



Blockley Community Shop

BLOCKLEY VILLAGE SHOP & CAFÉ

AFFORDABLE BASICS * NEWSPAPERS * MAGAZINES
 FRESH BREAD * CROISSANTS * PASTRIES
 SOFT DRINKS * WINES & BEERS * CONFECTIONARY
 BREAKFAST * LIGHT LUNCHES * CAKES
 HOT & COLD DRINKS * TAKE AWAY SNACKS

ALSO LOCALLY PRODUCED/GROWN
 DAIRY PRODUCTS * FRUIT & VEGETABLES
 SAUSAGES * BACON * MEAT

Weekday Opening Hours Mon - Thurs: 8am - 6pm Fri: 8am - 7pm	Weekend Opening Hours Sat: 8.30am - 6pm Sun: 8.30am - 1pm	Post Office Hours Mon/Wed/Fri: 9.30am - 2.30pm
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BLOCKLEY Village Shop will have a lot to celebrate on its first birthday in May - for the not-for-profit enterprise, owned and run by villagers as a co-operative, is already turning over almost £500,000.

Just 18 months ago, the village - which had once boasted eight pubs and a high street with 20 shops - was becoming a retail desert. The old village stores and post office was closing and the delicatessen and wine bar converted into a family home.

Now, the new shop and café, run by a full-time manager with a rota of 14 mainly part-time paid staff, is the lively heart of the village, catering for the local population of around 2,000.

But for resident Robert Willott, a member of the hard-working elected management committee of dedicated local people behind this success story, the 'magical moment' came when the 35-page business plan was finally presented at a public meeting.

"We spent hours and hours working on the plan; covering every detail from the layout of the shop, to whether to have a loyalty card to what we would do if the Post Office finally deserted us," he recalled. "We covered absolutely everything, anticipating as much as we possibly could.

"After a few good questions, one of the people in the hall just stood up and said, 'well, we think you've covered everything - and we're all behind you.' From that moment, all the internal debates

we had had as a committee were put behind us, and we just got to work to get shop off the ground."

Within a month, over £25,000 in £10 membership fees and additional capital contributions had been donated from individuals and local businesses. The committee then successfully applied for a £20,000 loan from ICOF Community Capital together with a matching grant from the VIRSA rural shops unit of the Plunkett Foundation. Premises were leased and opening preparations were made.

Under the leadership of local resident Chris Jury, the actor and producer well known for his role in the TV series *Lovejoy*, the committee took full advantage of offers from local people with useful skills and knowledge to share. Chris told a TV interviewer: "A community without a shop and a post office is a diminished community; a village should be more than just somewhere people sleep."

"Chris is a really passionate campaigner and was determined that we would not lose our shop. He really drove things along," said Robert. "We also had pro bono legal and accounting expertise which saved us a fortune, and enthusiasm and commitment from right across the community. It was essential to bring everyone on board.

"Part of the secret behind the success story is the café which seats 30, provides takeaway food for early morning tradespeople, serves light meals including Fairtrade and organic food and drinks, filled baguettes, cakes made by ladies in the village - and does a roaring trade in hot bacon baps!"

The village made a conscious decision not to use volunteers to run the shop and café - in contrast with the practice that works well in many village shops.

"The staff have to bake bread, wrestle with the coffee machine and cook and serve meals as well as operate the till and cope with loyalty cards, cash and the PayPoint bill-paying service," commented Robert.

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"Staff costs, including monthly bookkeeping, absorb nearly 25 per cent of our takings. We think it would be more difficult to manage the business if we had to rely on volunteers, but we always recognised this might be necessary if the venture had not attracted enough custom. Having paid staff works for us because we are a big enough enterprise to support that and enough people from the community have shown themselves to be willing and able to help on a part-time basis."

After the previous shop and post office closed in 2008, the committee negotiated with Post Office Ltd and successfully secured a replacement Hosted Outreach service, staffed from Evesham sub-post office on three half-days a week.

"We had to provide a cubbyhole and counter in our shop built to exact PO Ltd specifications, with numerous electrical and telephone sockets and security," recalled Robert. "There were frustrating delays in getting the Outreach service established, but PO Ltd provided a mobile van facility for three months to avoid people having to leave the village in the interim. Now we're working hard to promote the Outreach service, to ensure it gets the volume of traffic it needs to retain the present number of opening hours."

As the shop looks forward to its first birthday, Robert added: "Although it all took a lot of hard work, it is worth every minute when you pop into the shop and see so many people using it. We're looking forward to having the facility for many years to come."

Shop and café bestsellers

Golden Syrup
Sarson's vinegar
Plastic bottles of cider
Fig rolls
Fruit and vegetables
Expensive wines
Bacon baps and croissants
Local honey
Home-made cakes
Free-range local eggs

Top tips

- Talk to funders before applying for grants
- A dog hook outside the shop is vital
- Fridges and freezers give out a lot of heat; we had to spend £700 on fans
- Keep introducing new things, such as loyalty cards, shopping bags, a local calendar and cards, a bookstore, flowers, local seasonal produce
- It takes 750 photocopies when you apply for a liquor licence

- Get local businesses to help with signage, photography, printing, worktops, design, joinery, and IT
- Midcounties Co-operative Society provided free shop fittings, fridges and advice, and special orders can be bought direct from the local Co-op on good terms

For more information, contact: Robert Willott rgwillott@hotmail.com
<http://blockleyshop.org.uk/index.html>