

Response to Request for a Donation to Support Works at the Weston on the Green Community Shop

I would like to revisit the discussion we had at our last meeting regarding the Community Shop's request for financial support towards essential renovation works.

During the discussion, the principal concern raised was that the shop is a private business and therefore should not be eligible for financial support from the Parish Council. I believe this stems from a misunderstanding of the legal status of our Community Shop.

The term *Community Shop* is sometimes associated with a national supermarket chain, while the *Company Shop Group* operates a social enterprise model through a separate commercial organisation. Our village shop is neither of these.

The previous village shop was indeed a privately owned business, and any proposal to provide Parish Council funding to such a business would understandably have raised concerns. However, with the support and guidance of the Plunkett Foundation, the shop was purchased by members of the community through a community share offer. Ownership therefore transferred from private hands to the community itself.

The Weston on the Green Community Shop is registered as a **Community Benefit Society**. This is a legal form created specifically to operate for the benefit of the wider community rather than for private profit. Any trading surplus must be reinvested in the shop, the Post Office, or other community projects; it cannot be distributed to shareholders as profits. Shareholders invest to secure the future of an important community asset, not to generate financial returns.

The Society is managed by a committee drawn from the community, whose responsibility is to ensure that the shop continues to meet the needs of local residents. In addition to providing everyday shopping and Post Office services, the shop plays an important social role. It offers a place where residents meet, reduces social isolation, provides local information, and contributes significantly to the wellbeing and cohesion of our village.

The funding request before us is not intended to finance major redevelopment or commercial expansion. It is specifically to support modest improvements that will improve accessibility and ensure the continued safe operation of the shop for everyone in the community.

There have been rumours suggesting that extensive renovations are planned, which have understandably led to differing opinions. To clarify the current position, I contacted the Chair of the Management Committee directly and asked for an update on the proposed works.

His response was as follows:

"Following your email of 14th July, the initial works estimate was just over £39,000++. However, wearing my Company Secretary hat, I have advised the committee that the Shop cannot undertake works at that level of costs. The scope has therefore been significantly reduced, and the current estimate is just under £11,000, although I am still attempting to refine this further. Realistically, I cannot see the figure going below £10,000. These renovations include a ramp to make the entrance to the shop accessible, levelling of the interior floor to

avoid tripping, and essential works of compliance to fire-proof the ceiling between the shop and the roof above.

Any consideration the Parish Council can give to supporting this reduced programme of works would be much appreciated, as it will make a meaningful difference to ensuring the Shop and Post Office can continue to serve the village effectively."

Proposal

In light of the Community Shop's status as a Community Benefit Society, and given that the proposed works are modest improvements that will enhance accessibility, safety and the long-term sustainability of an important community asset, I believe it is appropriate for the Parish Council to offer financial support.

I therefore propose that the Parish Council approve a donation of **up to £1,000** towards the renovation works at the Weston on the Green Community Shop.

The funding can be met from the Donations budget line, which currently has a remaining balance of £1,000.00. This can be supplemented by the remaining **£865** from the original grant allocation. Although this grant funding was previously used to support the installation of the village defibrillator, the equivalent amount can now be met from the fencing budget line, which contains funding from the same grant source. This enables the original **£865** grant allocation to be applied towards this project without any overall impact on the Council's budget.

This proposal represents a relatively modest investment by the Parish Council in a facility that benefits the whole community and helps secure the future of one of the village's most valued assets.

*Regarding our legal ability to make such a recommendation, Local Government Act 1972, Section 137 allows local parish, town and community councils to spend money on activities and projects that directly benefit their area and residents.