

THE FUTURE OF SPEEN STORES AND POST OFFICE:

VILLAGE RESPONSE TO 'CALL TO ACTION' AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS 27 June

1. In a letter distributed in March, Ali and Bob Templeman outlined their plans for the period between now and the expiry of the current shop lease in September 2021. In May we asked the village for their views on the future of the shop and post office. We are very grateful for the 70 replies received and for the substantial number of offers of help of various kinds. This update summarises the responses to the questions we asked, notes some issues raised by respondents and outlines our plan to set up a working group.

2. Summary of responses received

Q1: Do you want a village shop and would you use it in future? Q2: Should the shop include a post office?

The response to both questions was a resounding Yes. Villagers clearly value the shop enormously and the special contribution it has made to village life during lockdown. Villagers also value having a post office. We have ascertained that Speen Stores Post Office has Community Post Office status which is an important consideration.

3. *Q3: 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)*

The least favoured option was (a). About one third chose (b) and a further third (c). Those choosing (b) wondered how realistic it would be to rely on volunteers. Those choosing (c) cited examples in other villages where this model operates successfully.

4. *Q4: How do you think the first floor could be used – community café; wine bar; alternative income generator?*

Responses to this question did not settle on any particular answer. Some favoured a community café or a wine bar, but others questioned either of these would generate sufficient business. A few doubted the suitability of the premises for either activity.

Q5: 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?

19 respondents offered to serve on a working group including a number of people with particular experience and expertise - in retailing, the commercial property market, social enterprise. Some said they would be willing to volunteer in the shop itself.

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5. Q6: *Do you have any other ideas?*

Respondents raised a number of other points, including:

- a. It will be important for this project to keep in close touch with Bucks Housing Association, although some villagers questioned the need for the village to be taking action at all at this stage. The impact of the Covid pandemic on the wider economic environment would need to be taken into account.
- b. It is understood that when the shop premises were sold to BHA 20+ years ago, a covenant was put in place requiring the premises to be run as a shop and this needs clarification.
- c. There was a suggestion that the village should commission an independent review of the rental value of the property or even consider buying the premises from BHA.
- d. Some respondents suggested that this project should take account of broader village issues, e.g. the future of the KW4 and the Village Hall, although others warned against the risk of over-complicating the task.
- e. This project should bear in mind that a couple of years ago plans were drawn up to extend the shop premises, though planning permission was never sought.

Next steps

6. Drawing on the offers of help made, we now plan to invite villagers with relevant expertise and experience to join a working group. We will keep the village informed of progress. If villagers would like to make any further comment at this stage, please send them to spenstorescrusaders@gmail.com

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