

Villagers suffer second community blow

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A COMMUNITY battling to save vital services has suffered another blow following the closure of its 100-year-old post office and village shop.

After serving Monks Eleigh for more than a century the village post office and stores has closed its doors for the final time.

It is the latest set back for residents who in recent times have seen one of the two village pubs close and seen plans to turn the local garage into a housing development approved.

Retiring postmaster Bill Cooper said: "This is quite an emotional day. There has been a post office and shop here for more than a hundred years, but it is just not viable any more.

"It is a sad day for the community and just hope they can find a replacement service as soon as possible."

Mr Cooper said he has spent the last 14 years battling to keep the shop profitable and blames its demise on changing lifestyles and the arrival of newcomers who do not support local services.

He is now seeking to sell his home and shop for residential use after failing to find a commercial buyer for the premises.

"About 10 years ago I put a lot of investment into expanding the facilities, but all it did was hold trade level. Local people have stayed very loyal, but newcomers get in their four-by-four vehicles and drive to the nearest supermarket, the bottom has dropped out of the market for village post offices," he added.

Despite the latest setback people in the village are battling to open new facilities to replace the lost services.

After two public meetings residents have set up a steering committee and have launched plans to open a new community shop and post office.

Funding for the scheme is being considered by the Countryside Agency and Mandy Coll, who has worked in the village post office for 20 years, has applied to become the new sub postmaster if the scheme goes ahead.

Nigel and Carol Ramsbottom, who run the Swan Inn, have indicated they would be prepared to let a barn in the yard of the pub be used for the new facility and discussions on the project are ongoing.

A Post Office spokesman said: "We would like to reassure residents in Monks Eleigh that Post Office Limited is doing everything it can to ensure postal services continue in the village. If anybody with suitable premises is interested in applying for the role of sub-postmaster they should contact us."