

## Marsden Grocery Cooperative: Launch Event

Sat, 29<sup>th</sup> September, Mechanics Hall

Around 100 people were present.

### Introduction & Background

Taru Sinclair introduced herself and explained that she facilitating the event. She welcomed people and explained the background to the idea.

10 years ago, around the time of the launch of the Green Valley Grocer (GVG) in Slaithwaite, a group of Marsden residents asked GVG to look at the possibility of setting-up a second shop in Marsden. They looked at the premises until recently occupied by 'Goodness Me', but there were difficulties with the building—in particular it did not have adequate space for a cold store – and GVG felt that they were not in a position to run two stores at such an early stage in their own business's development. Roger and Lindsey took on the business and were later replaced by Natasha and 'Goodness Me'.

'Goodness Me' has recently ceased trading and the café next door is extending into the premises. Two weeks ago a small group of people met and returned to the possibility of creating a cooperative greengrocer. They took a look at two further sets of premises – Cubecure and 'Owt for Nowt'. 'Owt for Nowt' is very promising – in particular it has a large storeroom at the back.

The group therefore decided to call a public meeting to test the appetite of the village for setting something up along the lines of GVG but Marsden-shaped.

### Green Valley Groceries

Taru then introduced Jon Walker from GVG who was one of the founding directors of the cooperative.

Jon gave the meeting a brief account of how GVG was set up. It happened in an incredibly short space of time – less than two months from the initial idea, through the creation of the business plan, to the share offer and the opening of the shop itself. He pointed out that cooperatives have a considerably better chance of success than the average small business and explained the membership and share issue.

### Premises - Layout

Taru then introduced Gordon Bruce, an architect from Marsden who looked at 'Owt for Nowt' last week.

Gordon explained that he has conducted a basic survey of the condition of the shop and its layout. He has put together some initial ideas for a layout which he was happy to share with people after the formal part of the meeting.

### Premises - Rental

Taru then welcomed Pete Toon who has been speaking to the estate agent dealing with 'Owt for Nowt' and taking advice from a local property consultant who is familiar with commercial property in Marsden.

The landlord would like c. £12K rent per year, however, the local property consultant has said that he believes that this is ambitious. The letting of commercial property in Marsden is, as we can all see, not going well at the moment and 'Owt for Nowt' has not been successfully let, apart from to the Council (which is a different matter altogether), for some years. He has therefore recommended that we attempt to negotiate a lower offer which might include a significant rent-free period.

### Organisation and Business

Taru then introduced Camilla Govan, another of the founding directors of GVG.

Camilla detailed the stages through which we now need to go, with a particular emphasis on the creation of a sound business plan and the importance of the share issue. There are specialist business advisors who can advise people setting-up cooperatives and she recommended contacting one of them. She also pointed out that investing in a coop was the same as any other investment, and that it was possible that the investment could be lost. Therefore the business plan was key and people should not invest more than they could afford to lose.

### Steering Group Setup

Finally, Taru introduced Fiona Russell, who was another of the founding directors of GVG, and is a Marsden resident and one of the people who have been looking at 'Owt for Nowt' proposal.

Fiona emphasised the need for speed. If the proposal is to go ahead, we need a legally constituted entity – the cooperative – which can negotiate with the landlord and agree terms asap, otherwise we will lose this opportunity. To this end, we need a steering group and a number of satellite teams which will take on key areas such as the creation of a business plan and constitution, premises and branding, communications and operational issues, including staffing.

For the steering group we will need people with time and enthusiasm to work hard for 3 to 4 months. The satellite groups will feed into the steering group and can include people with less time, but who have particular skills and enthusiasm. The aim is to set-up both the steering group and the satellite teams next week.

**People who are interested are invited to come to a meeting in the main hall at the Mechanics on Tuesday 9 September 7.30-9pm.**