

Public Meeting | 8th November 2023, St Mary's Centre, Felpham

St Mary's Centre was packed for the first Friends of Felpham public meeting, despite earlier traffic problems. Many apologies were also received as a result of the gridlock. The Save Felpham Village Post Office Campaign steering group outlined the reasons why they believe Felpham Post Office needs to be saved. From the overwhelming response, it appears residents, of both Felpham and beyond, agree.

Felpham is a very special place and most residents have made a positive choice to be or remain here. Too many vital amenities have been lost over the years and the meeting revealed a powerful desire to keep the Post Office, to enhance it and revitalise it. No one wants to see Felpham become merely a dormitory village. Having great pubs, cafes, churches etc. is what keeps Felpham vibrant and the Post Office is an important part of this.

The aim is to purchase, maintain, and grow the Post Office site, which is financially viable now, and would become even more so, securing it for generations to come.

* The Post Office would be opened 6 days a week. As a Branch Post Office with 'fortress' status, our Post Office provides more than just a postal counter. It holds cash to help local businesses and feeds its own ATM.

* As banks close on Bognor High Street, it is intended, in agreement with the GPO, to run additional "across the counter banking services" covering all principal banks (e.g. NatWest, Lloyds, Barclays, HSBC etc.), providing everything a high street bank does, but in the heart of our village.

* The shop would be enlarged and made more user friendly in terms of accessibility; the stock would not just be essentials but also offer additional items the villagers want and need.

* The upstairs of the house would be converted into a holiday let to provide a steady stream of income.

* The ground floor of the house becomes a Community Hub hosting a myriad of social and interactive activities - IT assistance, book exchange, information centre for local events and emergency alerts would be posted. The options are endless and the steering group are looking to local residents for more ideas.

* An important part of the plan is to retain the current staff. Charlie will remain as "Charlie the Post" and with the GPO will train others to work alongside him. There will be additional paid positions in the shop to cover the increased open hours. A 'paper person' needs to be added who is not shy of early morning starts - this role would ideally be a job-share. Of course, we would maintain the team of paper boys and girls.

* And finally, the garden: planners have indicated that with extra landscaping a mews of small retail units for local independent businesses is possible - an expansion of the pop up idea.

Sarah Hodgson, a member of the steering group, confessed that her middle of the night idea of 1000 people each donating £1000 was a tad simplistic. What is needed is for each person with a heart for our village to donate what they can afford - be that £10 or £10,000. This would mean that with additional grants and sponsorships, we, the community, can own our Post Office and village store.

By purchasing and running OUR Post Office, ensuring an important centre for our village, we can improve the viability of other local businesses. Other villages have done it, why not Felpham? Findon, Fittleworth, Kirdford, Slindon... If they can do it, we can too!

Can you help us in any way?

At this very moment the steering group needs additional expertise and experience or fund-raising, making grant applications, legal matters, social media. If you have any experience and are willing to help, please contact us.

Every generation needs to add its own input into our village. Now it's our time. What needs doing now is to SAVE OUR POST OFFICE.

Donate, and be an Ambassador (tell everyone - your friends and colleagues, your family people who have moved away...).

Send your suggestions and offers of help to info@friendsoffelpham.org

Just an idea suggested at the meeting but we thought a really good one! Family asking you what you want for Christmas but you have everything you want and don't need anything. How about a donation to Friends of Felpham to help save the Post Office?!

We can do this. Together, we can do this.



Photo by Kate Stewart