

## Statement in support for planning application 20/00685/FUL

Dear members of the planning committee,

I wish to express my whole-hearted support for the proposals to develop a permanent village shop and community hub through a modest extension to Wethersfield Village Hall, incorporating the disused and dilapidated bus shelter.

Having a shop at the front of the village hall will create a much needed focal point in a space that is currently tremendously underwhelming in an otherwise beautiful rural village. The disused bus shelter, is on the wrong side of the road and too far from where the bus stops to be used as intended. The external roadside space is currently an eyesore as visitors arrive at the village green opposite.

A shop front located in the disused space will serve as a social and community hub of Wethersfield Parish. We have confidence that a shop will revive our community spirit, enhance the natural beauty of the green and provide an economic stimulus for the area.

The shop will help to support community mental health and wellbeing, it will provide residents with a purpose to walk to the village green increasing mobility around the village. It will also provide opportunities for volunteering to work, enabling young and mature residents to interact and support each other and develop new friendship circles and support networks. It will provide essential work experience and confidence building for our younger community members and a renewed sense of purpose to our older residents.

CROWS (**Community Redevelopment Of Wethersfield Shop**) committee members represent the demographics of our parish, currently a group of seven unpaid volunteers. The committee formally established on 23rd May 2018, by the request of villagers through an informal public Parish Council Meeting.

CROWS have established a formal terms of reference with no financial gain to individual members or those associated with the committee. Members have a broad range of experience including business development, marketing, financial management, project management, building development, training and development along with large scale retail experience, which will support the successful outcome of the planning proposals.

The survey carried out by CROWS was the first step in establishing local views and support. The data collated was used to form a basis for the initial shop business development plan.

The survey headlines indicated:

- 57% will use the shop 2-3 times per week
- 75% want to buy local produce
- 92% want access to postal services
- 84% say a shop is essential to our community
- 91% want to see the shop as part of the Village Hall
- 81% of the surveys returned are from Wethersfield Village

To take steps to embed the shop as a vibrant hub for the community, it has been agreed it will be run and owned by the community through shares and a volunteer workforce. Extensive research was undertaken, through other local community run enterprises to

ensure the shops viability, along with investment for support from The Plunkett Foundation, who support small communities to set up and develop local rural community shops.

The shop will provide local farmers, local producers, makers and crafters an outlet to share and sell their produce. Reducing carbon footprint and increasing local economic growth. We also intend to provide an outlet where people can sell products such as surplus home-grown fruit and vegetables, and other home produced items. Environmental benefits will include less personal car use and locally produced food meaning fewer food miles.

Although the shop will be small, we have calculated that it is possible to get 65 running meters of display shelving, which will be 400 deep. Using cans as an example we could display 12 units of over 200 product lines.

The shop will also provide wider community engagement through knowledge of local amenities, local accommodation availability, event promotion, tickets sales for local events, displaying and sharing village newsletters from the plethora of committees and societies, acting as a showcase for local craftspeople. Any profits will be re-invested in the shop or put back into community development projects.

Extra services could also include prescription collection supporting our local Freshwell Health Centre, Lottery, PayPoint, Electricity Key charging, Cash Machine (ATM), mobile phone top ups. Our long-term aim will be to re-establish a full-time Post Office facility, parcel drop off and collection point.

I respectfully ask that the Planning Committee favourably considers this application and grants permission to proceed to the next stage of implementation.

Many thanks  
Jo Kattenhorn