

Questions & Answers

Sally Clark

Manager of Wigginton Community Shop & Café

Sunday 22nd Oct at 5.00pm

Welcome to Sally and Introductions

1. In 2016 Wigginton didn't have a shop, how did the idea of a community shop & café come about?

Our journey started back in 2016, when a young mother moved to the village and spotted that, while the village has a thriving social scene, public house and two churches, there was a gap in where people could go to meet on their own terms with no invitation needed. Somewhere for people to go to meet up during the day, young mothers with young children, people living on their own or groups etc.

A survey of the village and the surrounding villages revealed a strong appetite for a village shop and café; a community hub that would also serve as a shop window for local producers, built, owned, and managed by the community.

2. Did everyone in the village share the vision of a community shop & café and if not, what were their concerns?

The majority were in favour but there were concerns including.

- Vandalism of the new build
- Increase in traffic
- Would the shop be commercially viable?
- Would the shop attract too many visitors to the village?
- Could it compete with Tesco's just down the road?

3. Did the original concept always include a café or did you consider just a shop to begin with?

The plan was to always have a café as well as the shop. During our due diligence phase, we spoke to a number of other community shops, all of whom stated the importance of having a café for both the social scene it creates but also the high margin on coffee, cakes etc. The shop would not be able to survive without the café.

4. Which has proved to be most popular with villagers, the shop or the café or both?

Both. About 70% of our revenues comes from the shop, and 30% comes from the café. People like buying local produce and often will pop in to buy items and stop to have a coffee and vice versa. The café offers a friendly, personal service that is much appreciated by our customers. 70% of our profit comes from the café.

5. Starting any business involves risk. How did you mitigate the risk of the business failing commercially?

By having very strict management controls in place to ensure that pricing and profit margins were maintained, stock control was well maintained, cash flow was good and costs were controlled. Being well capitalised. All the elements any business needs to focus on, a community shop is no different in that respect.

6. How has the business performed when compared with the business case?

We have performed 'satisfactorily' even though we were hit by the COVID lockdown 14 months after opening. This was very tough as our business case did not account for a lockdown when our café had to close. We are very relieved to have survived and kept the business open and are in a much stronger position than we envisaged 5 years ago.

7. How did the Plunkett Foundation support the project?

The Plunkett Foundation have been invaluable in the advice and help they have given us. They advised on how to set up a Community Benefit Society, how to complete a share offering, the processes, and procedures we need to have in place, sources of grant funding etc. They gave us confidence by connecting us with the network of community shops across the country. We use them on an ongoing basis for training and support.

8. Did you raise much money from the community to support the project?

Yes, we raised £85,000 from the community by offering shares in the Community Benefit Society. This was match funded, Plunkett put us in contact with organisations who provide grants and loans to community businesses. We were also able to use the knowledge and specialities from our residents.

9. What benefits has the shop & café brought to the residents of Wigginton?

The shop and café have become a real hub of the village. Several groups meet regularly in the café including.

- The Tuesday Tea Club
- The Happy Hookers (a crochet club)
- Cuppa With a Copper (local PCO's come and meet residents)
- Compassionate Café (a partnership between Rennie Grove Peace Hospice Care charity)

Volunteering in the shop and café has enabled people to become more involved in the community, improved self confidence and reduced social isolation. It has offered young people their first job, welcomed Duke of Edinburgh participants and for some, their first jobs have developed into paid roles.

10. Are you reliant on 'outsiders' coming to Wigginton to use the shop & café?

Wigginton was already popular with walkers and cyclists, and we welcome these visitors. Whilst we could survive without 'outsiders', we welcome passing trade. The

Parish Council installed a new children's play area, which attracts a lot of families. We are located on the recreation ground, which hosts regular football matches. We welcome all these visitors to our shop and café. We are not reliant on these visitors but it helps!

11. Is the space used for meetings and get togethers; i.e. more than just a shop & café?

As mentioned before, several groups meet up in the café but we don't open the shop & café 'out of hours' as the village has other facilities for this and we didn't want to take business away from them. We are financially viable without having to do this.

12. There are concerns in Preston that a shop & café would turn our village in to a tourist hot spot. What has been your experience in Wigginton?

Wigginton has always been popular with walkers and cyclists as we're on the Ridgeway Path. The football club is popular, regular matches are played and the children's playground is very popular. All these attract visitors, people are coming to the village anyway rather than coming specifically to the shop. Using the shop & café means as a community, we make some money from these visitors.

13. Using a group of volunteers to help run the shop has been critical to your success. How easy is it to recruit and retain volunteers?

As with most community shops, volunteers are essential to the success of our shop & café. We have approximately 25 regular volunteers, who choose what shifts they would like to work via an online tool.

A shift is usually 3 hours, but some volunteers do less and some do more. We offer table service in our café and as a result, we need more people compared with a counter service. We know of some community shops who only have 1 volunteer working at any one time.

Not all our volunteers live in the village. Some come from surrounding villages and further afield to support us. There was a very high level of interest initially - over 100 expressed an interest and when the shop opened there were 60-65 committed volunteers. Now there are approx. 25-28 regulars.

14. How many paid staff do you have and how has this changed since the opening?

Staffing requirements are constantly reviewed as the business has developed. We currently have: 1 x paid Manager full time, 2 x paid Supervisors each working 15 hours per week 1 x paid Weekend Supervisor working 9 hours per week 25 active volunteers working at least one 3 hour shift per week.

We started off with just a paid shop manager, the other paid roles were introduced after opening as the business grew,

15. Have you ever had to shut because you didn't have enough staff to open?

No! But it has come close during COVID.

16. A visitor to your shop from Preston described 'parking mayhem' when she visited. Is it only visitors to your shop & café who use the car park?

No, the car park was there before the shop. It serves the recreation ground, football club and children's play area. It is owned by the Parish Council and is free to use so anyone visiting the village will park here. It was busy before the shop opened and most traffic is a result of people coming to the village for another reason.

17. How much local produce do you have on sale and is it popular?

About 70% of our product lines are locally sourced, from roughly a 30-mile radius. Locally sourced items we stock include beer, honey, cakes, sandwiches, chocolates, meat, fruit & veg, yogurt and cheese.

These have all proved to be very popular.

18. Tesco is just down the road, how do you differentiate yourself to attract customers?

By offering different products (locally sourced as above) and a highly personalised service with a friendly atmosphere.

19. What are your biggest challenges in running the shop?

Energy costs (we have now installed solar panels and wished we had sooner), price increases of products and remaining competitive and relevant during the cost of living crisis. Managing volunteers is also quite time consuming.

20. What are you most proud of when you reflect on your time running the shop?

That we're still open! Especially after COVID hit us when we'd only been open for 14 months. Also, the skills, training and work experience we have been able to give people has enabled several individuals to develop and transition to paid jobs. Seeing young people blossom and grow has been very rewarding. A huge range of people have got involved – those with special educational needs, retired people, those looking for a first job, those wanting to learn new skills and make new friends.

21. What revenue challenges have you faced?

Foot fall has not been an issue, we're confident in our ability to generate enough revenue.

22. Does most of your revenue come from villagers or from outsiders?

It's probably about 50/50 although we have no formal analysis of this data.

23. How old are your volunteers?

The youngest we employ are 14 and are part of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. The eldest are in their 70's.

Several of the DOE contingent have subsequently stayed on with us and a couple have moved in to paid supervisory roles. We provide local work for village children

who otherwise struggle to find work experience as they don't have their own transportation.

24. What time does the shop open?

The shop opens at 8.00am, a time mainly spent getting ready for the day and to accept deliveries of papers, milk etc. although we do get some preschool customers most typically start to come in from 9.00am. The café closes at 4pm ½ hour before the shop.

25. How many delivery lorries come to you?

We have one main delivery of essential items once every two weeks. Many local suppliers deliver their own or use a courier. Milk is delivered every day, meat 2 times per week.

The amount of delivery vehicles coming to the shop & café is dwarfed by the number of DPD, Amazon, Uber Eat etc deliveries now seen in the village

26. Do you take cards or cash?

We take both, cash is making a come back!

27. Do you have health & safety processes and procedures in place?

Yes, we are fully compliant with all processes documented and shared with volunteers. The Plunkett foundation advise on these matters. We recently had a food hygiene inspection and achieved a 5 star rating

28. What is your turnover?

Approx £275k – double the Preston model. The split between shop and café is 70/30 but the profit margin is reversed eg. The margin on a cup of coffee is 90%.

29. How many households are there in Wiggington?

The Parish of Wigginton covers a large, elongated area and encompasses approx. 650 houses. The immediate village has a population of 813 in the 2021 census.

30. Do you pay rent on the Parish Council land the shop is built on?

Peppercorn – and have never been asked for it. If the business fails then the building must be removed. We are confident that the community would keep the building but a contingency is reserved for this anyway.

31. Are you mortgage free?

We still have investment – our biggest member gave us 85k which we reduced by 5k after the first year in order to lower their investment. They have not asked for any more back. Our plan is to repay them within 5-10 years.

We also have an interest free government loan which we will very likely NOT have to pay back. However, if they asked for it tomorrow we would be able to do so.

32. Are there security issues?

We never have anyone on their own – always at least 3 on a shift. There is a secure safe which is cleared regularly. Windows and doors have metal shutters and there is an alarm system and CCTV cameras inside and out. There has never been any graffiti or problems despite being next the playing field where youngsters hang out.

33. Do you pay rates?

No, we are set up as a Community Benefit Society and such, we do not pay rates.

A member of the public stated that he would have loved to be able to volunteer and work locally when he was growing up in the village. Not having transport in a rural village makes job opportunities difficult to find. A job within the village would have been ideal.

Sally was joined by Sheila, one of her volunteers. During the meeting, Sheila spoke about her role and how having moved to the village from London, she found her volunteer role invaluable in helping her to integrate into village life and build her self-confidence. She has now progressed to become a Lead Volunteer with added responsibilities including cashing up.