



Community Hubs Project delivered by: Community Council of Devon  
Exeter Community Initiatives,  
Devon Association of Community Buildings

## Case Study; Plymtree Community Owned Shop & Post Office



**THE CHALLENGE:** *What were the challenges your community was facing which your project has helped to address? What does your project achieve or hope to achieve? What **difference** do people in your community experience as a result of the project?*

Closure of Village shop & Post Office. To ensure the village kept the shop & PO facility. Community Shop opened 7 months from initial village meeting, raising £20,000 in unsecured loans, £20,000 commercial and £20,000 grant from Plunkett Foundation.

Year 1 achieved sales of £135,000, returned a profit and repaid 25% of unsecured loans also donated £1,500 to local non profit groups.

It is clear by the results that the shop is well frequented by the villagers and from others in the surrounding area. The volunteers and villagers have a great sense of pride in the project and what the shop provides both the type of produce sold and the atmosphere in the shop, it is the hub of Plymtree.

**DEVELOPING THE IDEA:** *Where did the idea start, who was involved, what was the background that led to the need for your project?*

Notification of closure of old shop and post office as a result of Post Office closure programme.

The village did not want to lose the core of the village.

A large section of the village investigated other villages solution to the plight of Plymtree.

**MAKING IT HAPPEN:** *What processes were involved? Meetings? Committees/organisational structures? Consultation? Funding? Support from outside agencies/other expertise?*

There was a village meeting at which it was agreed that a shop had to be retained in Plymtree. A group investigated the options and a working Committee was formed. Finding a property was the key issue when that was found the project moved very swiftly. Meetings with Plunkett and further general village update meeting took place. Monies were raised and the property lease was agreed. Work was done to convert a small industrial into a suitable building to house the shop.

The committee produced a sound business plan which was accepted by the bank and the Plunkett Foundation grant followed.

A further grant from Devon County Council enabled us to stock the new shop and provide working capital to buy materials need in the decoration of the building.

A paid manager was appointed 2 months prior to opening, his role was to co-ordinate the fitting of the shop and source the stock and negotiate with suppliers.

The Plymtree Community Shop opened on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2009 seven months from the first meeting.

**KEEPING IT GOING:** *How is your project being sustained into the future? What will be needed to help this happen?*

The policy the committee adopted for the shop was to provide high quality produce and give the shop a "farm shop" feel. By this method we are able to achieve a gross retained profit margin of 27% and people travel some distances to shop in Plymtree because we have stock that supermarkets don't have.

This enables us to subsidise some staple foods like bread milk and eggs making us cheaper than some supermarkets.

**TOP TIPS:** *What have you as project co-ordinators/managers learned along the way that you feel other communities could benefit from – any suggestions which will help others to avoid pitfalls and missed opportunities?*

Motivation and management of volunteer work force  
Sales and marketing skills and training volunteers to develop these skills  
Communication with customers and staff, act and react.  
Set out clear objectives and ensure all understand what is expected and are onboard  
Build confidence in individuals and create a team spirit  
Purchase and use of comprehensive stock and sales control E-pos system  
Good business practice, control waste, stock, and costs.  
Good housekeeping, presentation and display stock well.  
The role of manager and the committee is to facilitate not dominate!

**WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOUR THREE "CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS" HAVE BEEN?:**

Obtaining the lease of a suitable property in the centre of the village  
Having a motivated and non political committee who are interested in people food and business.  
Getting and keeping the village involved and support from the volunteers