

Pub is the Hub Case Study

OLD CROWN COMMUNITY PUB, HESKET NEWMARKET, CUMBRIA



APPLICANT AND BACKGROUND

The Old Crown is situated in the centre of Heskett Newmarket, a small village situated 12 miles north-west of Penrith just inside the northern edge of the Lake District National Park. The village has a population of around 450 people, and other local services include a shop and post office. The village is also home to the Heskett Newmarket Brewery, located behind the pub, which was bought out by a local co-operative in 1999. The Old Crown came onto the market in the summer of 2002 and was purchased by second local co-operative, due to concerns that the pub would close. The aim from the outset was to preserve what makes The Old Crown the special kind of pub it is - a warm, cosy, friendly pub, that supports local traders and suppliers, and sells good food and local ales brewed at Heskett Newmarket Brewery. The Old Crown is Britain's first co-operatively owned pub.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Old Crown co-operative is structured as an industrial and provident society community co-operative with 124 members, who are mainly local villagers and other regular customers. The overall aim is to ensure the future of the pub as a thriving co-operatively run business and the pub co-operative enjoys a close relationship with the earlier brewery co-operative, with both enterprises supporting each other and having a vested interest in each other's success. The pub, as the only one in the village, is an important anchor for the local tourist trade supporting other local businesses such as the brewery, local guest houses and the village shop. Following the community purchase, the pub has been run successfully under a tenanted model and has grown from strength to strength with the development of a new kitchen and dining room, and a small community ICT facility.

OUTCOMES

The co-operative ownership model demonstrates one way in which local people can act together to keep a local pub open and thriving. It shows the great value placed on the pub and has provided a focus for community cohesion. The pub makes a significant contribution to both the economic and social fabric of the local community, providing local employment, supporting local suppliers and providing a welcome meeting place for locals and visitors alike. The commitment and enthusiasm of the co-operative also provided a catalyst for the pub's development, which has resulted in an increase in the community facilities to include a new dining/meeting room, and a broadband ICT facility that won 'Best Outreach' at the UK online centres awards in 2008, providing learning opportunities linked to a local primary school.

LESSONS TO LEARN

- As a project for the whole community, as many people as possible need to get involved and buy into the idea.
- For a co-operative to be successful, the local community must work closely together to achieve its aims.
- Use the media to float the idea of buying the pub and call for interested people to get in touch.
- Be patient, despite sympathetic vendors, community buy-outs can take many months to complete.
- Ensure that a realistic and robust business plan is in place.
- Consider carefully how the co-operative will be managed and who will run the pub.

PROJECT CAPITAL COSTS (EXCLUDING VAT)

Capital costs N/A.

There are 124 members of the co-operative who have contributed an equal shareholding of £1,500

The initial purchase was helped by grant funding from Cumbria County Council Rural Regeneration Fund and the Lake District National Park Sustainable Development Fund.

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