

Optimism over village shop's future

THINGS are looking up for villagers in Hallbankgate as they take the first steps to secure the future of their only shop.

Discussions on how to save the closure-threatened shop, which has served the community for more than 100 years, moved forward at the first committee meeting on Monday.

It was decided this was "an opportunity to create a village hub" and offer additional services under one roof, something that is likely to be in the Co-operative building, although not definitely.

Farlam councillor Steve Bowles said: "It was a very positive meeting. We have lots of people interested in driving the scheme forward.

"What we have done is to form our aims and objectives. Hallbankgate Hub aims to continue or establish a retail facility meeting the identified needs of the community and offering other desired community facilities and benefits."

The group of 30 formed four divisions that will look at different aspects of the hub initiative including a business plan, negotiations with Scotmid - the Edinburgh-based firm that runs Lakes and Dales Co-operative - a membership scheme and surveying the needs of the com-



Positive: Sue Stoddart, senior supervisor, with councillor and regular customer Steve Bowles, at the Co-op in Hallbankgate

munity, which would include a questionnaire.

Members elected John Foster as chairman, Christine

Lloyd as secretary and Aimee Barber, who will deal with communications.

In November, Lakes and

Dales Co-operative revealed that it would sell the shop as a going concern, but if a buyer did not come forward by April the company said it would be forced to close the business, as it had a low turnover.

Closure would mean the loss of five jobs and the community fears it would be a devastating blow if they lost the multi-purpose shop, which also houses a post office counter and Library Link, where books can be borrowed or requested.

Outside Hallbankgate itself, 20 elderly customers would lose the delivery service it offers.

A public meeting last month saw huge support for running the shop for the community. Forty people said they would volunteer to work in it, with a similar number saying they would invest.

Mr Bowles said it was too early to say how this would work, but that it is being considered in the business plan.

The Plunkett Foundation has been approached for guidance and advice on how the shop could operate as a community venture.

The committee are due to meet again on Monday, February 2.

For details about Hallbankgate Hub email aimeebarber@hotmail.com