

**BROUGHTON VILLAGE STORE
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UPPER TWEED COMMUNITY NEWS**

Village shop expansion edges closer

When Broughton Village Store reopened in June 2019 as a Community-owned Shop, it was always envisaged that at some point the fabric of the shop would require some serious improvement. The building acquired by Upper Tweed Community Enterprise Ltd is wind and watertight, but the rear extension is of primitive construction and the garden boasts a collection of multi-level concrete and timber sheds linked by an uneven set of concrete steps. There is no insulation and few concessions to the safety or comfort of staff having to carry shop produce up and down icy steps with no handrail.

After purchase, the Board of UTCE Ltd decided to put these significant shortfalls to one side in order to reopen the shop as quickly as possible, as every day that passed without a village shop eroded the future viability of the enterprise. That said, there was a massive voluntary effort to refurbish the shop's interior to create a new and welcoming environment for customers.

The new shop quietly picked up trade for the first 8 months after opening, but the otherwise unwelcome arrival of Covid-19 in early 2020 had a transformative effect on sales, which practically doubled overnight, from about £19,000 monthly to £37,000. The range of goods rapidly expanded, especially fresh fruit, meat, and vegetables. Volunteers scoured the country for elusive loo roll and with additional voluntary support we started deliveries of essentials to isolating households. Soon we had acquired a van.

As the pressures of the pandemic eased, the shop successfully retained and built on the enhanced level of sales. The Board of UTCE decided that this would be a good moment to establish the feasibility of digging out the steeply sloping garden and extending the shop into the space behind. Quite apart from the commercial imperative, it was considered vital to address staff safety issues as soon as possible. With the generous support of SSE's Clyde Borders Wind Farm we were able to employ an architect, engineer, and quantity surveyor. Drawings subsequently produced showed a much-enlarged shop, with a manager's office, staff toilet, and stockroom all under cover on one level. Planning permission was granted.

But there was much work still to do. Local volunteers removed an ash tree through the shop, twig by twig, and trial pits were dug in the soil to check ground conditions. Board members negotiated diplomatically with up to eight close neighbours to get access to the garden for machinery. It was soon apparent that the shop could not possibly trade while the extension was being built, so the Board sought alternative locations for a temporary shop. After some discussion, the Management Committee of the Village Hall kindly agreed that the shop could occupy the currently vacant cottage annexed to the south end of the hall, but this too would require some minor modifications to make a serviceable retail space. Once again SSE stepped in with a generous grant not only to enable plans to be drawn up and permissions sought, but to pay for the work itself.

This is where we find ourselves now: almost all permissions are in place and work should begin on the Village Hall cottage within a couple of months. At the same time we will begin the all important fundraising for the main work on the shop, which is expected to cost around £240,000. Part of this will be the much anticipated second share issue, which will be discussed at UTCE Ltd's Third Annual Members' Meeting on Thursday 15th September 2022 at 7pm in the small Village Hall. Only existing shareholders are eligible to vote at the AMM but after the official business is concluded we have decided to open the meeting to all members of the public who have an interest in the shop and its future viability. Please look out for posters and fliers in the shop with more details.

Christopher Lambton
Chairman UTCE Ltd