

Save Our Shop

**A Community Shop for
Hughenden Valley**

Resident's Update

Dear Residents,

Readers of Hughenden News may remember that when you received the edition at Easter time, it was accompanied by a questionnaire about the village shop. We were asking for your views about such things as:

- The importance of having a shop
- How much would you use it?
- What sort of things would you use it for?
- Where should it be?
- Could you help with the Community Shop project?

Thank you for your replies. The response rate was very good (please see over for a summary of the findings). Here is an update on the progress that has been made since then. If you thought that not a lot has been going on, you'd be mistaken!

Respondents of the questionnaire who indicated their interest in joining the shop steering committee were contacted and a committee has been formed consisting of:

Chairman – Tony Horton

Project Co-ordinator and Deputy Chair – Louise Jones

Finance – Peter Cannon

Marketing – Phil Ward

Retail Operations - Andy Cox

Premises/Site Management - Peter Elliott

Staffing - Sue Grace

IT & Sales – Dylan Jones

Secretary - Deirdre Richards

Following the formation of the steering committee, progress has been made on several fronts:

ViRSA - One of our first steps was to meet with a member of ViRSA, the Village Retail Services Association. This organisation focuses on the provision of retail services in smaller, more remote conurbations where the economic / commercial pressures for retail outlets are similar to those we face here in Hughenden.

Many locations adopt the approach of establishing a community shop whereby active support and participation from the community helps to achieve success where a traditional, commercial venture may struggle. The concept of a *Shop in a Box* is quite often adopted.

This is where a temporary structure is situated in the village, along with temporary planning permission, to test the viability of the business. This can lead to more permanent solutions when the shop becomes established or indeed, the temporary structures can become more long-standing features...a bit like the Eiffel Tower perhaps!

Possible locations – Initially Mr & Mrs Handcock, owners of the former Coombe Lane Corner stores were approached with regard to leasing or renting the retail space to a community shop facility. However they declined this proposal at the present time. The task ahead was therefore to identify and prioritise potential locations for the shop.

Local business people have been very helpful – those long established in Hughenden and those new to the area. However, for perfectly sound reasons, potential sites near Wrights, at Deeter Electronics, opposite the Harrow and close to the old village shop are not viable.

The most viable solution, subject to further discussion, would appear to be a shop alongside the Village Hall – the location which was most popular according to the responses to the questionnaire. Indeed, many of the established successful community shops are located next to village halls or in community areas.

The Village Hall Committee has been very helpful so far although discussions are on-going.

Visits to other community shops – Managers of nearby, non-competing community shops (in The Lee and Hyde Heath) have been very supportive in terms of sharing their experiences and giving advice. Learning more about the problems they faced and how they overcame them has been very helpful. If you are ever passing either of these shops they are both well worth the visit and are inspirational.

Relevant authorities - a number of organisations are involved in the process and dialogue is underway with them. Discussions and/or meetings have been held with the planning department of Wycombe District Council, District Councillors, the Community Development Officer, the Highways Agency and many others.

Finances - A business plan has been drawn up as part of the feasibility study and it will also be essential when it comes to raising finance and/or accessing grants or other available funds.

The present corner shop - Residents may be aware that the application to convert some of the previous retailing area to residential status has been turned down on appeal. The reasons given for turning down the appeal indicate the degree of support that exists within local government for rural shops. It would appear that the Local Authority views a village shop as both important and viable.

We would like to thank everyone again for taking the time to respond to the Questionnaire and especially those who indicated offers of services. These offers are likely to be taken up as and when a site for the shop is agreed.

If you haven't yet had a response to your offer of help, please don't lose your enthusiasm – your village shop needs you!

We will communicate more news very soon.

Summary Findings of the Save Our Shop Questionnaire.

There were 150 questionnaires returned which, as a percentage of those circulated was nearly 25%. This is well above average for a non incentive questionnaire. 98% of respondents were in favour of a shop.

All respondents viewed the shop as a priority with many of the respondents indicating a level of 4 or 5 (5 being the most important). Only 3 respondents indicated that they would not use the shop.

A list of goods people were likely to buy was included in the questionnaire. Interest was wide ranging with the majority of people wanting bread/bakery products, stamps, local produce and particularly newspapers and magazines.

The question was posed as to what services residents would appreciate. Many were indicated, although overwhelmingly respondents requested the shop as a delivery drop-off point for parcels. Newspaper delivery, cash point and dry cleaning were also highly valued.

Questions were also asked about which days and times the shop would be used. What became very clear on analysis was that people showed an inclination to use it every day of the week, at any time, from 6am to 7pm.

Over 50% of respondents offered to contribute to the project. 20% of respondents offered financial assistance through donations, loans or shares and 34 households volunteered themselves and members of their family to work in the shop.

A variety of trades and services were offered by residents such as shop fitting, maintenance, accountancy etc.

Any other thoughts/observations were invited and interestingly the majority of those who commented suggested that an ideal location would be near or adjacent to Hughenden Village Hall.

If you wish to view the full results of the questionnaire the database will be accessible to view at www.hughenden.org.uk. in the near future. (All personal details and identification will be removed).