

Amberley Shop on the Common Ltd**Annual Members' Meeting 18th October 2021****Chairman's report**

Welcome to the first Annual Members' Meeting since our share offer at the end of last year. Much has happened since we formed the Community Benefit Society in April 2018, and the pandemic has set us some difficult challenges as we work towards our objective of opening a community shop and café in Amberley. I want to start by thanking your management committee who have worked tirelessly and kept the faith throughout these difficult times.

I thought it would be useful to summarise what has been achieved, the obstacles that lie before us and how your management team proposes navigating past them. This is your project, it is your money that you have invested and it is important that you have an opportunity to scrutinise progress and approve the Society's plans. Progress has sometimes been frustratingly slow, but we remain focused. From the management committee's point of view we need to know that despite delays and changes, we have the continued support of members for the strategies we are pursuing to achieve our objectives.

1. Progress to date:**Design and approvals**

Since my last report, our architect David Newton has submitted his design and secured the necessary 'Faculty' from the diocese. This essentially grants approval for the changes that are proposed within the church. This faculty was amended to reflect some improvements to the space that was being created for the retail space. The faculty process involved a full consultation with members of the congregation and the community.

Planning consents

Following this, we secured planning consent from Stroud District Council and listed building consent for the external elements of the project.

Fund raising

We have been very successful in raising funds. We have secured grants from several trusts and funding bodies, and as you know the community benefit society (ASOC) launched the share offer in October 2020 closing at the end of January 2021. Helen will take you through the current position with our membership.

I am delighted to say that, through the share offer and from grants alone, we have raised over £158,000 towards the shop building work and set up costs. At the same time we have been supporting the church and the parish rooms with the "Improving Access for All" campaign, given that all of these improvements will benefit the whole community and especially our customers. Many of you will have been to one of the several fund raising and

community engagement events that have been held over the summer, these comprise a series of 'pop up café' events and more recently the 'Harvest Hop'. These events have not only raised money, they have also proved what a great community we have in Amberley once we are allowed out!

The Church (our future landlords !)

I started this report by expressing my thanks to the management committee, who have worked so hard behind the scenes, fund raising, organising events, researching all the ins and outs of the retail world. I wanted also to thank the church community led by Reverend John Spiers and Church wardens John and Henry.

It is this team who have driven the process of seeking approvals from the diocese, and have recognised the need to upgrade some of the facilities at the church for the benefit of us all. Without their support we would not have a scheme, and we are all grateful to them. The 'Improving Access for All' appeal has been doing very well – although it still remains a little way short of its target.

Links with the school

We have established a partnership with Amberley Parochial School to include the children in the process of setting up a community shop, and to use the shop and café as a learning tool. The children are already excited to be involved.

2. Challenges

Building work tenders.

Four contractors agreed to submit tenders against David Newton's specification and drawings for the shop envelope, balcony alterations and the WC fit out works in the vestry. Tenders were eventually issued earlier this summer.

Two contractors then declined to bid, and two contractors submitted tenders. At the time of writing we await the architect's tender summary but it is clear that both tenders have come in significantly over our budget.

There are 2 main reasons for this:

1. It is probably the worst time in recent history to be commissioning building work; builders are over stretched with too much work, and material shortages and supply problems have resulted in major price increases. Of particular note is the recent tripling of timber prices.
2. The scope of works and the specifications are to a very high standard which is reflected in the tender returns. However we need to cut our coat according to our cloth and the final outcome which will stand the test of time and form part of our future heritage, may need to be achieved in stages.

Change to Post Office's policy

You will probably have learned from previous newsletters that the Post Office no longer support the notion of a Post Office Local in Amberley. This was only made known to the Management Committee after the share offer closed. Prior to this, the Post Office had given us every encouragement with our plans for the church location. The reasons given for their change of policy are a re-evaluation of their coverage post pandemic and the fact that we have a visiting post office van (something we pushed for after the closure of the old post office!). We realise that this is a disappointment to some members but we are not in a position to change the Post Office's policy. This is why we have proposed a daily postal collection service from the shop by Royal Mail and a posting facility within the shop. We are pursuing the details of this scheme and how it will work and the Management Committee will advise further when we have them.

The way forward

Your committee believes that the need for this community hub is greater than ever.

There are two key issues that the management team need to resolve:

In the short term there is the question of building and set up costs, and we need to find a solution. Your committee has only just received the details of the two returned bids but we are looking at ways in which the build costs can be significantly reduced. We will report to members once we have reviewed all the options. These are likely to include a review of the scope, the specification and the means of procurement of the works necessary to establish the shop.

The longer term question concerns the assured future success of the facility. Your committee has worked hard over the past 4 years to establish a community shop and café in the village, our commitment has always been buoyed by the support shown by supporters (now members) who have said that they would welcome and use this facility. It is no surprise that plans should take this long to develop but since we began there have been many changes to our lives. We have experienced the Covid pandemic, two lock downs and hence many people have established new routines in the way they shop, communicate and interact. A post office local is not now part of the scheme, at least in the foreseeable future, and also our demographic make-up has changed with the arrival of many new families into the community.

Your management committee is firmly of the view that despite the different landscape this project will bring great benefits to the community. That said, your committee would like to seek your views and re-affirm the level of support that we have to make this project happen. So we intend to take further soundings shortly and secure what we hope will be a

strong re-affirmation of members' commitment to the project and to ensure that the potential demand for the shop in the community continues to make the project economically sustainable. We will also contact those who are new to the village, and who have not commented before.

Conclusion

The central vision for this project remains unaltered: We are seeking to create a community hub serving the whole of Amberley. It will be a convenient place to buy good quality provisions, it will support the local economy, it will be sustainable, it will be a social hub where people can meet and talk, and it will support local good causes, and will provide learning and employment opportunities for all ages.

We are at a cross roads now. Before we can move ahead, we need to address our building costs and I am confident that it will be possible to bring the building costs down to an affordable level while maintaining the quality appropriate to Church. We also need to seek confirmation that demand remains strong for this exciting project and so we look forward to hearing your feedback.