**Chair’s Report**

**CEPL12 AGM**

**Wednesday 25.09.24**

It would be fair to say that the last year has been a difficult time both globally, nationally and locally. It has also been, probably, the most difficult time in the history of CEPL12 with significant turbulence and a number of changes that have had a big impact on the company.

Twelve months ago, ill health meant that we were without a Chair, Transport and Community Liaison Directors, this inevitably put a strain on the running of the company. During the same period, we were having to make hard decisions about our Transport Enterprise. Historically this enterprise provided a valuable service to the PL12 community, the organised trips and outings were very much appreciated by many. Our ‘hoppers’ also provided much needed transport for a number of community groups, schools and other organisations. With the growth of the Red Bus Company the need for this service began to diminish, this, coupled with an increase in expenditure meant that the enterprise began to be a drain on our resources. One of our key ambitions is that we complement, rather than compete with, other service providers and so we entered into discussions with the Red Bus Company about working with them with the view to them taking over our commitments. We were delighted that they were able to do so, and so we made the decision to close our Transport enterprise with confidence that the local community would still benefit from a flourishing Community Bus Company.

We finally said goodbye to the Hoppers in March 2024 with a celebration of the fantastic impact they had made over the last 13 years. Current volunteers, including directors, were joined by past Directors and others involved in running the Enterprise over the years. We were particularly thrilled that John Penney, our most recent transport Director, and his wife Heather, could join us for the evening as John had reluctantly made the decision to step down as Director due to his ill health.

Our core purpose is to enrich the lives of people who live, work and visit the Saltash area, as such we want them to be accessible to all and so we do not charge for our services but rather they are run on a donation basis. Our most recent, and most successful enterprise, our Community Kitchen and Fridge, has grown considerably since it first opened its doors in 2022. Our amazing volunteer drivers collect food from a number of local providers, including Lidl, Waitrose, Co-op, Rowes, Greggs to name but a few. This provides us with produce to run our Kitchen and Fridge which Chris, Jos and the No 8 team creatively turn into meals, refreshments and cakes that are enjoyed by many. Our Community Fridge also provides an outlet for food that would otherwise have gone into landfill, the amount of food we collect varies from week to week and we never know what we will get, however our volunteers are outside rain or shine to tempt regulars and passersby to take what they can use for a donation.

One of our major headaches this year has been inadequate storage facilities, the space we have is cramped but, unfortunately, we realised that the green shed to the rear of No 8, didn’t meet food hygiene standards and therefore its use was limited. Cathy Jane, our Community Liaison Director, was successful in gaining a National Lottery grant to replace the unit, after much research and hard work the new container was successfully delivered last month. It was a logistical nightmare removing the old units and replacing them but somehow it all went smoothly on the day.

The new unit is purpose built to meet our requirements, including plumbing and electricity which means we have relocated the washing machine and tumble drier and, hopefully, it will in the future accommodate a freezer. This will mean we will be able to increase the amount of food we can collect as we will no longer be as limited for space.
Our thanks go to Daintons for overseeing the operation, and specifically to Cathy, Roger, Andy and Chris for running the whole project.

No 8 is our most exciting and popular enterprise, it is also our most costly venture.

Whilst the majority of food is donated, it means we are unable to charge for the meals, refreshments and produce on the fridge instead we are reliant on grants and donations to cover our costs. When we took on No 8, we were fortunate to receive funding to contribute towards the costs of employing a Kitchen Manager and to renovate the building, turning it into a safe space for so many people to enjoy. However, this funding was for a set period and came to an end in June this year.

In anticipation of the funding ending, coupled with rapidly rising costs, the majority of our time this year has been spent considering the financial stability of the whole company, we were clear that we needed to make changes in order to protect the organisation. We knew that doing nothing was not an option, without changes we were in danger of having to close down the whole company. We invested much time investigating a number of ways both to increase our income and reduce expenditure, including making applications for substantial grant funding. We were hopeful that we would secure this additional funding, especially as we got through the first rounds and were given very positive feedback following a final interview, but we needed to have other plans in place if these applications didn’t come to fruition.

Sadly, our applications were unsuccessful and so the options available to us were to close No 8 completely, reduce the working hours of our employees or making a redundancy. As a company, we have many legal obligations to remain compliant, we are totally run by volunteers, so we recognise that we need a paid Operations Manager to run the whole company on our behalf. After much debate we sadly came to the conclusion that the only practical way forward was to make the Kitchen Manager’s role redundant. I can assure you that this decision was not taken lightly, especially as we all know that Chris is the heart of No 8, however we had to consider the implications for the whole of CEPL12. I understand this is a huge blow for all the volunteers and customers of No 8, we all share your sadness but, we owe it to Chris to pull together to make sure that No 8 continues to thrive as a legacy to all his hard work, his energy and inspiration. I know that Chris would want that too.

(Chris, our finance director, will explain the financial process in greater depth and so I won’t go into further detail here.)

Having made this decision, we have been working with Chris and our volunteers to put things in place to ensure our Community Kitchen continues to thrive and grow. Sam Gardner, together with Sue Ellingham, are overseeing the changes and we have really appreciated the support from our volunteers who are determined to help in any way possible to keep things going.

The last year has also seen significant changes to our Dementia Voice enterprise. Rose and Carol originally set up this group over 8 years ago in order to support people living with, or affected by, dementia.

Following feedback from our social prescriber we made the decision to change the name of the group to “Memory Box,’ and to open the group up to anyone affected by cognitive impairment. We relaunched the group at the Singing session in June and were delighted that many visitors joined us for the event, including our Mayor, Julia Peggs who thanked the volunteers for their support. Following the sing song, we all enjoyed a buffet lunch provided by our Community Kitchen, it was a wonderful event.

 Our inspirational singing group, ‘Do you mind if I sing!’ has grown from strength to strength this year, led by the talented Teresa Stevens they have put on a number of performances over the year, at the library last February, at Ashtorre as part of the Saltash Songs and Shanties Festival. They are now busy rehearsing for a Christmas performance at the library.

Initially funding only allowed us to run this group twice a month, however we were delighted that a funding bid was successful and so they can now meet every week at the Wesley Church.

Our successful Memory Box Café moved from the Wesley church to Ashtorre last year, whilst the wonderful views and facilities were appreciated by everyone it was becoming logistically difficult to organise and so the decision was made to move back to its original home in No 8. The move took place in February, and everyone settled back in happily, under the capable hands of Pauline Newman (our Lead Volunteer who took over from Nicky Harris earlier this year) they make the most of the time enjoying the board games, nail painting and regular quizzes – always finishing with a song or two! More recently they have been delighted to be served hot pasties for lunch (thanks to Rowes!)

Our Veterans group continues to meet every fortnight, enjoying the chance to get together, to reminisce about old times and be entertained by a range of activities. Carol, who originally started the group, has reluctantly made the decision to step down from running the sessions at the end of the year due to family commitments. We didn’t believe that we could replace Carol, however, are delighted that we have made contact with a couple of veterans who have agreed to take over running the group and already have exciting plans for the future, so we can look forward to continuing our service.

Rose has been working with Saltash Town Council supporting their intention to make Saltash a Dementia Friendly Town, as a result the council has approved budget to make alterations to their premises. Rose also ran a training session in august that was well received. All our thanks go to Rose for her unwavering commitment and support, she really does make a difference.

As with other enterprises, our Memory Box groups face their own financial struggles, we have been fortunate to receive funding from a number of sources, including the Co-op and Mayor’s Charity, but this doesn’t cover all the running costs. Carol and Rose have worked hard behind the scenes to raise additional monies, these include holding raffles, auctions, and organising quiz evenings. They are currently planning a cream tea afternoon on November 8th and a social event at the Social Club in October.

I know they will be delighted if you can support them in their fund raising efforts.

Our community shop continues to bring delight to many customers who visit Fore Street. We now have over 40 traders who would otherwise not have an outlet for their talents, this is supplemented by our own Saltash themed goods. Which always go down well with tourists and locals alike. The economic climate has had a negative impact on our customers, but our lovely team of volunteers have worked tirelessly to improve the ambiance and displays in No 4. This is paying dividends as the footfall, and consequently profits, are now increasing. A side shoot of No 4 is the dedicated volunteers who have been making Mors Bags (using donated fabrics to make an alternative to plastic bags!) to date they have made over 1000 which are given out on the fridge and in No 4.

A number of years ago, Community enterprise took over the lease on Belle Vue, this was the home to the Foodbank and Citizen’s Advice. Because of that decision, we were able to support both organisations remaining in Saltash for the benefit of the whole community. We utilise the building to good effect by renting out office spaces that support Citizen’s Advice being able to operate free of charge and subsidise our other enterprises.

Until recently there has been no formal, long term agreement regarding the lease which has made it difficult to provide security for our tenants, however we are delighted that, in recent months we have been able to secure a 30 year lease which will enable us to plan effectively for the future. This model is an excellent example as to how community enterprises can operate effectively to generate a regular, predictable income in order to fund our community work. It is a model we are keen to replicate in the future.

Another ambition is to work with other local community organisations in order to improve the quality of life for all Saltash citizens.

We have made strong links with Oaklands Community Centre and are jointly putting on a number of activities at the Centre, including step into wellness and digital inclusion sessions.

As mentioned previously, we worked closely with the Red Bus Company, very recently they have taken over our small bus which is needed for a school contract. In the spirit of co-operation, they are allowing us to continue to use it in order for us to continue our mobile larder. We have also had talks about using No 4 as a booking office for their, very many varied activities, although this hasn’t worked out as yet, the offer is still very much on the table.

Our links with Saltash Town Council remain strong, we are working closely with them to identify areas of need within the PL12 community in order to plan for our future.

Community enterprises PL12 is a Community Interest Company, a not-for-profit organisation that is run by a board of volunteer directors. Our mems and arts state that we should operate with twelve directors, however in my time as a director we have never had a full complement. We hold regular Board meetings and give our time willingly to do the best that we can for the whole of the PL12 community as we are all passionate about the place in which we live.

Over the last twelve months there have been several changes in our Board. Our Transport Director, John Penney, stepped down from his role following a long period of ill health. We miss his chirpy banter and irresistible sense of humour – he certainly livened up Board Meetings. Sadly, John is not in the best of health, and we all send our best wishes for a full recovery to both him and Heather.

At the end of last year our Health and Safety Director, Peter Wilson, also stepped down. This is an important role as we need to make sure that all our properties and activities are monitored and meet all health and safety requirements – a big task! We are fortunate to have Roger Fursier as an incredibly talented man who can turn his hand to anything it seems, he is now supporting our health and safety monitoring as a volunteer.

Last year we were without a shop director, although Lisa Hambley did an amazing job overseeing No 4 as a lead volunteer. We are delighted that Sarah Crimp has recently taken over the role of Director, she has been associated with No 4 for many years now, I’m sure many of you have enjoyed her range of ’tasty treats’ on a Friday. She is working with her lead volunteers to continue to develop the range of local products we can offer (currently over 40 local traders use the space to promote their work.) We are delighted that Lorraine has agreed to support Sarah in her role as a lead volunteer, along with Heidi, Susan and Genia they work as team to ensure No 4 continues to thrive.

We are also delighted that Chris Bailey joined our team last summer, he brings a wealth of experience and has made a significant contribution to the team in the time he has been with us.

We are still looking to recruit more directors to the board, no specific experience is required but rather a determination to give something back to our wonderful town.

If anyone is interested to know more, please get in touch to find out more.

Of course, we couldn’t function at all without our amazing team of volunteers, to date over 120 people regularly give their time in so many different ways – from picking up food collections, sewing mors bags, washing dishes, serving in the shop and kitchen, organising events, helping with admin to name but a few … there are too many roles to mention! Everyone is valued and everyone brings something unique to our organisation – we thank every single one of them.

To the future,

It is clear from this report just how busy we have been in so many ways this year, and a lot more work has gone on behind the scenes than I’ve had time to mention!

I’m sure you have all seen our ‘Save Our Space / Save our Services’ campaign, this was set up to spread the word about our work and promote the many activities we are involved with. We are very aware that the majority of the PL12 population are either unaware or unclear about what we do, if we are to continue to grow and develop as an organisation, we need the support and backing of the local community, both businesses and individuals. The saying ‘if you don’t use it, you’ll lose it’ is true in our case.

We are pleased that, in the last few weeks the SOS campaign has already reaped benefits, we have been approached by a number of organisations with offers of help and support, showing that our efforts are promoting our work to a wider audience and are gaining visibility and credibility.

Clearly our aim for the next twelve months is to build on the start we have made in order to become financially independent. In the short term we have launched a crowd funding scheme, which we are delighted has gained matched funding, every pound we raise will be matched by Aviva. We also have plans in the pipeline to instigate a ‘Friends of Community Enterprise scheme’, this will provide the opportunity for anyone to support our work from near or afar. We have been developing this initiative for some months now and are hoping to launch it in the new year.

Alongside these activities, we are currently exploring a number of other initiatives as we recognise, we cannot stand still but need to take on ‘The Next Big Thing’, whatever this looks like it will need to complement the current provision in the area, meet local need and generate an income to support our other enterprises.

As I said at the beginning of my report, this has been a difficult year for CEPL12 but also for myself personally.

A prolonged period of ill health last year meant that my absence put an additional strain on the other directors, I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for ‘stepping up to the mark’ and keeping things going. I have been involved with our organisation for over five years now, during this time I have met so many different people and made many new friends. However, after living in Saltash for over 40 years, it is time for me to move on and so I have made the decision to move nearer to my family and spend precious time with them. After this meeting the Board will meet to elect a new Chair, I know there are still challenges to face but am confident that the team will rise to each and every one of them in order to better the life of our town.

I hope I can count on your support to enable them to look forward to the future with optimism because:

‘Together we can and together we do!’