

HESKET NEWMARKET COMMUNITY SHOP LIMITED
Sixth Public Meeting
Millhouse Village Hall
Tuesday 15th October 2024

Management Committee members in attendance:

Philippa Groves (Chair)
Simon Hewitt (Vice-chair)
Martin Woodham (Treasurer)
Michelle Boundy (Secretary)
Martin Nicholson
Helena Davies

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Updates
 - a) The Community Share Offer
 - b) Fundraising
 - c) Marketing and Communications
 - d) Grant Funding
 - e) The First 100 days!
 - f) Volunteers
3. Next steps
4. Q & A

1 Welcome

Philippa welcomed everyone to the meeting and set out the agenda. She said that this was the sixth public meeting we've held. Our next public meeting this year will be held at 7pm on the 17th December in Caldbeck Village Hall, and we will have some mince pies and mulled wine!

Philippa and Simon gave the following updates:

2a) The Community Share Offer

We're delighted to say that we have had a huge response to the Share Offer – we now have 290 founding members who have invested £345,661, well above our minimum target of £250,000.

We've produced our Share Certificates, which you can take away this evening. These will be available to collect at the shop for the next couple of weeks, and we are happy to deliver them to you, or post if need be.

Please do let us know if you spot any typos and we'll correct them!

2b) Fundraising

We must start by saying a huge thank you to our Young Farmers who organised a Car Treasure Hunt in September and raised £1,000. Thanks also to Mike Townend who raised £700 with his Secret Garden event in August.

We are very grateful to the organisers, quiz masters, bakers and buyers who joined in the fun. We're also grateful to our unstoppable fundraising team of Mike Townend and Celia Stobart. Mike reminded everyone that we are still looking for recipes and accompanying stories and photos for our Recipe Book. Please get in touch with the team, pop into the shop for a paper form, or complete one online.

Since coming together in March, we've raised over £16,300 through fundraising and donations and so far we've spent about £2,000. This has paid for the building survey, the valuation of the building and business, marketing and membership materials, and insurance and IT costs. This year's accounts (for the year ending 31st March 2025) will be presented to the members at our first AGM, which is likely to be towards the end of the summer/early autumn next year.

Here are some upcoming fundraising events for your diaries:

There is an illustrated talk and home cooked Nepalese meal by Dr Mike Townend on Tuesday the 22nd of October at 7pm at the Old Crown. Tickets are priced at £25. This event is almost sold out so please contact Mike as soon as possible if you'd like to attend.

Also at the Old Crown, we have a classical afternoon on Sunday the 27th of October from 3 to 6pm, organised by Clive Bush, with some very special guests – all donations welcome.

On Friday the 1st of November at 7.30pm our brilliant auction of goods and promises will be held at Caldbeck Village Hall. We have had some fantastic donations, and it is not to be missed! Bring the whole family, there is something for everyone, plus attendees will be suitably refreshed with a well stocked Bar.

2c) Marketing and Communications

We've continued to update our website and social media – do please let us have any shop or post-office related photos or news items you think would be of interest. We're grateful to John Price in Caldbeck for sending us some lovely old photos. It really helps with the donations and to raise our profile. Speaking of which, you might have seen us in this month's edition of Cumbria Life!

We have started sending emails from our official shop address which is info@hesketnewmarket-communityshop.co.uk If you haven't heard from us, please check your spam folder, and mark our email as not spam. You can also add us as an email contact.

2d) Grant Funding

As you've heard, we have raised a huge amount through our Community Share Offer, thanks to your generosity. We are still some £150,000 to £200,000 short of our funding requirement to buy the shop and start trading as a community organisation.

We have been lobbying MPs and ministers responsible for communities, and we had a recent response from the Under-Secretary of State for Democracy and Local Growth, MP Alex Norris. While he acknowledged the importance of communities and retaining community assets, he wasn't very specific about when and how the Government's Community Ownership Fund (COF) might reopen, saying they would seek to provide clarity in due course.

While we wait to hear, we've been busy investigating other sources of funding. We recently applied for national lottery funds through the Reaching Communities Fund and, while we weren't successful, we had some very good feedback. We were told that our application was very strong and that the project was something that really excited the funding team, especially our plans to open the tearoom and public toilet and to develop a meeting room. The exceptionally strong backing of the community was also a big plus.

Unfortunately, we were also told that competition this year is exceptionally high in Cumbria, contributing factors are thought to be the absence of COF funding and changes to local government (the move to unitary authorities) which has resulted in the loss of some funding streams. Competition for funding in Cumbria is always high and, to put this into context, last year's success rate for the Community Fund was only 6%, and it's expected to be even lower at 2 to 3% this year.

We were also told that this start-up stage of our project might be a better fit with social investors rather than traditional grant funders, and were helpfully provided with a long list of investors. Social investors offer development loans to organisations with a social or environmental purpose. Typically, the interest rates are relatively low, and some social investors offer a mix of investment and grant funding.

We've also seen this feedback echoed in the eligibility criteria for some of the smaller pots of funding we investigated – we could apply when we're up and running and have been trading for a while, but not while we are in the start-up phase. It may be that we end up with some investment to enable us to buy the shop and later down the line, secure grant funding to help with running costs.

2e) The First 100 Days!

In addition to investigating funding, we've been focused on the operational side of things and preparing for our first 100 days. We've started planning how the day-to-day running of the shop, post-office and tearoom would all work together, and what training, certificates, and insurances we'll need. We plan to open the tearoom in the early days, starting with light lunches of soup, sandwiches, and cakes and see how it all evolves.

We've also been thinking about the 100 days before we get the keys and preparing for that, so that as far as possible we don't have any disruption to service on Day 1.

2f) Volunteers

We've had a great response to our appeal for volunteers. We have just over 50 people on our list who are happy to help in various ways, thank you very much for putting your hands up! We hope to organise our first group meeting soon. We think it would be appropriate to wait to do this until we have successfully applied for investment or grant funding.

We know people would like to do different things: some people have said they'd like to focus on serving in the shop and post office, some in the tearoom. Some people would like to concentrate on baking and cooking for the tearoom, others on delivery or going to the cash and carry for supplies. Our current thinking is that we'll organise our volunteer team into groups of 4 to 5 people who will carry out these different roles. We're thinking about how our manager, or managers, will work with our volunteers and we're developing job and role descriptions.

Do please let us know if you are interested in volunteering – there will be a huge range of things to do something of interest for everyone.

3 Next Steps

The Management Committee will continue to:

- provide regular communications and organise local fundraising events;
- investigate investment and grant funding opportunities;
- plan operations.

We'd like to end as we did the last time by thanking Andy Bothamley, Diane and Ann for being so supportive – they haven't started rolling their eyes when we come into the shop and have continued to offer help and support with a smile!

4 Q & A

Q1: Has the Committee considered running a second Community Share Offer?

A: We have talked about it, and it might be something we'd do in the future but not anytime soon. We don't want to go back to the same people to ask for more investment though we have thought about running a share offer specifically for businesses.

Q2: Will training be provided to the volunteers prior to us taking on the business?

A: Yes. The Post Office will provide training for anyone involved in providing the post office service. There will also be training in food handling and hygiene, and we're fortunate that we can work with our neighbours at The Old Crown and Denton House to provide that.

Q3: What is Andy's deadline?

A: Andy has told us that he's flexible about when the sale happens. Once we have the funds in place to purchase the building and business, Andy will give his notice to the Post Office. We understand that the notice period can be between 6 to 18 months, and can also be extended if need be. Andy and Diane have offered to be on hand to share their expertise with us in the early days.