

Developing and Sustaining a Rural Community Shop

Elston Village Shop - 10 years on

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Volunteer and Resident of Elston

Elston Village Shop

Owned by the Community, for the Community

- Set up in May 2005 as a social enterprise
- Just celebrated it's 10th anniversary
- Managed and run by a team of local volunteers
- Much more than just a shop...
- Provides a hub for the community and a heart for the village



Elston Village Shop- The Original Shop in a Box !

Looking good on it's 10th Anniversary

Elston- little bit of background information

- Elston is situated about 5 miles south of Newark, a mile off the A46
- Approx 680 residents, in 290 households.
- Attractive village set in woods and farmland, acts as hub for small surrounding hamlets.
- A number of home based small businesses, as well as 2 remaining working farms.
- Most people who work commute to Newark, Lincoln or Nottingham.
- Over 30% of residents aged over 60 (based on 2003 survey)
- Facilities include refurbished Village Hall, Primary School, Pub, Church and of course our Shop.
- Active village with lots of clubs and activities


Elston Village Shop

What was the trigger to make it happen?

- **The Parish Plan**- Parish Plan survey of 2003 indicated that what the village most wanted was a shop/ postal services again
- The last shop/post office in Elston closed in 1998.
- **Elston Action Plan**-A steering group of local residents was formed, and with help from Rural Community Action Notts and support from Plunkett Foundation things started to take shape
- **Timing** -Luckily RCAN needed a community willing to pilot a project to take forward the concept of developing a community owned shop, with some funding from SRB available to help- we were willing to be guinea pigs!

Finding a Premises

The most important thing!

- Not an easy task- especially with very little capital funding
- A very tricky problem- way before the Localism Act or Asset Transfers
- Village Hall?- nowhere near ready for refurb
- Disused farm buildings?
- No property available in the village.....
- Then  ! what about a Portacabin until the Village Hall gets refurbished?

Funding

- Defra provided most of the capital to purchase the Portacabin
- Community raised £3000 in a weekend to meet deadline- long term loans and donations
- Planning permission obtained
- Village Hall field location approved- next to Village Hall, School and Car park- perfect location!
- But.....



The Shop in a Box being delivered

Fun and games on delivery day!!!

Now the hard work really started !

Making it work

- Dedicated support from RCAN business mentor given
- Business formed as Social Enterprise- as Company Limited by Guarantee for benefit of the community
- Funding helped initially to pay for 2 part time staff to manage the shop and get things set up
- Bank of volunteers recruited and trained
- Donations of shop equipment from local businesses
- Legal structures, Policies and Procedures drawn up
- Stock sourced and bought
- Ready to roll!



Grand Official Opening Day July 2005

Official opening with honoured guests Sir Andrew Buchanan, Mary Peatfield the oldest resident of Elston, and James Smith the youngest.

Trial and Error

(and being flexible)

- **Communications**- Using events and consultation with the local community about what the shop should provide in terms of-
 - Stock, services, opening times, home deliveries, shop layout, café area
- **Market Niche** -To begin with high end deli, outdoor fresh produce market stall- sadly not sustainable as too much wastage
 - Have now found niche as a convenience store plus with a friendly face
 - A place to chat and find out what's going on in the village, plus lots lots more.....

WHAT DOES THE SHOP HAVE TO OFFER?

As well as the normal convenience store we also provide: -

- **A dry cleaning service**
- **Photocopying/faxing/internet access**
- **A place to advertise and sell tickets for events**
- **Paypoint which enables you to pay by debit or credit card, pay bills, top up phones, draw cash etc.**
- **Alcohol and cigarettes**
- **Stamps, a parcel drop-off service**
- **Second-hand books and**
- **A tea or coffee for 50p**



General grocery section

Help from Plunkett given listing all basic grocery items
which we should always have in stock



Important equipment

Freezers, Chillers, Shelving, -All items either donated or purchased very cheaply from local retail businesses- except for the vital Air conditioning units!



Local producers important

Always promoting Local Producers. Best sellers are free range eggs, locally made bread and cakes, honey, bacon, sausage and cold meats. Donations of fresh fruit and veg from gardens and the Elston allotments



Jacqui, Volunteer Shop Manager in the 'office!'

Making sure the bills get paid and the volunteers arrive for their shifts!



Volunteering in the Shop

A great way to get to know the village, help keep the shop open, fight social isolation and make new friends. Also found of local information- especially for delivery people and newcomers to the villages!

Carol, one of the essential team of friendly volunteers

How we make it work today

- **Volunteers**- essential to keep the shop open. Rolling bank of volunteers with small group with key skills willing to take on responsibilities.
- **Customers**- Listening to and literally knowing our customers, providing a friendly and safe place to be, especially children.
- **Stock** -providing an 'emergency pantry', small number of essential stock items only, replenished weekly, popular local produce. (Just in time principles) Concentrating on high margin sales e.g Sweets and soft drinks
- **Services**-variety of services listed earlier all popular, Pay Pal especially, catering for different types of customer. Readily accessible source of information for Elston and surrounding villages.

How we make it work today

- **Good financial management-** keeping a very close eye on cashflow, balanced with stock levels.
- Have introduced a Prepay system to help cashflow and maintain customer loyalty.
- Number of cost savings over the years to reduce gap between profit and running costs- met by fundraising.
- **Opening hours-** regular hours weekdays and Sat a.m.
- **Location and synergy with other groups-** ideally situated close to the school. Support from and given too other clubs/societies in Elston e.g Garden Club, WI, Village Hall

What we have learned

- Vital to get professional support early on.
- Volunteers and staff with right skills essential, core team- understand and look after them!
- Peer learning-Visit other similar projects, avoid pitfalls!
- Be flexible- understand main needs of community and offer range of services that are manageable and affordable.

What we have learned

- Shop as a community hub, social value cannot be underestimated.
- Communicate- customer complacency, *use it or lose it!*
- Build support from local businesses/ tradespeople
- Keep stock levels low
- Keep close eye on the money!

Where do we go from here?

Into the Village Hall
next door.

Next phase of Village
Hall refurbishment
includes space for the
Shop and Café Area
but needs careful
planning to ensure
visibility.

So here's to another
successful 10 years!



Elston Shop Diaries

- First 'Shop in a Box' community owned shop in Nottinghamshire (UK?)
- Model for Toolkit rolled out to number of other rural communities across UK.
- Number of visits from other potential shop groups, including group from Germany.
- Provided essentials for villagers when snowed in.
- Ran family focussed 'The Hub' bar in Village Hall when local pub closed for year.
- Sustainable after 10 years ups and downs.

What does the Shop mean for you?

Comments from Customers and Volunteers

- Emergencies- when you run out, place for coffee and chat.
- Can get cashback and pay bills, stamps
- Convenient, sociable, know it's always there and someone to talk to.
- As volunteer/ newcomer helped me get to know people. Would really miss it if it went
- Children love it to spend pocket money on sweets
- Good location, park outside, no need to drive to Newark
- Like social aspect of volunteering, get to know people
- Like local produce, eggs lovely