



## **Detailed feedback from the July 2021 Community Consultation on the proposals for Root Farm Building prior to planning**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021 a total of 143 leaflets (59 paper and 84 digital copies) were sent out to tenants of the Duchy of Lancaster and posted through the letterboxes of all known village houses, farms and businesses in and immediately surrounding the village of Dunsop Bridge. The leaflets invited community feedback on the draft plans and proposals for Root Farm buildings.

Posters were displayed around the village and a soft copy of the information was made available on the dedicated website: [www.dunsopbridge.com](http://www.dunsopbridge.com). Hard copy plans were sent out on request. Direct contact was also made with key stakeholders in late June 2021 to explain the proposals and plans.

Twelve individuals engaged and provided comments, representing an 8% response rate. All issues raised in these responses are detailed below.

*Please note that only a very small proportion of the responses received over the 30-day consultation period related to our plans for Root Farm Buildings. The majority were in connection with the draft proposals for the Old Garage site. However, in the interests of transparency and dialogue, we have included both sets of responses in this summary document.*

### **BACKGROUND**

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A sustainable rural community demographic is one where there is a critical mass of people of all ages. This ensures that schools can remain open, employers can find workers, young people can find jobs and training opportunities and older residents can feel part of an active community. This creates a balanced, mixed economy which offers a breadth of different sorts of roles and allows it to adapt to changing economic realities.

Historically, churches historically acted as the principal place of gathering and community. They provided a communal place of worship and regular opportunities for neighbours to meet and share in each other's daily lives. The decline of church life, along with the closing down of other local services, can leave a village without any centre or heart. Recent changes to the village of Dunsop Bridge, including the closure of the former garage, the reduced post office hours and the limited offering in the local shop have left the community without any centre or hub. What is proposed is a new community hub building to combat this, providing a new multi-functional space for community gatherings, improving local services available to both residents and visitors and generating new employment opportunities.

The Duchy of Lancaster owns a number of buildings in and surrounding the village. The buildings at Root Farm and the Old Garage site are beyond their economic life. Something needs to happen to them. The developments proposed are not financially advantageous to the Duchy, but we believe that investment in these buildings will provide the building blocks to support the long-term sustainability of the village.

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## KEY THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK ON PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT OF ROOT FARM BUILDINGS

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Generally, the redevelopment proposals for Root Farm were supported, especially given the poor condition of the existing farm buildings. It was also suggested that the local school might benefit if people came to work in the spaces created by the proposed redevelopment. Specific questions raised – and our responses – were as follows:

**Q. Is there a need for workshops and units? Should we be encouraging people to travel to workspace in Dunsop Bridge? Is this an industrial complex and if so, what restrictions are there on the use of the units to prevent disruption to the adjoining holiday cottage and residential units?**

One respondent expressed concern that 13 small business units were being proposed here when the neighbouring site at Root Hill (originally developed for office use) had struggled to find occupiers. We were also asked how local businesses that might occupy the units might be. Would people be encouraged to travel from nearby towns to set up business in Dunsop Bridge? Respondents pointed out that Dunsop village is rural but not remote. It is approximately 20 minutes from Clitheroe, 30 minutes from Longridge and 40 minutes from Lancaster. This begs the question as to whether there is a need for more employment opportunities in the village?

- A. The balance of the commercial element of the buildings at Root Hill have been fully let and occupied for several years. The office space was relet (to a local resident) relatively quickly when the unit became available in Spring 2020. There was at the time demand from several organisations. Enquiries regarding the availability of the new workspaces at Root have already been received from a variety of different businesses, the majority of which are local and none of them are of an industrial nature. So there is demand for the space, provided the Local Authority will allow a change of use from the current agricultural classification. It would be wonderful to be able to let the units only to local businesses with local employees. Sadly we cannot guarantee this, nor can we prevent people from travelling from further afield. However, the type of space on offer is designed to attract predominantly local employers with local connections. As a historic landowner the Duchy is in the unique position of being able to wait and to work with local stakeholders to ensure that the right tenants are selected to meet the needs of the village and its community.

**Q. Do we need that many car parking spaces? What will be the impact on the adjoining farmhouse and holiday cottage? Is the present access track and visibility splays adequate for the proposed development?**

The draft proposals show 23 car parking spaces. Two respondents queried the quantity of spaces and asked whether the Duchy really envisaged such an increase in the number of vehicles visiting the site, given that the whole point of local employment opportunities in rural areas is to reduce the need for transport? It was also pointed out that this potential increase in volume of traffic would no doubt be of concern to local residents and could also detract from the enjoyment for those renting the holiday cottage.

- A. Traffic advisors are being consulted to accurately quantify the number of spaces needed to support the scheme. However, adequate car parking facilities are essential to prevent problems of cars parking elsewhere in the village. Over time, the provision of rural workspaces should, in theory, reduce car journeys but spaces are still needed to allow the cars to safely park away from the centre of the village.

The proposed redevelopment will undoubtedly have an impact on the enjoyment of those who live in the farmhouse and rent the holiday cottage, especially during the construction phase. Both properties are owned by Duchy. We believe that the long-term benefit of these proposals to the community outweighs the short-term impact of the redevelopment.

Safe access and egress to the site is very important. The appointed traffic advisors are reviewing site access, access track and visibility splays and will advise appropriately. As part of the planning process the Council's Highways department also review, comment and amend proposals where appropriate to ensure they are adequate, sufficient and safe for the community.

**Q. How will people travel between the communal facilities and the proposed work spaces?**

There was a suggestion that a covered walkway might be useful in connecting the communal facilities with the work units. This suggestion will be reviewed by the architect in the final design proposals.

**Q. How do you propose to deal with foul waste?**

The foul water drainage proposal is for a klargester range of tanks or treatment plants. The exact make and model will be specified by consultants. Whatever is installed will accord with current legislative requirements.

**Q. Could you not locate the communal workspace and therapy rooms at Root Farm?**

The proposed communal workspace and therapy rooms could be accommodated in Root Farm Buildings but it was felt that they sat more comfortably in the main hub complex so that if someone, for example was using the therapy room then partners/family/colleagues could comfortably sit and wait close by in the café area. Disabled access and access for the elderly is also easier on the Old Garage site.

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## KEY THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK ON DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR THE OLD GARAGE SITE

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There are still issues that require clarification before we can publish plans for the proposed redevelopment of the Old Garage site. A further opportunity will be available for the community to comment on the specific plans for this site in due course. This is why feedback on the draft proposals for the Old Garage site was not invited as part of this consultation. However, a small number of comments were received from neighbouring households and these, as well as our early stage responses, are detailed below:

In general, the feedback demonstrated support for the redevelopment proposals which were seen as providing a useful physical resource and new meeting hub for the village and villagers. Support was also expressed for the opening of a well managed and appropriately stocked village shop, a post office that is open for business and a small café/restaurant in line with the previous operations of the village tea room. Specific questions raised – and our responses at this early stage – were as follows:

### Q. Why does the village need a Community Hub when it already has a village hall?

This was mentioned in two responses. The main concern was that the proposals for the Old Garage site could make the village hall redundant, reducing the number of bookings and associated rental income. It was pointed out that a lot of money has been spent on the village hall and it would be disappointing if this turned out to have been wasted. We were also asked how the proposed communal space would be maintained and run.

- A. The creation of a village hub building is not in any way intended to detract from the existing village hall. We recognize that much ongoing voluntary work is done freely by the village hall committee and friends, along with fundraising to maintain such a welcoming community facility. What we are proposing at the Old Garage site is a very different and we believe complimentary space. It includes a shop and café facilities which we hope would be open to the public daily. However, given the concerns expressed, the Duchy will review the need for a community meeting room and library facility within the proposed new space, discuss this with Village Hall representatives and possibly retain a quiet communal workspace area instead. The operator of the main building will be asked to manage the therapy room bookings and space as well as provide access to the communal workspace.

There are a number of successful examples of community hubs in rural areas that work well and in parallel with village halls. One of the most successful ones is the Humbie Hub in Scotland. A small village with a village hall and a 'hub' with a very similar offering to what we are looking to create for Dunsop Bridge. See <https://www.humbiehub.com/>.

### Q. Proposed café/restaurant and Post Office

Concern was expressed over the potential increased capacity of the café. Respondents wanted to know whether it would offer takeaway facilities and highlighted recent issues with littering. Questions were also raised over who would be running the proposed café; how would we ensure that it is adequately staffed; whether this would be licensed and open in the evenings; whether the opening of the Post Office could be made mandatory for a set number of hours/days per week; and how the Duchy would choose the right people to take on the responsibility of this larger operation?

- A. The new space is envisaged as being larger than the tea room at Puddleducks in order to accommodate a wider offering including a shop, information for visitors etc, as detailed on the website. It will be easier for disabled and elderly people to access and the initial designs include space for people to sit outside, under cover and safely away from the streetscape. Profits that might come from a slightly larger café capacity and shop should help support the less lucrative or non-profitable running costs of the community offerings at the building.

The Duchy will not be running the hub. The intention is to find a local business to operate it. Choosing the right people to do this is the one of the hardest parts of the job and carries the biggest risk factor in any development like this. Initial discussions with several people and organisations are already underway. A final decision will take time. Thought has gone into the design of the building and every attempt made to be able to operate it with one or two members of staff in the quieter winter months.

Whilst it will ultimately be up to the tenants to operate the building to meet the needs of the community and visitors, there are likely to be requirements included in the lease to cover post office opening hours, grocery shop,

management of therapy rooms, communal workspace etc. Comments have been noted about the issues surrounding takeaways and this will be carefully considered before any final decision is made.

In discussions with the operator we would encourage them to stay open until 7pm in order to provide an early evening café food and shop offering to the village and surrounding areas. We understand that there are concerns about external noise from the outside areas and feel that 7pm is late enough but 5pm a bit too early. A licence to sell and serve alcohol would we feel be appropriate in order to provide a wider offering in both the café and shop. However, this along with many other things would be subject to Council decision and approval.

#### **Q. The hub as an 'event space'**

Two respondents asked for clarification over whether or not the hub building would serve as a large events space, asking whether this was needed, who would run it, and will the residents have a say in any events or services offered here. They also asked whether the Duchy would be running the hub or whether the management of it would be given over to a third party.

It is important to state that this is not intended in any way to be a space for very large events. The Duchy has in the recent past declined a lucrative offer from an organisation wanting events space due to the negative impact this would have on the local community.

#### **Q. What about the e-bike shop that is currently there?**

We are in regular communication with the e-bike business and it would be great if it chose to stay in the village. It is wonderful to hear that they have very much become part of the village and are now firmly part of the community.

#### **Q. Opening the area behind the Garage onto the playing fields.**

It has been suggested that the village green can become overcrowded with picnics, deckchairs and children playing on a fine summer's day. We have also been informed that the field by the playpark is a facility regularly used by residents to exercise and train their dogs. One respondent expressed concern that any opening up of the area behind the Old Garage site would effectively take away this facility from residents in favour of providing a direct benefit to the café and visitors to the village.

- A. There are always difficult decisions to be made when looking at new development proposals. We recognise that the opening up of the rear of the building may not be popular with adjoining tenants or some residents seeking to walk their dogs. However, we genuinely believe that this is the right thing to do for the benefit of the wider community. The back of the building is a wonderfully sheltered place and opening it up to the playing fields to the rear will allow more people to benefit and safely use the space. It would also alleviate congestion on the village green and the inevitable hazards for children playing near parked or moving traffic. For these reasons, we believe the proposals will allow more residents to enjoy the playing fields as well as visitors.

#### **Q. Grocery Shop**

Support was expressed for an improved village shop. However, some respondents wanted to understand how it would be run and how the Duchy would ensure it was properly stocked. There is a divergence of opinion on whether stock should include more of a 'farm shop' or a 'convenience store' offering. The point was made that if residents do not use the shop then it will inevitably be subsumed into the café (as has happened previously).

- A. A village shop does need to be well supported by the community. To ensure that this happens, the operator may need to stock a good, wide mix of groceries and other 'staples' which are sensibly priced as well as a wider offering of locally produced and sourced products. We believe that the slightly larger café proposed as part of the new hub will help support the shop as well as other community functions such as the therapy and communal workrooms. It is not meant to compete with the wider and more extensive food offerings elsewhere in the but should provide products needed by local residents at appropriate prices as well as a selection of local items and products which would appeal to visitors to the area.

**Q. Parking, high volume of traffic and road safety**

We know that many residents have expressed concern and frustrations over parking in the village. This includes issues around the blocking of access to off-street parking and private roads, parking on the road side and verges, etc. Respondents queried whether this would be compounded by the redevelopment proposals which are designed to attract greater numbers of visitors – and new residents – to the village. It has been suggested that the village parking/road management system would not be able to cope with larger numbers of visitors.

- A. Concerns and frustrations over traffic, cars and parking problems is a countrywide issue compounded over the past year and a half by Covid-19 lockdown arrangements. We cannot control people driving into the heart of the AONB and are not actively seeking to draw more visitors to the area but rather to cater for those who are already there. However, it is probably true to say that a new building with ease of access might inadvertently do this. A draft proposal has been tabled for parking and discussions will be held along with appropriate surveys and advice from traffic consultants, highways officers and the Parish Council as to the best way of addressing the issues raised. Opening up the rear of the Old Garage site and providing better connectivity and pedestrian routes from the carpark through to the river will help keep pedestrians off the public highway and away from associated traffic and parking hazards.

**Q. Privacy & Noise**

How will villagers' privacy and security be maintained if a large public hospitality venue is opened? What measures are proposed to safeguard tenants that are adjacent to the new development? Are there any guarantees that noise and language can be managed and controlled at this venue especially considering the outside seating area?

- A. Our proposals do not include plans for a 'large public hospitality venue' at Dunsop Bridge. Discussions will be held with occupiers on both sides of the development well in advance of any development commencing. However, it should be noted that these houses will be next to an active construction site for well over a year. There will be noise and associated disruption to their enjoyment of these residential premises, and this is something that is being discussed internally at the Duchy. We will advise those immediately affected if and when our proposals are finalised and approved. In the event of any redevelopment on site, proper and safe hoarding/fencing will need to be installed to shield the development and minimise its impact on the life of the village. We would not want what is proposed to impact on residents' wellbeing. We acknowledge that there will be some noise from external areas once these are operational and this will be mitigated where feasible.

**Q. Post Office**

There is general support for the long-term ambition to retain the Post Office at Dunsop Bridge. Respondents pointed out that the existing facility has been closed since March 2020, even though it is supposed to be open on Thursdays between 12-2pm. This continued closure has had a detrimental effect on local business and inconveniences local residents. What assurance can the Duchy give that the Post Office will open regularly each week?

- A. The Post Office is an integral part of the community. We are aware of the levels of concern among local residents that this has remained closed for a considerable period. We believe that a Post Office is an essential element of any redevelopment proposals for the village and will be seeking to ensure the service is protected, retained and moved to the new community hub building in time.

**Q. Potential for an Increase in visitor numbers and associated impact**

A small number of people have told us that increasing visitor numbers have had a detrimental impact on roads, fences, signage, stiles, gates and gardens in the village as well as congestion, inappropriate parking and litter. It has been suggested that emergency vehicles would struggle to get through if required due to inappropriate on road parking.

- A. The past 18 months have been extraordinarily difficult for many people – and many areas of outstanding natural beauty around the UK have experienced huge increases in numbers of visitors unable to travel further afield. This has obviously proved challenging for those who are fortunate enough to live in these areas. Nevertheless, as custodians

of a historic landed estate we believe that it is the duty of the wider Duchy family to facilitate public enjoyment of these spaces as well as fostering a greater understanding of the laws and customs of the countryside. Issues of parking and traffic will of course be the subject of forensic examination by highways officers and the Duchy's own traffic consultants as we develop our plans.

**Q. Fly-tipping and Litter**

Is there a plan to control increasing volumes of litter if visitor numbers increase? The rubbish in the village is said to be at record levels, resulting in regular litter picks by residents. Fly-tipping of commercial waste is also a concern. How will the Duchy address this?

- A. We cannot control fly-tipping, which is a matter for the local Council. However, we will review concerns over a 'takeaway' operation. As we understand it, an additional bin has now been secured from the local waste services department to help deal with over-flowing public bins. An appropriately sized 'bin store' has been allowed for as part of our redevelopment proposals and we would work with the local Environmental Health and Waste officers to ensure that all necessary safeguards were in place. However, if we secure the right tenant then he/she/they will have a vested interest in keeping the surrounding areas clear of rubbish.

**Q. Facilities / walks / general village condition and tourist information.**

Lack of maintenance has caused most circular walks from the village to be unwalkable over the last 12 to 18 months. Walks are also poorly marked out and there is no information on the variety of walks available anywhere in the village. The area is too small for a tourist information office, but a good and well positioned sign / illustrated noticeboard detailing walks out from the village would be of great benefit to both residents and visitors.

- A. We have taken this suggestion on board as part of our plans for the Post Office, shop, and new community hub building. We will also feed in suggestions for a public noticeboard to our architects and design consultants. We would be happy to work with community groups who may have put together planned or structured walks to publicise them as widely as possible.

12 August 2021