

**Minutes of the First Meeting to discuss the development of a
Community Shop and Post Office in Bradwell on Sea
held at The Post Office, High Street on
Wednesday 3rd June 2009 at 8.00pm.**

Chaired by – Cllr Allen (Chairman of Bradwell Parish Council), Reverend Margaret Whitford & Mr Michael Baker (MB, owner of the village shop premises).

Minuted by – Donna Tristram

1. Welcome

Cllr Allen welcomed all those present.

2. Introduction - Aim of the Meeting

Cllr Allen explained the aim of the meeting (Appendix 1) was to decide if there was enough support amongst residents for a community run shop and post office. Cllr Allen discussed the merits of a village shop as a place which not only provided groceries but, social support, community information, somewhere to meet: a focal point for the village. She explained that two waves of volunteers would be required in the initial stages:-

- (i) to set up the business
- (ii) to help get the premises ready

3. Introduction – History

Reverend Margaret Lawrence continued the introduction (Appendix 2) by explaining that even though an attempt to open a village shop in the church had failed due to lack of support she, like MB, hoped and believed passionately in this project. She concluded by quoting the findings of a recent report which confirmed that village life tends to die off after the loss of the village shop.

4. How a Community Shop Works

MB presented a slide show (extracts attached, Appendix 3) explaining the basis of a community run shop enterprise. VIRSA, a charity organisation set up to assist community shops, state that on average a community run shop has a turnover of £ 95,000, employees 1.3 persons, has a volunteer base of 25 and makes a profit. Michael advised that a similar sized village in Essex, Henham, which has operated a community run shop for 10 years, has only been unable to open twice due to lack of volunteers. MB explained that three boxes entitled, “Now”, “Later” and “Never” had been placed in the shop so that residents could vote on the desirability of certain items such as newspapers, perishables, cigarettes and alcohol after the meeting had ended. He also explained that the start up costs for stock, insurance etc., could be raised from interest free loans from community members (say £ 100 each person) and/or grants, which were generally offered on a 50/50 contribution basis. Michael advised that realistically the shop could open within 1-2 months, probably initially with a limited range of stock.

5. The Post Office

MB presented a slide show (extracts attached, Appendix 3). He confirmed two meetings had been held with Essex County Council who advised they are willing to fund the re-opening of the post office on a part time basis (probably 5 mornings per week). Bradwell on Sea finds itself in a very unique and privileged position, as Essex Council are the only county currently funding these projects and will only be able to support 20 or so ventures of this nature. In return, Essex County Council requires the shop to house an information point, promoting their facilities, for which they would pay a small annual rent. Essex County Council will also consider contributing towards any renovation costs to bring the premises up to health and safety standard.

6. Questions

The meeting was then opened up to questions.

Q Will newspapers be sold as the shop will need to be open 7 days per week? Has this been considered?

A This will need to be decided by the committee but realistically newspapers would not be offered from day one due to, amongst other issues, obtaining the contract to sell them.

Q Do Post Office Limited/Essex County Council need to see the shop open and running for, say, a year or so, before they commit their money to funding the post office?

A No, Essex County Council are ready to commit to the project now, they just need a shop of some sort in operation.

- Q** What was the response from the community? How many questionnaires were returned?
A Out of 400 questionnaires, around 30 have been returned, which is a reasonably good return rate.
- Q** Does the community shop at Henham sell papers?
A Only on a Sunday to order – it is difficult to get the contract to sell papers.
- Q** Does Michael Baker, as landlord, have any restrictions about opening hours?
A No
- Q** How much of a grant could be attained for the project?
A There are grants available up to £ 20,000, but the community need to match the funding. Essex County Council have commented that they would consider funding a toilet and Michael suggested being ambitious in asking for money. An awning is another possible purchase. The shop is in a reasonable condition and would only need painting and minor repair. Cllr Bateman offered to install the toilet.
- Q** Has any consideration been given to the Waterside Community as they have also lost their shop? Could there be a subsidiary, perhaps in the old chandlery at the marina?
A This has not been considered, but yes could be, as it is up to the Management Committee to decide. Perhaps a mobile arrangement run through a pre-order system could be set up, similar to the mobile library.
- Q** What does VIRSA stand for?
A Not sure, but they have recently changed their title anyway.
- Q** How many volunteers do you want?
A This is what needs to be discussed and decided, but firstly we need to know if we have the support here to move forward with this venture.
- Q** Who is the Management Committee – are you? (addressed to people chairing the meeting).
A No and we are not necessarily putting ourselves forward for the job either. Again, it is up to the community to decide.
- Q** With regards to the start up cost loans, could they be donations?
A Yes, this could be possible.
- Q** Has using a distributor such as “Cost-Cutter”, a company who would stock the shop been considered?
A No, nothing like this has been looked into yet, but yes, the Management Committee, once formed, could consider this option. To date, consideration has been given to the requirement for two groups of volunteers, one for business management and one for maintenance (a more in informal group). A second public meeting would need to take place just before the shop opens to decide on the Management Committee.
- Q** What will happen if the all work is done in setting up the shop and then there are no volunteers to run it?
A There are always risks, but to go on the assumption that it will work is probably the best way to drive the venture forward. Reverend Margaret commented that the residents at Downhall for example, are asking “when” not “if”.
- Q** What happens if the landlord decides he has had enough?
A MB responded that as landlord this is not his intention, but he accepts that the future is unknown. However, as with Henham Community Shop, ownership can change hands and the business can continue unaltered.
- Q** Would there be a lease, which would need to be honoured by the next owner?
A Yes, as was the case with Henham.
- Q** Is the shop separate from the next door property now?
A Yes
- Q** How will the community be informed of the response of this meeting and the questionnaire feedback as there should be a follow up to keep the momentum?
A Via the Parish Magazine and any other suggestions will be considered.

Q Would the shop stock local produce, such as Sarah Green's Organics and would the producers be able to offer the produce on a sale or return basis to the shop?

A Yes, this would be considered by the Management Committee.

Q (Question to MB, Landlord) Will you be putting your own money into the venture?

A No, I will maintain the shop and it looks like I will need to fund putting in heating, but it is my ambition that the management committee will run the shop and I intend to be a volunteer.

Q Are you looking to start the management committee tonight?

A Yes, if anyone wants to put themselves forward.

Q Would a tea room be considered?

A As long as health and safety issues were not a problem.

7. Decision regarding whether the project should proceed

Cllr Allen asked for a show of hands to support the project.

The attendees indicated their support for this venture.

8. Opening Day Discussion

MB suggested a target date for the Bradwell Pilgrimage (4th July) as the shop would legally be able to run from this date, business rates having to be paid and insurance. It may prove too optimistic for the official first day of trading, but instead act as more of a fundraising day, where ice creams and refreshments could be sold to not only raise revenue, but also draw attention and raise interest in the project.

One resident offered his immediate support as a shop volunteer and offered to work towards the 4th July opening.

Cllr Bateman offered to co-ordinate the maintenance works.

A discussion regarding the 4th July opening ensued and it was suggested that tea, coffee and perhaps even cream teas or sandwiches, could be offered in return for donations. Reverend Lawrence advised that he used to visit a book shop in Manchester which used this idea very successfully raising a lot of good will and trade. Either the village hall or church would hopefully be able to offer the use of an urn. (the church has an 8 litre one).

9. The Next Step

After a general discussion it was agreed that sweets, newspapers and cards were important products to sell.

It was agreed that another meeting would be arranged to discuss the campaign for the pilgrimage.

MB advised that it would probably need 6-8 people to spearhead the project over the next couple of months.

MB advised that 2 job descriptions were listed on the shop counter and any interested persons should approach him to put their name forward.

The attendees were then asked to take some time after the official meeting was closed to record any comments or suggestions on a wall board and also any persons wishing to volunteer were asked to make themselves known to Michael.

No definite date was set for the next meeting.

10. Close of meeting at 9.03pm

Cllr Allen closed the meeting thanking all participants for attending.

Appendix 1

Do we as a village community feel that we need a shop and a post office and how do we want it run?

There are many advantages to having a village shop – it is not that it's somewhere to get the weekly shopping – most people go to the supermarket – it's a place that is convenient for the forgotten things or for people that can't always manage to journey into town. It is a place that local people can sell their produce or to drop in for a newspaper. It is a social support network to find out what is going on in the village, who is poorly, talking to neighbours and giving us a sense of belonging to a community. It's somewhere that will sell BADS tickets or hold onto prescriptions or just to have a chat.

We are here to decide what we want and how we can achieve it. Many people have tried to make money from running a village shop, but the reality is that to be successful there has to be a strong volunteer force of interested, committed people to initiate the whole thing. We will need some people who will give the shop a face lift and a group who are happy to thin about rotas, finance and actually setting up a business.

Tonight we need to try and gauge how the majority of us feel.

Appendix 2

Some of you are probably wondering why Laurence and I and the Church are involved in this project. We're involved because we feel it's important for the Community and **so** important, that when we lost both the shops here in the village, we attempted to set up a part-time Community Shop in the Church building itself – but in the end sadly had to give up the idea because not enough people supported it. Our shop served the very useful function of being a place for people to meet and have a cup of coffee and exchange their news, but not enough people were coming through the doors to make it viable as an actual Village Community shop, which was what it was primarily all about.

Michael has come to Bradwell in the hope that this building will become a proper functioning Community Shop, and give back to the Village something of value that's been lost. I'm hoping that today his dream and ours will become a reality.

Up until two years ago, Bradwell boasted a village hall, three pubs, a primary school, two shops with post offices and a church. Two years later, the two shops with their post offices have gone, we are struggling to maintain our church and across the country village pubs are struggling as well. My fear is that unless we do something very quickly, we will lose what community buildings are left, and together with that, any sense of community spirit and cohesiveness.

A recent report on rural communities made by Coventry University and supported by Defra concluded that: **“Five local facilities are particularly important to rural people: the village hall, pub, primary school, shop and church.”**

(Faith in Rural Communities: Contributions of Social Capital to Community Vibrancy – quotation from a recent study made by Coventry University & supported by Defra)

We've got a chance here to bring back the shop and post office and keep the community alive.

I passionately believe in the importance of keeping the Community of Bradwell vibrant. We have something very special here and something worth fighting for. The Parish Council are giving the project their fullest support and the County Council and Post Office believe that sustaining community is **so** important that they're willing to make grants available to make the project viable. The question is, “Do we also believe it's important enough to make the idea of a Community Shop for Bradwell into a reality?”