



Oakridge Lynch Post Office and Village Shop



ALTHOUGH Kim Gorny had been running the village Post Office and general stores in the Cotswold village of Oakridge Lynch near Stroud for almost 14

years, she knew that an influx of younger, affluent families meant her business would have to change to meet the times.

The old Post Office had steps with no access for disabled people or for mums with pushchairs, and the space inside was extremely limited.

So, three years ago, Kim and her husband Mike started thinking about how they could expand the shop in order to build the business and to help save the Post Office from closure, which was on the cards under the national review.

When friends living across the road from the old Post Office decided to sell their large house, it was suggested, in passing, that the Gornys could fit their shop nicely into the ground floor.

"It all started from there," recalls Mike. "There would be plenty of room to create a new, much bigger shop and Post Office. So, we stretched ourselves to the hilt, and bought the house. Then we organised a meeting for the village. We put: "Future of your Village Shop" on the posters and that certainly drew the crowds as I think they were expecting bad news.

"People were delighted when we told them of our plans, and were very forthcoming with all sorts of ideas of what we could sell and what services we could offer."

But the cost of converting the ground floor of the house, and part of the garden into parking, seemed prohibitive.

It was then that the Gornys realised they could apply for investment from the county's Rural Renaissance programme which used South West Regional Development Agency funds to support the rural economy.

Despite problems caused by delays at regional level in actually receiving almost £65,000 from the programme – which the Gornys matched - the money meant they could turn their dreams into a reality.

The new Post Office and village stores opened in August 2007 and not only offers a wide range of grocery items as well as fresh, locally-sourced meat and poultry, specialists breads and Duchy Farm organic veg boxes, but the new coffee shop is also doing excellent business.

"We have free WiFi in the coffee shop and local people – and weekend visitors – pop in to work on their laptops here," said Mike. The space also displays art works by local artists, including bookbinding and jewellery. A recent visitor was the Bishop of Gloucester who based himself in the shop to meet local residents.

A key to the shop's success has been to extend opening hours until 7pm on weekdays – although it has taken a while for local people to get used to this.

"More and more people are realising they can do their shopping here after work," added Mike. "We are quite an isolated community with no passing traffic as such. It's taken people a while to get used to it, but it is making a significant difference."

There is also a balance to be drawn between offering 'cheap and cheerful' and premium items, says Mike. "It's really important to work out what your customers want – some may need value baked beans, but there are others prepared to pay for free range chicken. You have to make sure you get the balance right, appeal to all the potential shoppers."

Having the active support of local people is also vital. "People have a choice about where they shop – our job is to encourage them to shop here. At the same time, we appreciate the fact that without the support of the residents, we would not be able to continue with the business. But we all understand that, and we feel we are very much part of the community."

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