

Cotswolds LEADER Case Study – Bledington Community Shop and Café



More than 10 years ago the privately-owned village shop in Bledington closed, leaving the community without a store for the first time in living memory. The closure meant that residents faced a lengthy round trip to the nearest shops and the community lost an important gathering place. As a result, the village became isolated for many, particularly the elderly and those living alone.

Ever since then, the community has worked hard to create a new shop and café. Bledington Community Shop Ltd, a community-owned registered society, was established in 2011 and is run by an elected management committee. Using a business model adopted by the majority of successful community shops, the venture is now owned by over 300 members who bought shares and who all have an equal say regardless of their investment.

In November 2018 a £39,026 Cotswolds LEADER grant was made to Bledington Community Shop Ltd towards the construction of the new community shop and café. Works began in early 2019, erecting a purpose-built structure, steel-framed and wood clad, designed by a local architect and built by a local builder. The building's agricultural feel complements its surroundings and expresses its functional role at the centre of the village. Cotswolds LEADER was one of many funders, with funds raised through community shares as well as local fundraising events, donations and grants.

“Creating this shop and café has been a true community effort”, says Michael McCulloch, the joint chair of the shop management committee. “Over 300 villagers have been involved in many different ways. People who have been building the shop look forward to becoming regular customers, and sampling goods from local suppliers.” The nine management committee members were supported by 35 locals who volunteered their time to task groups in preparation for the shop opening.



Bledington Community Shop and Café opened its doors on 16 November 2019. The shop and café is run by a team of over 40 volunteers from Bledington and surrounding villages and supported by a full-time salaried shop manager. Situated on the Oxfordshire Way between Chipping Norton and Stow on the Wold, the shop provides a new meeting place as well as goods and services not readily available to those without transport, including free internet access and postal facilities. Other proposed services include dry cleaning, shoe repair, a notice board and a DVD and book swap. The café offers hot and cold drinks, pastries and cakes. In time it is hoped that the offer will also include afternoon cream teas, light lunches, homemade soups and sandwiches as well as a children's menu and daily changing blackboard specials.

The project will increase social contact and provide more openings for volunteering and work experience, thereby strengthening community involvement. In fact, it is hoped that the shop will become a hive of community and voluntary activity, playing an active role in addressing rural isolation. The management committee is also planning to distribute any surplus funds, over those needed to develop the shop and café, to support community projects.

The wheelchair and dog friendly shop and café is open seven days a week, welcoming local residents, walkers, cyclists and commuters who use Kingham Railway Station. It will help to ensure that Bledington remains a thriving and vibrant community by keeping people working and contributing to the village. Robin McCulloch, joint chair of the management committee, says "it will become the heart of our community in one of the loveliest villages in the Cotswolds."



Alison Robinson, CEO of Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC): *"The LEADER programme has provided funding to enable a much-needed community hub to be built. Impressively local people invested in it and organised themselves effectively so this asset could be realized. Providing innovative and wide-ranging service/activities it will help combat isolation, build community cohesion and open up a range of opportunities for existing and future communities to come. The structure itself is beautifully constructed which adds to the overall sense of wellbeing that the project strives to deliver."*

For more information on Bledington Shop & Café visit: www.bledingtonshop.com



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