**Chair’s report on the year and review of the current trading position.**

“I now come to the chair’s report on the year – the second full year of trading of the Candover Valley Community Store. Chris has already given you the key points which I make no apology in repeating again:

Turnover up 21%

Total transactions up 15%

Average Basket spend up 12%

Profit up 6%

As in the previous year, we have followed a nationwide trend which has seen small local shops flourish in exceptional trading circumstances as customers chose to shop more locally. But unlike last financial year when we experienced a huge peak in demand in April to June; in the financial year we are reporting on, you can see from the chart (entitled current year trading update) how the trading pattern has steadied and become more consistent (after a peak in July 2020 which saw the end of the first lockdown and a peak in March 2021 at the end of the third lockdown).

In our second year of trading, CVCS has continued to build up substantial reserves and to set aside a sum for a community projects fund.

**Staffing**

Keeping the store and post office open and well stocked requires a great deal of hard work from our stalwart staff and our valiant team of volunteers. Particular thanks are due to Garry Green, our indefatigable manager, for driving the store forward through the last challenging 12 months and for working so hard to make the store the success it is today. In this he is ably supported by assistant manager Emma Simpson and senior assistants Sean Ennis, Rebecca Jackson and Louise Harris. (Louise joined the team in May 2021).

From July, youth workers aged 16 – 19 started to work paid shifts at weekends in the store. This allows CVS to fulfill a community objective to provide valuable work experience for young people in an area where part time jobs are scarce. At the same time, employing youth workers helps us fill our weekend shifts.

As well as thanking our paid staff for all their efforts, may I also take this opportunity to thank our loyal band of volunteers who have taken on so many shifts during the past year making it possible to keep CVS fully open through three nationwide lockdowns and fluctuating Covid restrictions.

To all our many and varied volunteers – whether serving at the post office or behind the till, whether making cakes, picking up deliveries, posting updates on social media, sorting out the wiring, fixing the plumbing, painting and decorating, deep cleaning the fridges and freezers, putting up outdoor lights, weather proofing picnic tables or advising us about HR and Health & Safety matters – we could not do this without you and we are so grateful for all your help.

We have a wonderful team - thank you all.

**Improving store operations**

During the course of the year Garry and the store management committee have worked hard to improve store operations. As a result of customer demand and higher-than-expected trading levels, a new wholesaler (Costcutter) was selected. There have been many advantages to moving to a new wholesaler:

* More regular deliveries of goods to keep the shop well stocked and ensure Garry doesn’t have to spend hours searching far and wide for items
* More access to Fairtrade products, especially wines, sugar and bananas
* More access to British fruit, vegetables, salads and meat under the Co-op label
* It has given us the ability to buy some products at better prices and pass the savings on to our customers
* It has given us better access to recycling of cardboard and plastic and more use of returnable trays.

New equipment was also purchased to increase the efficiency of store operations: - a second cash till and two new card readers; a larger and more efficient open-deck chiller; new ventilation fans behind the refrigeration units; new metal shelving units carefully integrated amongst the rustic wooden shelving to increase available display space but preserve the overall ‘look’ of the store; new fruit and vegetable racks on which to display the produce outside at the front of the store.

Solutions have also been found for our lack of stock storage and rubbish disposal problems. Having applied for and achieved the necessary planning permission, the bin store was extended so all unsightly crates, bins, bread trays, buckets and trolleys can now be hidden away neatly. CVCS is also most grateful to the trustees of the village hall, for signing a licence agreement that formalises our use of the old doctor’s surgery as the CVCS overflow stockroom.

**Post office and staffing**

The post office has continued to be well used, particularly during the periods of lock-down when sending cards and parcels became an important way of keeping in touch with family and friends. From the post office commission chart on your handout - you can see peaks in the level of commission in July and August and January (commission is paid one month in arrears) reflecting just how busy the post office was during lockdown and over the Christmas period.

**Current trading figures and plans for the future**

So now I am going to speak briefly about our current trading figures and for this you need the chart entitled current year trading update in the key facts handout.

As you can see in July and August, trading has settled and turnover for those two months, though down on the same months in the previous year is still at highly satisfactory levels. A downturn has always been expected as coronavirus restrictions ease and life returns to some form of normality after the pandemic. This trend is also reflected in the post office commission received for the first three months of this new financial year (shown on the post office commission chart). It is however encouraging to note that store turnover in September and October of this year exceeded levels in the two preceding years and post office commission received this September was very close to that received in September 2020. All of which indicates that trading and use of the post office remain at satisfactorily steady levels.

At the beginning of December, our assistant manager Emma Simpson will be taking maternity leave and I am sure you will want to join us in wishing Emma and her husband Ian, a very happy and safe arrival when the time comes. Filling the gap soon to be left by Emma, we are delighted to welcome two new members of staff: - Ali Cumber from Upper Wield and Alison Hutchison from North Waltham. Both have been appointed as part-time senior assistants to help us run the store and post office.

So finally let me now bring you up to date with our plans for the future.

To mark the second birthday of the Candover Valley Community Store we carried out a customer survey to find out what our customers felt we were doing well and what we could do better. We are most grateful to all those who responded and gave their helpful feedback and to Jocelyn who carefully compiled the results of the survey which has helped the committee draw up a list of priorities to help improve our operations and shape our future planning. First and foremost, to enable us to conform with legalities and trading standards, the team has been working on how best to label and price our products; we have also been looking at how best to disaster- proof the business whether by increasing our staffing levels or improving our ordering procedures; and we have been reviewing our product ranges.

We have had another year of fantastic sales growth, and have benefitted from shopper habits during lockdown. However, from our more recent sales pattern, we seem to have reached a more stable phase. So, we now have an opportunity to reinstate our core values and make them relevant within our new found regular turnover.

So, in the New Year we will be looking at the changes we can make to improve CVS’s environmental footprint. We will review the store’s ‘green credentials’. For as COP26 has made abundantly clear, we all need to take our environmental responsibilities seriously. We won’t be converting to ground source heat pumps any time soon (sadly) and the first steps we take towards this goal will be small ones but we hope to start with easily achievable ‘wins’ that will help us bit by bit, buy more local produce, reduce packaging, food miles and single use plastic. So please bear with us, there is much to do and a long way to go but we are most grateful for your feedback. Keep talking to us, above all keep supporting us and remember …..no offer of help will ever be refused!

That concludes the chairman’s report

 Jane Laws

 Chair, Candover Valley Community Store

 17 November 2021