

Cotherstone Parish Council Community Consultation

A consultation leaflet, response form and supplementary clarification flyer were delivered to all 294 properties in the parish. By the (extended) deadline of 6 March 2020, 136 responses had been received (a 46% response rate). Some questions were not answered by some respondents, so the total number of responses for any question does not always equate to the total number of respondents overall. 51 respondents made additional comments and these are provided in full, anonymised as necessary.

1. Which option is your preference for further developing as a Cotherstone Community Venture? (please tick only one)

51 'Existing shop' **51** 'Chapel' **28** No community venture

2. Regardless of which option is pursued, would you use a café

12 More than once a week **20** Weekly **76** Occasionally **24** Never

3. Regardless of which option is pursued, would you use a community-run shop

36 More than once a week **45** Weekly **45** Occasionally **5** Never

4. a) If the Parish Council was to offer a public shares option to a future community shop/café project, would you be interested in buying some shares?

14 Yes, definitely **40** Yes, maybe **43** No, it's unlikely **36** No, certainly not

b) If you selected definitely or maybe, in principle, how much might you consider investing?

13 Less than £250 **15** £250-£500 **15** £500-£1,000 **7** £1,000-£2,500

3 more than £2,500

5. If the Parish Council did fund a community shop/café venture and it did not generate a net profit, this might result in a cost to the Council and thus an increase in the parish element of the council tax. How do you feel about the prospect of your local council tax precept increasing to enable the venture to stay operating? (in the current year a Band D property in the parish pays £25.14 as the parish precept).

19 Strongly support an increase **59** Support an increase

28 Against this idea **24** Strongly against this idea

Community Venture consultation comments

If a community 'hub' was developed at the chapel site, what would be its relationship with the village hall?

Suggestions: Other surrounding villages might be willing to offer financial support to the project particularly if the post office is maintained - this is a vital asset to the dale as Barnard Castle Post Office is not as easily accessible for those living further up the dale and would reduce the carbon footprint considerably not to mention ease traffic going back and forth over Barnard Castle bridge. This could become the hub at the heart of Teesdale serving not just Cotherstone but Lartington, Romalldkirk, Eggleston, Mickleton etc. The land at the rear of the chapel already has adequate parking space and in addition would there be space for cyclists to camp overnight? In time perhaps pods or even a shepherd's hut - local business Hodgsons could perhaps sponsor a wooden building/shelter for cycles - good advertising for them. If the toilet facilities required for the café were at the rear of the building they could be utilised as part of overnight camping for cyclists during the summer months. Endless possibilities for exhibition space in the chapel building. A mezzanine floor could possibly house further accommodation?

As I work, live a 10-minute walk from Barnard Castle, 3.5 miles from Cotherstone, I am realistically unlikely to use a shop/café more than a few times a year. However I support the idea of a community enterprise. I do wonder how much a small community can support a larger enterprise using the chapel, especially looking at the problems the Witham have despite a much larger catchment.

We are not, in principle, opposed to a community-run shop but are less enthusiastic about including a café in the proposal. It appears the Steering Group have chosen the two most expensive options to put forward when there are a number of other possible solutions that could be explored as follows: 1. Using one of the rooms in the village hall for a shop/café. The village hall seems to be under utilised and using the building for a shop/café would ensure that the building is more fully utilised. There would be no upfront purchase costs with this option and very little outlay would be required to fit out a small shop and café. 2. Using the storage building across the road from the village hall. This appears to be the ideal option for a shop but would be of insufficient size to accommodate a café. Again, there would be no upfront purchase costs and the fit out costs would be fairly low although more than would be required in comparison to the village hall. 3. Purchasing or hiring a Portacabin or shipping container. A used Portacabin or shipping container could be purchased for not much more than £5,000 and could be fitted out for a similar amount. The cabin or container could be sited on the car park across the road from the village hall, as one example, but there are other locations in the village that would be suitable. 4. No village shop. The fourth option is, of course, to accept that a village of this size cannot support a shop, particularly if that shop does not include a post office. At the last census the population of the village was around 600 and I doubt whether that has increased at all and may well have decreased. This would suggest that there are probably around 500 people with the ability to make purchases in a shop which is clearly insufficient to support a viable business. There is probably minimal passing trade on the B6277 and there are currently two Co-op stores and a Morrisons in Barnard Castle with a Lidl proposed for the near future. All four major supermarkets now delivery online shopping to the village so a local shop cannot hope to compete on cost which is the main criterion for the majority of people. I read an article in my newspapers recently about the village of Broughton in Hampshire where the owners of the village shop/post office were looking to retire and couldn't sell the business so it was due to close. The community decided they wanted to retain a shop so actually started off by renting a shipping container. The venture has been so successful that they have now moved into permanent accommodation but the point is they started off in a small way to test the water and progressed from there. The other point to make with this is that Broughton is located on the edge of the New Forest and is a much busier area from a tourist point of view and is probably more affluent generally than Teesdale. The proposals on offer here seem to be doing the exact opposite by starting off with potentially the most expensive options when no one really knows whether the proposals are feasible. I would suggest that it is unlikely that purchasing the existing shop will be the preferred choice so that leaves us with using the Methodist chapel but I have a couple of points to make about that option. There does not appear to be any allowance in the figures for remedial works to the chapel before any works are undertaken to convert it to a shop and café. Firstly the slate pitched roofs have reached the end of their serviceable life and need to be completely recovered. Slates regularly blow off and a hole has appeared in the slates following recent storms. It was only a couple of years ago that a substantial hole appeared in the roof coverings due to adverse weather and this is likely to be an ongoing problem. I understand that one of the reasons that the chapel will no longer be used, apart from the ageing congregation, is the ongoing and future costs of maintaining the building and I estimate that the cost of recovering the slate roofs will be in the region of £45-£50k. In addition, the timber windows have also reached the end of their serviceable life and need to be replaced before they start to fall out, which I estimate will cost at least another £20k and probably more. These are just the two major items that are visible on the outside of the building without taking into account any maintenance issues internally.

1. Unlikely to get chapel for £165k. 2. Conversion costs are likely to be far higher than quoted. 3. Planning permission? 4. Income is based on what the shop is now producing - it is unlikely the post office will be happy with the chapel due to security, this will reduce income - won't be the same contract. 5. It will take at least a year for the chapel to be ready for use even if planning permission is granted - most people will already be shopping in other areas. 6. No guarantee the community would be successful in bidding for chapel. 7. The Barn at the shop has lots of scope for development - no mention has been made of this.

Household is split, one favouring current shop and the other seeing no future or sustainability for a community-run venture.

We are willing to invest money in the venture and have the following comments: 1. If we invest we would want a better understanding of the structure and financials of the present business and a projection of the future financials. 2. Post Office - it is our understanding that the post office pays a basic office salary and commission on transactions. If this is the case have these been included in the financials and what is the split versus shop transactions? 3. Parking - we have concerns about parking in this part of Cotherstone - even with the car park. It is important for the new venture to be accessible to both walking and driving customers and visitors. 4. Café - Has consideration been given to idea of renting the café space out to a local/regional business - to generate regular income and better manage investment costs? Unfortunately we were unable to attend the first two meetings, so apologies if the above comments have been addressed. We fully support the retention of a local shop.

Can offer IT expertise and provide general DIY.

I have used your 'some highlights' table: 5 Parking — absolutely critical. 6 Expansion - agree. 7 Overheads — chapel may be expensive - how old is it? 8 Garden - red herring! If you cannot park you will get only locals, therefore any more income? 9. Accommodation - do not agree - if there is nowhere to park who will use it? Fox has rooms and a car park. Also, a café must be dog-friendly. Have you included wage inflation in your calculations?

We are very concerned about the maintenance/running costs if the chapel is used. We support the principle of a shop, but in other premises. Is it possible to arrange something with the new owners of the old garage - overrides the disadvantages of the other 2 options ie parking and high maintenance costs.

I'm in favour of the concept - a community venture to own and run our village shop plus café and post office is bold and inspirational, but the practicalities concern me greatly: the scheme is entirely dependent upon volunteers to run it, presumably with double manning necessary, and I can't see our relatively small population sustaining the required commitment. I favour the existing shop option as it is the right size, has additional income from the proposed accommodation, and is in a sound condition - while the chapel is a big space which might never be filled, and is in a doubtful state of repair which clearly suggests burdensome maintenance costs. The Steering Group have done a good job to get us this far, for which Cotherstone should be duly grateful - despite my reservations I'm prepared to back the scheme, though practical considerations may well prove insurmountable.

1. Having lived in the village for twenty years we really value the shop and the post office and would support any initiative to save them in principle. However we feel that emphasis should be placed on solving the main problem and that widening the scope of discussions to cover community facilities and coffee shop shifts the focus away from the issue of continuing to provide a shop and, if possible, a post office. 2. We strongly favour the 'existing shop' option as meeting the primary need and being lower risk. We doubt the viability of the 'chapel option'. 3. As presented, the figures appear to favour the 'chapel option' but there are question marks over the figures: understatement of development costs of 'chapel option' - although referred to there are no costs including for re-roofing, insulation, re-wiring, plumbing etc. There may also be other unseen building costs. Has the chapel had an asbestos survey, for instance? Parking is promoted as an advantage of the 'chapel option' but again there are no costs provided for improvement of access. Income from 'existing shop' appears understated. If the first floor accommodation were to be used as a holiday let we would expect more than £400 per month from it. We accept the figures provided will be based upon best estimates. Current income levels are far more likely to be maintained with the continuity of the 'existing option'. The disruption caused by interim arrangements whilst conversion work is done to the chapel might have a permanent effect on custom as people change their shopping habits. The closure of the post office might also impact upon general shop trade. There is no provision for working capital (aside from stock) and contingencies - the business will need cash.

I would be interested in space within the chapel to start up a business. I am also interested in the café - either working salaries or perhaps voluntary in some way. I think the idea of this community hub is a brilliant idea and I see a huge potential in the development of the chapel - from toddler and youth groups, a place for the elderly to hang out and have a cuppa, a café serving the local residents and tourists etc. I think we would take a leaf out of the Bowlees Chapel and create something just as exciting here in Cotherstone and I would be happy to get involved at some level.

My view is for the existing shop premises but not sure where the figure of £50k has come from re café and self-contained accommodation. The door at the end of the passage could be locked to separate a flat from the shop/café, then a toilet/washing up area could be installed either under the stairs or in the study area all for little cost. The café area in the current room used as a lounge.

In our opinion, the owners of the shop/post office have got exactly what they chose to buy. A shop and post office. They have done a very good job and spent their money well. They have now decided that they no longer wish to carry on. They offered the business up for sale. No one wants to buy it. We feel that they should have predicted these problems in light of the length of time the business was up for sale before they bought it. Most people assumed they were 'lifers'. Why should the village feel the need to bail them out? If they had a residential property that would not sell (as many people do) the local community would not lift a finger to help. The 'post office' provides mobile services these days to isolated communities with no shops. Most people have access to a car or bus, the town is 15 minutes away. Supermarkets offer better deals and will deliver to your door. Village shops died a natural death at the end of the Victorian era.

If an increase in Council Tax is necessary to support the shop/café we would only be happy if this was for a short term period - say 3 years whilst the shop/café is established. Once established the shop/café should only continue if it can become self-sustaining. We are concerned that you have not included any questions regarding volunteers as we consider this aspect of the project to be as important as the financial ones. Reliable volunteers are hard to come by.

We are uncomfortable with both options due to the financial risk involved, however our comments are as follows. We feel that the chapel option would be gravely detrimental to Cotherstone Village Hall. The village hall IS the hub of the community and already offers all the options referred to in the leaflet - meeting space, craft workshops, pre-school options, selling space etc. At present the hall is not used to its full potential because of lack of volunteer support/interest. It has an annual coffee morning and still struggles to get community support; it is the same faces every year! Both options include a café, is this necessary? In the winter months how many people do you see in and around the village? There are lots of hoops to jump through to serve food to the public and a café so close to the one existing pub serving food would have a detrimental effect on them. The shop option is by far the most sensible way forward but it is our view that it is very important to retain the post office services, as without it the footfall for any shop will be gravely diminished. Without a café, the accommodation could then be fully rented out with a guaranteed regular income of around £400 per calendar month, £200 short of the estimated project income for a café but without the overheads and staff/volunteers needed. It will be also practically ready to go immediately with no delays due to building work. Our biggest worry is that with either scheme, volunteers are needed. After the initial opening will the running of the scheme end up falling onto the laps of the 'usual volunteers'! The play park set off in a similar vein. They initially had lots of support and willing volunteers who perhaps did not realise the commitment needed. Due to the lack of volunteer interest, they rarely fundraise and the natural trail equipment is now in a severe state of disrepair and some of the children's play equipment has been removed for safety reasons.

1. Would the 'chapel option' take business away from the Village Hall? 2. The 'chapel option' creates many potential problems or difficulties. The result would be delay and, possibly, friction among those managing the venture. In the interest of reducing hassle, the 'shop option' might be wiser, and less wasteful of existing resources.

The Village Hall is already a hub for the community - why aren't we considering this venue? It could have a post office and café, art gallery, craft workshops, visiting hairdresser, selling space or repair café. It already holds meetings and many community events - why split the usage between two places when one is already struggling for bookings? We know that the car park is only used by a few people on a Wednesday for lunch club - this area could potentially be put to better use as a garden/seating area. If the issue is securing the post office I'm sure bright minds could overcome this issue and a rejig could make the space work for the existing groups. It seems such a shame to not utilise this gem we already have and save the cost of buying an additional property and put the cash to making the village hall the best it can be.

We feel the 'chapel option' would be very detrimental to Cotherstone Village Hall ie. Making a Community Venture within the chapel. We have a very, very suitable venue within the village hall, which over the years we have lived here - 50 years - has always been a buzzing place for so many activities, maybe not as many at this point in time BUT the hall is available for everyone to use.

We would be willing to volunteer to support either project with help in the shop/café and with renovation work. We would support either options shop or chapel as we feel both have benefits — the shop because it is up and running to little loss of service, café facility would be easily achieved with a lovely garden as an asset to this and opportunity to use upstairs as accommodation or café extension. The costs for this of £50k seem high compared to chapel of £70k. The benefits of chapel option are scope for expansion and/or other facilities but the main benefit is the parking -and lack of this at the post office which we have reservations about with the congestion that occurs in this area so increased (hopefully) footfall would be a major problem for having a café in the current shop. On this basis we have chosen the chapel option - there are reservation for this too - it being less visible and the cost of work to be done though it would be hoped that local residents would help and support the improvement work with their voluntary time and expertise. We feel having the café at the rear of the chapel would probably be a better option due to facilities already being there, parking and possible outside space - though this is less visible perhaps the shop could be at the front? Though these will probably be better together - visibility/access v amount of work and parking?

1. Only two high investment hence potentially high risk options have been presented. Lower investment/lower risk options should also be open for the consultation, rather than dismissed by the Steering Committee/small proportion of residents. Grants and donations are more likely for low risk proposals. 2 An example is the 'hearse house' which surely could be converted at cost of several 10s of £1,000s and does not require purchase. If this could not accommodate a café as well as a shop then make full use of the village hall facilities for this. Car parking is also better here. The 'long term viability' example calculations would be very different. 3. Unknowns and Risks for the 'existing shop' option are applicable to both options providing a misleading guide which should be taken account of in response evaluation. 4. We are happy to help progress a preferred option with a real chance of success but are concerned that the objective must be very clearly defined or else a lot of effort will be spent on things which do not address the actual need. 5. The best way to support and fund the village shop for long term viability is for the village and visitors to have incentives to promote the use of it rather than threats of penalties if it is not supported. 6. Sorry to be a bit negative - appreciate it is not easy!

I am against this idea because the figures don't make sense! And I can't see volunteers working for nothing for very long. Times are changing - I see Tesco, Sainsbury etc in the village every day. Everything can be bought online even the library can supply a book on the laptop. It's only old people who still buy papers and use the shop for gossiping. It would be a good idea to have iPad classes in the village hall for educating the oldies. The village hall needs supporting - we have a first class lunch club on Wednesdays. There is a table stop sale tea and cakes for the village hall before Christmas - it's a minority of the village who support it. If the volunteers want to run a café I am sure this could be done in the village hall and a travelling post office could operate on certain days. Support the village hall without getting millions in debt.

Already have a village hall so I feel chapel option extras would be against this.

I think another option to be explored is to use the village hall as a café and shop. The village hall is massively underused and this should be developed as a community hub if it is felt that the village needs one. The unused car park could be turfed to make an outdoor café, the back room or middle room could be used as a café and the other as the shop. The pub at Gunnerside has just started a 'mini shop' stocking essential and looks to be working well. I object to my council tax increasing to fund a failed attempt at a community venture.

The chapel is a nice idea but I guess it would take £200k+ on top of the purchase price to do a good conversion. Would the converted space be in competition with the village hall? The old petrol station looks a reasonable size and cheaper to convert - any chance of it coming up for sale?

Whilst I support the 'chapel' alternative I consider the whole chapel to be far too big for the proposed enterprise and will result in a 'white elephant' burden on the shop/café. I think you would struggle to occupy the large proportion of the building. A successful alternative could be to install the shop/post office/café in the old school room which would be quite adequate. The chapel itself would convert into 4 flats to then benefit the Methodists.

1. Cannot decide between the two options on cost grounds as insufficient costing for the chapel option, which would become a great white elephant and would have a very negative effect on the Village Hall. The Steering Group's 'recommendation' cannot thus be taken seriously. 2. If the venture fails after 4 years - this example is very misleading and ignores, apparently, the length of time it would take to sell the failed shop premises. A clear example of the liabilities must be put forward to everyone before a final decision can be made by the community.

Can't ask people to invest with no guarantee of investment return - that's not good business! How long would parish council underwrite loss for? Business Plan required.

My sole interest is the sale of newspapers - no one has suggested how this can be achieved - perhaps copy Bowes or ask Middleton newsagent to help. Why is this being sent out by post? Surely among all your younger respondent, it could have been hand delivered - this is what I mean about Council's relentless waste of money.

A suggested alternative would be to perhaps utilise the village hall somehow to host a shop/café. Although ideally it would be nice to keep it in existing situ. We are happy to support and assist with a community venture if the majority was to keep existing shop. The idea of the chapel seems unnecessary and non-viable.

We are both happy to volunteer our spare time into the community venture.

As the existing shop is 'up and running' I think this is a more sensible option which will keep continuity in the services offered. I feel that the 'chapel option' might end up a something of a 'white elephant' as there are already enough such operations nearby, like the Witham Hall and The Hub in Barnard Castle, also Bowlees Visitor Centre and if we are without a shop for any length of time people's shopping habits will change accordingly.

Out of the two proposals put forward on this leaflet we think that the existing shop would be the more viable option. It is up and running and once taken over would be straight into action whereas the chapel option in our opinion would eat money in converting it and the general upkeep of such a big old building. Also as is stated in the leaflet the existing shop would be a much more saleable asset if the venture should fail. We also have a large, useable community facility in the village hall - do we need another?

Interested in volunteer opportunities in shop/café. Ideally keep post office facility is possible.

From long experience I cannot see the chapel as a viable option - it is a large building and I cannot see the demand to sustain it as a community building when we already have a village hall. I would like to see the Parish Council approach some of the Housing Associations with property in the village to see if there is a possible joint venture that would substantially reduce the risk to the PC and the rate payers.

I have completed the questions to a point, but I am concerned that no mention is made anywhere that responses are confidential. That is essential. I am not prepared to have anyone knowing what we might, or might not, be prepared to invest in such a venture, regardless of whether or not we might use it ourselves! I'm afraid that I have therefore only indicated that we would be in favour of the existing shop, which we would continue to use occasionally. We do fully appreciate the value/importance of such a facility within a rural community and it would be very sad to see it lost, as one

only has to look at nearby villages where no such shop/post office/café exists. Middleton Tyas is a perfect example of where this has been made to work, by all accounts really successfully, and Dorothy Logan would be worth talking to!

Due to difficulty of parking in Cotherstone, widening the access to the chapel should be contested in the final project proposal.

Why not run a small shop and post office counter for a number of hours each week from the village hall?

Two shop owners have run the village shop with great commitment. From the figures given at the meeting it is not financially viable. For such a small village I am not convinced there is a sustainable level of volunteers to cover the hours needed. I did offer to volunteer if the community want it, but it would only be occasionally for a few hours. I think without the tourist trade this would collapse (caravan parks). I think the Parish Council have done an excellent job in the way they have managed this process/community consultation, as have the Steering Group. If it does not go ahead everyone has tried their best. Thank you.

Following the 'dissolution' of the working group, who will take this project forward?

Both favour chapel more although idea of accommodation for rent at shop - interesting space at chapel for different uses appealing and car parking. Both willing to volunteer for jobs such as basic maintenance, cleaning rota, help in shop/café, not on a committee though.

Views of other resident at address: If enough volunteers come forward, chapel ideal, but I don't feel it is a good enough community at the moment to take it forward. The village has a perfectly good village hall for meeting rooms etc. Figures for café usage are not realistic - winter months will have very little or no usage.

We have emailed with regard to the apparent discrepancies in the comparative cost summaries. Clearly this shows the 'existing shop' option as more profitable, and with a notional rent income of only £400 per month.

Properly fund, manage, care and maintain a café facility within the village hall site.

I notice that the approximate figures for re-roofing, insulation, re-wiring and plumbing work to the chapel are not included in the 'phase one' figures. I suspect that this would be a huge figure resulting in the comparison figures being skewed. I would suggest that an approximate cost for these works be obtained, along with an approximate repayment cost and how it would impact on the 'net profit per month' figure for the chapel. Only then could a true comparison be made.

1. Café in village been tried. 2. Shop too expensive on goods. Certainly do not want to be paying more money!

Too many assumptions and too little back-up evidence, eg. who would want to buy a converted chapel, therefore how can you put a re-sale value on it? Also, what constitutes a café, so how do we know if we would use it?

Cotherstone already has a community hub in the village hall. Post Office may not generate profit, but it does 'bring people into' the shop/café.

1. The Barn could be used as a business unit. 2. Investigate parking spaces at school on a weekend and during holidays to support café.

I feel that creating a community space in Cotherstone may be detrimental to the Village Hall and it seems a shame that a building, already half-suited to use as a café and village shop might suffer from competition in the longer term. Profits generated would help with the upkeep of the village hall obviously and some of the finance envisaged for either of these new ventures could be very profitably used for refurbishment and equipment for the Village Hall. I feel it can't be ethical for a village the size of Cotherstone to try to maintain two such buildings. Resources and help should be combined/pooled to make a success of one, rather than being split, in the many senses that having a new facility may result in. If a part of the village hall become the shop/post office then we would use a café weekly, use a shop weekly, we would be unlikely to buy shares and we would support an increase in parish precept but not otherwise (ie if a new facility was created).