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# Shop's shut, but optimism is now growing over bid to buy it

## Hallbankgate society's talks with Scotmid make good progress

VILLAGERS have lost their fight to keep their only shop open – but insist talks about its purchase are looking more promising than ever.

Hallbankgate's Co-operative closed last week at the end of a two-month extension period to give the community group wanting to buy it more time to gather funds and agree on a sale.

Following a period of uncertainty only weeks ago, Hallbankgate Hub Community Benefit Society and shop owners Scotmid agree that they are making progress.

Although negotiations on the sale are still being finalised, the society's chairman, John Foster, thinks it won't be long before they have some good news for the village.

He said: "We hope we've found a way of collaborating to make this work. We now feel confident that we're moving forward."

The shop, which is being sold as a going concern, closed as planned on June 1. Its original date of closure was April 1.

The shop has served Hall-

BY JENNY BROWN

bankgate, near Brampton, since the late 19th century and Mr Foster said without it some people would struggle.

"For some it just means an extra trip or two in the car. For other people without cars or who can't drive for various reasons, given that we've only got one bus a day into Brampton, it will cause difficulty," he said.

"On the positive side we have made very good progress in our discussions with Scotmid since the impasse a while ago.

"We are hoping to move fast once we've got something signed on the dotted line. We're talking about the coming couple of months or three months."

A bid is due to be submitted to Power To Change, a new charitable trust set up by the Big Lottery Fund to support and develop community business ventures.

This would be a grant the society would need to match-fund, but is dependent upon the completion of a sale.

Mr Foster said: "It is a sub-



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stantial sum which will enable us, if we get in, to do necessary refurbishment and get ourselves moving with

initial stock and get the business going."

Hallbankgate Hub Community Benefit Society

already has promises of about £20,000 from pledged shares and Farlam Parish Trust, which will hand over

£13,000 when plans are underway.

Following a successful bid, renovation works and improvements to preserve the old building would be carried out.

Hallbankgate Hub wants to provide a community cafe and revive the shop and its services which included a Post Office counter and Library Link. Further down the line a delivery service could be introduced.

Everything is dependent on grants and local support through shares.

"We'll be doing what we can to make it work," added Mr Foster.

Malcolm Brown, head of corporate communications at Scotmid, said "positive is the key word" although he stressed negotiations, which have moved on, were ongoing.

"It's certainly looking much, much better than it was a couple of weeks ago, so it's very positive," he added.

Mr Brown added that negotiations with the five members of staff were also ongoing.