

Pub is the Hub Case Study

The Pheasant, Neenton, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 6RJ



Since The Pheasant closed in 2006, Neenton had been a village under threat. With no public space or facilities other than the Church – no shop, no post office, no village hall, no school, no playground – Neenton was destined to become just a collection of houses. When the pub became semi-derelict in 2010, the idea was born that The Pheasant might be bought and restored by building new homes on part of its land. A group of enthusiastic local villagers became willing volunteers and eventually Neenton Community Society (NCS) was formed in 2012 as a charitable Community Benefit Society to carry the acquisition project for the derelict Pheasant Inn through and own the premises in perpetuity for local people.

Thanks to a pioneering collaboration with Shropshire Housing Group and 'can do' community rights thinking supported by Shropshire Council, two thirds of the funds needed were raised in this way. The balance of the funds required from grants including the Marches Redundant Buildings Fund and Shropshire Council's Rural Challenge Fund, from loans, and through community shares. Just before Christmas 2013, the first part of this dream came true – The Pheasant came into the ownership of the local community. Pub is The Hub's initial role centred upon viability offering advice and a market perspective.

The Pheasant at Neenton, dating back to the 18th Century, eventually re-opened its doors in November 2014 after nine years closed! Fully restored, re-furbished in style with its magnificent Oak Room restaurant and expanded, with letting bedrooms and all the facilities to be a thriving enterprise for the 21st Century. This historic Shropshire pub offers relaxed dining, traditional values and good company in a real country local. It provides delicious, classic British recipes with a twist.

One of the limited number of community pubs that are owned collectively, The Pheasant's business is currently run by Neenton Community Society through a wholly-owned subsidiary, Neenton Community Trading, a Community Interest Company established for the purpose.

Project Summary:

The next phase was to look at how the Pub could engage with the local community. In various consultations starting on the first Pheasant Day in May 2012 and an open meeting to finalise ideas in April 2015, local people suggested all kinds of activities, facilities and services that could be based at the pub. The priority areas agreed for local community benefit were:

- children's activities and play area.
- services such as a drop-off/collection point for local suppliers, internet access.
- crafts, pub games and drop into the Oak Room for tea or coffee when the pub's closed.
- entertainment and live music.

Pub is The Hub provided advice and support plus facilitating a grant for the play area and a collection centre for the village. With support from Pub is the Hub, and the efforts of a band of enthusiastic volunteers, the Society has built a play areas for toddlers and older children featuring a tower slide, tractor and sand pit in the pub's orchard garden and it is available for local children to use, whether the pub is open or not. There are plans in place to set up a parcel drop off and collection facility at the pub. The grant also provides a laptop and related equipment to set up an internet help point so local people without internet facilities or expertise can access a wide range of goods, services and information.

Outcomes so far:

The Pheasant is a viable trading vehicle with on budget achievement. Great reviews through TripAdvisor and positive feedback on Facebook on the letting bedrooms and the food offer have contributed to high ratings and a 'feel good' factor, with the pub and garden becoming a 'Hub' for the community and chosen destination for drive-to customers. The Pheasant has won the Sawday's Community Pub of the Year 2016/17.

Lessons to Learn:

Very useful as a learning curve and exemplar for other communities as to what can be achieved.

Total Project Costs	£4233
Contribution from Private Sector	£233
CSF Grant	£4,000

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Neenton Community Society