

Community Shops



**Plunkett Foundation's support in
2011**

Introduction

Plunkett Foundation (<http://www.plunkett.co.uk>) supports rural communities to take control of the issues affecting them through community ownership. We are the only national organisation supporting the development of community-owned village shops in the UK. Through a dedicated team, specialist support programme including 4 regional advisers, 16 regular mentors and over 50 specialist consultants, as well as online and telephone contact, we are able to support communities to open new community-owned shops and to help existing community-owned shops to thrive. Below is a short report into our work with community shops in 2011.

Growth of the sector

At the beginning of 2011, there were 251 community shops trading. At the close of the year, this figure stood at 271. This includes **19 brand new shops**, plus 4 that were already open but previously unknown to Plunkett.

The South East of England saw the greatest level of growth with 7 new shops, followed by the South West with 5. Of the 19 shops to open in 2011, Plunkett has worked with 17 of them throughout their process of setting up, with 14 using Plunkett's Model Rules.

In addition to openings, there has been a steady increase in awareness of the community ownership model, with more communities exploring the model for themselves. Plunkett's Community Retail Team handled **130 new enquiries** from communities seeking advice and support in setting up a new community shop, averaging at 11 new enquiries each month throughout 2011. In total, Plunkett is working with 149 communities, helping them to explore setting up a community shop.

The **£5.3m Village SOS campaign**, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and delivered by Plunkett Foundation and its partners Co-operatives UK, Locality and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), has also played its part in raising awareness of community shops. It saw 6 television programmes broadcast on primetime BBC, together with 13 regional events and a funding competition take place in 2011; further events, a national conference and the Advice Line will continue into 2012.

How we supported community shops in 2011

Throughout 2011 Plunkett committed around **£650,000 of support** to community owned shops. This included the Village Core Programme, in partnership with Co-operative and Community Finance, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and supported by Lankelly Chase, which funded **11 new shops** through a combination of grant, loan and community finance. The programme has now allocated its known resources, bringing the total number of communities supported to **75 over 5 years**, not including the number of communities who have been encouraged by knowing the funding was available but not ultimately needing it. An additional £60,000 was contributed to the programme by Victory Housing for projects based in Norfolk, and £5,000 from Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) for projects in Sussex.



The **Making Local Food Work programme** (<http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk>), funded by the Big Lottery Fund, also contributed to the success of community shops in 2011. Of significant value and impact was the Look for Local Food strand, which saw Plunkett Foundation working with 114 established community shops throughout the year to expand their local food offering and increase sales. Of the 114, **68% are now stocking more local food**, and 62% reported a **significant increase in sale turnover**.



Support through this programme also extended to general retail and business support, and 50 participating shops also held community events and tastings. Additionally, 10 community shops took part in study visits, 9 received mentoring support, 16 delivered training as mentors, and 10 received specialist business support or attended training events.

In June this year, our ability to provide specialist business support was given a boost as a result of Plunkett Foundation commencing work as a **Co-operative Enterprise Hub** contractor. This enables Plunkett to provide up to four days of specialist support to co-operative organisations. Seventeen co-operatives have been awarded support thus far, 12 of which are community owned village shops. This support has also helped 2 food co-ops, 1 co-operative pub, 1 Fisherman's co-operative and 1 Community Supported Agriculture project. Advice provided via the Co-operative Enterprise Hub has complemented that provided by Plunkett's core Community Advisers, who between them worked **246 days** supporting a combination of the 130 new community enquiries and 271 established shops. When combined with the support offered by all specialist advisers, the total rises to **768 days**.

Helping communities to help themselves

Plunkett launched a new set of 'model rules for community ownership' in November 2010, for Industrial and Provident Societies for the benefit of the community. These rules included an option to enable the society to raise 'substantial amounts of capital'. In 2011, using these rules, Plunkett registered **23 new societies** with the FSA, converted 1 existing community shop previously registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee, and updated one other existing community shop that was using outdated Model Rules. Out of 10 of these communities who have launched a community share issue, **£561,000 in share capital** has so far been raised.

Being part of something bigger

2011 saw the birth of a brand new support service for community owned shops, developed in direct consultation with them. In March, the **Plunkett Community Shop Network** was launched; a membership scheme that allowed community shops to access a range of products and services at heavily discounted rates. The benefits package was developed as a response to the things community shops professed to needing the most, such as discounts on energy, card payment services and insurance, and is in constant development. **Forty-three shops have joined the scheme since its launch, with savings for each member estimated to be in the region of £500.**



In addition to the Benefits Package, membership has created a **strong steering group** consisting of 7 community shop representatives who have taken an active interest in the work of Plunkett Foundation and in shaping the direction of that work moving forward.

Membership has also been the platform from which to foster a sense of belonging to a community shop movement and facilitating community shops to talk and network with one another. Throughout the year, **3 national networking events took place**, each hosting a variety of training workshops and opportunities to share best practice – attracting an average of 103 delegates per event. Additionally, shop staff and volunteers took a more active role in networking remotely via the online Community Shop Network (<http://www.plunkett.uk.net>). Online membership has grown to almost 700 as a result of **248 new members** joining in 2011.

Greater recognition

An important part of Plunkett's work is to raise the profile of community owned shops and highlight the issues communities face in trying to take control of the issues affecting them through community ownership. This is done by developing and influencing policies relevant to rural communities and community owned enterprises, as well as promoting the approach in high profile press and media campaigns.



Throughout 2011 community-owned shops attracted significant media attention in a variety of ways, through high profile celebrity opening events such as that of Milland in Sussex, which saw Downton Abbey star Hugh Bonneville cut the ribbon (pictured left), to longer-term recognition of being viable businesses. Five out of the

seven regional finalists of the Countryside Alliance Awards – known as the ‘**Rural Oscars**’ – were community owned shops. Brockweir and Hewelsfield Community Shop won The Times’ **Best Farm Shop** award as well as the **Best Local Food Retailer** title in the prestigious BBC Food and Farming Awards 2011. Lodsworth Larder was a winner of the **Nectar Small Business Awards**, Yarpole was the first community shop to be recognised by the **Queen’s Awards for Voluntary Service**, and many other awards were won at regional county level giving recognition to the contributions community shops make to their own communities.

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