

# It's one very happy Hub as village shop sale succeeds

## Delight all round as community completes Co-op store takeover

BY JENNY BROWN

VILLAGERS who worked tirelessly to save their only shop are preparing to reopen it - as owners.

Community benefit society Hallbankgate Hub Ltd has successfully bought the former Co-operative, owned by Edinburgh-based Scotmid, for £45,000 almost a year after the company announced it was no longer viable.

Refurbishment work to transform the shop in Hallbankgate into a community hub - complete with post office and library services as well as a cafe and information point - is soon set to begin, and it is hoped the shop will reopen in early spring.

The Co-operative, which closed in June, had served its community for more than 140 years.

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.

A combination of community shares and a £13,000 donation from Farlam Parish Trust raised £70,000, which was match-funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Power to Change charitable trust.

It is the first time Scotmid has sold one of its properties to a community group and both parties admit it has not been straightforward.

"We set out on this route and I don't think any of us anticipated that it would



Now at their convenience: Refurbishment work to transform the shop in Hallbankgate will start soon

take this long to buy the premises," said John Foster, Hallbankgate Hub chairman. "But on the plus side, the time has been necessary in order to raise the funds and get the matching funding from the Big Lottery. So it's all come together very satisfactorily."

"Although it's taken time, we're now in as good a position as we could have hoped to be. It's been worth the wait to be able to have got the grant money we have and to have got the local support we have."

Malcolm Brown, head of corporate communications at Scotmid, was delighted. He said having no template meant "a tremendous amount of work" made it happen.

"We wish them the best for the future. It shows what hard work, perseverance and a willingness to see

something through can achieve," he said.

"Although the size of the store meant we couldn't make it work, it doesn't mean to say that a community, who will have a whole different set of parameters, can't make it work."

Shareholder and local businessman Peter Lloyd, 62, welcomed the news. Between him running Fine Hardwood Boxes and his wife Christine running The Old School House B&B, the couple used the shop daily.

"I believe in the village shop. I think it's an excellent thing for there to be one in a village. It makes for a village to have a heart."

"You don't see anybody from one day to the next without the shop," said Mr Lloyd. "I think it will make a difference to the village when it reopens and hopefully everyone will be in-



Joy: Some of the shareholders taking over the shop. From left, chairman of the Hallbankgate Hub John Foster, Peter Lloyd and Isla Bober with her children Ivy, left, four and Ezra, two

LOUISE PORTER

involved and will embrace it and take it on."

Mum-of-two Isla Bober, 37, who is also a shareholder, has missed the convenience of the shop since it closed.

She used it regularly to buy bits and pieces, as well as for its post office and library link services which

she is keen to see return.

Alterations will be completed through a mixture of voluntary and paid workers, and Tim Brown of Hayton-based Ashton Design is the architect for the project.

On completion of the sale Mr Foster added that people might feel more confident to invest in the share prospec-

tus which is now open-ended. Shares can be bought in multiples of £20.

Visit hallbankgatehub.org/ or call secretary Steve Bowles on 07765 690851 for details. Applications can be sent to The Secretary, Hallbankgate Hub, Peel House, Hallbankgate, Brampton, CA8 2NJ.