

Richard Pennycook
The Co-operative Group
1 Angel Square
Manchester
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Friends of The Wellington campaign HQ

18/05/2014

RE: CO-OP AGREEMENT TO CLOSE THE WELLINGTON HOTEL, NEW WHITTINGTON, CHESTERFIELD, DERBYSHIRE.

Dear Mr. Pennycook,

Further to our previous correspondence regarding the Co-op being party to an agreement to close the Wellington Hotel. The Wellington is now listed as an Asset of Community Value in recognition of the beneficial role it plays at the heart of our community.

This status and value is supported by an 1800 signature petition, a unanimous motion passed by Chesterfield Borough Council, the granting of an Article 4 Direction by the planning authority, local press and radio coverage, mentions in a parliamentary debate, the on-going activities of our group and the continued support of the local community, groups and businesses. (Please see enclosed supporting documents)

Your previous letter indicated that New River Retail had sole responsibility for the decision and the Wellington Hotel was not specifically targeted by the Co-op. We are now in receipt of a letter from David Lockhart of New River Retail stating that you have an agreement with New River to provide a store at the specific site.

This information puts the responsibility for the closure of the Wellington directly with the Co-op, without the Co-op's specific agreement to take the site, New River would be free to consider other options including, sale or leasing to ensure the existing value to the community is maintained.

Your previous correspondence and actions of the Co-op are in direct contravention of the Co-op Group Values and Principles:-

“Self-help – we help people to help themselves” - So far the Co-op has been obstructive.

“Self-responsibility – we take responsibility for, and answer to our actions” - The Co-op has tried to pass responsibility for its actions to a third party and has been deliberately misleading.

“Equity – we carry out our business in a way that is fair and unbiased” - *The Co-op is clearly biased in the favour of a commercial partner to the detriment of our community.*

“Solidarity – we share interests and common purposes with our members and other co-operatives.” - *The Co-op is demonstrating the polar opposite of interest and purpose to the Friends of the Wellington co-operative group.*

“Openness – nobody’s perfect, and we won’t hide it when we’re not “- *We agree the Co-op has made disastrous and imperfect decision to destroy our community hub but has hidden behind New River to avoid responsibility.*

“Honesty – we are honest about what we do and the way we do it” – *No you have been dis-honest in fact and by implication in not adhering to the groups values and principles. We were also led to believe the research carried out by Lesley Reznicek would be considered. Obfuscation is dishonest.*

“Social responsibility – we encourage people to take responsibility for their own community, and work together to improve it.” – *You have sought to discourage our responsibility and our work to maintain and improve our community by trying to persuade us that “the normal planning procedures will allow the communities concerned a fair and full opportunity to express their views to the relevant local authority”. You must have known A4 to A1 use does not give any opportunity for objections.*

“Caring for others – we regularly fund charities and local community groups from the profits of our businesses.” *The Co-op has demonstrated it cares nothing for the wellbeing of individuals, elderly, disabled, widowed, young and old who rely on this community hub and the social cohesion that it facilitates.*

“Autonomy and independence – co-operatives are always independent, even when they enter into agreements with the Government and other organisations” - *Clearly the Co-op has entered an agreement with another organisation ,namely New River, to deliberately subvert the Co-op’s autonomy and independence.*

“Co-operation amongst co-operatives – co-operatives work together with other co-operatives to strengthen the co-operative movement as a whole” - *Ref. Solidarity above, unless you perversely count your non-co-operation as a tactic to strengthen the resolve of the Friends of the Wellington co-operative group*

“Concern for community – co-operatives also work to improve and develop the community, both locally and internationally.” – *Lack of the Co-op’s concern for our community is so blatantly obvious that only a complete reversal of the agreement with New River can hope to clean up the besmirch image of the Co-op name in this community.*

In your previous response you chose to completely ignore our reference to the Co-Operative Group’s values and Principles.

Is this because the board only considers these as advantageous although vacuous and misleading marketing tools?

Or does the board have a belief that actually adhering to these values and principles are a real and valuable distinguishing feature of the Co-operative Group?

If the latter please re-consider your decision: Instruct New River that closure and conversion of the Wellington Hotel would be against the interest of the Co-operative group. Forcing through planning against the wishes of the community and local authority would produce damaging PR . If conversion did go ahead the viability of a store would be seriously undermined by ill-will amongst the majority of the village and surrounding areas.

As a co-operative group ourselves we wish to keep (and enhance) the way the Wellington serves the community. We have indicated to New River that we may be in a position to bid if the business were to be put up for sale. As a fellow co-operative group it would be fantastic if we could work together to achieve a common goal.

Yours sincerely,

on Behalf of "Friends of the Wellington"