

Saving Rural Retail Services



**A Herefordshire guide for...
village shops, post offices & public houses**

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Foreword

Look for the beating heart of any community and you'll find the local shop, pub or post office.

Catering for our everyday necessities these local amenities are so much more than a nearby place to pick up a paper, purchase a pint or post a parcel. They are much loved local assets and part of the reason we call the communities we live in our homes.

Losing one of these local treasures is often a huge blow to local people. Frustrated by the system, communities have often felt like passive bystanders, powerless to step in to save somewhere threatened with closure.

This Government is changing all of that by pushing power away to the people. We know that communities have the initiative, ideas and dedication to do something about it. That's why we are giving them the opportunity to step up to ensure these hubs can carry on in the community, business as usual.



Through new Community Rights measures in the Localism Act, we are giving direct power to communities and individuals that make it easier for them to get things done and achieve their ambitions for the places where they live. It's not just about saving local shops and pubs, it extends to giving local communities the chance to takeover running a local authority service if they want.

Parish councils can play an important part too, working with the community and helping to support local businesses. Through the Localism Act, parishes can agree with district councils, to offer discretionary business rate discounts for vital local businesses and they will be able to better protect local assets through their own neighbourhood plans.

This guide helps set out what communities and local residents in Herefordshire can do to prevent a village shop from closing and losing that vital service and as I've already explained the answer is now a lot. There are great examples throughout this booklet to show you what is possible and what can be achieved when local people, local parishes and local councils come together to take control in their communities. If like me you care about your communities, it is well worth a read.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Bob Neill'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B'.

Bob Neill
Communities Minister
December 2011

Foreword

As we all know, Herefordshire is a very beautiful and rural county with an abundance of individual village amenities such as shops, pubs and post offices.

For many residents living in rural areas, these services are more than just a handy place to pick up a newspaper or post a letter, as more often than not they also provide a community hub for people to come together.

It's never a good day, when a community finds out they're losing one of their vital services, as often the nearest replacement may be many miles away and for those unable to travel on their own, it can leave them feeling very isolated.

The fact that Herefordshire communities and parish councils are working together to save their local services, is not only testament to how important they are but also highly commendable in a time of economic change.

This guide provides a wealth of useful information for those looking to prevent the closure of a vital village service, while the Herefordshire case studies are truly remarkable and will hopefully prove to be a great inspiration for others wishing to save a local amenity.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Olwyn Barnett'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Councillor Olwyn Barnett

Chairman of Herefordshire Council

January 2012

Introduction

It can often come as a shock, when it's announced that a rural service is due to close. It leaves residents wondering what they'll do without it and if there's anything they can do to prevent it from closing. This is especially true during tough economic times, when a lot of businesses are facing difficult challenges, none more so than village services such as shops, post offices and pubs.

So what can communities do to prevent a village service from closing and losing a vital asset for local residents? This useful guide from Herefordshire Council answers that very question and much more. It provides valuable advice and information by discussing the various processes and stages in detail, including legal structures and business plans, whilst demonstrating the advantages of working closely with supporting organisations, such as parish council's for greater success.

The guide will also demonstrate that there's no reason why a service can't be operated as a private business by an individual, partners or company, although some of the enclosed information may not be fully applicable. However, one point to be stressed is that in order to succeed in a rural community, private businesses must engage with local residents and gain their support. The examples of The Kilpeck Inn and Wellington Delights, prove that successful rural services can flourish when the community and / or parish council, work in partnership with a private business.

So with this in mind, the guide will follow a community approach, detailing the processes for opening or saving a rural service. It also contains six Herefordshire success stories from communities who've actually "been there and done that", highlighting not only what can be achieved, but also the processes involved, pitfalls to avoid and lessons learnt.

Top Tips...

It's also worth noting, that the principles introduced in this guide can be applied to saving any rural service, whether it's a public telephone box, leisure facility or open space.

Don't forget to foster a sense of "use it or lose it" within the community, in order to have a chance of succeeding.

Key Contact...

Private business assistance

Val Pike
Economic Development Co-ordinator
Herefordshire Council

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vrp@herefordshire.gov.uk

Getting Started

The village shop is closing! What do people think?

Even before formal notification is received, news of service closures normally filters through communities by word of mouth. So what can residents do to prevent the closure from happening?

It is quite often the way, that informal discussions between local residents can gather the general opinion of the community, but this needs to be captured through a public meeting. The meeting itself is needed to ascertain if the service is required within the community, with the number of residents attending being indicative of the need for the service. So in this instance, it really is a case of “the more the merrier”!

If there is sufficient support to continue the service, an ‘SOS’ (‘Save Our Service’) Committee needs to be established. The committee needs to contain dedicated volunteers, who have the drive and ambition to take the project forward for the benefit of the community, as it can be a long and arduous process.

Top Tip...

When trying to effect change and save a rural service, it’s imperative for the entire community to lend their ‘voice’ and support to the campaign, if it’s to be successful.

Wellington Shop & Post Office

In 2009, it was announced that the current village shop was due to close, as the owner no longer saw it as a viable business opportunity. The small shop was located within his home, which meant future development or expansion was virtually impossible. However, the community decided to come together to try and save it.

An action group was quickly formed, comprising residents of all ages and parish councillors and after a community meeting and a village wide questionnaire, the project was underway as a community led venture. The group utilised funding from the parish council and Rural Shops Improvement Scheme, to get the project up and running and after nine months of hard work and dedication, Wellington's Shop and Post Office was officially opened on 26th June 2010.

The temporary premises are leased from the parish council and not only host the village shop and post office, but also a new parish meeting room for use by the whole community. A site for a permanent shop has been earmarked elsewhere in the village and after securing the lease, the second phase of the project will soon be underway. The new permanent building will be a custom designed facility, incorporating an even larger community meeting room

During the early planning stages, the Shop in Wellington Action Group (or SWAG as they're more fondly known!) examined all available options as to how the business could be run, including a volunteer run shop. However, as it was apparent that there wouldn't be a sufficient number of volunteers available, a local shopkeeper in a neighbouring village was approached instead. Although this meant the business would now be a commercial venture, it would also be clearly supported by the community.

The parish council kindly agreed to provide all the relevant equipment, such as shelving, counters and fridges free of charge, which greatly helped the financial situation.

May 2011 brought a change of ownership and Wellington Delights, as it is now known after a competition for local school children to choose a new name, was re-opened under the management of a Hereford based businessman. The shop undertook a small face lift and is now well stocked with new lines arriving every week! There is every indication that things are going well, which has given the parish council the confidence to take the plans for the new shop to another open parish meeting. So all we can say is.....watch this space.



The Committee

Although a business isn't even in place yet, a dedicated committee is required to lead the project forward.

The structure of the committee depends upon the individuals involved, it could be a simple group of friends or a parish council led group, but it should consist of a minimum of three people (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) and a maximum of twelve.

At this stage, it's important for the committee to set out its aims and objectives and allocate roles and responsibilities to its members.

The committee also needs to thoroughly investigate the options available for running the business, will it be a community enterprise run by volunteers with or without a paid manager or alternatively will it be a privately run business with paid employees?

Although the committee may have an idea in mind for how the shop will be run, this will depend upon the level of community interest, involvement and commitment. This will be gauged by the numbers attending the meetings and from the questionnaire responses, which will be distributed during the next stage.

Clearly if there are only a small number of people supporting the project, it will be a long uphill struggle, which will probably end in failure. This is why it's so vitally important to engage the entire community, especially if it's to be a volunteer run organisation.

As Albert Sheffield from the Eardisland Community Shop pointed out "people say it's all about location, location, location, but in my experience it's all about volunteers, volunteers, volunteers".

The committee will also need access to certain abilities, so it's essential to ascertain early on what skills and experience members and volunteers have, such as retail sales, accountancy, plumbing and design and how much time they can dedicate each week.

The following skills and qualities would be advantageous:

- Solicitor
- Accountant
- Business adviser
- Parish councillor
- Community leader

- Good computer skills
- Property knowledge
- Retail experience

It's worth bearing in mind, that if these skills aren't available within the community, they may need to be sourced from external organisations, for which a cost will be incurred. However, Herefordshire Voluntary Action (HVA) have a comprehensive database of volunteers across the county, who may have the required skills and be willing to donate their time.

As the campaign progresses, sub-committees can also be formed to run specific elements of the project, such as business planning, fundraising, publicity and volunteer management.

Top Tips...

Remember to consider all the available options, because although a community project may sound like the best idea, if there aren't enough volunteers to run the shop then a private business with paid employees may be the way to go.

It is recommended to invite the Parish Council Clerk to be the treasurer, as not only can they control the budget, but it avoids the necessity of setting up a separate bank account and parish councils are also able to claim back the VAT on purchases.

Key Contact...

Herefordshire Voluntary Action (HVA)
Berrows Business Centre
Bath Street
Hereford
HR1 2HE

01432 343932

enquiries@herefordshireva.org



Yarpole Village Shop & Post Office (The shop in the church)

At the end of 2004, with the closure of the last remaining shop in Yarpole, villagers got together to discuss the possibility of running their own community shop. The outcome of those discussions was the formation of Yarpole Community Shop Association Ltd in March 2005.

After receiving permission from Enterprise Inns to use land behind The Bell Inn for a village shop, Herefordshire Council also granted a two year temporary planning notice. This allowed the Yarpole Village Shop to officially open within a leased Portakabin, with initial funds from 236 villagers who'd purchased non-redeemable 'shares' in the shop for £10 each. As a show of support, the post office also moved their village services into the new premises.

At the same time, church authorities identified the need to modernise and improve St Leonard's Church, in order to create a useful community asset. After establishing a village committee and consulting with local residents, plans were drawn up to incorporate the village shop into the church. In order to fund the project, a total of £250,000 was raised, with a staggering £37,750 coming from village fundraising alone. The building work commenced in January 2009 and only nine months later the shop moved into its new home, although some work is still needed on the chancel.

On 1st October 2009, Yarpole Village Shop became the first full time shop to operate within a church. The shop, which is run and managed by volunteers, consists of a committee (who are elected every year), a part time manager / post master, a part time stock manager and over 50 volunteers.

The sheer number of volunteers has helped the shop stay open for longer, in order to cope with local demand, whilst also ensuring coverage at difficult times, such as during the summer holidays. Along with the day to day running of the shop, they also collect stock, deliver customer orders and sort the newspapers early each morning.

Yarpole's 2011 accolades include winning the Countryside Alliance's Best UK Village Shop & Post Office Award and the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the first community shop to have received such an acknowledgement.



www.yarpolshop.co.uk



Community Consultation

The next step is to collect as much evidence as possible from local residents, in support of the community based project. There are a number of ways to do this, depending upon the community:

- 1) Call door to door in the village
- 2) Send a written questionnaire to all households
- 3) Call a formal community meeting
- 4) Hold an information 'open day' in the village hall

The responses will not only demonstrate if there's a demand for the service and a commitment to use it, but also a list of willing volunteers. The responses can also provide information to help formulate a plan of action.

In the majority of cases, communities will have already undertaken a Community Planning Exercise, which will have resulted in a written Parish Plan. This can also be used for supporting evidence, as it demonstrates the issues which are important to those living and working in the local community, including the provision of a village shop.

Top Tips...

It's worth noting that a good questionnaire response rate is considered to be between 45% and 55%.

A typical community shop needs on average 25 dedicated volunteers to keep it running on a daily basis.

Key Contacts...

Assistance with Parish Plans

Anthony Bush
Parish Liaison & Rural Services Officer
Herefordshire Council

01432 260611
abush@herefordshire.gov.uk

Assistance with questionnaires (signposting service)

Dave Tristram
Project Development Officer
Herefordshire Council

01432 260636
dtristram@herefordshire.gov.uk

The Kilpeck Inn

In November 2005, The Kilpeck Inn which was then a run-of-the-mill village pub called The Red Lion unexpectedly closed. The closure was attributed to poor trading, after the owner lost custom, confidence and support from the community, with repeat club and function business relocating to alternative venues.

The closure meant the pub was placed on the licensed property market for a highly ambitious price of £425,000 which ultimately limited any interest from potential investors. After a few months, Herefordshire Council received a planning application to convert the premises into a private dwelling. This was all the incentive the community needed to galvanise themselves into action, to save their last commercial facility. A 'Save Our Pub' action group was formed and a campaign was put together with support from Herefordshire CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

After declining the private application in January 2006 and turning down the planning appeal, Herefordshire Council's Planning Inspector accepted evidence from CAMRA that the business was grossly over priced and was limiting prospective buyers. Eventually, the pub was placed back on the market at a more realistic price.

In the Summer of 2007, the community collectively decided to act and with assistance from the parish council set about examining the possibility of buying the pub. Although this option never came to fruition, it did highlight the positive support for a revitalised pub. After witnessing the emotional commitment from the community, local resident Neil Kerr decided to purchase The Red Lion. This meant that not only was the impasse at an end, but the villagers would also get their pub back.

After a name change and a six figure investment including a Rural Enterprise Grant to substantially upgrade the premises, The Kilpeck Inn re-opened for business in May 2010. It is now a thriving business at the heart of the community, offering fine dining and quality accommodation for locals and visitors alike.

The residents of Kilpeck have demonstrated why it's so important for communities to work together to save their facilities. By exploring all available options, they not only have a village pub again but also confidence in the owner who has been wholeheartedly welcomed and supported by the community.

www.kilpeckinn.com



The Business Plan

It may sound like a very daunting prospect to devise a business plan, but it's essential to ensure the project runs smoothly.

The business plan is where the aims and objectives are set out, along with how the business will operate, start up costs and projected running costs.

So what exactly does a business plan look like? The following information, which can be amended to suit different projects, will help a committee to get started.

Introduction

This is basically the what, why and how. What's the proposed project, why did it come about and how will it be achieved? The responses from the community consultation can be included to justify from the outset the need for this type of business in the local community.

Aims and objectives

What does the shop aim to achieve and how is it planning to achieve it?

Marketing and action plan

It's important to also develop a marketing and action plan, listing the target audience, key messages, proposed activities, responsibility, completion date, budget costs and progress updates. The project also needs to be reviewed on a regular basis and updated where necessary. This will provide a quick reference to what's happening at any one time and how everything is progressing (hopefully on time and within budget).

Company structure

This is the basic structure of the business, how it will be set up and run, what legal status it will hold and what will happen to the profits. There are a number of options available, so it's important to decide upon the one which is best for the business and the community.

Planning

Are there already existing premises which can be altered and used? If so, is a 'change of use' required? If a new location is needed, will it also require a new build?

Business details

This should include all the information relating to the shop itself. Will it be selling produce only or will it offer other services too, such as a post office, Tourist Information Centre or café? What equipment will be required, including refrigerators, freezers, display stands, cash register, card payment facilities, computer and telephone?

Staffing information

What staffing structure will the shop operate? Will it have paid staff, will it be solely run by volunteers or will it have an amalgamation of both? How many staff and / or volunteers does it hope to have and what days and hours does the shop plan to open?

Finance

How much will it cost to start the business, what are the projected running costs (business rates, rent, bank charges, insurance, utility and staff costs) and the forecast sales and profit margins?

If possible, obtain access to the existing shops financial accounts, as this will quickly highlight the viability of the business, along with its costs, turnover and profit.

The majority of projects will require more money than communities can raise themselves, which is why it's important to investigate alternative sources, such as funding grants from various organisations, including parish councils.

Exit strategy

If the worst was to happen and the business failed, who would have responsibility for bringing everything to a close and what would happen to the assets (money and equipment).

Selling the idea

Once the business plan has been developed, in order for it to have a chance of succeeding, it needs to receive acceptance and support from the local community. The best way to achieve this is through an 'open day' event or parish meeting, where residents can find out exactly what is happening. It's always important to keep the community up to date, none more so if they're providing the funding or if the parish council is looking to increase the precept.

Putting it into practice

It can be an incredibly rewarding experience when after weeks or months of hard work, the business plan is put into practice and the project starts moving forward. There will always be challenges ahead, but a strong team meeting regularly with a well structured plan, should be able to overcome any obstacle.

Top Tips...

A comprehensive business plan can be presented to potential investors to secure vital funding for the project.

A business plan is required regardless of whether it's a community venture or in cooperation with a private business.

Meeting on a regular basis will not only keep the project on schedule but also keep the energy and momentum going. The community groups featured within this guide recommend meeting on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

Regular E-Mails and newsletters are a very good way of keeping the community up to date with proceedings.

A good way to raise additional funds is to sell non-redeemable 'shares' of £10 each to local residents.

Remember to involve and meet with Herefordshire Council's Planning Services during the early stages.

Key Contacts...

Business plan and funding assistance

Dave Tristram
Project Development Officer
Herefordshire Council

01432 260636

dtristram@herefordshire.gov.uk

Financial and company structure assistance

Elaine Edwards
Community Enterprise & Finance Officer
Herefordshire Council

01432 383030
eedwards@herefordshire.gov.uk

Planning assistance

Planning Services
Herefordshire Council

01432 260386
planning_enquiries@herefordshire.gov.uk

Environmental assistance

Environmental Health and Trading Standards
Herefordshire Council

01432 261761
info@herefordshire.gov.uk

Licensing assistance

Licensing Department
Herefordshire Council

01432 260105
licensing@herefordshire.gov.uk

Community owned shops

The Plunkett Foundation
The Quadrangle
Woodstock
Oxfordshire
OX20 1LH

01993 810730
www.plunkett.co.uk



Eardisland Community Shop

The Eardisland Community Shop, which opened for business on 31st March 2010, is the first shop in the picturesque black and white village for over fifteen years.

It all began in June 2008, when Eardisland Parish Council hosted a public meeting to gauge available support for a community shop, village website and Parish Plan. The need for a village shop to serve the 394 residents and 20,000 annual tourists was agreed, so the independent Eardisland Community Shop Association was established with support from the parish council.

After distributing questionnaires to local residents to gain support for the project, funding was acquired from a number of different sources, including the Plunkett Foundation, Herefordshire Council, Eardisland Parish Council and the Big Lottery Fund. The committee even raised money by selling non-redeemable 'shares' to 161 members of the community for £10 each. It was also decided to operate the shop as an Industrial & Provident Society for the benefit of the community, as recommended by the Plunkett Foundation.

After 18 months of planning, the shop finally opened its doors within the historic Dovecote museum in the centre of the village. The grand opening was officially conducted by village postman Paul Jones, who the committee felt represented the characteristics and qualities they wished to achieve of reliability, availability, service and customer focus. The event was attended by over 70 members of the community, all of whom were entered into a raffle to win shopping vouchers, with children taking away a 'goodie bag' each. There was also a lot of media interest in the project, with live radio interviews from BBC Hereford & Worcester and articles in the Hereford Times, Herefordshire Life and Country Life. The shop was even featured on a BBC programme focusing on community shops.

The shop currently has 50 volunteers on the books, representing all spectrums of society, with the committee knowing exactly what skills and experience each can offer. Albert Sheffield, the committee Chair has 35 years experience in sales and marketing, while other volunteers have accountancy skills and keep the shops financial accounts or retail skills to ensure correct product range and pricing.

The shop, which has been described as a 'Tardis', is proud to promote local produce, with 76% of their stock coming from local producers within a 30 mile radius of Eardisland. The fruit and vegetable section is sublet to a local producer, who provides a range of fresh produce on a daily basis, with the shop accepting a commission for each item sold.

The shop, which is uniquely housed in a heritage building, has also become a dedicated community hub and Tourist Information Centre. The Dovecote itself can claim some praise in the success of the project, since the trustees responsible for the Grade II listed building have allowed the shop to pay a minimal 'peppercorn' rent, which has kept the overheads to a minimum.

In the first nine months of trading over 1,300 hours had been amassed by the committee and shop volunteers, which is a remarkable achievement for such a small community. Now in its second year, the shop is exceeding previous sales and it is hoped that a sustainable business has been developed to serve the community and its visitors for many years to come.

www.eardisland.org.uk

In The Meantime

As the featured success stories demonstrate, it can be a long and arduous process between the initial planning and consultation stages to when those doors finally open for the first time! It can quite literally be months or even years before a project comes to fruition, so be prepared for the long haul.

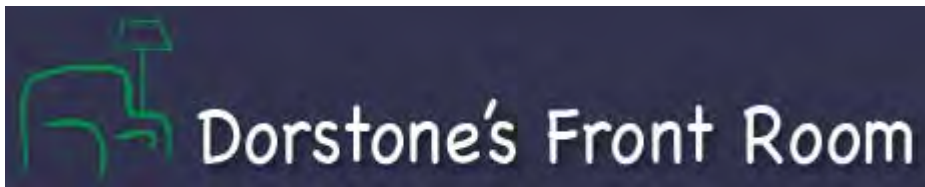
This is why it's important to meet on a regular basis, not only to ensure the business plan is still fit for purpose but also to ensure momentum and boost flagging moral.

It's imperative that the community doesn't give up on their dream, even if it takes awhile to reach it.

Top Tips...

It is highly recommended to visit other similar enterprises for advice and guidance. The local businesses featured within this guide would be a great place to start!

The business plan isn't designed to simply sit on a shelf and gather dust, it's a working document which needs to be reviewed on a regular basis and updated when necessary.



Dorstone's Front Room

DFR, as it has come to be known locally, began life in 2008 after Dorstone's small post office was closed. For Dorstonians, the loss of the post office was a major blow as like many rural communities, it was the daytime hub of the village and served as a meeting place, information centre, gift shop and 'social glue'.

So local residents decided to get together to replace what had been lost and with the help of over 25 village volunteers, different funding sources including Rural Regeneration Zone and Nexus, DFR was born. It has quickly become a key element of village life and a unique place in which to share a taste of a beautiful rural community.

DFR however, has gone beyond being just a simple community meeting place and now offers a wide range of different services, including refreshments, hosting the visiting postal van and tourist information to meet the demands of their clients.

They serve tea, coffee and local cakes every day with the famous 'Bacon Butty Friday' rounding off the working week, with a promise of the 'best bacon butties for miles around' between 9am - 12pm. They also stock a 'fix a meal' range of local produce, including potatoes, sausages, bread, cheese, jams, cakes and ice cream.

Part of DFR's mission is also to provide a cost effective venue for the display and sale of local arts and crafts, along with being a registered Tourist Information Centre providing:

- Local walking maps
- Area information (including pubs and accommodation)
- Local family history links

DFR's other extensive services include a lending library, office services, heating oil purchasing consortium, newspaper delivery, village emergency centre and public information.

www.dorstonesfrontroom.org.uk



The Grand Opening

The final act!

At the beginning, it may be hard to imagine what the end result will look like and if it will ever come. However, it will come and when it does it will be a marvellous feeling to be able to say “we’ve done it”. This is when all the hard work needs to be celebrated with a well deserved special event.....The grand opening.

Although it has to be remembered that after the grand opening, the truly hard work begins, because it’s one thing to get the shop up and running, but it’s quite another to make it a success. This is when the community’s commitment must come to the fore because never was there a more apt saying than “use it or lose it”.

When planning the grand opening, it’s important to gather as much interest as possible, especially from the local media. This is important to not only raise awareness of what has been achieved, but also to promote the shop in order to gain potential customers.

Media release

A media release is an important element of the publicity campaign, as it informs the community and media of the proposed event. The media release should include:

- Background information (what happened, when, why and how)
- Event details (location, date and time)
- Shop details (opening times and produce available)
- Volunteering opportunities

It’s a good idea to send the media release at least two weeks in advance and media contact details can be found on the internet or within the media publications themselves. It’s advisable to issue two media releases, one before the grand opening to promote the project and the event and a second one a few months afterwards containing a progress update.

Posters

It’s always a good idea to have a few posters displayed in locations throughout the community, to promote the grand opening. The posters should be eye catching but also clear enough to be read from a distance and should mention the event details, along with any other information such as music, entertainment or prize draws.

A good way of gathering extra support and attention is to run a competition for local school children to design the poster, with the winning entry being used for the campaign.

Photographs

Remember to arrange for good quality digital photographs to be taken on the day, as these can not only be sent to the media if they can’t attend, but can also be used for community newsletters, websites and social networking sites (Twitter and Facebook).

The internet

Dorstone, Eardisland and Yarpole have all developed their own websites, in order to promote their community projects. Although there may be initial set up costs, the annual running costs should be minimal and in today’s ‘age of the internet’, it’s important to embrace technology and publicise the shop to as many people as possible.

The free alternative is to set up a social networking page such as Twitter or Facebook, which allows updates, information and photographs to be posted on a monthly, weekly, daily or even hourly basis! Yarpole have even posted a few videos on You Tube, promoting different elements of their community shop.

Community involvement

It's advisable to involve the local community as much as possible, not only to maintain interest and support but also to create a sense of community pride. This can include events to raise funds, school competitions or cakes and crafts for the grand opening.

Marketing support

Additional marketing and publicity advice and support can be obtained by contacting Sharon Amery at Herefordshire Council. Sharon will be able to offer ideas and information to help the publicity campaign be as successful as possible.

Top Tips...

In order to generate media interest in your grand opening, try to have a high profile individual attend the event, this could be a local sports personality or political figure.

Don't worry if the media can't attend on the day, arrange to take a few photographs and send them across afterwards. They can still prepare a story using the photographs and a media release.

When contemplating a community website, it's important to note that a lot of local website design companies offer discounts to charities. Although, hopefully a community volunteer may have the necessary skills available to complete it for free!

Key Contact...

Sharon Amery
Marketing Officer
Herefordshire Council

01432 260324
samery@herefordshire.gov.uk

Mortimer Country Stores

Mortimer Country Stores, which was born out of a village initiative in 2007, is housed on the site of a disused shop next to a local garage in Wigmore.

The imagination of a small group of residents was fired up in October 2007, after receiving feedback from a survey and the Parish Plan concerning the possibility of opening the village's first shop in three years. The group came together to organise a management committee to develop a co-operative shop which would not only serve the residents of Wigmore but also a further 500 or so from neighbouring areas.



The committee managed to secure a £15,000 loan from the Plunkett Foundation with match funding coming from various regeneration grants and the local community.

After seven months of hard work, the store was officially opened on 10th May 2008 by actor John Challis, famous for his role as Boycie in Only Fools and Horses and attracted wide spread media attention.

The shop, which employs a part time manager, is supported by a band of 15 or so volunteers.

The general ethos is to promote local produce, with approximately 60% of their stock coming from 20 producers living within a 15 mile radius of Wigmore. They place great emphasis on fresh food, with fruit and vegetables picked that morning and pies baked and delivered steaming hot. A local artisan bread maker is also used for their 'Speciality Bread Friday', which has villagers queuing up to buy whatever has been created that morning, whether it's focaccia, brioche or olive bread.

The store, which is run as an Industrial & Provident Society (IPS) Co-operative, currently has 110 share holders and is proving very successful, making steady progress year on year.

wigmoreshop@hotmail.co.uk



Supporting Organisations

There are a number of local and national organisations, who can be contacted for additional information and support, whether it's advice on obtaining funding, working with the community or setting up and running a shop or pub.

The parish council

Although a community project does not necessarily need parish council support, often their involvement can be important to the success of saving a rural service, whether it's a village shop, post office, public telephone box or open space.

Herefordshire has 134 parish and town councils, who have overall responsibility for the wellbeing of local areas. Every year, they raise funds to meet the identified needs of the local community, with their work falling into three main categories:

- Representing the local community
- Delivering services to meet local needs
- Striving to improve the quality of life within the parish

The majority of parish councils will have previously completed a Community Planning Exercise, which outlines the local area including key services, features and future plans. This document can be a useful tool when advocating the need to save a rural service.

Herefordshire Council

There are a range of different departments within Herefordshire Council, which can also be contacted for assistance, ranging from funding and finance advice to marketing support:

| | | | |
|----------------|---|--------------|--|
| Anthony Bush | Parish Liaison & Rural Services Officer | 01432 260611 | abush@herefordshire.gov.uk |
| Dave Tristram | Project Development Officer | 01432 260636 | dtristram@herefordshire.gov.uk |
| Elaine Edwards | Community Enterprise & Finance Officer | 01432 383030 | eedwards@herefordshire.gov.uk |
| Sharon Amery | Marketing Officer | 01432 260324 | samery@herefordshire.gov.uk |

The Plunkett Foundation

This national organisation, which was set up in 1919 by Sir Horace Plunkett, helps rural communities through community ownership. Their work focuses on three main areas:

- Helping rural communities to set up and run community owned shops
- Supporting rural communities to develop a wider range of community owned services, including broadband and libraries
- Promoting and supporting community farming and food enterprises in England

The Foundation is an invaluable source of information and support and was used by Eardisland Community Shop, Wigmore's Mortimer Country Stores and Yarpole Village Shop and Post Office.



Herefordshire Voluntary Action (HVA)

HVA provide local support and development services to community and voluntary groups across Herefordshire. Their main areas of work are:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Community development
- Policy research
- Volunteering services (recruitment and good practice)
- Partnership work
- Representation
- Service to individuals in the community

Top Tips...

The Plunkett Foundation have offered a few interesting facts for consideration. In 2011, there were 256 rural community shops in the UK and of these...

- 98% stock local produce
- 65% hold IPS legal status
- 59% accept debit cards
- 58% incorporate a post office
- 55% have a combination of paid staff and volunteers
- 40% have a café

The Step By Step Guide

Getting Started...

The village shop is closing, what do people think?

- Formal notification will be received, stating that a rural business is for sale or due to close
- Organise an informal community meeting to gather public opinion on the closure
- Form an 'SOS' ('Save Our Service') Committee



The Committee...

What should the newly formed committee do...

- First of all, decide who will be on the committee (between 3 - 12 members)
- Set out the aims and objectives and allocate roles and responsibilities
- Investigate the options available for running the business (community venture or private business)
- Ascertain the skills and experience available to the committee
- Engage with the parish council, Herefordshire Council ward member and the community



Community Consultation...

The committee should begin to raise community awareness that the village service is due to close and gauge support for a community based project, this can be done by:

- 1) Calling door to door in the village
- 2) A questionnaire survey
- 3) A formal community meeting
- 4) An information 'open day'



The Business Plan...

In order to ensure success for either a community venture or a private business, a comprehensive business plan needs to be devised, which should include:

- Aims and objectives
- Marketing and action plan
- Company structure
- Planning
- Business details
- Staffing information
- Finance
- Exit strategy

In The Meantime...

It can sometimes be months even years before a community project comes to fruition, so be prepared...

- To meet regularly
- Boost moral
- Dig in for the long haul

Whatever happens...Don't give up on the dream!



The Grand Opening...

The final act!

- Promote the project and business by organising a high profile event (community based projects often generate high levels of interest and free media publicity)
- Attempt to create a sense of community pride and ownership with local residents, along with a "use it or lose it" culture

Contacts

Campaign for Community Banking Services

www.communitybanking.org.uk

Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA)

www.camra.org.uk

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC)

01432 353492

www.halchereford.gov.uk

Herefordshire Council's Community Enterprise & Finance Officer

01432 383030

eedwards@herefordshire.gov.uk

Herefordshire Council's Marketing Officer

01432 260324

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Herefordshire Council's Parish Liaison & Rural Services Officer

01432 260611

abush@herefordshire.gov.uk

Herefordshire Council's Project Development Officer

01432 260636

dtristram@herefordshire.gov.uk

Herefordshire Voluntary Action (HVA)

01432 343932

www.herefordshireva.org

Pub is the Hub

www.pubisthehub.org.uk

Rural Shops Alliance (RSA)

www.rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

The Plunkett Foundation

01993 810730

www.plunkett.co.uk