

# ONE LINLITHGOW



All businesses in Linlithgow have been affected by the pandemic - some severely, others fortunately less so. Many have had to radically adapt to survive.

One Linlithgow, the elected body representing all businesses in the town, is doing all in its power to help them through these unprecedented times.

But decisions are not taken by a faceless organisation with no real understanding of the myriad problems businesses are having to confront. Volunteer Board members are facing the same issues with their own businesses - some more challenging than most.

Here, we give their very personal accounts of the struggle to stay afloat - but stories that are also optimistic, and reflect a wider concern for all businesses in the town - many of them next-door neighbours.

## Mark Darragh, owner PlayBugs soft play centre



*“Well, 2020, the year that just kept on giving - but not in a good way! When we entered the national lockdown in March, like any responsible business owner, we closed up to ensure the safety of our team and customers. We took out the fresh food to try and reduce waste, and I made up boxes of cakes to drop off on my neighbours’ doorsteps.*

*Everyone probably thought that by following the rules, within a few months life would go back to normal. How wrong we were!*

*Life in Linlithgow as we know it has been quite different, with no Marches, no Party at the Palace, and no more quiz at Platform 3! I know how tough it is for every business owner in town, having never been allowed to reopen. I feel especially for all the parents, grandparents, carers and child-minders I meet who have missed having a coffee, cake, and a chat whilst they get a little bit of peace while the children play.*

*Despite all this, and 2021 not getting off in a way we would all like, many businesses are still here in Linlithgow. Thanks to the ongoing financial support provided from the UK Government we all hope to get through it and reopen as soon as it is safe to do so.*

*As a volunteer member, and vice-chairman for One Linlithgow, I want to see us support the entire business community to grow back stronger, greener, and encourage the local community to continue to support the town. Let’s hope we can get back to enjoying everything Linlithgow has to offer as soon as possible. Until then stay safe and well.”*

## Jill Wardrope, owner Network Promotions



*My main concern was being able to return to the UK to look after my small business in Linlithgow, which supplies promotional merchandise.*

*After an experience not dissimilar to those in the film ‘Planes, Trains and Automobiles’, we eventually made it home and back to work. A few days later, when lockdown was implemented, sales fell off a cliff!*

*Much of the promotional material that we supply is for events and meetings, none of which are going ahead. So many organisations that would usually purchase promotional merchandise are experiencing their own difficulties. While marketing and promotion is important in times of difficult trading, it’s understandable that so many have had different priorities under current circumstances.*

*With an ever-changing situation resulting in factory shutdowns, we’ve experienced issues bringing goods from abroad, and delays with manufacturing in the UK. I’ve had to look at other ways of sustaining my livelihood, and quickly adapted by supplementing our offering with PPE such as hand sanitising stations, face coverings, sanitising gel, hygiene tools and antibacterial products - all branded with our customers’ logo or message.*

*I’m expecting difficult months ahead, and I imagine none of us will emerge unscathed. I feel incredibly lucky, however, that my family remains healthy, and my businesses have survived so far, when so many have suffered both directly and indirectly as a result of Coronavirus. I try to keep a positive mindset as we all work our way through to the other side.”*

## Mike Smith VC, Linlithgow Union Canal Society



*“LUCS is an atypical business: not-for-profit, with voluntary staff, to attract crowds of people to enjoy the charming Canal Basin – and to explore the commerces of the Burgh while in town.*

*‘Crowd’, however, has been a very bad word since March. Instead of pay, our volunteer members are rewarded by the camaraderie of working together to share the many various joys of making a tourist attraction work: the prize is happy, smiling faces all around.*

*But now, no visitors, no work parties, no income (apart from generous donations), but the usual ongoing maintenance/repair to be done in a solitary, not social, way.*

*This interminable-feeling loss of society is very hard on those to whom LUCS is a crucial social lifeline. LUCS decided to try to keep the social aspects going virtually, to help raise spirits and keep people in touch, within and beyond the Society.*

*We have Zoom coffee-breaks, Zoom Committee Meetings, and Zoom Talks... and a fun video of Santa, sleigh, reindeer and elves all arriving by canal (just search YouTube for “LUCS Linlithgow”)! We also used the enforced downtime to digitise our archives ([museum.lucs.org.uk](http://museum.lucs.org.uk)).*

*Having been closed since March last year, we are now trying to unravel the virus-safety complexities, so that the Fleet will be able to sail again, and the fun resume, just as soon as permitted (more volunteers are always welcome)!*

*As to the farther future, LUCS is very aware that 2022 is the Union Canal’s 200th anniversary, and the fires of imagination are already lit to create a major celebration to help LUCS reinvigorate the Burgh.*



## Diana Kelly, owner SpecSavers Regent Centre



Two things were uppermost in ophthalmologist Diana Kelly's mind when lockdown struck last March: keeping her fledgling Specsavers business going, while doing all she could to help relieve the pressure on local GPs and pharmacies by dealing with eye emergencies in the area.

*"I could have gone to work in one of the emergency eye care facilities that had been established, but I wanted to keep a presence in my business, which I had opened only a few months previously. I had to shut my door and furlough the staff. I spent long hours manning the phone and was able to help quite a lot of my patients remotely, as well as some referred by other opticians in town, with whom I developed a good relationship.*

*I could see emergencies, and I had quite a few of them. Soon after lockdown started, I recall seeing seven emergency cases one day, including a local, who had dangerously high pressure on his eye, and another who had a large corneal abrasion - a scratch on the cornea. I treated all the cases successfully, which meant that the emergencies did not need to be seen by a GP, or at a hospital."*

Diana said she had been 'greatly relieved' to fully reopen her businesses in the town's Regent Centre in July, and bring her staff back in. She had also decided to take on a recently-graduated ophthalmologist, who was fully qualified and could see patients, but required to practise for a year for registration.

*"We've got all the appropriate safety measures in place, and the staff have all received special training. It's great to be able to see patients again, but where appropriate I'm consulting remotely. And I'm now coming increasingly across an issue brought about by home working: people developing eye problems after spending up to 10 hours a day on their computers."*

Added Diana, *"In some ways, we've been affected more by the pandemic than most. It's been exhausting, but I'm just glad we're able to be here to help in such challenging times for everybody."*

## DIGITAL MARKETS

One silver lining of the pandemic has been the near-universal recognition of the importance of shopping local. Watching an already-beleaguered retail sector suffer enforced closures has encouraged people away from online retail behemoths and back to local, independent businesses.

Of course, it hasn't been possible lately to head into town and support your favourite shops and services, so One Linlithgow teamed up with those businesses to run the **Linlithgow Digital Christmas Markets**, which were enormously successful. Around 30 businesses took part, making almost £3,500 between them! Almost £1,000 of that total was made in the first three hours of digital trading!

It has been a privilege to provide this kind of direct support to businesses in their hour of need. If 2020 had been a normal year, we may not have had to come up with new ideas to the extent that we have done. Nobody will remember it as a "vintage" year, but we'll be able to take that innovation with us when life begins to return to normal.

Of course, we were never going to watch the Christmas

markets succeed, then call it a day! The post-festive lockdown wasn't exactly a surprise, but is still enormously damaging to independent businesses. So, with the first major retail opportunity approaching us in the form of Valentine's Day, One Linlithgow will once again be collaborating with **MyLinlithgow.com (Community Development Trust)** to bring you...



We'd love to welcome you on the day. Just visit the site and the market will be obvious from the homepage! Why not stick the flyer from this magazine on the fridge to remind you?

Hundreds of products from dozens of local businesses will be available to browse and buy, just as easily as any online retailer, but supporting your friends and neighbours instead of billionaires! Find the perfect gift for Valentine's Day, or just treat yourself, and enjoy the cosy feeling of supporting the local economy!



## ONE LINLITHGOW UPDATE

There's plenty of activity lined up for Q1 2021, including supplying more PPE to businesses, promotional activity (including business videos and highlighting travel links, once restrictions allow).

But first, some good news about the town-centre CCTV project: the first camera is now operational at the Vennel, with civil works going ahead at the County Buildings column to get the wireless cameras from the Cross to Regent Centre operational. After that, two small (partial) road closures at either end of the High Street will allow the rest of the high-resolution cameras to be commissioned, completing the original system (more plans in place beyond that... watch this space).

If you live on the High Street and are concerned about privacy, please be assured that private windows are blocked out from the feed (just like the picture shown here - the image is unedited, it's exactly what the feed shows).

