Roadwater Village Shop:
A Rural Enterprise Exmoor business case study

After the sudden, unexpected death of the owner, the thriving village shop remained trading. Within a few months it was put up for sale however, there was no immediate buyer and to prevent closure and so the Village stepped in.

Roadwater Community Shop Limited was quickly formed. £36K was raised in shares to purchase stock and lease the shop until further decisions could be made on the shop's future. (June 2015).

Until the summer of 2018 the shop was managed by a group of directors. The original part-time staff stayed on and along with over 40 volunteers organised the daily running of the shop.

The business remained for sale but as time passed it became apparent that, for the shop to be a success as a community enterprise, a new trading model was required. To achieve this a completely new steering group was formed to investigate the feasibility of buying the whole property outright on a freehold basis. The steering group recommended formation of a Community Benefit Society (CBS) (also advocated by the Plunkett Foundation of which the shop is now a member.)

At a village meeting in April 2017, attended by 102 residents, there was unanimous agreement to form a CBS for the purchase of the shop and flat amongst other steps moving forward.

The steering group members became the management committee of the new CBS and on 1st July 2018 completed purchase of the shop for the village.

Between September - December 2019, the Shop was rebuilt alongside refurbishment and extension and a newly created cafe area.

To date the shop has 9 paid employees alongside 50-60 volunteers directly from the community.

The shop is more than just a shop. It is a continually changing and growing community project. Amongst many other offerings, the café is used as a friendship hub to ensure the elderly members of the community have somewhere to socialise. They are providing "youth experiences" to younger members of the community helping them to gain confidence and an understanding of the working world.

As a champion of supporting local, they stock and support as many local producers as possible alongside recently becoming a plastic free Exmoor ally and boasting a milk refill station.

Benefits and challenges of working on Exmoor

Benefits

- Ever increasing visitor footfall with groups and cyclists passing through the village.

- Abundance of fantastic Exmoor producers readily available to support one another.

- Local produce is uniquely Exmoor.

- Community spirit and support is overwhelming.

Challenges

- Exmoor weather can be difficult in the winter months therefore, neighboring villages can struggle to access the shop.

- Renovations and planning were very difficult. We were very lucky to have a local architect donate his time at a hugely reduced rate. If we didn't have his support we would continue to struggle with the paper work and understanding of the restrictions.

- Since the first lockdown there has been an increase in 2nd homes being purchased across Exmoor. This will continue to threaten the communities and economy on the Moor.

Aspirations and advice

Aspirations

"We have so many aspirations however, we have undergone a lot of change very quickly. We must ensure our current offering is stable before pushing forward with our new ideas."

We are always looking for ways to become greener and more sustainable.

We are looking to explore how we are able to give back to local resources or charities. How we can continue to support other causes on different levels.

We want to increase our social impact with the café. Provide different support groups and a hub for other local businesses to access should they need somewhere to network."

Advice

"Our advice for others doing business on Exmoor is to ALWAYS involve the local community. Listen to them, ask for their advice and collaborate with them. We are all working towards the same goal so making sure you grow together is always the best way forward."