Notes from Volunteer Meetings about a Community Shop

Two meetings of people interested in volunteering to help set up and run a community shop have been held. The notes below summarise the main points from these discussions.

First meeting, 30 November 2022

Summary

It was felt important to investigate the potential for running a village shop and/or Post Office, given the benefits of providing goods and services in the community and as a social lifeline for residents.

It was felt that the previous shop had not offered all the products wanted by the community.

Consultation would be needed to see if there was enough active interest from residents in using a village shop to make such an undertaking viable. A negotiated arrangement with the current premises or a new location would need to be found at low or no cost to make a community shop economically viable.

Current shop premises

- The freeholder has no incentive to do anything until 2028 when the lease with Bestway runs out.
- It isn't feasible to run a community shop in the current premises with the current rent and rates. Significant reductions in rent and rates would be required to make viable the possibility of a community shop here.
- The current space is large for a community shop (approx. 1500sqft, Plunkett Foundation suggest 500sqft is the optimum required). It would be more manageable if divided up into 2 or 3 units (as it was previously). Bestway could be approached to see if they would sub-lease part of it. This would almost certainly need approval by the freeholder.
- The freeholder could decide to convert the premises to residences, allowable under planning laws and bypassing the Asset of Community Value (ACV) process.

Alternatives to a shop in the current premises

- Given potential issues & costs of running a village stores in the current location, alternative locations and ideas should be explored.
- Ideally a community shop would be run from a premises owned by the community.
- If the community didn't own the premises then any rent / rates would have to be low to be profitable, especially given that community shops lack the 'buying power' to offer low prices.
- Would it be possible to arrange something at the Social Club? Although possible issues with parking and access for deliveries as well as a potential need for planning approval.
- Could a community shop, selling basic provisions (and potentially running a PO for a couple of hours a day) be run under an arrangement at Hartley Farm? Either with the direct involvement of Hartley Farm or by renting a unit.
- Need to contact local organisations to make them aware of discussions around a community shop and to ask for possible ideas and help – Social Club, pub, churches.
- The potential for a hybrid model, involving more deliveries, or a completely mobile shop could be explored.

Consultation on need and demand for a shop

- It's as important to gauge demand for a shop as it is to explore possibilities for a shop.
- Need to establish what the current and future need is, particularly given that the shop shut over 6 months ago and people will have found alternatives.

- The questions asked in a survey need to be considered carefully, so that answers aren't just a 'wish list' that won't convert into purchases.

Demand and running of a Post Office

- There were businesses in Winsley that had used the PO for sending of parcels.
- The Winsley PO hadn't provided a full range of service and many PO services were now available online.
- It would be difficult to run a stand-alone PO as the structure is such that PO staff are not paid a salary but are paid out of profits.
- Sale figures for the PO were relatively low, £16,000.

Running a community shop

- Running a community shop would need at least 1 FT paid manager and around 70 volunteers.
- Other examples of community shops should be looked at.

Communications

- Need to publicise the community shop project and meetings. The PC uses Facebook, community website, noticeboards and The Weaver. Flyers could be put in local amenities.

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

- The shop is one village amenity, the Parish Council has been looking at drawing up a Neighbourhood Plan to consider the future of all village amenities. Volunteers are needed to be part of a Steering Group. Contact Ian Berry (ianberry@winsley.org.uk) if interested.

Second meeting, 25 January 2023

Feedback from conversations with The Galleries, Community Shop in Freshford

- Need to own your own premises
- Need to raise a lot of capital, they'd done this through shares to the community.
- The shop was 'owned' by Freshford and Limpley Stoke Community Association a charitable enterprise so money could be returned to local causes.
- The Post Office is open for two half-days a week.
- To get charity status to set up an enterprise to run a community shop could take 12/18 months.
- Two years ago, The Galleries made a profit but with the difficult economic climate this year they were likely to break even and next year could even see a loss.

Conversations with Hartley Farm

- these had been positive with a clear wish to support the village.
- potential for extending the range of products offered.
- could they offer a discount card for everyday items for villagers?
- could they offer a prepayment, credit scheme?

No other options could currently be identified.
It was agreed to conduct a survey of residents to help guide further actions. Distribution would be on paper via The Winsley Weaver, from 1st March, with an online version being promoted through social media channels at the same time.

Another meeting will be held once the survey has ended (after 31 March).

Any offers of help - please contact: parishclerk@winsley.org.uk