painters, decorators and recruitment team, the 'Findon Village Collective' opened its doors in October 2017, less than six months after the original business closed.

The shop certainly deserves its reputation as a useful, friendly, welcoming and extremely attractive addition to Findon village. It is open every day of the year except Christmas. Other than a full-time manager and a remunerated team operating the Post Office Counter, all involved, from the management committee to all who clean, serve behind the counter, and buy the stock are volunteers - a great team with a rich variety of life and professional skills, willingly shared. Purchases are from local providers wherever possible and deliveries are made to people who are housebound or unable to carry their shopping home.

All profits are returned to the community. Support is provided to the local pre-school play group and Christmas hampers have been provided for families in need. The Post Office is run at a commercial loss because the village needs the huge range of banking and financial services it provides. Social housing is provided in its own property. Informal information and advice is always available from the groups and networks using their local shop as a social meeting point and it even functions as a tourist and information centre. It truly is an initiative 'for the community by the community'

Steve Smith, who chaired the Management Committee through the long and detailed application process, proudly commented "We are extremely fortunate to have such a dedicated and capable team of volunteers, many of whom are always looking for what more we can do to help others and how we can do a better job. We take pride in the appearance of our store and see customer service as the focus of our engagement. If anyone asks for help, the answer is never anything other than "of course we can". We look to provide support and help to others beyond our immediate community through sharing our experience with others in need of such support. I am so pleased and proud that the contribution of all our volunteers has been recognised by this outstanding award."