

A Business Plan for the Purchase & Operation of Freeland Methodist Church (‘The Chapel’) as a Community Hub

**Updated
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**Freeland
Community
Benefit Society**

www.freelandcbs.community

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Executive Summary

Project overview: Freeland Community Benefit Society (FCBS) aims to acquire, restore, and operate the historic Freeland Methodist Church ("The Chapel") as a community hub. The first phase will feature a café, combined with a flexible community space. Depending on how the project evolves, FCBS may develop additional community services (recognising the strong interest of a shop among community members) in a later phase of the project.

The building: FCBS has commissioned and reviewed building and structural surveys that make recommendations about remedial work; these costs are included in the refurbishment plans and overall budget.

Community support: Extensive village consultation shows strong support, with 70% favouring a café/shop model and 65% supporting a café/community space. Over 100 individuals expressed willingness to volunteer and/or expressed interest in offering pledges of financial support.

Governance: FCBS operates as a Community Benefit Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, governed by an elected Management Committee with expertise in company formation, project management, finance, legal and community development.

Meeting community need: The Chapel will directly address key local issues identified in community feedback, including older adult isolation, parent isolation and addressing a current lack of youth provision – with potential for evening workshops, creative activities, and a safe, welcoming venue.

Community benefit: This project will restore a historic building with significant heritage value constructed in 1805, provide employment opportunities, and work alongside existing businesses to provide a flexible, family friendly community space for events, workshops, and social activities.

Operating model: FCBS will tenant The Chapel to a café operator, ensuring community ownership while enabling the tenant to focus on running a successful business. Rental income will fund building maintenance and generate a small surplus for wider community benefit. To support long-term sustainability, the lease will include a flexible rent mechanism linked to the café's profitability—ensuring both FCBS and the tenant share in its success.

The tenant: FCBS will appoint a skilled, community-minded tenant to run a vibrant café, combining commercial expertise with a commitment to local benefit. The tenant will support the project's aims, complement village businesses, and help sustain village life. Following positive discussions, FCBS confirms that The Oxfordshire Yeoman is the preferred tenant and is confident a mutually beneficial agreement can be reached.

Funding: The capital required to purchase and refurbish The Chapel is currently estimated at £339,000, comprising: £150,000 in community shares (revised upward following feedback on the lower potential for share investment from other sources); £70,000 in share funding from other sources (revised downwards); and £119,000 from grants/donations.

Next steps: Share pledge launch (June 2025), Chapel purchase bid submission, grant applications, tenant selection, building acquisition, refurbishment (Winter 2025/Spring 2026), and opening (Easter 2026).

1. Introduction

Background

Freeland Methodist Church on Wroslyn Road, Freeland—known to Freeland residents as ‘The Chapel’—has been at the heart of the community and Freeland’s historic centre since 1807, making it the oldest Methodist place of worship on the Circuit. However, the building has been unavailable to the public since 2017 when The Chapel was closed for public worship.

The building currently has planning permission from West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) for Class E (“Shop and Café”) and F2 (“Local Community Use”). Following closure, the Methodist Circuit twice applied for change-of-use planning permission to convert the building into a house, but both requests were denied by West Oxford District Council (WODC), with the second refusal unsuccessfully appealed. In his final report, the Planning Inspector wrote:

“The community hub, shop and especially café would offer opportunity to retain a more spacious interior. With an emphasis on serving local people, the hub would also have a community use similar to the way that the chapel use served the village.”

It was with these principles in mind that Freeland Community Benefit Society (FCBS) formed in 2018 with the intention of buying the building and renovating it as a community hub for the benefit of all Freeland residents. With the applications for change-of-use delaying the sale, The Chapel was only placed on the market in March 2025. FCBS understands from the agent, Abbey Properties, that following market testing in April and May, The Chapel will be offered for sale through closed bids on 11 July 2025 with a guide price of £175,000.

Community Benefit Societies

FCBS operates as a Community Benefit Society (CBS), a corporate structure designed for organisations that function for the benefit of the wider community rather than solely for the benefit of their members. In the UK, CBSs are registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

CBSs can raise capital by issuing community shares, which are typically purchased by individuals, businesses, or organisations who wish to support the Society’s objectives: for example, running community facilities, cafés, shops or other local services.

Shareholders become members of the CBS but unlike traditional companies, each member has one vote regardless of how many shares they hold—the ‘one-member, one-vote’ principle. Members support the Society’s mission and participate in its governance (e.g. electing the Management Committee). If the enterprise generates sufficient reserves the Management Committee may be able to pay modest interest payments to shareholders, although any profits will usually be reinvested for community benefit. Unlike co-operatives, CBSs are not primarily member-serving; their primary purpose must be to serve the broader public and community interest.

Appendix 2 provides a more detailed description of Community Benefit Societies, and Appendix 3, of Community Benefit Society shares.

The FCBS Management Committee

FCBS's Management Committee is responsible for all strategic and operational decisions required to run The Chapel. The Management Committee has significant experience of project management, leasing, contract tendering, contract management, equity funding, company formation, accounting, public relations and communication, and running community groups and charities. FCBS is therefore confident it can effectively and efficiently manage the building and any third parties or tenants who become involved.

FCBS aims to recruit a solicitor and accountant to provide legal and accounting advice. It is currently in discussion with local candidates for these unpaid roles.

The Management Committee is advised by the Plunkett Foundation, a UK-based charity that supports communities in establishing and managing community-owned businesses.

Short biographies of the current Management Committee are provided in Appendix 1.

2. Partnership with the Community

Consultation with local businesses and partners

The Chapel is located in the heart of the village close to the Oxfordshire Yeoman Pub, Freeland Nurseries, the Village Hall, St Mary's Church, and the recreational playing field (see Figure 1). FCBS plans to develop The Chapel as a community hub, complementing rather than competing with local businesses.

When notified of FCBS's plans, Trevor Johnson, owner of the Pub, said: *"We are really pleased the group overseeing the bid is committed to making sure the plan for The Chapel benefits the village as a whole, as well as the pub and other businesses."*



Figure 1: Location of key Freeland services

Robert Crocker, Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee and local farmer, said: *"There's a huge opportunity for The Chapel to meet needs that the village hall facilities currently can't accommodate. Examples would be exhibitions, and community events which struggle to find availability in the hall."*

Tim Webster, owner of Freeland Nurseries, has also expressed support for the project, seeing its potential to complement their busy and unique business located in the old walled garden of Freeland House.

In addition to local businesses and elected officials, FCBS has received a supportive response from Eynsham Park Estate and Blenheim Estate.

Consultation with local councillors

Local councillors are strongly supportive of FCBS's plans. The Chair of Freeland Parish Council Peter Foster, Councillors for West Oxfordshire District Council Lidia Arciszewska and Roger Faulkner, and Councillor for Oxfordshire County Council Liam Walker have all expressed strong support for FCBS's work to secure The Chapel for community benefit.

Consultation with the village

To gauge support for the project within Freeland, FCBS prepared a questionnaire in March 2025, which was hand-delivered to all households in the village. Residents were able to complete and return the physical copy or respond online.

A total of 227 responses were received (from 211 households), representing a significant proportion of the village's 550 households. Almost 95% of all participants supported the proposal to acquire The Chapel and utilise it for community purposes, with three-quarters of these supporting a combined shop and café, and nearly two-thirds, a café coupled with a flexible community space.

Financial support for the project was also encouraging. Around two-thirds expressed interest in purchasing community shares as a means of providing capital investment, with three-quarters of respondents indicating they would be willing to support a modest increase in Freeland Parish Council precept (the portion of Council Tax specifically allocated to fund services provided by the parish council), should that prove necessary (**NB, the Management Committee has since agreed this option will not be pursued**).

The consultation also identified a strong willingness within the community to contribute time and effort. Some 113 individuals indicated they would be willing to help with aspects of the project's development or operation and 114 respondents requested a pledge pack, thus expressing interest to become involved in supporting the project financially. A number of comments expressed in the questionnaire are shown in *Figure 2* below.

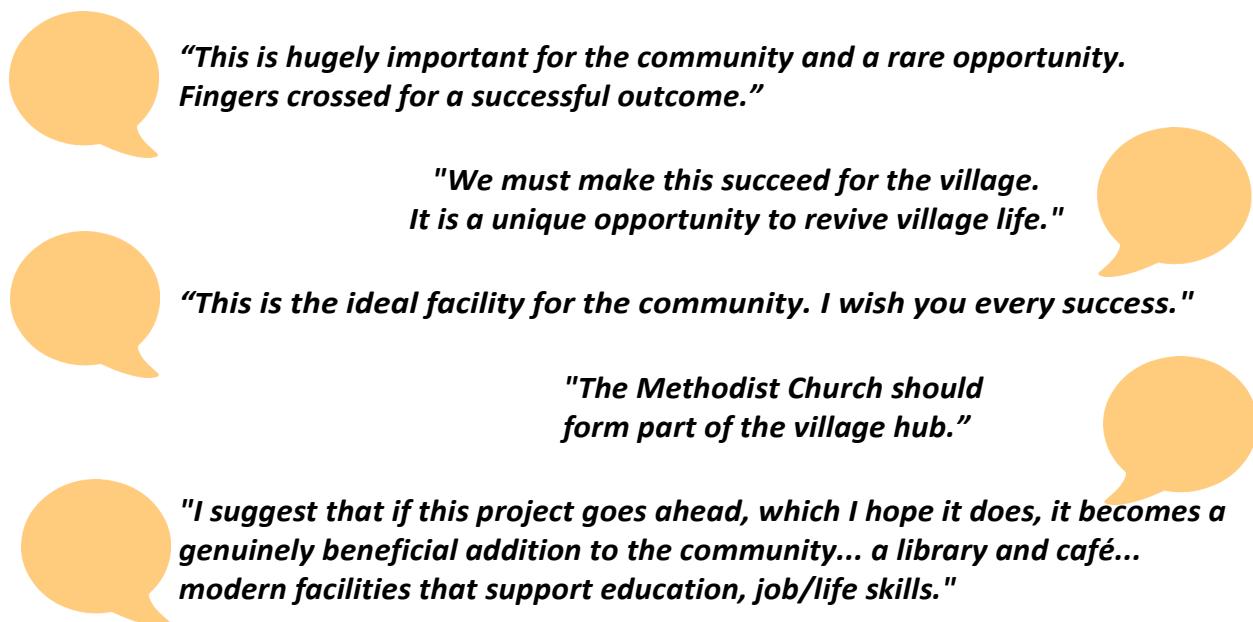


Figure 2: Quotes taken from responses to the community questionnaire

3. A Vision for The Chapel

Operating model

In considering which operating model should be adopted for The Chapel, speed, risk and flexibility are key considerations.

While the desire for a shop remains strong within the community, the fixtures and fittings of a retail premises render it less suitable for community meetings and events. There is also the question of risk: shops require high levels of management whether volunteer- or tenant-run operations, so there are general complications such as staff rotas and long term tenancy expectations, and specific considerations for Freeland—including the viability of a shop given changing buying habits, the linear geography of the village, and the proximity of the well-stocked and well-supported Co-op in Long Hanborough.

The need to move at speed also dictates the importance of an operating model that is sufficiently viable and sustainable to engender confidence among potential investors and supporters. For these reasons, the Management Committee identified a combined café and community space with a tenant running the café as optimal at this initial stage.

The Chapel as a tenanted café / community space

The Chapel has significant potential to operate successfully as a café and community space. Its layout, visibility, and proximity to key village assets and services make it well-suited for repurposing into a vibrant, flexible space.

As well as this model providing a clear pathway to meet community and viability goals, it retains flexibility to evolve the model in future years. Importantly, the tenant's 'offer' must complement that of the Oxfordshire Yeoman pub opposite; therefore, after discussion with the Pub, FCBS can confirm the Pub is the preferred tenant and both entities are optimistic that agreement can be reached on how to operate the facility in a way that benefits both the Pub and the community. Failing this, the tenant must be an entity sympathetic to and willing to collaborate with the Pub. The Management Committee would retain control over tenant choice, ensuring compatibility.

An evolving model

A café and community space are the beginning of a long-term, flexible community project that can grow with Freeland's needs. Its function as a community meeting point offers the opportunity to improve wellbeing and community cohesion as well as supporting local groups, art and music through evening community use.

As the proposition develops, there is potential to expand the physical space through a modest extension, allowing FCBS to accommodate a wider range of uses or additional services such as a shop. This flexibility allows the project to evolve over time, ensuring it remains relevant, sustainable and rooted in the needs of the local community.

Heritage value

This project would restore an important historic building—the oldest Methodist Church in the Witney Circuit, established shortly after John Wesley's death in 1791—to a use which is consistent with Methodist values. Freeland is unusual in having a Nonconformist chapel before the construction of its Anglican church St Mary's, making this building a unique part of village and regional heritage. Restoring it will not only preserve this rare legacy but also encourage further appreciation and investment in local history.

Meeting Community Need

In 2022, Freeland Parish Council conducted a community survey to understand how residents felt the village should evolve over the next 10 years. There were clear concerns about lack of amenities and social isolation, which are laid out in more detail in Appendix 4. The Chapel will directly address key local issues identified in this community feedback:

- Older adult isolation – by offering accessible daytime space, clubs, and social activities.
- Parent isolation – through a family-friendly café, toddler groups, and opportunities to connect during school hours.
- Lack of youth provision – with potential for evening workshops, creative activities, and a safe, welcoming venue.

The flexible layout of the building allows it to serve different groups throughout the day and week, becoming a shared space for all ages and stages of life.

Economic development

This project will create new jobs especially for younger people in the village seeking work experience or older people looking for part time work, supports existing local businesses by increasing footfall, and establishes Freeland's only shared workspace to boost enterprise and collaboration.

Daytime hot-desking and family-friendly space

Freeland needs a welcoming daytime space that offers daytime flexibility for individuals, families, and informal groups. The Village Hall is geared more toward scheduled events rather than relaxed stays, co-working or spontaneous gatherings. The Chapel would offer comfortable, well-equipped hot-desking space and a welcoming environment for parents with young children.

Community activities

Outside of café hours, the space would come alive with community-led events and social programming. The village questionnaire indicated that as well as support for use as a meeting space, there was strong endorsement for use as a gallery, library, music workshop or performance space.

Smaller than the Village Hall and bigger than the Newell Room, all of the above uses complement the Hall's functionality, especially in allowing longer term installations such as exhibitions. The Chapel can also expand the current meeting room capacity offered by the Hall, accommodating regular midweek events such as workshops or small clubs. The evening availability will maximise the use of the space, and while financial contributions from these activities will provide a minimal contribution to the overall business model, it will ensure the space meets the social and cultural needs of a wide cross-section of the community.

4. Structural and Building Surveys

FCBS commissioned a building survey with Historic Building Advisory Service. The survey was completed in May 2025 and provided a detailed analysis of the condition of the building, including a few areas requiring work. These works have been included in the cost estimates outlined in Section 6.

Given the Stonesfield slate roof, FCBS also felt it was a prudent step to commission a Structural Building Survey with Stantec. Again, this report has been used to inform the refurbishment cost estimates. These surveys were funded from reserves donated in 2018 to establish FCBS, which have been carried over.

5. Purchase and Renovating The Chapel

Purchasing The Chapel

Abbey Properties is asking for offers in the region of £175,000, and now has announced a bid deadline of 11 July. FCBS's bid will balance prudent use of the funds pledged towards the community and other investment in share capital and anticipated from grants, with a realistic assessment of the building's commercial value.

Refurbishing The Chapel

Following the completion of the building and structural surveys, and after consultation with local architects and builders, FCBS developed a detailed refurbishment plan. FCBS also made provisions for professional fees, fundraising costs and utility expenses during the refurbishment period. These estimates have guided the development of a careful and realistic budget to ensure funds are used effectively and transparently.

Cost of Purchase and Refurbishment

The total budget for purchasing and refurbishing the property is £339,000 – see *Table 1*.

Table 1: FCBS budget for acquiring, refurbishing and setting up The Chapel

Capital Costs (non-itemised due to commercial sensitivity)	£
Building purchase	Withheld
Stamp duty	Withheld
Refurbishment	Withheld
Purchase and renovation contingency	Withheld
Total Capital costs	£305,600
Start-up Costs	
Architect, surveyor, legal, etc	£15,000
Pre-trading utility and other bills	£10,000
Start-up cost contingency	£8,400
Total Start-up costs	£33,400
Total Capital and Start-up costs	£339,000

6. Funding Sources

Overview

FCBS aims to raise a total of £339,000 startup funding from a combination of share and grant funding, broken down as follows:

- £220,000 raised from selling shares in FCBS:
 - £150,000 from the community share offer
 - £70,000 funding from other investors, including the Co-op's Booster Programme
- £119,000 raised from local benefactors and grants

Community shares

FCBS forecasts the need to raise £150,000 from community share pledges. The original target was to raise £120,000 from village residents by 28 June to be sure of submitting a bid. In the intervening time, however, FCBS received feedback of higher-than-expected renovation costs, and a lower-than-expected potential for locally-based organisations to invest in shares. This has led to the target for community pledges to be revised upwards to £150,000, which is calculated to be achievable given the interest in pledging in 2019 and the quantity of early pledges made just after the 2025 campaign was launched.

In terms of share pledges from other sources, Blenheim Estate has expressed interest in supporting FCBS through social investment. The Co-op Foundation's Community Shares Booster Programme also offers significant funding for successful share offers, but expectations for levels of funding available through this scheme have been moderated. Hence the total funding budget through these other sources has been reduced to £70,000.

FCBS launched the pledge pack on 7 June 2025. The prospects of securing The Chapel are significantly increased if £150,000 is pledged from residents before 9 July, the Management Committee's cut-off date to prepare its bid for submission by the 11 July deadline.

Grant and donations

To complement the community share appeal, FCBS is actively engaging with a number of grant-giving bodies and local stakeholders. These include:

- Freeland Parish Council, from whom a grant is being sought – **note, the option of increasing the Parish Council Precept will not be pursued.**
- West Oxfordshire District Council's community grant programme 'WestHive'.
- The Architectural Heritage Fund, which supports the regeneration of historic buildings.

In the longer term, the National Lottery Heritage Fund also represents a significant opportunity to support heritage and community-focused phases of the project. Together, these partnerships will be critical in securing the full start-up capital required to acquire and refurbish The Chapel for community use – see *Table 2*. A timeline towards The Chapel's purchase and refurbishment is contained in Appendix 5.

Table 2: FCBS breakdown of funding sources

	Minimum
Community Shares	£150,000
Supported Share funding	£70,000
Grants	£119,000
Total	£339,000

7. Operating Model and Tenancy Approach

The success of The Chapel as a community hub will depend on a strong financial foundation that balances commercial viability with community benefit. Following detailed discussions, the Management Committee settled on a tenancy model it believes combines long-term sustainability, effective risk management, and meaningful community value for investors in FCBS.

Building maintenance and capital investment

FCBS is likely to assume responsibility for refurbishment alongside the long-term maintenance of The Chapel building. This both increases the likelihood of securing a strong tenant and ensures long-term protection of the asset. FCBS expects maintenance costs to vary significantly over time. Therefore, a key objective for FCBS will be to build sufficient capital reserves to absorb any significant planned and unplanned costs that could occur in future years. This will mean that we expect to generate around £45,000 of funds within five years of starting operations. This approach ensures the long-term stewardship of the building remains with the community while enabling the tenant to focus on operating a successful café business without the distraction or burden of significant capital outlays.

Rent structure

The rental model is designed to provide financial sustainability both for FCBS and the tenant. Rental income will cover FCBS's maintenance obligations and generate a modest surplus to enable share sales and support wider community objectives, consistent with the society's community benefit purpose.

FCBS's preferred model is for the tenant to not be responsible for funding refurbishment or structural improvements, and will bear only the agreed rent as their financial obligation during the lease period. It is believed that this structure will encourage tenants who have entrepreneurial ideals but lack the financial resources to provide risk capital for building purchase or renovation. To promote long-term sustainability, the lease will include mechanisms to adjust rent levels according to the underlying profitability of the business, ensuring both tenant and FCBS share appropriately in the café's success.

Rental income from the café

The Management Committee researched rental values for commercial property in West Oxfordshire and talked to two business owners running cafés in the locality. FCBS's financial model assumes that the café offers food and hot and cold drinks across the week from Monday to Sunday. The financial model assumes a monthly rent of £600-800, generating an annual income of £7,200-£9,600 from the café. This rental income will be further supplemented by fund-raising activities and evening community rental income to provide FCBS with the funds necessary to meet its obligations. We expect these further activities to generate £2,000 of income per year. A simple business model for a café is contained in Appendix 6.

Tenant profile

The selection of the tenant is central to the success of the venture. As indicated previously, FCBS will therefore aim to recruit an experienced, motivated tenant with the necessary entrepreneurial skills, operational expertise, and customer focus to build and sustain a vibrant café business.

In addition to commercial competence, the tenant will be expected to share FCBS's commitment to community benefit, actively supporting the broader aims of the project and contributing to the long-term vitality of village life.

Governance and division of responsibilities

Our approach is designed to retain community ownership and control of The Chapel, while ensuring that the day-to-day café operation is led by individuals with the necessary commercial skills. It offers a robust, low-risk operational model that aligns with both the financial and community benefit objectives of FCBS. Nonetheless, the Management Committee has considered the risk and mitigations. These are contained in Appendix 7.

8. Next Steps

FCBS is pursuing agreements in principle from local businesses for financial support, and is identifying specific grant opportunities in order to confirm eligibility and establish time-scales and parameters.

Local residents willing to invest in this venture are asked to **complete the Pledge form** (available from the FCBS website www.freelandcbs.community) to notify the Management Committee of their intentions **before 11 July**. Please see the Appendices for more information about owning Community Benefit Society Shares, and for timelines.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The FCBS Management Committee

The seven-person Management Committee was voted into place by FCBS members in May 2025. Members of the Management Committee are voluntary, receive no remuneration and have no personal financial interest in the project beyond the amount they may invest themselves.

Amy Jackson has lived in Freeland for over 20 years. She's committed to improving the social vibrancy of the village through her time as parish councillor, campaigning for appropriate development in Freeland, and supporting the funding of local amenities. In her day job, Amy runs a communications consultancy specialising in rural issues and uses her social science PhD to conduct quantitative and qualitative research.

Andy Murray (Treasurer) lives in Freeland with his wife Aliya and son Alistair who is currently busy doing A Levels. He has retired as a Project Engineer in the Oil and Gas industry starting out with eighteen years spent with Esso Petroleum Company followed by engineering company assignments in crude oil production and pipeline projects. He is also involved in the Allotment Association and Village Speedwatch.

Colin Smith (Vice Chair) has lived in Freeland for 50 years since coming to work in the IT department at the Regional Health Authority. He and his wife have two sons, both of whom were educated at Freeland Primary school and Bartholomew secondary school in Eynsham. In addition to his involvement with FCBS, he is chair of the Freeland Energy Group—part of the Eynsham CAPZero project aiming to make Freeland and other local villages carbon neutral by 2050.

Jane Duff (Vice Chair) has lived in Freeland for over eight years now and currently edit the Freeland Grapevine. She has run her own music teaching business for over 50 years and is passionate about preserving a high quality of life for all Freeland residents.

Mike Foster and his family have lived in Freeland since 1998. He was a school governor at Bartholomew School in Eynsham then Chair of the Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust. He worked as a mental health nurse in the NHS and was Deputy Director of Nursing at Oxford Health NHS Trust before retirement. Since then, he has been able to pursue his interest in smallholding, including keeping a small flock of rare breed Portland sheep.

Philip Huxley (Secretary) has lived in Freeland since 1992. Both his children were educated at Freeland Primary school and Bartholomew secondary school in Eynsham. Philip worked in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries for over 40 years, most recently as Vice President, Oncology for a company developing anti-cancer therapies. In addition to managing science, Philip's professional life has included equity financing, company formation, asset sale, business development and project management.

Tom Harden (Chair) lives in Freeland with his wife Alice and two children, both born in the village with the oldest about to start at Bartholomew. He runs a small commercial strategy consultancy advising board directors and investors, and has worked with 80 clients over 12 years, including a number of hospitality businesses. He is also involved in Freeland's micro bakery, serving the village fresh bread every Friday since 2020.

Appendix 2: Community Benefit Societies

Legal Structure: The proposed enterprise will operate as a *Community Benefit Society (CBS)*, registered under the *Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014* and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Purpose: The primary purpose of a CBS is to operate for the benefit of the wider community. All activities and surplus funds will be directed towards achieving community benefits, rather than maximising financial returns for individual investors.

Membership and Governance: A CBS is owned by its members—individuals or organisations who purchase community shares. Membership operates on a *one-member, one-vote* basis, ensuring democratic control regardless of the size of shareholding. Members play an active role in governance, including the election of the board and key decisions at general meetings.

Raising Capital: A CBS raises capital primarily through the issue of *community shares*. These are withdrawable shares designed for community investment, typically offering a modest return. Share capital remains at risk, but provides an opportunity for members of the community to directly support the venture.

Profit Distribution and Reinvestment: CBS profits are used to sustain and develop the enterprise, reinvest in the community, and—where appropriate—pay limited interest to community shareholders. The CBS structure ensures that surpluses are not distributed as dividends but retained for the benefit of the community.

Asset Lock: An asset lock may apply to restrict the distribution of assets, ensuring that any retained value is applied to community purposes even in the event of dissolution.

Distinctiveness: A CBS differs from a co-operative (which serves members) and from a Community Interest Company (which operates under company law). The CBS model is specifically designed to ensure that community benefit is the overriding purpose.

Appendix 3: Community Benefit Society Shares

This appendix outlines key features of the investment offered to members of Freeland Community Benefit Society (FCBS), and explains how these differ from conventional equity investments. The structure reflects both the Society's legal obligations and its overriding commitment to community benefit.

Asset Lock and Capital Protection

Community Benefit Societies are governed by the *Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014*¹ (CCBSA 2014). Under this legislation, the assets of the Society are held for the benefit of the community. The Society is subject to an asset lock, which means:

- Investors cannot sell or transfer their shares on an open market.
- When an investor withdraws their shares (subject to the Society's discretion and financial position), they receive no more than the original amount invested — there is no scope for capital appreciation.
- In the event that the Society is wound up, any residual assets (after repayment of share capital and liabilities) must be applied for the benefit of the community, and cannot be distributed to members.

This asset lock ensures that all capital raised serves the long-term interests of the community and prevents the private accumulation of capital gains by investors.

Withdrawable shares

- Shares may be withdrawn by members who have held them for a minimum period of three years.
- The Management Committee will specify a maximum total withdrawal for each financial year.
- Withdrawals will be made in the order in which they were received up to a maximum total withdrawal specified by the Management Committee for the financial year.
- All withdrawals must be funded from trading profits, reserves or new share capital raised from members and are at the discretion of the Management Committee having regard to the need to maintain prudent reserves and the Society's commitment to community benefit.
- The Management Committee may suspend the right to withdraw shares (wholly or partially), indefinitely or for a fixed period.

Interest Payments

While community benefit societies may pay interest on share capital, any such payments are strictly limited both by law and by the Society's governing rules:

- Interest on share capital is not a reward for investment risk or capital growth, but a modest compensation for the use of capital.

¹ Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (CCBSA 2014)

- FCBS may (but is under no obligation to) pay interest to shareholders subject to the following:
 - Payment of interest must be from trading profits and is at the discretion of the Management Committee having regard to the long-term interest of the Society, the need to maintain prudent reserves, and the Society's commitment to community benefit.
 - The primary obligation of FCBS is to apply its profits to community benefit, and only after fulfilling this duty may it make interest payments to investors.
- In practice, this means that any interest offered is likely to be modest and typically aligned with rates offered by ethical or social investment schemes.
- The primary obligation of FCBS is to apply its profits to community benefit, and only after fulfilling this duty may it make interest payments to investors.

The society's rules govern the specific provisions for interest payments, including the Management Committee's discretion to declare or withhold interest based on the financial position of the society in any given year.

Appendix 4: Community Need

In 2022, Freeland Parish Council conducted a survey of residents to understand what they liked and disliked about Freeland at that time, and what their hopes and fears for the village were over the next 10 years. Around 150 people participated, with the following findings:

- Older age groups (65 and over) were significantly more likely to mention the problem of isolation and loneliness in the village
- Young people (under 25) and parents of teenagers were more likely to mention how little there is to do in the village
- All age groups talked of frustration with lack of public transport, which can further compound loneliness, boredom or lack of social opportunity experienced as a result of poor village amenities.

Other summary results are reproduced in the charts below. These indicate unhappiness over lack of amenities (*Figure 3*), support for a café, shop or other facility (*Figure 4*), and concern about the risk of losing existing amenities (*Figure 5*). The aim of the café/community space is to not just provide groups in need with social opportunities, but to complement existing services such as the pub and nursery, and increase their long term viability. The full survey results can be obtained from Freeland Parish Council.

Q18: Please tell us up to three things you like least about Freeland - free text

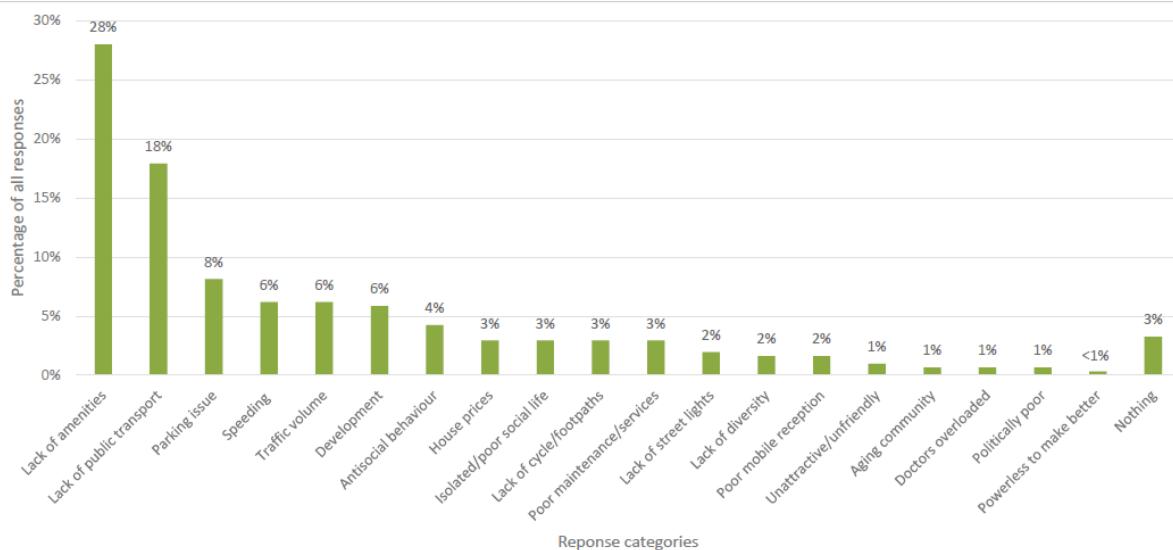


Figure 3: Categorised free text responses to a question asking what participants like least about Freeland

Q20: Please tell us up to three things you are looking forward to most about the future, in relation to Freeland or more broadly - free text

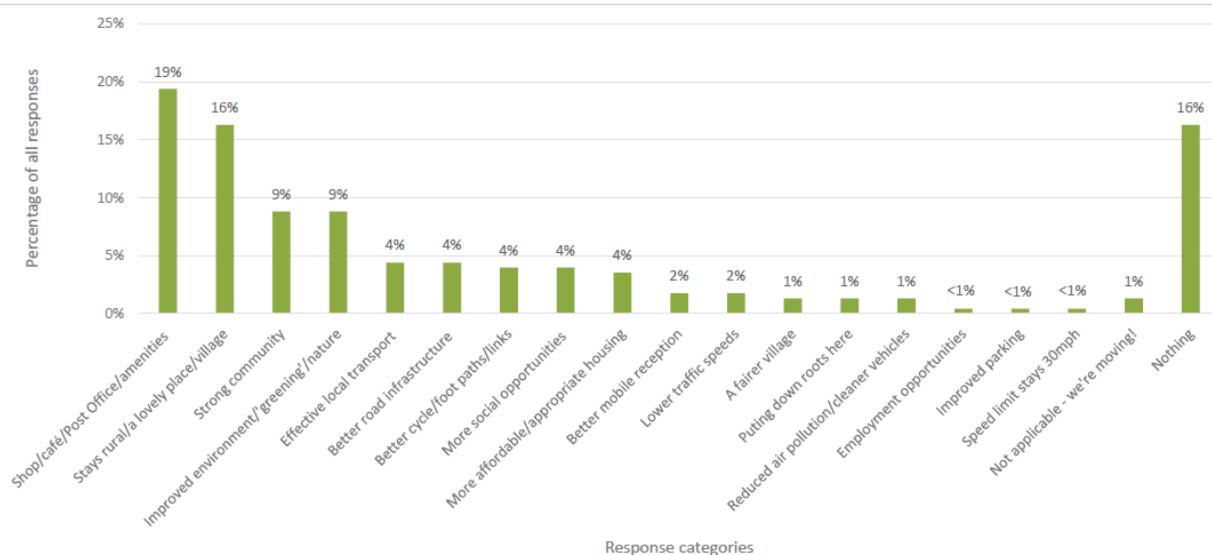


Figure 4: Categorised free text responses to a question asking what participants are most looking forward to about the future

Q21: How upset or concerned would you be about the following potential situations?

Answered: 137 Skipped: 12

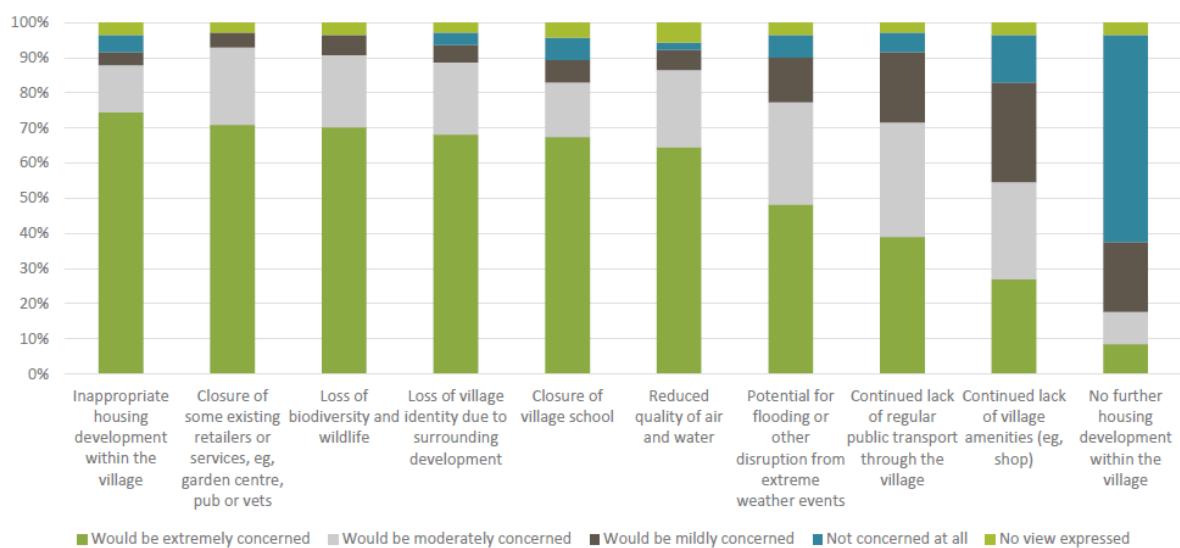


Figure 5: Level of concern about different scenarios in the village; note the closure of existing village services generated the most moderate or extreme concern of all offered

Appendix 5: Timelines

Phase 1: Bid preparation

<i>Planning and preparation for bid</i>	<i>March-May 2025</i>
<i>Community consultation</i>	<i>May 2025</i>
<i>Business planning and grants secured in principle</i>	<i>April-June 2025</i>
<i>Pledge offers secured from community</i>	<i>June 2025</i>
<i>Tenant in principle secured</i>	<i>June 2025</i>
<i>Bid submission</i>	<i>June-July 2025</i>

Phase 2: Awaiting decision/preparing for purchase

<i>Share offer preparation</i>	<i>June 2025</i>
<i>Grant applications proper</i>	<i>June 2025</i>
<i>Bid notification</i>	<i>Est. July-August 2025</i>

Phase 3: Purchase agreed/awaiting completion

<i>Share offer issue</i>	<i>July-August 2025</i>
<i>Grants secured</i>	<i>July-September 2025</i>
<i>Purchase completion/Building acquisition</i>	<i>September 2025</i>

Phase 4: Renovation and set up

<i>Renovation/refurbishment</i>	<i>September 2025-March 2026</i>
<i>Tenant secured/agreement in place</i>	<i>September-October 2025</i>
<i>The Chapel opening</i>	<i>March-April 2026</i>

Appendix 6: Simple Business Model for Café

Having consulted with other café owners we have produced this simple business model to highlight the viability of the café operating model.

Table 3: Financial breakdown of a modest café operation

	Base performance	Medium performance	Stretch performance	Notes
Covers per day	50	60	70	
Covers per month	1,500	1,800	2,400	
Average Spend/customer	£6/cover	£6/cover	£8/cover	Blend of Coffee and Cake, and Sandwich spend
Gross Turnover/month	£9,000	£10,800	£19,200	
Net Turnover/month	£7,500	£9,000	£16,000	
Cost of sales/month	£2,250	£2,700	£4,800	30% of turnover
Staff costs/month	£3,000	£3,600	£6,400	40% of turnover
Utilities costs/month	£600	£600	£800	
Other costs/month	£640	£700	£760	Inc cleaning, transaction fees, insurance, rates
Rent/month	£600	£800	£1,200	Rent modelled to increase with café revenue.
Total expenditure/month	£7,090	£8,400	£14,360	
Profit/month	£410	£600	£2,040	Profit generated by the café tenant

Appendix 7: Risk Analysis

FCBS has undertaken a risk analysis for the project which is summarised in *Table 4* below.

Table 4: A summary of the anticipated risks and planned mitigations

Risk	Impact	Mitigation/action
Insufficient funds	FCBS is unable to purchase and renovate the building	Abandon project and reimburse any funds received
Unable to purchase property	FCBS is unable to purchase and renovate the building	Abandon project and reimburse any funds received
Unable to appoint and keep good tenants	Having the right tenant is critical to the success of the project	FCBS will evaluate the suitability of prospective tenants using a balanced scorecard approach. They will need to have previous experience and a sound business plan. As a further option, The Chapel could be run as a community venture with a manager and staff hired directly. FCBS has already received offers from people with the necessary skills to do this.
Gaps between tenants	Negative impact on cashflow	<p>FCBS will implement regular reviews with the tenant and two-way feedback. FCBS will work closely with the tenant to anticipate any problems early and identify/support action plans to help maintain and grow their business.</p> <p>FCBS will assist the tenant where possible with marketing, voluntary help (e.g. stop-gap cover for staff, grounds maintenance, etc).</p> <p>FCBS will impose a reasonable notice period and have a plan ready in the event that the tenant does give notice. FCBS is exploring tenant insurance.</p>
Unexpected repair costs	Higher than anticipated expenditure	FCBS has carried out building and structural surveys prior to the purchase of the building. It will allow a reasonable contingency in its refurbishment budget.
The business is not viable	No rental income can be achieved	If—despite a sound business plan, vigorous and sustained marketing, and the support of members and other customers—the business does not develop as anticipated, then FCBS would be forced to close the café, sell the assets and repay the original investors, with any residual assets to be used for the benefit of the community. This is clearly not an outcome FCBS seeks, nor one it thinks is likely, but this possible course of action should give investors some security that in the event of the enterprise being unsuccessful, they will recover some or all of their investment.

Appendix 8: Frequently Asked Questions – FAQs

Q1: Who is leading this project?

A: The project is led by Freeland Community Benefit Society (FCBS), a not-for-profit, community-led organisation formed to acquire, restore, and repurpose the Freeland Methodist Church for the benefit of the local community.

Q2: Does FCBS have the skills and experience to run this project?

A: There are over 100 community pubs/ cafés around the country. The FCBS management committee has a lot of relevant experience and it is being advised by specialists, including existing hospitality business owners. It is also being supported through advice and financial support by sector specialists including Plunkett UK.

Q3: How will the tenant be selected?

A: The Management Committee will put together a set of requirements that inform the tenancy, to make sure FCBS finds one that is the best fit for the community. This will involve interviewing potential tenants and assessing their business plans against FCBS criteria. FCBS will also carry out due diligence on each applicant. The Society's members will approve the final selection. The preferred tenant is the Oxfordshire Yeoman Pub, so that the café complements the existing social provision within the heart of the community. Failing that, the tenancy must provide an offer that complements rather than conflicts with the Pub.

Q4: Will the tenant offer any benefits to members, such as discounts?

A: As part of the tenant selection process, FCBS will ask each what benefits they'd consider offering to members. These benefits will need to be balanced against the need for the tenant to run a profitable and sustainable business.

Q5: What is the vision for the building?

A: FCBS's vision is to restore the historic Freeland Methodist Church and bring it back into community use as The Chapel, a community asset. In the short term, FCBS will aim to create a daytime café and flexible community space, with the potential to expand into a shop or other services based on local demand in time. The building will remain in community ownership.

Q6: Why does this matter to the community?

A: There is strong community support to retain the building for communal use rather than see it lost to private residential development (which has already been refused twice, the second time under appeal). Survey responses indicate 75% of residents support a café/shop model, and 65% support a café/community space. The building has deep historic significance and is the oldest Methodist chapel in the Witney circuit.

Q7: How will the building be funded?

A: FCBS is pursuing a combination of community share investments, grant funding, and Parish Council support, though not through raising the parish precept. FCBS has also commissioned building and structural surveys to support credible funding applications.

Q8: How will it be run?

A: The proposed operating model includes securing a tenant with hospitality experience to manage the café. The community space will be managed by a volunteer-led committee. FCBS also retains the flexibility to adjust this model over time—including volunteer-run options or expansion to other uses.

Q9: What is the legal status of FCBS?

A: FCBS is a Community Benefit Society, registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. This structure ensures that the building will be held for the long-term benefit of the community and cannot be sold off for private profit.

Q10: Is there a risk the project won't succeed?

A: Like any community venture, there are risks. However, FCBS has taken steps to mitigate these, including:

- Securing the correct planning use.
- Completing professional surveys.
- Consulting widely with the community.
- Engaging early with grant funders and stakeholders.
- Preparing a detailed business plan with contingency planning.

Q11: Can local people get involved?

A: Absolutely. FCBS welcomes and indeed is actively seeking all forms of involvement—from volunteering time or skills, to investing in the community share offer. There will be many opportunities to shape and support the project as it develops. If you'd like to invest, please make sure you complete a Pledge (available from www.freelandcbs.community) before 28 June.

Q12: What happens if you don't raise the funds?

A: FCBS will continue to explore phased development, and it is structuring the share offer and grants to be conditional and returnable if the project does not proceed. The aim is to proceed responsibly, with clear communication at every stage.

Q13: What are the long-term goals?

A: In the longer term, FCBS hopes to:

- Extend the building to enhance its usability.
- Consider community retail options.
- Host arts, music, and wellbeing activities.
- Support other local ventures aligned with our mission.

Please contact the Management Committee with any queries – we would be delighted to hear from you.

FCBS Chair, Tom Harden is available on 07809 147261 or Committee members can be contacted via freelandvillagehub@gmail.com

Enquiries can also be submitted via the contact page of FCBS's website:
www.freelandcbs.community

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