

Home Living

THERE'S PLENTY FOR YOU HERE

This local shop isn't just for local people – it's run by them too. *Rob Kingston* reports from a Hampshire village that refused to lose a vital hub

On a sunny Saturday morning, the village shop in Broughton is humming with activity. Bikes lean outside while children run in to spend pocket money on sweets; dogs are tied up while their owners pop in for a paper; and there's a steady stream of customers picking up fresh bread and eggs or posting parcels. The espresso machine is steaming away, trying to keep up with locals stopping for a coffee and a chat. It's a vital local hub – yet without a concerted community effort, this pretty spot in Hampshire's Test Valley would be one of the growing number of British villages left without a shop or post office.

Three years ago, Bob and Judith Gillespie, the owners of West View Stores, on the high street, announced that they were retiring after 16 years of running, and living above, the shop. With no buyers coming forward, residents needed to come up with a plan or face a four-mile drive to Stockbridge to buy a pint of milk.

A small group set up a committee and canvassed their neighbours about the best way forward. Buying the existing West View Stores was not an option – the former shop, now with planning permission for conversion into a family home, is on the market for £750,000 (chartersestateagents.co.uk) – and with no alternative premises available, they had

to get creative. Their solution wasn't a case of thinking outside the box, but thinking inside one: fitting an entire shop into a 30ft by 10ft shipping container in the village hall's car park.

To fund their "shop in a box", the committee, headed by Julia Jenkins and Jane Tabor, both retired and in their sixties, took advice from the Plunkett Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that helps rural community businesses get off the ground. They incorporated a "community benefit society" that enabled them to sell shares, which they priced at £20 to reflect the village's SO20 postcode. More than 200 residents invested,

