

EVERY LOCAL SHOP COUNTS

Brockweir And Hewelsfield Community Shop, Wye Valley



Source: www.virsa.org/pdf/Brockweir.pdf

At a time when communities want to have local shops and services more than ever, every local shop counts. The Brockweir and Hewelsfield Community Shop is a shop with a difference. It is based in the Wye Valley, an area of outstanding natural beauty on the border of Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire, and shows just how this kind of community venture can be done. Fred Simpson, Project Manager of the Brockweir and Hewelsfield Community Shop, explains how it came about.

Why was the community shop established?

In 2000 the area's only local shop closed so the community decided to get together to build a new shop. We wanted it to have a community focus and act as a base for a full range of community services.

About 500 people live here in about 250 houses. Every house has about 2–3 acres of land and some houses have been here since the 16th Century. We're now a commuter village, but we also have a mix of farmers and retirees. It is three miles to the next shop in the nearest village but a lot of people felt that if they had to get in the car to go shopping they may as well just travel on to the nearest supermarket.

What services do you offer?

The community shop includes a café, general store and food outlet, post office, library kiosk, art gallery and IT training suite. The café sells tea and cakes and the shop sells a good range of household goods including some local produce. The post office was the service that local people feared losing the most.

People can also order books which the Gloucester Mobile Libraries deliver to the shop when they come to the village. We have eight computer workstations for local people to use and this has been vital in training hundreds of people through the Forest of Dean College. Local artists display and sell their work in the art gallery. Local businesses use the upstairs area for conferences because it's a nice place to meet. And we have a business tenant upstairs who contributes to the shop's rent.

How is the community shop managed and financed?

Initially, a small team did the main project work, but now the shop has been handed over to a management committee and we are an Industrial and Provident Society. We have a paid manager and 40 volunteers and the land is leased from the old village hall. **We started with grants and local**

people putting in their money, but now we survive on revenue from our services and soon we will have repaid all the money we loaned.

The shop is also environmentally friendly. How did you do this?

Being environmentally friendly wasn't an original objective but we quickly realised that social, economic and environmental sustainability was important.

The building is made of local green oak with a high insulation and low-energy design that fits beautifully into the picturesque landscape.

The roof has photovoltaic tiles which generate electricity from the sun. There is even a gauge in the shop to show visitors how much power is being produced. In addition, a ground source heat pump (which draws heat up from the ground) provides renewable underfloor heating and hot water. This has been no more expensive than ordinary heating systems.

Because of the electricity we generate from solar energy, we are saving nearly four metric tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO²) annually, and about £500 on our energy bills. We used to export electricity back to the National Grid but we use it all now.



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This is great. But why wasn't it expensive?

We got outside funding. For many funders environmentally-friendly design and energy use is important. So we knew it also made good economic sense to go green as we were very likely to get the grant.

The shop has obviously improved the local area. What are the biggest changes you have noticed?

The area has seen a change in people over the last 20 years – there are now around five times as many cars as before. And we face the same problems as any other village where house prices are very high.

We could have become just another commuter satellite village, but developing the community shop has brought us loads of benefits. The main one is the social value – seeing people connecting. People build their lives around the shop.

What advice would you give to other rural (and urban) communities threatened with losing essential services?

Look at what you can do yourselves and learn from similar projects. We produced a DVD showing how the shop started as a way of encouraging others to do the same. People were reluctant to believe it was possible but we held public meetings to convince them we could do it and now the whole community is involved in supporting the shop. Even newcomers to the area get involved straight away.

What makes us successful, apart from the local involvement, is the scale of the services we provide. For example, we have people who just come to visit on a Sunday and sit around outside and enjoy the atmosphere. It's important to design a place which will be part of or add to the local area and which will make volunteers and staff want to work there.

Facts

Local Shopping

- **What we buy (and where we buy it) has an impact across the world and in our communities.**
- Buying local goods and services keeps money circulating in your community and **helps create local jobs**. It also cuts down the distances some goods travel which in turn saves energy, cuts pollution, and helps tackle climate change.
- Buying **local organic food** supports farmers in the UK and elsewhere who are farming without the use of pesticides that may damage the environment. It also supports many new small businesses and some evidence suggests that it has direct health benefits.

Green Energy

- In a well-installed ground source heat pump system every one unit of electrical energy put in will yield three or more units of heat energy (a coefficient of performance of 3). This electrical pumping energy can come from renewable resources if you produce renewable electricity on-site or buy green electricity.
- A heat pump is just like a fridge working in reverse; you just get the heat from the back and send the cold air outside.
- **Heat pumps are more efficient** (i.e. require less electrical input) when they are running at lower temperatures. It is therefore a great idea to combine them with high insulation and if you can underfloor heating.
- Underfloor heating enables your heating system to run at a lower temperature whilst producing the same thermal comfort of the room. This is because the heat rises towards the people instead of skirting up the walls to the ceiling.
- The Energy Savings Trust has found that for each kW peak of installed photovoltaic system you can expect **to save approximately 325kg of CO₂ per year**

Further Resources

- There are a number of organisations and websites providing more information on local shopping and local markets such as www.soilassociation.org, www.netmums.com/lc/food_local.php and www.localfoodworks.org
- Did you know that wireless monitors are now available which give you instant feedback on the total energy consumption of a household or small office allowing you to see real time energy use?
- In Gamblesby, Cumbria the local community decided to do something about their dilapidated village hall. They increased its energy efficiency and installed a ground source heat pump to reduce the energy use and cost of the building. For more information take a look at the case study on the Community Action for Energy website: <http://www.est.org.uk/uploads/documents/cafe/cafe%20case%20study%202022.pdf>
- To find out more about energy projects for your community including funding support, training, contacts, advice and more case studies, contact the Community Action for Energy Team (CAfE) at 08701 261 444 or email CAfE@est.org.uk. You can also find them online at www.est.org.uk/cafe.
- The Low Carbon Buildings Programme is a government grants scheme designed to support renewable energy installations on domestic, community and business properties. For more information regarding grants for renewable energy installations, check out www.lowcarbonbuildings.co.uk or call 0800 915 0990.
- For more specific information regarding solar photovoltaic power take a look at the British Photovoltaic Association website: www.pv-uk.org.uk. They represent the photovoltaic Industry and provide information to the public.