

THE FUTURE OF THE SPEEN STORES AND POST OFFICE – CALL TO ACTION

Dear Villagers,

In mid March, Alison Templeman, who has with Bob, Connie and latterly Ian, run the Village Shop and Post Office for the past 12 years, circulated a letter to Speen households in which she explained that the lease on the premises, held by the Bucks Housing Association (BHA), will expire in September 2021, leaving less than 18 months of the existing lease to run. She gave notice that she wished to cease any major involvement with the shop as soon as possible. This means that if no action is taken by the village, the shop will close in a matter of months and the Sub Post Office will be likely to close shortly thereafter. The hairdresser who occupied the first floor of the premises has closed her business permanently. **If no solution is found, BHA will seek to find another tenant within 6 months of the expiry of the lease.**

Under normal circumstances it would have been helpful to have had a meeting with members of the village to discuss what action you might want to take but we are living in challenging and unprecedented times and this is clearly not possible.

The key issues are:-

- (a) The current lease with BHA ends in September 2021 – if the Village has not found any alternative arrangement for the shop within 6 months of expiry of the lease (March 2021) then BHA will look for another tenant who might not want to run a shop, or seek an alternative use for the building;
- (b) In respect of the Sub Post Office, Bob is a self-employed Sub Postmaster on a rolling contract with Royal Mail. In theory he could run the Sub Post Office for a limited period once the shop was closed. However, this model could not be sustained on a long term basis.
- (c) Bob, Connie and Alison would be happy to have some ad hoc involvement in the shop's future if a solution could be found;
- (d) There is potential for another enterprise to occupy the top floor of the premises;
- (e) Within the next few months the village has the opportunity to work up a potential solution to safeguard the future of the shop if it wishes to do so.

Potential solutions might include:-

1. A shop run by the village community as happens elsewhere – Hughenden Valley is a recent model.
2. The village could buy the shop business for £30,000 exc. VAT and put in a manager to run it. A business plan will need to be devised to ensure that the shop covers its costs at the very least.
3. Income generation options for the first floor should be reviewed including the potential for a coffee shop; wine bar or other form of income generation.

On the assumption that you want Speen to have a shop, we would like feedback on the following:-

1. Do you want a village shop and would you use it in the future?
2. Should the shop include a Post Office?
3. How do you think the shop should be run and managed?
 - a. Entirely by volunteers
 - b. Entirely by a paid manager with staff.
 - c. A combination of (a) and (b)
4. How do you think the first floor could be used – Community Café; Wine Bar; alternative income generator?
5. Would you be willing to get involved with a working group to take forward a plan for the development of the future of the shop?
6. Do you have any other ideas?

Please send your comments by 14 June 2020 to spenstorescrusaders@gmail.com and leave your name and contact information in your reply.

Such a venture is not an insignificant undertaking. This is an array of guidance on the issue which has been issued by the Plunkett Foundation – www.plunkett.co.uk – the document How to Set up a Community Shop gives a taste of what is involved.

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