

Frequently Asked Questions

1) Why do we need a village shop?

In the Neighbourhood Plan, many residents highlighted the need for a village shop. In addition, it was envisaged the shop could be a community run business and the feasibility of a community shop was added to the Project List in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan also noted that any individual or group wishing to provide a shop, should develop a business plan to ensure it is a viable project.

A project has therefore been initiated to develop this concept. The enterprise is planned to be run as a Community Benefit Society; owned and run by the community.

2) Why do we need a new village hall?

In the Neighbourhood Plan, many residents highlighted the need for a new, larger village hall.

The Neighbourhood Plan also noted that any individual or group wishing to investigate the feasibility of this should contact the Parish Council with a business plan.

The current village hall is not big enough for many activities e.g. badminton, table tennis, pickleball, group activities such as Pilates etc. It's used mainly by the Nursery School, who use it 4 days a week during term times, precluding other groups from using it.

Additionally, it is not a space conducive for adults to use, nor is it aesthetic for many events or celebrations. It is essentially a Nursery School, not a village hall, and kitted out as such.

A project has been initiated to develop the concept and business plan.

3) Why do we need a new village hall when we have the church, which is already an underutilised space?

The church has been designed as a place of worship and as a result, many activities such as badminton, yoga, Pilates, pickleball, children's parties etc would not be viable in the church.

Whilst the space is great for some groups e.g., Choir practice, it is not a space that can be used for many community activities.

The project team are looking at new and additional facilities, the functioning of the church is not part of the scope of the project.

4) What did we learn from the 2022 village survey?

In the 2022 village survey, 82% of respondents were in favour of a shop and 66% were in favour of a new, larger village hall.

Requested items were local produce, bakery items fresh fruit and veg, a café and postage stamps.

Top requested services were the café as a meeting place and parcel drop off.

About half of the respondents would use the shop and café once a week or more

5) Preston had a village shop and it closed, why do we need a new one?

The village shop closed over 25 years ago. Since then, consumer habits and expectations have changed significantly, the village has grown significantly in size and continues to do so.

Residents have highlighted the desire to have locally sourced products, sustainable products, good coffee, homemade cakes etc, available within the village, reducing journeys into town and doing 'our bit' to support climate change.

In addition, the shop will provide a place to meet during the day and provide additional services such as parcel drop off, dry cleaning, prescription pick up, home deliveries within an hour etc.

None of these services were available when the previous shop was open. These additional services can easily be added to augment the basic offering.

6) Why have a community (owned and run) shop?

The presence of a community shop can lead to increased local engagement and participation, encouraging mutual support and care within the community. Social infrastructure, such as a community café or shop, can make an enormous contribution to a community's resilience in the face of a crisis.

Once open and operating, community shops become highly social places which bring people together of all ages, backgrounds, interests, and gives them a purpose to interact.

In rural areas, a shop may often be the only space for local people to meet one another. Under community ownership, shops can be transformed into inclusive businesses in a variety of ways.

For example, they might offer training and employment opportunities to people with additional needs or disabilities; they may participate in social prescribing or in schemes that help people who have experienced mental health issues to return to employment; they prevent social exclusion by offering access to cash and help with accessing essential services such as bill payments.

7) You have stated the village is getting bigger, how many more houses will there be?

Including all current and proposed new developments, the number of houses within the Parish will have increased by approx. 110 properties over a 10-year period.

The development of PHC alone will deliver approx. 60 residential units to the village.

This in turn will lead to a population growth of between 200 and 300 additional residents of the village with no additional infrastructure to support this growth.

There is a possibility that due the additional development, an existing retailer such as Lonsis, Nisa or Spar could identify a need and open up a shop in the village - a commercial operation which would not have our community at its heart.

8) Will the new shop be viable?

We have used data provided from the Plunkett Foundation, a charitable organization that supports over 400 community shops in the UK, to assess viability.

The average turnover for a community shop in the UK is approx £185k pa. This figure comes from over 400 community shops successfully trading in the UK, so we know the business model works and community shops are viable.

After analysing the responses to the 2022 questionnaire, an average weekly revenue from villagers, together with estimates of further footfall from walkers, cyclists, visiting cricketeers, school parents and new houses, a turnover of £150k after 3 years is deemed achievable in Preston, with a potential to increase this turnover once the business is mature.

This level of revenue will achieve profitability and is realistic, having been based on available data.

9) When would it be envisaged the shop & café would turn a profit?

We envisage the shop and café will be profitable within 3 years. The addition of a café within community shops has been shown to improve both turnover and profitability.

The café is essential to the success of our proposal.

10) The village shop in Great Paxton has not made a profit in 4 years. Why will the Preston shop be profitable?

The shop in question is a small portable structure with no café. The business is not supported by the Plunkett Foundation. We have identified both as being key to a successful community business.

11) Will the Business Plan be shared with the village?

Yes, the Business Plan will be shared with the village, it will be accessible via the Preston Village website.

12) Where will the shop & café be located?

The proposed location for the shop & café is the Altham's Field, opposite the main gates to PHC. This site is within the Parish boundary.

Although many people consider the Red Lion a preferable location, the board of the Red Lion turned down the opportunity to host the community shop & café on it's land.

13) If new community facilities are built on the Altham's Field, will it encourage further development of the field?

No. NHDC have confirmed this site is Green Belt land. All development of Green Belt land is considered inappropriate and therefore harmful to the Green Belt.

Development may occur if there are **very special circumstances** in which planning ought to proceed. The Community Right to Build process is one such example of very special circumstances, whereby a community can agree to develop Green Belt land for community purposes.

As advised by NHDC, we plan to use the Community Right to Build process.

This option is not available for developers and as such, the presence of new community facilities will not encourage further development as the field will remain protected by its Green Belt classification. The majority of the land will remain unchanged, an agricultural field.

The field is protected by NHDC's Local Plan, which runs up until 2031.

14) Has NHDC used the Community Right to Build process before?

No, not as far as we are aware.

15) Will the community facilities all be built at the same time?

The project has been designed so it can be delivered in phases. The current prioritisation is;

1. Shop & Café
2. Market Garden
3. Community Hall

16) Has the project been costed?

A budget estimate of £500k has been allocated to building the shop & café, the first phase of the project.

17) What will happen to any profits generated by the shop and café?

A Community Benefit Society (CBS) will be set up to run the shop & café. Any profits generated will be re-invested into the community. The members of the CBS decide where any profits are allocated.

All residents of the village will be able to join the CBS.

18) What will happen to the building if the business fails?

The building will be of a modular design. If the business fails, the building would first be offered back to the community. Failing that, it will be taken down and sold.

19) Why have a café, why not just a shop?

Data from other community shops has shown a café enhances the overall proposition and significantly improves profitability of the business.

Café items have a much higher level of profitability compared with shop goods. As an example, the Wigginton Community Shop & Café near Tring in Hertfordshire has a café.

The café represents 35% of total turnover but 80% of the profit.

We aim to follow this proven model to maximise commercial viability.

20) Why have a café when I can have a coffee at home?

No one will be stopped from having coffee in their home but for those wishing to enjoy a fresh barista made coffee in a social environment, the café will offer this option.

As with the Red Lion, people can drink at home but many choose to drink at the pub. Enjoying a coffee at the café will be no different from enjoying a pint at the Red Lion.

21) Will you be relying on volunteers to run the shop?

We plan to employ a salaried manager, who will be responsible for the day to day running of the shop and café. This role could be a job share, employing two people.

The business model of using volunteers to help run a community business is well established, used in over 400 community shops in the UK, so we know it works.

Volunteers are a key strength of the community shop sector, boosting the shops' viability by lending their skills, keeping costs down and spreading the workload to manageable levels, enabling the businesses to focus on growth and development. They also add to the friendly and community-focused nature of the shop environment.

Based on 390 available community shop records, we know that 93% of community shops are supported by volunteers, of which 10% are solely run by volunteers.

We recognise the value of local people being involved with this project both for their wellbeing and in contributing to a community venture.

22) How many volunteers will you be needing?

To start with, we envisage needing approx. 25 volunteers to support the shop manager(s), assuming the business is open 7 days a week.

Volunteers will be asked to complete at least one shift a week, each shift will be 3 hours.

Staffing requirements will be constantly reviewed as the business develops. As an example, the Wigginton Shop & Café has a turnover of approx. £280,000 and employs:

- 1 x paid Manager 40 hours per week
- 2 x paid Supervisors each working 15 hours per week
- 1 x paid Weekend Supervisor working 9 hours per week
- 25 active volunteers working at least one 3 hour shift per week

23) Can Preston support a café and a pub?

Yes, it can. The café will predominantly sell coffee, teas, cakes, sandwiches, breakfast rolls and afternoon tea. It will not sell substantial meals. The Pub is not open on a Monday lunchtime, in the mornings or weekday afternoons; the Café will be open at these times, augmenting the current pub offering rather than competing with it.

At peak times, especially in the bluebell season and in the summer months, customers often exceed the capacity of the Pub. The cafe will help to alleviate the over demand, as well as providing an offering during times of the day when the pub is closed.

Questionnaire responses indicate that a café would enhance the village in providing a place to meet during the day when the pub is closed.

24) Will the new community facilities create additional traffic in the village?

The location makes it possible for most residents to use sustainable modes of transport (walking and cycling) to access the facilities and as such, a noticeable increase in vehicle movements is not expected.

With a shop in the village offering a range of goods and services, some trips into town may be reduced so overall, any additional vehicle movements are expected to be very low.

Visitors to the village, including those coming to use the schools, pub and cricket club, are not expected to increase in number because of the shop and café.

The shop & café in Ley Green has been operating for a number of years and the village has not become a 'tourist hot spot'. Our facility will not be a 'Didley Squat' type destination, it will be design for local people and run by local people.

25) What about the parking?

Parking will be provided on site for a limited number of cars. We envisage a similar size parking area to that provided at the Red Lion; approx. 15 - 20 spaces.

26) Hitchin is only a few miles away and has everything you need, why would people use a shop and cafe?

The shop and café are not being designed to replace a weekly grocery shop; we will focus on items that are not readily available in local supermarkets.

For example, fresh milk refill vending machines, refillable laundry and cleaning liquids, refill dry goods, homecooked ready made meals, homemade cakes, local meat, cheese, eggs, ice cream etc.

Wigginton Community Shop & Cafe near Tring in Hertfordshire is approx. 1 mile from a Tesco superstore. The shop has been successful and profitable by offering a range of goods and services that augment those available in town.

27) How will you fund the cost of this project?

The biggest source of funding will be Section 106 money from the PHC development. This money is paid by the developer to help offset the impact of the planning permission.

Although the amount of 106 funding has not been decided, it is reasonable to expect a figure of between £300,000 to £500,000 which could be allocated to qualifying projects. New community facilities would qualify for this funding.

There are a variety of other funding options available. They include:

- Community Shares
- Crowdfunding
- Grants
 - Government
 - National Lottery
 - Sports England
 - Local Council
 - Charitable Trusts
- Donations
- Loans and social investors

In 2022, £3.5m was raised in community shares alone and to date, £48m has been raised to help community businesses get started.

The Plunkett Foundation will help with all funding options

28) Will a new shop and café impact other local shops?

No. We will not be opening a Post Office and we do not intend to sell newspapers and magazines. Our focus will be on providing goods and services for residents of Preston, not competing with other retail outlets in nearby towns and villages.