

23/02523/F    OBJECTION    Location. Lack of empirical data, attention to detail and viability.

Before I list some of my many concerns (the list would be too long) that I have with this application; it would be only fair to acknowledge the determination by FKS (Friends of Kirtlington Shop) in their attempt to bring a project of such complexity to fruition. On the positive side they have demonstrate tenacity and persistence, however, on the opposite side it lacks detail; it is not cohesive and there are too many imponderables, there has been a lack of transparency all the way through. So based on the current information, it is impossible to form a fair and reasonable affirmative conclusion. I have no qualms that the motivation and intent of FKS are well intended, but it demonstrates a lack of experience and business acumen. The last thing the village needs is to go through the disruption of planning and the build process only for this venture to miss the mark and then there will be further disruption to disassemble and remove the building before restoring the site.

This new venture must be viable and to do that it has to be in the right place, the tucked away, off the main road next to the Village Hall car park will largely depend on villagers, and it will not draw too many shoppers from passing trade, it is not a destination venue. Will this be enough to make it viable?

As most villages will testify, I think the majority of the village would agree that another village shop would be a great addition again, but the venture must be consistent and the costings fully understood. What is successful in one village does not guarantee success of another.

Some time ago this village enjoyed a vibrant, busy, friendly well stocked shop; it stocked all manner of goods with lots of essentials and there is no doubt that it was the hub of the village. It 1994 that shop won the national village shop of the year award. But that was several owners ago now. This shop was on the main A4095 and drew trade from the village, people passing through and builders that were in the village at the time all used to buy papers, lunches and snacks.

Subsequent owners of the shop didn't have the same motivation as when it was run pre-1994. It was always a hard act to follow, but under the 'new' owners it soon started to deteriorate. Several attempts were made by villagers to get the shop back on track, it didn't work out. Covid didn't help either, because shoppers had to make alternative arrangements. The demographics of the village has been changing for some time now, with new families moving in, travelling in and out of the village, working long hours, tending to children etc., everyday family life really. There are families whose ancestry goes back generation after generation; other although not born in the village have lived here for a very long time and some who have not lived here for vey long, all of whom have had to make alternative shopping arrangements. Shopping habits have changed and it still applies today. So, for those who suggest that the opening of the Co-op in Bletchingdon and Sainsbury's in Heyford was the cause of the decline of the shop, should maybe retrace their steps and look back at the history.

The Community Shop has the disadvantage of needing a new building, the choice is to build from scratch will increase the high startup cost. (this can be achieved if everything aligns as Wigginton), but the initial monies raise will be absorbed by build cost.

Any shop has to have the right mix of goods and services. And it will take time to build up this knowledge, get it wrong and it will result in stock wastage with items left on the shelf, affecting the bottom line. It can be the difference between success or otherwise. It is muted that high-quality items will be the order of the day. However, this usually means high prices and will not suit not everyone in the village.

Initially it was billed as a shop and café. selling papers, fresh bread and milk and other supplies. Much emphasis was made of the coffee shop as a meeting hub. In the intervening time the offering has been extended - alcohol, somewhere to take your dry cleaning and your shoe repairs etc. There is nothing unique about any of these items that cannot be purchased locally, in all likelihood with more choice and at better prices. Perhaps included in your next supermarket delivery etc.

To accommodate a shop, table and chairs, all the internal fixings as well as the coffee shop and all the products and service on offer will require a fair amount of storage. We know that the cost of storage in

such a 'small' place will be at a premium. As I have not seen the business plan, I am not too sure if there is capacity in the building to do all of these things and I wonder if the building is large enough for all of these elements?

Within the village there are already several opportunities to meet up for coffee, all arranged by many local volunteers. They all do, and have done for some time, such sterling work and work tirelessly for many others, not just for coffee. Along with many other associations they raise money for various activities, in the village so there could be consideration that this could be a distraction or dilution of other activities.

There is no doubt that it would be nice to meet up for coffee, but we are lucky to have options, now timing has gone against FKS and is unfortunate for the community shop that a new coffee shop and deli in the reopening in the Dashwood, just 375 metres away, will open in early November. It will be serious competition. It is central to the village and has plenty of onsite parking.

The Plunkett Foundation, used by KFS, has advised many organisations before. They have a tried and tested methodology on how to set up and run a community shop, their template is clear. It suggests holding public meetings to gain support and raise awareness of the project. Although some awareness and updates have been made via the local Village News/Internet and sometimes Parish Council meetings little new information has not been sufficient to convince the majority of the village that this is the right way forward. The first meeting was held by FKS in late April 2022 to the present business plan uses data from that time. The audience from that meeting was used to assume that those present meant support, it did not, some were on a fact-finding exercise. This data should not have been used the way it was portrayed. It was pointed out to FKS that this was not the case.

Also, it is usual for surveys to be verified and result taking in to account factoring to get to more realistic results. I don't know if this happened but I suspect the numbers were represented as literal.

The reluctance to share details of the business plan. The lack of exposure and full transparency to the business plan is rightly or wrongly is questionable. How do we know what figures that have been uses, have been weighted or factored. We have no idea what assumptions have been made to this plan. A good plan will highlight what has been included and what has not. There should be no nasty surprises which could mean a time delay or that extra funds will be needed. Reading the business plan can often give a realistic indication as to the success of the project.

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Successful business planning and plans must stand up to scrutiny; it should be based on up-to-date data with variables identified. It is impossible to assess if this business plan fulfils these criteria because it has been kept from public view. It is impossible to access the level probability of success. So, based on the information presented withing this application and preceding comments, the conclusion can only be negative, too many unknowns.

#### Some further discrepancies

Some of the content of the application is questionable and is in need of further explanation. A couple of examples are

- The Pre-App was submitted in December 2021 specifies a building constructed in stone, but the Application submitted in September 2023 suggests a timber clad building. The costs between the two is considerable, and even if the latter is the preferred option, we know that in recent years material prices have increased to such an extent that any costing contained within the plan will require additional funds to be raised. So much so that whatever is in the budget in the current business plan it will be an under estimated. No matter what the contingency has been considered, it will not be sufficient. The increase in material costs show little chance of abating at the moment and will require a big increase in the budget and it may well be on more than one occasion. So, I question the start up viability.
- The Design Access and Heritage Statement makes the comparison with the materials used for the Community Shop as a timber cladding building, it makes the comparison in likeness as that used

for Mirror Cottages in Park Farm. Rightly contained within the village. Whilst this may be technically correct, it fails to mention that that Mirror Cottages are about one mile away as the crow flies from the Community Shop and a mile and a half by road. They are completely surrounded by trees and completely hidden from view on all sides, alternatively the Community shop being right next to the Village Hall and Sports Field in full view of all. A fair comparison?

#### Location – South Green – private road.

There is much to say about this – The local properties, will have interruptions to their lifestyle disrupted. It is unfortunate that FKS have not consulted these home owners or seen their way to keep these residents informed. There is no question that the comings and goings will be affected, they will be the most impacted within the village, yet they know as little or as much as the rest of the village. The Plunkett Foundation makes a point of saying how this should be handled. It wasn't in this case.

The application suggests that the location for the shop is central, the site chosen because there is nothing else that is appropriate. At time this was correct, but recently an alternative location has been suggested, but FKS has declined this offer on the basis that they think it is not a suitable. This location as suggested it is not ideal either and will not attract passing trade (even the 'old' shop had trading difficulties and it was on the A4095). The only way of attracting additional clientele is by adding additional advertising on the main road, cluttering the both sides of the road.

Access to the Community Shop will be down one a Y shaped road, two prongs of South Green down to one opening in to the village hall car park. Both are single-track roads, which has two access points from the A4095. On each side of the road there are private dwellings. It has no pavement or street lights and it is currently not in the best state of repair, with a damaged road edges and plenty of potholes, (currently filled by local residents).

The suggested parking for the shop is to use the village hall car park. It is used by walkers going in to the park, and by parents/carers delivering and collecting children to and from the short walk to/from the primary school. This means carers and children have to walk on the edge of this road at least twice a day (four times for parents/carers). Sometimes dodging traffic, puddles and potholes. This is the only place to safely park because they travel to the school from further afield (Heyford etc).

It is also used by residents and carers/children going to and from the Youth Club, etc or any Village Hall activities. Users of the sports field use it as does people using it to go the church too. It is busy even outside of school delivery and pick uptimes with vehicles coming and going,

The application already touches on the 'generous' car park by the village hall and that it is convenience for the shoppers. What it omits to say is that the car park is already busy and is already in need of resurfacing. Maybe FKS could consider making a contribution to the upkeep of the car park.

Like the village hall car park, South Green (private road) that is also failing. In April 2023 the Parish Council carried out survey of these roads and, if compared with the application document Highways Planning Transport Statement just three months later in July 2023 there are inconsistencies.

The residents of South Greens have not been consulted by FKS to discuss any likely issues as a result of the shop location, they should have been considered, this in my view is just not acceptable. These residents that will carry the extra burden of the additional traffic and disruption – construction, customers and delivery vans, no matter how large or small there will be some disruption. The application suggests that there will be very few deliveries, but as they are proposing to sell papers, fresh bread and milk presumably daily deliveries will be needed. There is also an assumption that people will walk or ride their bike to the shop, there are no supporting data to validate this, no survey has been carried out. The north of the village is at about half a mile away, so it is unlikely that people will walk whilst carrying shopping back to their house, pretty much same in the opposite direction too. If you are cycling on the A4096 and unless you are cycling on outside of premium time it is pretty scary and an accident waiting to happen.

The potholes on South Green will require people to negotiate the potholes when it rains (difficult to see when they are full of water), whether on foot, on a bike or in a vehicle it is frightening. Parents with pushchairs, and maybe accompanied by another child or two will have a nightmare, and if everyone converges at the same time it can be dangerous and chaotic.

The shop has recently been offered an alternative location but that has been rejected as they think the new location is unsuitable. It may have been a safer location.

To ensure success of a project like this it will take experience, and patience and I wonder if it will settle quick enough to make money.

Time taken to bring this to the planning stage is indicative, as a business proposition it is lacking in too many areas to be given my support.