

PRESTON COMMUNITY GROUP

‘THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY’

1. RETAILING TRENDS

The last shop in Preston closed in 1996 as it was unprofitable. Since that time the internet and changes in food retailing have resulted in every supermarket offering deliveries. Deliveroo in conjunction with Waitrose will deliver within 20 minutes!!!

2. TRAFFIC

Traffic is already an issue as access roads to the village are very narrow and in poor state of repair making it difficult for vehicles, walkers and cyclists to navigate safely.

3. LOCATION

The location of the proposed development is outside the village boundary. The recently released neighbourhood plan clearly states there should be no development outside the village boundary. Any change to this status could lead to further development.

4. VILLAGE HALL

The need for another village Hall is questionable. The present hall is perfectly adequate for most of the village needs and has recently been fitted with a new kitchen.

St Martins Church is underutilised; the church would welcome additional use on the basis that ‘we use it or lose it’. It too has recently installed new toilets and a kitchen.

Additional village facilities are located on the recreation ground which are to be expanded.

5. BUSINESS PLAN

The business plan appears grossly overstated and is unlikely to stand up to scrutiny by a lender. Very little financial detail is included.

The proposal seems overambitious and expensive (the real costs have not been revealed apart from an estimate of £500,000 for the shop and café).

6. FUNDING

The source of funding has not been made clear. Any grant funding is likely to require matched funding possibly from private investors. Any private funding would be unsecured and high risk.

7. CREATING A 'DESTINATION'

The extent of the project strongly suggests that a 'destination' is being created which will rely on custom from outside the village resulting in increased traffic. Offley Hoo Farm (4.2 miles from Preston) are currently going down this path.

8. COMPARATORS

Throughout the consultation we have been compared to other locations; Wiggington, Hampstead Norreys and Halstock . After visits to each and an analysis of their accounts it is very difficult to see how they can be compared as they are all larger villages. Preston is a small village with 175 dwellings rising to >250 when all current developments are completed. The 2020 census population of 449 is also likely to grow. We are less than 3 miles from the centre of Hitchin and we currently have a bus route serving the village.

9. FUTURE OF COMMUNITY SHOPS

The Plunkett Foundation, often referred to in the Proposal, has highlighted in their latest report that community shops are entering difficult times. Recruiting staff and volunteers is a major issue. We must also be mindful of current economic conditions and the cost-of-living crisis.

10. THE RED LION

At the heart of this village, we have THE RED LION, widely recognised for its success as a community pub. It is located on the Green and any shop/café must not jeopardise its success by operating as a competitor.

WE URGE YOU TO THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT.

DOES PRESTON NEED A SHOP? OR WOULD IT JUST BE 'NICE TO HAVE'.

This appraisal has been brought to you by concerned residents of our delightful village. We all moved here for what it has got, not what it hasn't got or what it needs.

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