

PRESTON COMMUNITY GROUP

The Working Group (those in favour of building new village facilities on Green Belt land), have provided an FAQ document on the village website. The Preston Community Group (those against building new village facilities on Green Belt land) have drafted their own responses to these FAQ's.

The Working Group's FAQ responses are provided below with comments from The Preston Community Group following (**in bold text**).

We urge you to read this document and carefully consider all sides of this important debate.

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.

The Working Group is very selective in the data it uses in order to give the impression that there is a lot of support for its initiatives. The truth is somewhat different.

In the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire results, (slide 30), 28% of 245 people (69 people) said they would like to see a shop. Only 1% (2.45 people) said that they would like a café. In a later part of the Plan, 30% of 212 people (63 people), said they would like a shop "if money was available" (slide 45).

From listening to people in the village, it seems that many people might have been thinking about a small shop with a few essentials in existing premises, not a project of the scale and disruption being put forward by the Working Group.

The Working Group has, so far, only supplied sketchy details on cost and revenue. It is regrettable that the Parish Council have launched a new village survey in the absence of any business plan that would allow people to properly judge the viability of the project.

The Preston Community Group has conducted its own research and does not consider the current plan to be a viable project.

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.

As the Working Group has made clear, there is currently no business plan for a new village hall.

Looking at the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire results, regarding 'Negatives about Preston' (slide 27A) - 1% (3 people) responded 'lack of leisure facilities' but there is no mention of a village hall. However, in the 'What would you change' section (slide 30), 3% (7 people) said 'village hall'.

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In the 'amenities' section of the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire results (slide 44) 12% (25 people) said they would like a larger village hall and 3% (7 people) said they regularly did Pilates. Badminton, table tennis and pickleball have been suggested as potential activities in a new village hall by the Working Group. None of these activities are mentioned in the Neighbourhood Plan, but there is mention of a need for an indoor swimming pool, clay pigeon shooting and rugby.

Whilst providing an excellent location for the nursery school, this is not the only function of the current village hall. If the Preston community wishes the village hall to serve a broader section of the community and support other activities, then investment can and should be made into improving current facilities, not building new ones.

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.

Research into The Plunkett Trust has revealed several initiatives relating to the use of churches within community projects (see <https://plunkett.co.uk/community-businesses-in-places-of-worship/>). Whilst this type of use might be considered inappropriate for Preston, it is surprising that the Working Group has discounted engaging with the church to explore ways it might be leveraged to support additional social activities.

A representative of Preston Church has made it clear that community use of the church would be welcomed. Moreover, the new kitchen and toilet facilities - provided in large part from donations by villagers - were installed partly to facilitate further use by the community.

It should also be noted that there are good facilities in Hitchin for Yoga and Pilates and many of those who practice these activities are already active and committed users of these facilities.

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.

The Working Group's reliance upon the 2022 survey is flawed as it only comprised 170 responses and also included parents from Preston Primary School and Preston Nursery School who are not resident in Preston. The figures of 82% and 66% mentioned by the Working Group equate to 139 and 112 people respectively. Preston currently has a population of 425 so it is clear that these responses represent a minority view. In short, we learnt nothing of value from the 2022 village survey.

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,

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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.

While consumer habits and expectations have changed since the village shop closed, the most significant change in retail has been the huge rise in the use of same-day delivery services. This makes the viability of any local shop even more precarious.

Local produce is already readily available from local producers who, we are sure, would much prefer we buy their produce directly.

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.

The Working Group point out that "In rural areas, a shop may often be the only space for local people to meet one another". This is clearly not the case in Preston which has thriving social activities.

The village has numerous social functions already organised by established community groups as well as the Red Lion (quizzes, harvest auctions, music). The church fulfils a local need for socialising too. The village has a strong community spirit as witnessed by the two recent functions held for the Queen's Jubilee and King's Coronation. The addition of a café will impact very little on the engagement and support this friendly village community already provides to its residents.

It is not our experience that young people will want to congregate where they are likely to be overlooked or overheard by their elders. While they might congregate in the proposed car park after hours, they are unlikely to linger in the café.

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 Londis, 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.

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According to the Preston Parish Council, Preston's current population of 425 people could expand to 630-650 by 2027 assuming all current developments proceed as planned. The Working Group wish to cater for a population we don't yet have with the risk that additional facilities could act as a trigger to encourage even further development.

The Parish Council, in its accompanying letter to its latest survey, also makes it clear that neither Londis, Nisa nor Spar would be able to open a shop in Preston. Therefore, the possibility that these existing retailers will open up a shop in the village is zero.

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.

We have not yet seen a business plan for this proposal. We have been offered selective glances at other community shops in the UK, but none of these plans and figures from other places correlate with the unique community here in Preston. Many villages with community shops have larger populations than Preston, do not have a thriving community-owned pub and are located in areas with strong tourist interest and high numbers of visitors.

The response from the Working Group makes it clear that the turnover of £150k is dependent on "further footfall from walkers, cyclists,.....". Those who do not wish to attract more visitors to Preston should not support the Working Group's proposal.

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.

Again, no business plan has been provided to support this vision.

The Working Group's response highlights that a shop is not commercially viable without a café – and, as mentioned previously, the desire for a café in the Neighbourhood Plan was negligible. It should also be noted that such a café would directly compete with The Red Lion and thereby undermine an extremely successful community-owned initiative.

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.

One unprofitable example has been provided by the Working Group by way of contrast. It is well recognised that UK retail has come under pressure due to the shift to online shopping, rising overheads and too much debt. According to the BBC, shop closures were up 50% in 2022 compared to 2021.

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According to the [Plunkett Foundation](#):

- 95% of community businesses have been affected by the cost of living crisis
- The most common effect reported is that customers are spending less (affecting 58% of community businesses)
- Over half are struggling to cover their day-to-day costs (53%)
- 37% of businesses may have to delay improvements and investments
- Around 1 in 10 community businesses are reducing their services or hours to manage costs

The leader of The Working Group also happens to be a Director of The Plunkett Trust and has a vested interest in promoting the Trust's activities.

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.

We look forward to reviewing the long-awaited business plan.

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 its land.

The concept of a village shop was first proposed by the board of The Red Lion. They eventually turned down the proposal when it became clear that it would not be economically viable. Not surprisingly, they also discounted the creation of a café that would compete with the pub's own food revenue. Those who think The Red Lion should develop additional facilities can always lobby the board directors with regards to the viability of a village shop.

We already witness people parking on the village green and along the Hitchin Road and School Lane, creating dangers for our children and others. Residents who enjoy a central position in the village have to brace themselves for the surge of visitors and traffic during the beautiful bluebell season. A café and shop have the potential to turn the village into 'bluebell season' all year round.

Altham's field is entirely inappropriate as a location for this initiative. It is unspoilt Green Belt land and is only being offered on condition that a market garden is added to the initiative – something for which there was no demand identified in the Neighbourhood Plan.

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.

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There is no guarantee that further development won't happen. The Community Right to Build is an example of one type of 'very special circumstances' (VSC) which allows development on Green Belt land but there are other reasons why 'very special circumstances' might apply:

- Overall shortfall in housing supply for a particular area. Local need for residential accommodation of types and tenures
- Current and emerging Plans do not make adequate provision for types and tenures.
- The development would enable some form of infrastructure needed by a community.
- The proposals make a significant contribution to unmet need.
- The housing proposed meets a specialist need which might release other already constructed housing and
- Emerging local plans may include proposals to alter the Green Belt and allocate your site for development.

The leader of the Working Group is also a board member of First Garden Cities Homes which states that "we are committed to delivering affordable housing that meets a variety of needs" and that "We have a growth target of 450 new houses.....across the following target local authorities" including North Hertfordshire.

In relying upon the 'very special circumstances' exception we would be sending a clear message to NHDC that we are prepared to erode our Green Belt, contrary to the principles enshrined in Preston's Neighbourhood Plan.

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

No, not as far as we are aware.

The Community Right to Build is a further potential stage of this process that would be undertaken by North Herts District Council and to permit the development of Green Belt land.

At 50%, the referendum threshold set for the Community Right to Build process is very low and only considers the views of the people who bother to vote. If 50% of voters are in favour, at the very least 50% are ambivalent or against – and likely many more if you count those who didn't vote.

This sort of process causes division in communities and risks projects being railroaded through when a high proportion of the community is not in favour. Everyone needs to be aware that there is a real threat to our community if, and when, we get to the Community Right to Build process.

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

With no business plan, it is not surprising that the building plan is not much more detailed. There is no timetable provided nor explanation of what would happen if the shop and café prove unsuccessful – will the market garden and community hall still go ahead?

There is no environmental impact assessment for this new build. The Working Group has made much of its environmental credentials in other documentation and during village meetings. According to the UK Parliament Committee, the UK's built environment is responsible for 25% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions. It is clear that the most environmentally-friendly option is no development at all.

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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.

Preston Community Group will provide their own feedback on this when a full and detailed Business Plan has been provided by the Working Group.

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.

There is no clarity on who would be eligible to sit on the CBS – presumably those who live within the village boundary?

Existing village organisations, including the Preston Trust and Parish Council struggle to get active participation so, over time, yet one more organisation might fail to attract volunteers.

The CBS could also create conflict with other organisations in the village. Decisions about where to place money within a community frequently brings about discord and conflict – these decisions are usually best left to people democratically appointed to the village structure operating within organisations that are already in place, in order to best serve the whole village.

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.

Given the huge costs involved and disruption to the village as well as the widespread anxiety that we are hearing within the village, this answer is extremely casual. It is difficult to see what use the village would have for this building once the business fails. And the second option of taking down the building and selling it is highly impractical and unlikely to recuperate the initial investment.

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.

Cafés may well have a higher level of profitability, but it's not a café the village has said it wants! In any event, the initiative proposed is for a shop, café, village hall and market garden so the comparison provided is meaningless.

According to a volunteer at The Wigginton Community Shop and Café, they launched the operation with 45 volunteers, a number that has now shrunk to 25. Furthermore, Wigginton is a large parish on the edge of Tring with a population of 1,483. It bears no resemblance to Preston.

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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.

Tea and coffee are already offered at The Red Lion which underlines the fact that the café would be in direct competition with the Red Lion. It could truly be an 'own goal' to build the proposed café at the cost of weakening the Red Lion.

It has also been mooted by the Working Group that coffee purchased in The Red Lion is inferior to coffee purchased from coffee shops in Hitchin. If that is the case and there is demand for more sophisticated coffee, then a simple remedy is to find investment to improve beverage options in The Red Lion – potentially using the same 106 funding from the PHC development that the Working Group plans to take advantage of (see Q.27).

In slide 35 of the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire results ("Amenities and facilities used or visited"), of 303 responses, 24% (73 people) said they visited The Red Lion at least once a week; 24% (73 people) at least once a month; 38% (115 people) between one to eleven times a year; 9% (27 people) less than once a year 5% (15 people) never.

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 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.

Relying on volunteers to run the shop, café and market garden, under the supervision of a paid manager, probably requires further research before any working plan can be based upon such an idea.

The fully-loaded cost of a salaried manager (or managers) is not insubstantial. As anyone knows who employs people, aside from the cost, employing people responsibly includes abiding by a complex bundle of employment law together with HR administration and obligations which should not be taken lightly.

No mention is made of a chef though the café will be preparing food – perhaps the manager will operate as chef as well? Selling food will require that the café abides by The Food Standards Act 1999, the Food Safety Act 1990, The Food Safety Order 1991 as well as general food law relating to food imports and exports, safety, traceability, labelling and product withdrawals and recalls.

With regard to volunteers, with many initiatives, there is usually an initial take-up in numbers of volunteers that swiftly dwindles (see the example in Q19 referring to the Wiggington Community Shop & Café). This business proposal is entirely dependent on the ability to source and retain volunteers for the long term and there is considerable uncertainty whether this is achievable.

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What will be the fall-back position if volunteers fail to turn up due to sickness, childcare/carer issues or when interest wanes out of apathy? What contingency will be allowed in The Working Group's business plan?

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

See previous response regarding volunteers. As previously explained, we do not find comparisons with the Wigginton Community Shop & Café of any value.

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.

No it can't. It is entirely disingenuous to claim that the café is not in direct competition with the pub, as is the idea that pub capacity is often exceeded during the summer months and that the café could act as a spillover. The pub garden is extensive and the pub flexes staff resources to meet demand during the summer.

There are no valid questionnaire responses indicating that a majority of people believe 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.

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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 designed for local people and run by local people.

The Working Group's own questionnaire implies that the success of the shop and café will depend on income from people outside of the village and the claim that this initiative will not increase the numbers of visitors to the village is entirely speculative. It is naive to suggest that 'any additional vehicle movements are expected to be very low'. In visiting other community-style shops, the Preston Community Group believes that visitors to the village would hugely increase because of the shop and café.

Ley Green is not on a through route like the entrance to Altham's Field so the comparison is not valid.

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.

The position of the facilities (on the periphery of the village) might mean that villagers on the other side of the village will drive to the shop. Some villagers drive to the Red Lion! Much like the Red Lion overspill that happens around the Village Green and onto School Lane, Crunnells Green is likely to be used for excess parking, especially when the proposed village hall is used for a function.

Wigginton Community Shop & Café has 30+ spaces for a small shop and café and, on visits by several villagers, the car park was found to be full with cars queuing on the road to get in. On one occasion, several cars that were fed up with waiting in the lane were trying to turn around in residents' drives creating mayhem.

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.

Indeed, Hitchin is a 10 minute drive away and we also enjoy the privilege and choice of other local shops, not to mention numerous food delivery options.

'Topping up' their shopping with 'items that are not readily available in local supermarkets', might not be priorities for families trying to manage their household budgets. With no price list available, it is impossible to gauge whether the cost of items will be competitively attractive.

As the Working Group admits, the Wigginton Community Shop is not viable without the addition of a café. Wigginton is also successful because it is positioned on a playing field which attracts families and walkers - most of whom drive to the shop.

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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.

The project is unlikely to meet the timings for Section 106 monies from PHC, and the figure of £300k-£500k is the maximum available and which will be used by NHDC with Preston Parish Council getting a smaller amount for local projects. The money will also need to be split across more than one project and the village may well decide that there is much better use for this money than the initiative proposed by the Working Group – including ways of meeting some of the objectives of the Working Group without building extensive facilities on green belt land.

What isn't specified in the Working Group's response above is that the expectation for this project is that funding of the initiative will depend on voluntary personal investment. Whether the Working Group can achieve the funding it requires given the risky nature of the initiative, is unknown. Those who already invest in The Red Lion may well be reluctant to invest in an initiative that competes with The Red Lion.

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.

Again it is disingenuous to say it will not impact other shops in the area. It is a crowded and competitive market, and the Ley Green shop will suffer from a loss of trade as will The Red Lion. Other businesses in adjoining villages, such as Gosmore, St Ippolyts, Kings Walden and Whitwell also face a potential loss of trade.

We should be supporting existing businesses in this current economic climate not seeking ways to undermine them, especially when they supported us during the pandemic.

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