

# Slindon Forge Project - Consultation responses

## Top Line summary of Consultation

This short report has been prepared to summarise the main relevant issues at this pre-planning stage of the project.

The material gathered within the consultation process will also provide significant input for the specifics of the shop/café if and when we get to the stage of deciding on the mix of goods and services to be offered, but at this stage this report focuses on the *principle* of using the Forge as a shop, café and information point.

The report provides a summary of key responses to the community consultation process, which comprised 3 linked activities;

- A *questionnaire* to all 242 households in the parish (distributed at the end of March 2009)
- A 2-day '*Exhibition*' with more details of the plan, held in Coronation Hall on 3 & 4 April 2009 (10.30am to 4.30pm)
- A *Public Meeting* at 7pm on Friday 3 April 2009. Those who took part included some of our advisers and supporters of the project including
  - Helen Melia, Chairman of Strood Green community village shop
  - Gordon Roddick, co-founder of The Body Shop and Slindon resident,
  - Nick Herbert, our MP who is also, relevantly, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Farming & Rural Affairs
  - our District Councillor, Norman Dingemans

The purpose of the consultation process was to identify community wishes and needs – for two important reasons;

- The project will only go ahead *if* the community want it. The Slindon Life project team, the National Trust (and Arun District Council) had agreed that evidence of community support was a necessary pre-requisite of any further action to progress the project.
- Key details of the project will take account of community input. We wanted community ideas - albeit at this stage we wanted to focus on the *principle* of creating a community shop and café. We also knew that many in the community had questions about the project, and the Consultation events provided the chance to air

**Overall**, the consultation provided ample evidence of widespread community support.

The following pages provide a record of the consultation process and short summary of the main findings

## **Public meeting (3 April)**

About 75 people attended and were generally very supportive.

Some genuine concerns were raised however;

- Parking especially at school times (those who live in Meadsway were especially concerned about this, but it was a more widespread concern. Indeed this was an issue raised by the Trusts Architectural Panel representatives who visited the Forge in October 2008 to consider the project).  
We are working with Arun District and WSCC to address this.
- Commercial viability was questioned by some who felt it was a laudable idea but not realistic or achievable (mostly on the basis that the previous village shop had failed and a sense that the village isn't big enough to support a shop. (We don't accept this view on the basis of careful research and business planning but it is an entirely legitimate concern that will be explored more fully as part of the development of a robust business plan).

An important question was raised

- How will the decision be taken on the structure of the venture (volunteer-run v commercial tenant).

## **Exhibition (3 & 4 April)**

82 people came to see the Exhibition which consisted of a series of about 15 display panels explaining the core idea, the likely customers and some basic facts, along with examples of other community shops.

The Exhibition also included 3 'suggestions boxes' inviting those who came to note down ideas, pose questions and asking for offers of help with the project.

### **Brief summary of ideas 'posted'**

- 20 ideas posted including
  - Use Gastons Farm, not Forge
  - Integrate Hall, shop and field
  - Ideas for solving the parking issue
  - Café to prepare meals for primary school
  - Concern at 'sweets outside a school'

### **Brief summary of questions left**

- 5 questions left – 4 concerned parking; the other (from a child) enquiring if sweets & ice cream could be offered at the shop

### **Offers of help**

- 31 offers in total (ie about 35% of those who came to the exhibition)
- Almost all want to buy a share (7 wanted just to do so)
- Wide range of other offers of help, including some specialisms (surveying, publicity, insurance etc)
- 9 offered to join the steering group to do the work of getting the project 'live'

## Questionnaire – top line summary

- 242 questionnaires were circulated to every household in the parish.  
78 completed questionnaires were returned – representing a 32% response rate.

### Question 1 – support for the principle

This is without doubt the single most important question at this stage of the project.

- 91% were SUPPORTIVE of the principle of making a community shop and cafe at the Forge.
- Of the 7 who DIDN'T support it, 5 were on the grounds that they don't believe it is viable – NOT rejecting the idea *per se* (ie rejected in sorrow not anger)
- Thus only 2 actively rejected the principle
  - One on the grounds that parking would be problem – but even here they suggested a farm shop at Gastons Farm should be set up, and The Forge used as a blacksmiths (not farrier)
  - One on the grounds that the Trust should take responsibility for restoring the Forge and make the space available for exhibitions

Given the almost unanimous support it is perhaps useful to look in more detail at the pattern of actual response since we can perhaps assume that non-response will tend to reflect indifference rather than *active* rejection.

Although the individual questionnaires were confidential, we included a code on questionnaires\* to identify the *rough* location of each to enable us to explore three quite different respondent circumstances and contexts for response; the table below describes these 3 circumstances and indicates the response rate for each;

Locational circumstances	Total no. of households	Response Rate
Residents of Reynolds Lane & Meadway (directly affected – within sight and sound of Forge)	28	46%
Residents of north part of village (within walking distance but not directly affected)	104	33%
Residents south of A29 and outlying parts of Parish (would need to drive to Forge)	110	25%

(\* some scribbled this out, so the figures do not entirely match up with the total response rate).

### Question 2 – rating of the value of the scheme

Average of 'scores out of 10';

Value to the community as a whole : 8.4  
Value to them personally : 7.3  
Appropriate use of Forge : 8.3

There is not much scope for these scores to be higher! Thus, these figures indicate not only widespread community support for the project as a whole, but the different

elements (personal *and* community value) and the appropriateness of using the Forge for the project are also widely supported

Note that many – almost 40% - rated the *community* value as greater than the *personal* value.

### **Illustrative examples of open-ended comments**

#### **The best thing about the project.....**

**Comments dominated by enthusiasm for the sense of belonging and building a closer community, plus some additional themes of practicality and positive comments about a new use for the building**

*Fosters a sense of community spirit, convenient for basic shopping needs and attractive to visitors*

*Helping to build a stronger community*

*It would make a very happy & useful addition to Slindon)*

*Convenience*

*It can't come soon enough*

*Think BIG!*

*Keeps the village ALIVE*

*Will put a centre in the village, which it lacks*

*A practical use for a redundant building*

*Improving the sense of community, convenience and environmentally good*

*I miss not having a shop*

#### **Worst thing about it.....**

**Comments focus on both parking and commercial issues**

*Parking could be a issue, but on the other hand it could slow down the traffic rat run!*  
[Many in a similar vein]

*Viability – there are shops at Walberton, Barnham & Eastergate. Would it get enough trade?*

[A number of very similar comments were made]

*A waste of time and money – bankruptcy*

*Where will the money come from?*

[And a number of similar concerns about losing capital invested in the project]

## Other personal and community benefits.....

*A village is empty without a shop and lots of people feel isolated. It can be a meeting point*

*The notion of a transition village comes to mind – also to encourage local producers to sell more locally – many opportunities will arise*

*Keep the venture simple, cost effective and useful for all the village – do not make it over fussy*

*A chance for possible local employment*

*With the Forge, café, Hall & new piece of land there is an opportunity to create a large, multi-function centre round which we can all get together*

*Encourage visitors who at present continually ask about shop, pub, tea shop*

*Brings the community together. Being a new resident it would be nice to feel involved*

## Likely community usage

At this stage, the detail of likely usage of the shop/café is somewhat premature and overall community support for the *principle* of the project is the key issue for our purposes. Moreover, the responses, whilst informative in confirming our assumptions in the business plan (which is hugely reassuring), they are not entirely surprising.

In practice, the experiences of other shops and the published data on the secondary shopping market makes it clear that *everyone* uses shops of this type but whether or not people will use The Forge will depend on the appropriateness of the mix of goods on offer and the quality of the people who run it.

Nonetheless, a few points about shop and café usage are worth noting as they have implications for the scale of the proposed building works and the types of facilities that would need to be incorporated into the building.

- Few expect to use the shop for their main shop, but most expect to use it for a *range* of different types of secondary grocery shopping
  - Top up on essentials, things forgotten or run out of
  - 'Treat' items
  - The things you need to buy often(And on that basis the main categories of products sought are fairly predictable – see below)
- Main items sought are dominated by fresh bread, fruit & veg, milk but also
  - Basic groceries and deli type products
  - Off licence & papers, greetings cards(in fact a fairly comprehensive range of classic convenience store goods)
- Anticipated frequency of usage is very varied but the most common expectation is roughly weekly.
- Key services sought are prescriptions drop off/collection, dry cleaning and ATM, plus information about village events
- Unsurprisingly most want keen prices, but there is a broad demand for both local produce and fair trade goods.

- Relatively FEW local residents expect to use the café on a very regular basis (but the business plan assumed this) – but this facility is widely praised as a *social* benefit and some are very enthusiastic about this facility.

## Reactions from other bodies

A wide range of those with specific vested interests were also consulted over the project – including community groups (including parish, district and county councillors), local businesses, both schools and various local authority departments etc.

Non-response from many (so far)

- Pudding Club *'applauds the initiative'* that can *'only enrich the village'*
- College positive
- Primary School generally very positive – albeit concerns about parking, specifically delivery vehicles rather than shoppers
- Parents and Friends of primary school positive
- Spur fine – provided it isn't subsidised/unfair competition
- Nearest neighbour (Kate Procter) supportive
  
- Arun District Council hugely supportive
  - Norman Dingemans helpful and enthusiastic
  - Economic development (brokering contacts with grant bodies)
  - Planning & Conservation all ok with it all (site meeting on 14 April confirmed this).
- Action in Rural Sussex want to actively support (via RASP initiative)
- County Councillor, Derek Whittington, supportive and helped to broker highways dept in a constructive way
- Nick Herbert MP supportive and helpful (will be useful for generating publicity when/if we need it)

SlindonLife  
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