

# **Genesis of The Selsey Care Shop**

This article records how a number of local community groups developed and eventually came together in the Selsey Care Shop under the 'umbrella' provided by the registered charity Selsey Community Forum.

## **Selsey Community Forum**

**Selsey Community Link** was set up in 2010 by Dr Mike Nicholls. It was a partnership of local voluntary organisations which sought to identify and meet local needs in the relatively isolated seaside town of Selsey. Shortly after its formation, the Link was re-titled **Selsey Community Forum** and became a Registered Charity which not only sought to identify local needs but also to satisfy them by setting up and sustaining new initiatives. These activities demanded close partnership with other local community groups, councils, churches, businesses, statutory organisations and, most importantly, sponsors. Since that time, successful bids have been made for a great number of grants from national and local government, charities and other organisations. In addition, support has been forthcoming locally from businesses as well as private individuals who provided not only funding but also a wealth of benefits-in-kind, including the abundant energy and precious time given by much-valued volunteers.

Of the many projects set up by Selsey Community Forum, two proved to be particularly relevant to the later formation of the **Selsey Care Shop**:

**Selsey Information Exchange** provided an information service for the local community and aimed to raise awareness of the remarkably diverse range of local facilities and activities which were already available. It also set up a Community Diary and provided information for visitors and new residents in the town as well as running an internet radio station, alas now defunct. From 2012, Selsey Information Exchange occupied a small unit at Penny Lane Arcade in the High Street.

In March 2018, Selsey Community Forum played a significant role in establishing and subsequently leading the **Selsey Dementia Action Alliance** which sought to create and sustain Selsey as a dementia-friendly community. The alliance, which involves local councils, charities, churches, businesses, health organisations, voluntary groups and individuals, has an impressive list of achievements.

## **Selsey & District Carers Support Group**

Selsey & District Carers Support Group (now **Carers Support Selsey**) was formed by Janet Harris in 2000 and offered a sympathetic ear and emotional as well as practical support to unpaid carers in the Selsey area. The group was initially run from a private house with meetings being held in the Seal Hotel and, later, the British Legion. It became a Registered Charity in 2003 with an Administration Officer working from an office in The Malthouse, with a consequent need to attract more funding.

In 2009, and in touch with around 300 unpaid carers, the group took on shop premises on the corner of the High Street and East Street and for many years provided an Information & Support Centre which was opened by Sir Patrick Moore and the then local MP Andrew Tyrie. The centre offered a warm welcome and a strong cup of tea or coffee provided by understanding people who, from their own experience, could help with the concerns and difficulties of unpaid carers. The service was free to users and included outings and events for carers as well as those for whom they cared. In addition, the group offered assistance with completing Carers and Attendance Allowance forms as well as working closely with Carers Support West Sussex who were able to provide a range of specialist support services. Unfortunately, the services which the group offered were interrupted when, in 2017, a vehicle collided with the shop it occupied in the High Street. Some time later, Carers Support Selsey opened new premises close to Selsey Information Exchange in the Penny Lane Arcade.

Over the years, Carers Support Selsey introduced many innovations. Apart from selling donated items in the shop, the introduction of monthly Car Boot sales brought in much needed funding for the free services offered to local unpaid carers. These included Coffee Mornings, transport to medical appointments, outings to Garden Centres and other places of interest, a 24 hour/365 day helpline, a monthly newsletter and lots of cream teas!

## **Selsey Timebank**

As a pilot-scheme in West Sussex, **Selsey Timebank** was set up by Sarah Empson in October 2011 to offer people the opportunity of obtaining the help they needed by exchanging their skills with others in the neighbourhood. It worked on the basis that everyone's time is valued equally: an hour spent by an individual helping someone else was equivalent to an hour spent by someone helping that individual. The scheme was seen as a way for people to come together to help others and help themselves at the same time. Participants 'deposited' their time in the bank by volunteering and withdrawing from the bank to pay for tasks done for them by other Timebank members.

In the rather grand words of its Constitution, 'Selsey Timebank exists to give practical help and support to others. The scheme will serve as a way to restore a sense of good neighbourliness, to enhance our community and to encourage people to be active citizens'. Selsey Timebank operated under the 'umbrella' provided by Timebanking UK.

Selsey Timebank existed between 2010 and 2014 and grew to have over eighty active members. There were, however, two problems: firstly, once introduced to each other, mutual help continued without the Time Bank being made aware of that activity. (Incidentally, some of those relationships still continue today!) Secondly, and more importantly, it was found that many potential members, although needing help, were not really able to undertake tasks in return. It was recognised that Selsey has a relatively elderly population with many retirees, a high proportion of whom have lost their partners and live alone often far away from their families and earlier friends. In consequence, there is increased risk of loneliness and social isolation particularly, but not exclusively, among the older population. It became apparent that there was in Selsey a significant number of people in the community who were both isolated and having difficulty with normal, everyday tasks such as shopping, gardening and simple home maintenance. In 2013, this experience led to the Timebank proposing the formation of 'Friendship Watch', a local community group similar to Neighbourhood Watch but with the emphasis on looking after people rather than property. West Sussex County Council generously supported the proposal with 'Big Society' grant funding of £2,000 and thus enabled the setting up in 2014 of a new community group: it was farewell to Selsey Timebank and welcome to Selsey Community Watch.

## **Selsey Community Watch**

Selsey's relative geographical isolation (and perhaps the RNLI Lifeboat of which the town is immensely and rightly proud) had already promoted a good community spirit and there were several organisations which provided both practical help and moral support in order to improve the quality of life for local people. These included Carers Support Selsey, The Visually Impaired People Club (VIPs), the Venture Club, Selsey Lions, East Beach Church (now Beacon Church), the Methodist Church, Selsey Medical Practice and the Community Warden (an employee of Chichester District Council). A significant part of the envisaged function of a 'Friendship Watch' was therefore already in place within the community. However, it was apparent that if more were done to coordinate the activities of the different groups and organisations, then their combined value might be significantly enhanced.

It was therefore proposed that the existing community groups and other organisations be loosely combined as '**Selsey Community Watch**'. Such an

association would require very little change or reorganisation; in the main, it would simply require opening up new and reliable lines of communication between existing local organisations. To this end, Selsey Community Watch was overseen by a committee, meeting monthly and representing local professional, voluntary and other groups, as well as its own volunteers.

For a host of different reasons, many people, elderly or otherwise, might not wish to be more involved in the local community; clearly, such views must be respected. However, where there was consent, Selsey Community Watch sought to keep an open eye on the whole community. It could only do this through those most in contact with the vulnerable and who were therefore best situated to initiate help when they thought it might be required. These included medical and veterinary staff, statutory bodies, PCSOs, taxi and voluntary drivers, shop-keepers, postmen and, importantly, neighbours. It is those people who made up the 'eyes and ears' of Selsey Community Watch and with whom close working relationships were fostered.

Selsey Community Watch shared a small unit in the Penny Lane Arcade used by Selsey Community Forum, principally for Selsey Information Exchange. Over a period of time, the following were the main services established with every effort being made to provide them free of charge. These services were later to be continued by the Selsey Care Shop.

**Befriending.** Depending on the circumstances, and on those involved, befriending can take many forms; it can simply be visits to a house-bound person and a friendly chat over a cup of tea, or perhaps be outings for pleasure or to attend hospital or other appointments. It also includes functions intended to promote social interaction and friendliness.

**Good Morning Selsey.** Started as a 3-month trial in July 2015, Good Morning Selsey (now Good Morning Call after its extension to wider parts of the Manhood Peninsula) is still going strong today. The service offered a daily phone call to those who might be lonely, vulnerable or housebound and would appreciate a friendly chat. Good Morning Selsey has proved very successful, not only in offering the opportunity for a chat, but also in alerting to the need for immediate or other assistance when it was required. This service sometimes required a large number of callers and, occasionally, calls were made by volunteers from distant holiday destinations such as Cornish car parks and French cafes!

**Senior Selsey News.** Senior Selsey News (now replaced by the Selsey Community Forum Newsletter) was a monthly publication that presented matters that might be of particular interest to our older residents. It was aimed at producing nostalgia, reducing isolation in the

community and provided information on local events and activities. It was large-print, with no reference to such things as the internet or email addresses; it was published until its 67th edition.

**Movies for Memories.** Movies for Memories started in 2014 and involved the showing, with a good old-fashioned projector, of some well-known classic old movies which proved to be very popular with the audience at which they were aimed. An additional attraction was lunch!

**Respite Sunday Teas.** In response to a comment that Sunday afternoon was the loneliest period of the week, twice-monthly Respite Sunday Teas were started in partnership with the Methodist Church and with the then East Beach Evangelical Church (now Beacon Church). Having later been joined by St Wilfred's and St Peter's Churches, Respite Sunday Teas are now held four times each month - and are still going strong! The events have involved not only tea and some really lovely cakes, but, from time-to-time, board games, quizzes and musical entertainment but, above all else, they involve natter.

**Selsey Dementia Action Alliance.** Forget-Me-Not was Selsey Community Forum's project to create and sustain Selsey as a truly dementia-friendly community. This led to the Selsey Dementia Action Alliance which was formed in March 2018 and now has an impressive list of achievements as well as involving including local councils, charities, churches, businesses, health organisations and voluntary groups as well as individuals.

**Christmas Lunch.** The first Selsey Community Christmas Lunch was held in 2014 for those who would otherwise be alone for Christmas. Like those held since, it was a great success for both the guests and the many volunteer helpers. 105 lunches were served in the Town Hall or delivered to people in their own homes. Generous donations from businesses and individuals raised £2,320 for the event and £340 was raised on the day for the Fire Brigade Benevolent Fund. Christmas Lunch is still a very successful annual event.

**Grow Selsey** started at the Bridge Support Centre behind Selsey Library developing the outdoor spaces into what is now called **The Hidden Garden Community Project**. This venture has developed with the support of enthusiastic volunteers who grow organic fruit and vegetables, sow wildflower meadows, develop flower borders and create new spaces for wildlife. Grow Selsey continues to expand its activities and was recently involved in the Selsey Open Gardens event.

**Other Services.** Other services involved co-operating with and supporting other organisations. In particular, assistance was given to outside organisations seeking to run events in Selsey.

The level of Selsey Community Watch activity, all undertaken by volunteers, was such that by 2018, it was apparent that larger premises than the small unit in Penny Lane would be necessary for the future. In addition, the footfall there was low; alternative premises somewhere within the prime area of Selsey High Street, between East Street and West Street, were highly desirable. A shop at 121 High Street, in the right place and about the right size, became available but represented a significant financial risk, especially when coupled with a change from an all-volunteer operation to one involving paid, part-time staff. Nevertheless, that risk was taken and has since proved to be fully justified.

## **Selsey Care Shop**

### **At last, we have arrived at the Selsey Care Shop!**

The Selsey Care Shop was set up as an innovative project to serve as a one-stop location for access to the activities and services previously provided by Selsey Information Exchange, Carers Support Selsey, and Selsey Community Watch. A crowdfunding project was set up to help meet the costs of this new venture. Unofficially, the shop first opened its door in June 2018; officially, it was opened on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018 by the then local MP, Gillian Keegan. As well as being a new contact point for the organisations from which it was formed, the shop also offered new support services for bereavement and relationship counselling. Once again, a guiding principle was that, wherever possible, the shop's activities and services were provided free of charge. The Selsey Care Shop became a hive of activity and has been widely admired as a great example of community care with volunteers and, for the first time, paid part-time staff playing a big role in supporting their local residents. The first major challenge faced by the Selsey Care Shop was COVID-19.

**COVID-19.** At the beginning of the Covid pandemic, an alliance of local organisations very quickly set up **Selsey COVID 19 Mutual Aid**, with the Selsey Care Shop taking a leading role. The alliance's aim was to alleviate some of the many problems created by the measures to counter the pandemic. The existing Selsey Care Shop befriending activities were expanded rapidly and, during the first weekend of restrictions, over eighty additional volunteers were recruited to form a 'Buddy' system where volunteers within the community provided help for those living near them who were self-isolating or had other problems arising from the circumstances at the time. At its peak, the Buddy System was making contact with local residents nearly 2,000 times each week to arrange shopping,

collect prescriptions, deliver food, distribute Senior Selsey News and information leaflets as well as making supportive phone calls and addressing other matters. Although all its events and activities had been cancelled until further notice, Selsey Care Shop remained open to coordinate Selsey COVID-19 Mutual Aid. When the COVID measures were such that the shop had to close, it was still able to provide advice and assistance by telephone for some of its normal services.

**Today.** Since its formation, the Selsey Care Shop has continued to expand the services that it provides. In partnership with Chichester University, professional organisations and charities, the shop now offers a wider range of wellbeing counselling, help with finding employment, assistance with financial matters and conflict resolution. In addition, the Buddy System has been refined and expanded to include, at modest charge, transport with volunteer drivers for local people to attend medical and dental appointments within about 40 miles of Selsey. The shop is also, in partnership with other communities in the Manhood Peninsula, assisting them in setting up their own various activities and services. The Selsey Care Shop has gone from strength to strength in providing for its local community. An immense amount of effort on the part of its trustees, staff and many volunteers has established an organisation which is widely praised and, more officially, recognised by the award in 2024 of the King's Award for Voluntary Service - a prodigious recognition. It should also be recorded that the driving force behind the existence and outstanding success of the Selsey Care Shop has been Dr Mike Nicholls whose efforts were recognised in 2019 with the award of a BEM for his services to the community.

You can find out more about the Selsey Care Shop as it is today on its own dedicated website: <https://www.selseycareshop.uk>