

SARAH'S SPEECH OPEN MEETING AUGUST 13TH 2024.

It is my responsibility to bring you a report on what we have been doing over the last eleven months and bring you totally up to date.

Firstly, I would like to thank, on behalf of the Directors, all the individuals who have tirelessly given of their time, experience and resources to assist us – you will know who you are

The steering group – what an amazing group of people – thank you.

Three mentors who ably professionalised our activity from the structure of the CIC and our responsibilities, to reviewing every word of our Levelling Up Grant application – thank you

The resident who paid for the survey and lots of leaflet printing – thank you

The shop owner who provided our banner – thank you

The retired surveyor who tidied up our plans for the pre-planning application and the architect who advised on the route to full planning – thank you

Editors of local magazines who monthly provided space for our news – thank you

Those who worked behind the scenes at events, delivered letters, helped with petitions – thank you.

For the use of other's social media – thank you

I am sure I have missed many – please forgive me – even this week three tradesmen dropped everything to come to our rescue – a locksmith, fire-alarm and burglar alarm specialists – thank you

We worked so many hours on the grant application, firstly the research and evidence gathering for what felt like months, - we felt ready to apply and succeeded in the first round – in April the government added additional criteria and we learned there was one final window for application – 31st May. The work load became intense but we were ready and we and our mentors were optimistic of a successful outcome.

Then the previous government announced the election, purdah came in to play – no decisions, no communications – zilch. The current government announced 'no levelling up grants. Devastating news – but we would not give up – despondent but not broken by this rather large hiccup.

The Directors and Steering Group went back to basics – what was our purpose? TO SAVE OUR POST OFFICE.

We had to implement a plan B. And then came the unexpected and extraordinary good news – an anonymous donor came forward to provide all the funds needed to purchase the Post Office and Village Store business but not the building.

Luckily, at the same time, the property on Grassmere Parade that traded as Corals became available to lease. In order to secure the property, we had to move fast and have managed to negotiate very favourable terms.

Mark, the vendor approved the Post Office and shop deal, a price was agreed and Heads of Terms signed. We are currently negotiating the takeover with the Post Office, which may take 6-9 months as there are many hoops to jump through. Don't worry, the village post office and shop will continue as it is, until then. The staff are fully updated and, I'm sure you'll be delighted to hear, will be coming with us.

Grassmere Parade is where the original village post office was located, the post office is coming home! This is a bright, airy space, big enough to house two post office counters, a banking hub and enlarged shop. It is still in the heart of the village with nearby parking and disabled access. The beating heart of the community remains, exactly there – in the centre of the village.

The contributions you have made and donations moving forward, are as vital as they ever were. They enable us to transform the space, transfer the business and finance the Post Office and shop until it is up and running. Costings suggest that in time, without the overheads of a building that needs constant maintenance, this will lead to increased viability and profitability for the future. This means in due course we hope to be able to begin to repay loans on a pro rata basis.

We believe this to be an excellent result enabling us to Save Our Post Office and we hope you agree! Obviously, we will have to suspend some of our other plans in the short term, eg the Community Hub, but we're working on that.