

HESKET NEWMARKET COMMUNITY SHOP LIMITED

Public Meeting Caldbeck Village Hall Tuesday 14th April 2026

Management Committee members in attendance:

Philippa Groves
Simon Hewitt
Martin Woodham
Michelle Boundy
Judith Kent

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Looking ahead
3. Meeting our Strategic Objectives
4. Some changes
5. Our business model
6. Tearoom plans
7. Developing the whole building
8. Our Official Launch
9. Next steps
10. Q & A

1 Welcome

Simon formally welcomed everyone to the meeting, gave apologies for Martin Nicholson and Garry Hobson, and introduced Judith Kent as a newly co-opted member of the Committee.

Simon began by acknowledging the tremendous work done by our shop manager, Richard Townend, and our dedicated team of volunteers. He said that they have all worked tirelessly to get to grips with the running of the shop and post office and have been absolutely brilliant! The volunteers have given their time freely, grappled with the complexities of the business and mastered the dark art of the post office system. We are all truly grateful for their time and for sticking with it – it really hasn't been easy.

Simon also thanked all our customers for being so patient as we learn the ropes, saying that we really appreciated that and we will get quicker! Our volunteers may only be in the shop for a few hours each week, so sometimes it can take a while to get to know all the complex processes.

Richard was given the mammoth task of picking up the reins of the business, learning all about the post office and supporting our volunteers – it was all new to him too so he was only a couple of steps ahead of our volunteers who were looking to him for advice. Simon thanked Richard for all his hard work, and acknowledged

that it hadn't been easy not least managing us, the Committee, as we presented him with yet another 'bright idea'.

Simon went on to say that, as mentioned in our recent newsletter, the management team totally underestimated the size of the task ahead when we took on the shop. We thought we had a good understanding of the business, but it wasn't until we took control that we realised just how many bespoke services were being offered. We also underestimated the inadequacy of the Post Office training – we all completed 15 hours of online training and not once did we see what the Horizon screen looked like....! And who knew that selling a newspaper could be so complicated!

Simon then acknowledged the work of his colleagues on the Committee saying that we had worked together over many long hours to get to this point and he would like to thank them too. He said it's fair to say that it's been a bit intense at times!

He ended by saying that the good news is that confidence is growing amongst the team, new lines are being introduced and are selling well, and shop takings are showing positive signs of growth. Richard is working hard to keep prices down by buying well and shopping around for the best deals that can be reflected in our pricing – it's still early days, and we have a long way to go, but initial results certainly look positive – the prices of some items have come down, and our confidence and our sales are growing!

2 Looking ahead

Now that the community owns the shop, the role of the Committee is to ensure that it's well run, becomes profitable, and stays in business for the long term. To enable us to do that, we will need to keep a very close eye on our finances – cashflow is a critically important aspect for us to keep tight control over.

We also need to simplify how the shop operates. Over the years numerous bespoke services have been offered to customers. Andy and Diane have done all they could to meet the needs of each and every customer. As a result, there are few standard processes, and the simplest of tasks can appear very complicated. This was fine when someone was in the shop all the time, but it makes it very difficult for our volunteers, some of whom are in the shop for half a day each week. So, we need to simplify and standardise processes where we can.

We also need to get the whole building working for us and contributing money. Philippa will shortly update everyone about reopening the tearoom, and she will also touch on what we are considering for the residential part of the building.

3 Strategic Objectives

Simon reminded the meeting of the strategic objectives of the Society, which we all need to keep sight of:

- **Preserve Essential Services:** *Maintain access to fresh food, groceries, and post office services, which are vital for the community's daily needs and social infrastructure. We're well on our way with this one.*

- **Combat Isolation:** *Provide a focal point for social interaction and support, particularly for isolated and vulnerable residents.* It is really nice to see the social interactions happening in the shop, with people passing on news and ideas.
- **Support the Local Economy:** *Stock and promote local produce, thereby supporting local farmers and producers.* We're very aware that we need to make commercial decisions about everything we stock, and balance this with supporting local where we can.
- **Enhance Community Engagement:** *Offer volunteering and employment opportunities, fostering a stronger sense of community and involvement.* We feel we are on track with this one, given how we are running things.
- **Develop Sustainability:** *Ensure the shop and post office become a thriving, sustainable business owned and run by the community for its benefit.* Everyone had put their faith in us to run the business on behalf of the community and, if we are to make it sustainable, we need to take some difficult decisions, and we hoped everyone understood why that was the case.

Simon said that these were our guiding principles, and that whatever we do for the shop has to be for the benefit of the community.

4 Some changes

Simon said he'd mentioned several times over the past couple of years that the post office income supports the shop, which has struggled to make a profit for several years. He said, because of this, we must do all we can to turn the shop around to ensure it thrives for the long term. We are confident that we can do that, but we do need to make changes to the way the business has been run in the past. We've always said we would implement evolution not revolution – we don't want to break anything that is working!

Keeping an eye on our cashflow is probably the most important thing for us now, as it is for any business. As we'd expect, money is tight. Currently we pay for most of our stock on delivery, and that's a significant outlay so we need to sell the stock and get the money into our bank as soon as we can.

When we took over the business, we knew that some customers had accounts with us for their grocery deliveries, but it turns out that there are many more customers than we thought who don't pay for their shopping when they get it, and this is something that has simply evolved over the years.

Currently some customers are billed for their shopping weekly, others are billed monthly, and a significant number have informal arrangements where they pop things in an 'open basket' on the till and they pay sometime in the future. We really do trust everyone, but having many credit options makes it really complicated to manage the money.

Some people pay by BACS transfer, some require an invoice to be posted, and others come into the shop to pay – its all very complicated and time consuming, for us and for customers.

Offering several ‘account’ options not only takes a huge amount of time to manage, but it also makes things very complicated for our volunteers and this leads to mistakes. It also means that at any one time we have a significant amount of cash outstanding, and we can’t really continue to work this way.

Newspaper sales are a significant part of our business, about 20% of our retail income, and they bring a lot of additional trade into the shop – so we need to keep them. However, margins on newspaper sales are wafer thin and we currently offer both weekly and monthly newspaper accounts. This means that we don’t receive payments for a large proportion of newspaper sales until well after we have paid for them. So, we will be looking at tightening up that too.

We need to make some changes that simplify the processes, ensures that our community shop keeps its head above water and keep the flexibility of having an account for those who really need it.

We can do this in several ways.....

- 1) We can ask people to pay using good old cash!
- 2) As you know, we now accept card payments (and via phones and watches too!) so we really need to encourage people to pay for their groceries and newspapers when they get them. About 50% of our sales are now paid using cards – it’s easy!
- 3) For those who really need an account facility, our new till system allows customers to register their card on the system. This means that people could come into the shop, or order a delivery in the usual way, but the till would automatically charge the card on the system and then either email or text a receipt to the customer. The customer would also have a shop receipt that they could check against the automatic payment if needed.

We wouldn’t be able to see the bank card details, and the details would be held securely by Square, so it is safe – and well used in other businesses like ours.

We need to make the changes very soon, so we will now begin to contact customers who pay on account to discuss alternative ways to pay. We know we need to be careful here as we don’t wish to lose any custom, but we need to balance that with getting the business onto a firm footing.

We will also start to have conversations with those who don’t have formal accounts but put the shopping into ‘open baskets’ and pay later. Our aim is to implement these changes from the beginning of May.

We'd be interested to hear everyone's views on reducing credit terms, so hopefully we can pick that up during the Q&A session at the end of this meeting.

5 Our business model

Simon talked next about our business model, which is to have a paid manager supported by a team of volunteers, and that remains the case. It's a good business model but is heavily reliant on maintaining a strong team of volunteers through the year and into the future. Our volunteers are doing a fantastic job, and we are very grateful for that. Having one paid employee does however carry an element of risk, so we need to address that risk.

To that end, we will shortly be advertising a paid part time role. This will be for only a few hours a week but will ensure we have continuity when Richard is on leave etc. It will also take some pressure off our volunteers.

Employing another staff member represents a significant investment for us, but if we are going to grow the business we need to do it.

We are also very keen to hear from others who would like to volunteer to work in either the shop, post office or tearoom – or all three! We have learnt a lot, and I can confidently say that your training will be better....!

We'd also like to hear from anyone who would like to join the management team. We are all working hard on this project, and have been doing so for over two years, so now that we have bought the business and become shopkeepers, it's a good time to strengthen the team and introduce some new blood and fresh ideas. So, if anyone feels that they have both the time and motivation to join the team, please let us know.

Simon reminded the meeting that Michelle said at our first AGM last June that she would step down from the role of secretary in 12 months' time. Although she will remain actively involved in the shop, Michelle still plans to step down from the Committee in June, so we'll be looking for a secretary to take her place soon. Simon thanked Michelle for her hard work over the years, and handed over to Philippa.

Philippa welcomed everyone to the meeting, and said that we were all very grateful for the amount of time and effort Simon has given to the project, as have the whole team.

She said that the Committee were delighted that Judith has joined us and, along with David and Freddie Hughes, is a member of our buildings team. With her wealth of knowledge from working at Carrock and of the building trade, Judith is a busy lady and is juggling many roles as well as helping set up this weekend's stall at the Mungrisdale Spring Fling - we hope to see you all again there!

Philippa echoed Simon's comments about Michelle, and said that she will be missed on the Committee when she leaves us, as she has been such a tremendous support, but she also still has a full-time job and she can't do both and we should not expect

her to do any more. Her expertise will be missed but she is not moving away and will still be with us in the shop and post office.

6 Tearoom plans

Philippa updated the meeting about the opening of the tearoom. She began by saying that we were all very keen to see the tearoom open but - and there is always a but! - since it was last open before Covid there had been many changes in Food Hygiene, allergies, and Health and Safety guidance, some for the better and some bordering on fanatical but in order to operate successfully we need to keep within those guidelines.

One issue so far has been securing sufficient volunteers to cover all shifts in the tearoom as it would be pointless opening and then not having cover to keep going. We do now have 15 committed volunteers with several extra who are willing to fit in on occasions but to set off we do need every shift filled. So, if you fancy a chance to channel your inner Mrs Overall, please see one of the team or Richard at the end of the meeting.

Philippa acknowledged that Richard is sometimes on his own in the shop, without any supporting volunteers, which is a breach of our lone worker policy. We all know that Diane, Ann and Andy did long shifts on their own but, as a Committee, we need to make sure all bases are covered and adhere to all the policies we set. No one working in the tearoom will ever be on their own as support will always be on hand. And at busy times we will support with extra staff. And if you fancy doing a shift with a friend as a double act then that's fine too.

After discussions with Richard who has worked in this field before joining us, and it is his area of expertise, we will be offering a basic menu initially until everyone is happy and up to speed with working conditions and we can make sure that everyone is fully aware of the hygiene rules. After that, we can extend our menu and we are excited to see where we go and what is on offer in the future.

So, the short answer to any question about when we are opening formally is VERY SOON and if you would like to offer to do a shift in the tearoom then we would be delighted to have you with us.

We are delighted that our Bags of Choice scheme is proving so popular and my sister Annette, Carol Hine and friends are being kept busy making bags from all sorts of recycled materials. To date, the scheme has delighted many but also raised around £300. Whilst they are given away for free many people choose to donate a sum and it great to see bags coming back into the shop. Some are bought as gift bags and it is gratifying to see that, considering the cost of a paper bag made in China compared with a recycled bag made from material which might otherwise been binned. Thanks to the lovely ladies who are giving their time and expertise to do this for us and the PLANET!!

7 Developing the whole building

Phillippa then updated the meeting about our plans for the future of the building. David and Freddie Hughes and Judith Kent have joined us on this side of the project and they have been a tremendous support and a great help dealing with visits from agents, builders and suppliers of solar etc.

We have discovered a couple of issues with the roof which we were unaware of previously and the upshot of this is that whilst we were in line for a solar grant it appears that we need to look at fixing the roof first. It would be pointless putting panels up on a roof which will need work within a year or so.

Our next question is what to do with the rest of the building and to get an income from it as soon as possible. One of our options is to forge ahead and get a separate entrance to the living accommodation and rent it out as a whole providing the village with a further house and garden. This could be for a period of two to three years until we find further funding to extend and equip the bigger community hub. We have had visits from two separate agents, and it appears we could be looking at between £900 to £1,000 a month for rent but there is a bit of remedial work to do to bring it up to an acceptable state.

We have asked for some quotes for putting in the stairs and it's complicated by plumbing and electrics. We should be able to do this with expertise and patience, but it will be at a cost and further funding will be needed. Rough estimates to do this are in the region of £40,000 to £50,000 so we need to get our heads down and seek out further funding. Again, once we have been trading for a year these things may become easier to source. In the meantime, we've brought a set of plans with us for anyone to look at.

Our next job will be to draw up more detailed plans, the present ones have been done for us by Colin Aimes for free as a contribution, but more detailed plans will need to be paid for. Unless anyone has a pet architect up their sleeve??

8 Our Official Launch

Phillippa reminded the meeting that our Official Launch was coming up on May 16th. She asked attendees to take some flyers with them for display on notice boards, schools, shops, pubs and wherever else they could.

She said that the official who will be doing the honours had yet to be confirmed but that we had a full, packed programme for the day. (Our official has now been confirmed as Iona Frost-Pennington, Deputy Lieutenant of Cumbria.)

There will be a Local Cumbrian Foods and Crafts Fair, and a Hesketh Hat Competition which we hoped everyone would embrace and join in. After judging that at 2pm, we will be asking everyone to join us for a Mad Hatters' Tea Party at 3pm on the green. Phillippa promised we'd book some beautiful weather and said that whether people chose to bring their own picnic or buy from the stalls on the green, the Old Crown, Denton House or the Community Shop, it would be great to have the whole community there.

If anyone would like to sponsor one of the classes for the hat competition it will cost £20 - please get in touch with Philippa or any of the Committee members to discuss.

Philippa said that we were lucky to have so many talented musicians in the area. Brian Woodhall and Brigid Garvey have organised great entertainment including our own Rhubarb Thieves, a blast from a Brass Band, and the Millhouse Singers, amongst others. It will be a real family day out and a great celebration of all three community businesses.

This weekend coming, on 18th of April, we are at the Mungrisdale Spring Fling with our basket competition and information about the many things we have available in the shop. To win the basket of goodies from the shop, you'll need to guess the weight and cost of the whole basket. The winner will be announced on Saturday afternoon at Mungrisdale.

9 Next steps

Simon set out what the next steps were for the Management Committee. He said we would be focussed on:

- Streamlining processes to make things easier for volunteers and customers.
- Reducing credit terms.
- Re-opening the tearoom.
- Expanding the range of products in the shop.
- Buying well to reduce costs.
- Strengthening the Management Committee.
- Recruiting a part-time staff member.

Simon finished the meeting by sharing a quote from A.A.Milne, the author of the Winnie-the-Pooh books. He said he was reminded of this when thinking about how the Committee had grappled with learning the business and trying to improve things over the last few months...

“Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it. And then he feels that perhaps there isn't.”

10 Questions, Answers and Comments

One of the volunteer team, Rod Phillips, told the meeting that he enjoyed giving his time in the shop, saying it was a nice way to meet people and that he'd recommend it to all.

Another comment from the floor was that we now had a better selection of goods on offer, and there was a positive collective response to our plans on changing how we deal with customer credit.

Q Would the post office be able to offer the service of renewing licences with DVLA?

A We do not currently offer this service, but we will look into it.

Q Will volunteers for the tearoom need to hold a food hygiene certificate?

A No – as all necessary training will be provided.

Q Will the shop continue to deliver groceries?

A Yes, we will!

Q Will the tearoom offerings be baked on the premises?

A The offerings will be locally sourced, but we do need to know what exactly is in each of our products. We don't want to walk before we can run with the tearoom so we will start small and carefully.