

# Stawley Community Association 2016

## Chairman's Report for Annual Parish Meeting

Sally and Martin Perry officially took over the tenancy of the shop on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016 with a one-year licence granted by the SCA in the absence of any head lease agreed with Somerset County Council.

The existing head lease that the SCA has on the shop from Somerset County Council expired on 24 April 2017. For months prior to this date, and subsequently, strenuous efforts were made by the SCA Committee to renew the head lease with Somerset County Council with constant reminders being sent to Council officers that the lease was due to expire and needed to be renewed.

Despite numerous promises, SCC failed to take any action to renew the head lease and the Committee reached the conclusion that no purpose would be served in continuing to press SCC on this matter. A new lease would impose additional costs on the SCA and/or the shop and the Committee's view was County Council had effectively decided that the existing lease should be rolled forward on an ongoing basis.

In the absence of a head lease there was little point in reinstating the shop lease and so a licence agreement has been put in place between the SCA and Sally & Martin Perry which continues their tenancy until 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

The SCA committee has been active in trying to upgrade shop equipment and help Sally & Martin to tap into the local volunteer support they will need to run the shop. A new chiller was purchased for the shop by the SCA thanks to a grant from Village Shop SOS. A further grant was secured from Taunton Deane Borough Council to enable the purchase of a new shop till, an A board sign and the redecoration of the shop. This grant required matched funding that the SCA has provided. The SCA has also funded and installed new road signage for the shop, which has undoubtedly been helpful in attracting passing custom, and funded some smaller items.

Further expenditure to improve the shop is planned including the provision of new chairs, cycle stands, replacement shelving, CCTV and new flooring. These items will be the subject of a further grant application to Awards for All which should be completed shortly.

The most important development during the course of the year has been the wide range of people who have volunteered to help out in the shop in various ways.

Volunteering has supported many aspects of the shop's activities from essential repair & maintenance work, the creation of an attractive website and Facebook page, putting together grants applications, through to staffing and running the shop during periods when Sally & Martin have taken a well-earned break.

There have been some highlights during the year. We had the shop opening event in July with our guest of honour and local celebrity, Peggy Wotton, cutting the ribbon to mark the official re-opening of the shop under Sally & Martin's tenancy. This secured some good local media coverage and quite a few 'likes' on Facebook. The wine tasting evening at the Pavilion proved successful and Sally & Martin treated the volunteers to an excellent 'thank you' dinner earlier in the year.

On the financial side, the SCA have kept an eye on Sally & Martin's progress and we can report that trading has been good in this first year and the shop is in the black. However, it is important to make the point that trading in the black is largely a function of how little Sally & Martin take out of the business, particularly in comparison to the amount of hours they put in. The SCA would not be able to employ somebody to run the shop on the basis of current levels of turnover and gross profit. The shop is a hybrid – part community and part commercial and I don't see that situation changing in the foreseeable future.

Sally & Martin are providing an excellent service to this community in exchange for long hours and a very modest financial return. We should be grateful to them and support them in any way that we can to ease their burden and give them time off.

More volunteers to help in the shop would be particularly welcome and I would encourage anyone with some spare time to contact Sally & Martin to discuss how they might help. Speaking from personal experience I can say that working in the shop is both satisfying and entertaining. It helps keeps you in touch local people and what's happening in the area – I can highly recommend it.