

Chair's Report

What a successful year we had in 2019! For the first time we were able to appoint a full-time manager, Suzie Hodgson who started in June 2019. This has been an aim of the committee for a long time and we were pleased to be in the financial position of being able to realise this aim. Suzie has settled really well into the role of manager and has the complete mix of skills needed for the role.

We continued to improve the premises in 2019. We were able to refurbish our toilet area in September and also improve safe access to the loft including a light so that it is easier to access storage there.

Our shareholders continue to support us – without their commitment the shop would not be able to continue. By increasing their shareholding or helping by giving loans when needed, their support is essential to our growth.

Our volunteers continue to be amazing – we are so grateful for the time they give up to help in the shop, sometimes at short notice, and the time they spend outside of the shop helping to promote it.

2020 started optimistically with great sales in what is generally a quieter time of year for retail. We celebrated our 10 Year Anniversary at Ruskin College on 4 March. It was a lovely evening starting with a delicious buffet. John Coyle and Rachel Walding started the evening by giving a presentation about the history of Headington Fairtrade Cooperative. Two films about Fairtrade were then shown, "Playing Fair", then "25 Years of Fairtrade."

To end the evening, Bart Ashton, chair of the Oxford Fairtrade Coalition talked about "What is a Fairtrade city?" It was lovely to see so many volunteers and shareholders there. Thanks are due to everyone who helped organise the event, particularly Pru Dickson, and to David Blythman (Scott Fraser) for their financial support. A Fairtrade jute bag was produced to commemorate our 10 Year Anniversary.

I went to New Zealand two days later where I remain in lockdown. Since then life in the UK has changed dramatically due to the coronavirus epidemic. While I've been away, there have been many committee discussions either via email or Zoom. It was decided that as the shop is not an essential business, that it would close on 24 March and that our manager would be furloughed from 1 April. She will receive full salary while she is furloughed - the government job retention scheme will pay 80% of her salary and we will top it up. There were discussions about whether to run a delivery service but the committee decided against this. We are very grateful for the government small retail grant, the rates exemption and our landlord exempting us from rent for at least May, as this support will enable us to continue when the shop is able to reopen again, and support our suppliers who are suffering.

When the shop will reopen is uncertain at this time. There have already been discussions on how to reopen safely for staff, volunteers and customers when the time is right.

There will be challenges along the way but I am confident that the Headington Fairtrade Cooperative will overcome these and be able to support our partners overseas again soon.

Sue Baker