

Too convenient to see it go



Great save: John Foster at the Hallbankgate Co-op convenience store

John Foster knows all too well about how to take on a community venture. He and a group of residents from Hallbankgate, near Brampton, are within reach of owning their only shop, which closed in June.

But it's been almost a year since the group, who formed community benefit society Hallbankgate Hub, feared they would be hit with a triple blow when Scotmid Cooperative decided to close the branch because it had a low turnover. The shop also housed the village's post office and a library link.

It was being sold as a going concern until April but Hallbankgate Hub negotiated with Scotmid to keep the store open for a further two months.

They have raised £70,000 through a community share offer and were successful in getting a match-funded Power to Change grant from the Big Lottery Fund.

He says they would have struggled without The Plunkett Foundation, which provides advice and support to more than 300 community ventures across the country.

"It was from them that we got our model rules that became our

constitution as a community benefit society. We'd have been floundering without that."

Kimberley Lawson has been in contact with Mr Foster who says he is happy to share their experience.

Mr Foster thinks the closure of shops goes hand in hand with the demise of other services including public transport.

But, he says, there's also the aspect that a shop provides a focus for a community. "Plunkett has evidence that when shops go, other community services follow. It's kind of like a domino effect. And it's in order to prevent that, that I

think communities have been taking these matters into their own hands and doing what we've been doing.

"There is a trend for small rural shops to close and that trend is partly to do with people having cars and not using the shops. They don't have as greater dependency as there used to be.

"It's also, simply, economics. These shops tend to have quite small margins."

Hallbankgate Hub will manage to save what the shop was losing on the staffing by having one paid member of staff and a team of volunteers.