

FINAL DRAFT

## **Background**

Good evening, my name is James Venton, and I am here tonight as the Planning Agent representing the Jeanes family, Mr. Pope of Faun & Co Butchers, and a well-established national retailer offering a mini supermarket.

I am here to discuss an important matter concerning the parcel of land situated to the north of the A38, just east of Stogursey Lane. You may recall that this land, owned by the Jeanes family, was recently the subject of a residential development proposal. The application was declined by Somerset Council's planning team, but tonight, I hope to revisit the potential and importance of this site with fresh perspectives and insights.

Before the previous planning decision was made, and in the time since, we have been in ongoing discussions with Somerset Council Planning Department. These discussions have led us to refocus our approach, particularly on the retail and commercial aspects of the site, as guided by Planning Policy T2b, which places a huge emphasis on community benefit.

## **The Village and Retail**

Through consultations with local business owners, past and present, it has become clear that the village has been struggling to maintain a sustainable shopping presence.

Mrs. Pocock, a long-standing resident, recalls the significant impact the closure of the village bank had on local businesses. Faun & Co butchers business saw a large uplift during covid but sadly people have since reverted back to driving to supermarkets where they can park and find all their weekly shop in one place. Decline has been continual and with the post office also at risk, she fears the future is bleak for the remaining village shops.

The recent closure of Castle Stores highlights this issue, and further investigation reveals a pattern of decline in local retail over the years. Once home to a variety of businesses, including two green grocers, a Post Office, a Bakery, 2 Butchers, a Chemist, a Haberdashery shop, a Saddler, 3 Pubs, a Garage, an Estate Agent and a bank, Nether Stowey has seen many of these essential services disappear. Even the Premier Store on St. Mary's Street has faced instability, with frequent changes in tenancy, further underscoring concerns about long-term sustainability. Parking, access, and pricing issues have also been raised by parishioners, adding to the general challenges.

Having lived in Nether Stowey and nearby villages for many years, I myself have seen how village facilities have steadily declined generally. This isn't unique to Nether Stowey—many local shops in nearby villages like Wembdon and Cannington have closed, and Kilve's shop is set to follow. Faun and Co shut their own Stogursey shop not too long ago. Other butchers in the area such as Cooks, Poles, Doddens, Trott, William and Symth to mention just a few have also shut their doors for good. In fact, the only local butcher moving forward in a sustainable way is Pynes who has created something very similar to what this proposal offers.

It's crucial for local councils to act early and address these challenges, and I've always regarded Nether Stowey Parish Council as forward-thinking in this regard.

## **The Proposal**

So what are we suggesting? In light of all of the above, we have explored how a new retail proposal could create a viable community asset that addresses these needs and arrests the decline, while supporting the local economy and creating local jobs.

Unfortunately, Mr. Pope of Faun & Co Butchers couldn't join us tonight, but we've had extensive discussions with him regarding his concerns about the future viability of his business. The current location is no longer feasible —parking is limited, access is difficult, and he relies heavily on loyal village customers, as passing trade has dwindled. His staff has reduced from 10 to just 3, in recent times and without a solution, the business faces the very real possibility of closure.

This proposal has been devised to address these concerns by creating a new village facility that would relocate Faun & Co Butchers and "The Kitchen" café restaurant, it would include for a new mini supermarket and essential local services, community space and a children's play facility. This potential development, designed in a farm shop style, will create over 50 jobs for the local community, and safeguard the future of the remaining village businesses. With improved parking facilities, it will reduce traffic congestion within the village and remove the current difficulties associated with deliveries.

To make the project viable for a developer, the proposal will have to include some housing, potentially up to 57 residential units, incorporating an affordable housing element. This potential development represents an opportunity to safeguard shop facilities in the Parish while addressing long-standing issues and supporting and growing local employment.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this proposal has been devised to assist with arresting the undoubted decline in the village shopping facilities, and protect the rural economy. It is a proposal that thinks outside the box, rather than sitting back and watching current businesses fail one by one, and then wishing something had been done earlier. Once these facilities go, they are lost forever.

I believe you are very much at a pivot point here. The worrying signs are there already. If you chose to do nothing, I would wager that the two main shops that your village has left will fail in a very short time frame. Alternatively, to me it seems you are being presented with an exciting opportunity here. So please do not throw this opportunity away out of hand.

We are not here tonight asking you to sign off these plans. We appreciate there is still some work to do on them, and we would welcome the Parish Council's input in terms of the design and what is included, or not. What we are here to ask tonight, is do you as a Parish Council, a) in principal recognise there is an issue that needs addressing and b) will you as a PC support the general principal of a proposal such as this as a Community Benefit under Planning Policy T2B and thus enable us to put some more meat on the bones of this proposal, to work with you in safeguarding Nether Stoweys future sustainability and viability.

We would welcome any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your time