

Planning bid delay hits shop opening

Likely to be month after June date

BY JENNY BROWN

VILLAGERS hoping to reopen their community shop face a further delay – after learning they have to apply for planning permission.

Hallbankgate has been without its corner store for 10 months already, and it will be a little longer before residents can walk to buy their groceries again.

Hallbankgate Hub has applied for planning permission for a change of use of the shop which it wants to reopen with an additional cafe and resources area.

Campaigners have been working for more than a year to ensure Hallbankgate will once again retain the shop which had been part of the makeup of the village for more than 140 years.

John Foster, committee chairman, said: "We're just hoping the planning application won't have any problems.

"We were originally advised that the extent of the changes wouldn't require planning consent, but now we've been re-advised that they do.

"We hadn't factored going through planning in our timescale."

The group had hoped to be open by June 1 – exactly one year since the former Co-operative closed – but now expect it could be at least a month later.

John said: "It would have been quite a significant date, but when you compare this with some of the stories we've heard through the grapevine about community shops getting themselves up and running, I don't think the timescale is that out of the range.

"These things take time, particularly when they're



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been done by a group of volunteers, all of whom have other commitments and other jobs. We are reasonably pleased with our progress so far."

Hallbankgate Hub has applied for planning for both phases of the development and have an outline budget of £50,000. Phase one will see the shop, cafe and post office established followed by further facilities, including exhibition space and a community resource area, in phase two if the first phase is profitable.

The Hub will have a central service till and cafe service area, with space either side for seating and tables. The shop area will be slightly smaller than the previous shop. An existing porch will be removed and a new oak porch built over the original front door.

"Hopefully, people will think of it as a place to go and spend some time and not just buy their milk," said John.

The three-storey shop has been cleared out and a local builder has expressed an in-

terest in helping with the works for a discounted price, but it will have to go out to tender once detailed plans have been drawn up.

Meanwhile, the group has been granted £10,500 from the Cumbria Community Foundation. They have already been successful in receiving £70,000 through Power to Change, which was match-funded to money raised locally, and a grant of £30,000 from the Prince's Countryside Fund.

John said the planning process was a good way of testing the water at a further stage, and is keen to hear what people have to say because the committee want it to represent the community.

"If people are keen to see this happen it is helpful if they express their enthusiasm," he said. "Judging by the survey we did in February or March last year, which was really why we carried on, there was large-scale support for this."

Comments can be made on the application 16/0209 on Carlisle City Council's website until April 8.