



Plunkett UK

Supporting rural community-owned businesses

Impact Report 2024

Who are Plunkett UK?

A national charity, which supports people in rural areas to set up and run a wide range of businesses in community ownership. We do this to achieve our UK-wide vision for resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities.

We have promoted the community ownership model for over 100 years because of its track record for delivering better businesses for people, communities, the economy, and the environment.

What is a community business?

Any type of business that trades for community benefit and is democratically owned and controlled by the local community.

How can you find out more?

Through our website: www.plunkett.co.uk

On the phone: 01993 630022

By email: info@plunkett.co.uk



A foreword from our sponsor

There are an increasing number of resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities across the country, thanks to the tireless work of a growing network of community-owned businesses, which are supported by Plunkett UK.

This Impact Report, which Blenheim is delighted to sponsor, recognises the achievement of **787 community-owned businesses** that trade for the benefit of their local area, with 32 new entities opening in 2023.

We all celebrate the positive impact of the community business sector in 2023, especially in the face of the current cost-of-living crisis. Against the odds, **the five-year survival rate for community businesses remains an outstanding 99%** – more than double Office for National Statistics' data for small and medium-sized enterprises, which is 44% over the same period. Over 20-plus years, community-owned businesses' survival rates also remain phenomenally high at 92%. **In reality, very few businesses close once they are community-owned!**

Every community business trading at this time is testament to not only the model, but also **the thousands of people behind them driving them forward each and every day**. It is amazing to hear that £2.9m was raised by 3,600 people in rural communities, who bought 'community shares' to help these businesses open last year.

Plunkett's role at the heart of this sector and their expertise should not be underestimated. Last year the charity launched its **universal business support service** whilst continuing with programmes at the core of its business service. It also shared its plan for promoting **equity, diversity and inclusion** in the countryside, using the community business model as the driver for positive impact at a grassroots level.

BLENHHEIM

Across 2023, Plunkett received **424 enquiries** from a range of businesses seeking support across the UK and delivered 606 days of one-to-one support to 260 community businesses, by matching community groups with an **expert adviser**. Not only this, but Plunkett also **raises awareness** of the community business model and creates **a supportive environment** for community businesses to operate, via membership, networking, research and advocating with government, think tanks and funders.

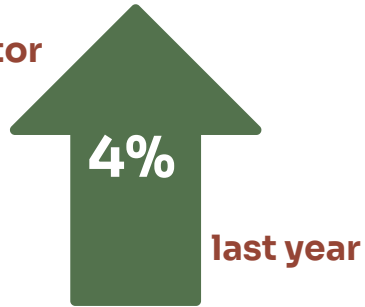
This is why Blenheim is proud to partner with Plunkett UK, whose headquarters are just down the road from us in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. Given that there continue to be tough times ahead, we encourage community business leaders to make the most of the **valuable advice and support available through Plunkett**, and to seek Plunkett's help every step of the way. You are not alone and are in very good company.

We know Plunkett will continue to support new and existing businesses to navigate challenges, while advocating for better support for the sector.

Dominic Hare - Chief Executive Officer, Blenheim Palace



The sector
grew by



In the last 10 years, the sector
has almost doubled, with



The long-term survival rate
of community businesses is



with very few
ceasing to trade
once open

The 2024 Impact Report is published at the midway point of Plunkett UK's five-year strategy, which includes an ambition to grow the community business sector by 20% by 2026.

Taking into account the reported growth figures from last year, since the start of the strategy Plunkett has supported:

Growth in rural community businesses of 8.2%

Growth in all community businesses of 7.6%

**Supporting
a sector that
is growing**



The growing impact of a growing movement

Community businesses bring together diverse networks of people who encourage community action and tackle a wide range of issues, putting the interests of their community first.

Plunkett UK has promoted the community ownership model for over 100 years and has a track record of delivering better businesses for people, communities, the economy, and the environment.

We help community businesses to:

1. Provide more services and amenities that communities really value and need
2. Enhance the local economy through localised supply chains
3. Create access to more employment, training and volunteering opportunities - often supporting people who are excluded from the labour market
4. Tackle climate change by implementing environmentally sustainable initiatives
5. Promote equity, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all

Our Impact Report will showcase the ways in which community businesses that Plunkett has supported and worked with in 2023 are achieving impact in each of these areas.





**Nearly 1 in 5
businesses saw an
increase in the
demand for services
last year**

**67% of businesses
absorbed price rises
where possible to
enable services to
remain affordable to
customers**

*Plunkett UK's 'Community
Ownership: A Better Form
of Business' 2023*

1. Provide a wide range of services and amenities that communities value and need

Most community businesses supported by Plunkett operate in areas of market failure.

Also predominantly based in rural areas, which are often remote with poor or no public transport, the businesses enable people to access core services that many take for granted. The existence of these businesses, be they shops, pubs, cafes, woodlands, hubs or heritage centres, **can be transformative** for people on low incomes, living with disabilities, or those with caring responsibilities. They help people who can become isolated to **remain connected and feel included** in the place where they live.

In 2023, against the backdrop of a well-documented cost of living crisis, the community business network demonstrated **a continued commitment to providing key services**, in the face of extremely challenging trading conditions that they themselves were facing.

INSIGHT

Focus Easington, in County Durham, established a community benefit society to create 'The Welcome Centre' to provide key local services to people in need. The project is based in Easington Colliery Methodist Chapel, which has been at risk of closure since 2022, and is an important local asset in an area of high deprivation. Thanks to the work we have been doing with the Benefact Trust, Plunkett were able to support the community's aspiration to see the chapel being sympathetically modernised to become an accessible, multifunctional community space offering regular worship alongside youth provision, a lunch club, employability sessions, health and wellbeing services and a community-owned launderette.



72% of businesses proactively ‘source locally’ for goods and products as part of their operation

Plunkett UK’s ‘Community Ownership: A Better Form of Business’ 2023

2. Enhance the local economy through localised supply chains

According to research by Plunkett partners, Power to Change, for every £1 spent with a community business, 56p stays in the local economy – compared with just 40p for large private sector firms. At the heart of this figure is a commitment made by the community business movement to **source locally**, genuinely contributing to and creating a circular economy in the places they exist.

Localised supply is perhaps most obviously seen amongst the network of community-owned shops, stocking and marketing **goods and produce** from within a local proximity to their business. However, behind the scenes there are also examples of how the movement contributes to **other local economic growth**. For example, the use of local trades people and engineers supported Amberley Shop on the Common, a community shop in a church in Stroud, to open last year. Even at Plunkett, we utilised a local marketing firm, Purpose and Action Ltd (PANDA), to lead on our brand refresh.

INSIGHT

Menter y Glan Ltd, a community pub in Powys, Wales was the winner of Plunkett’s 2023 Rural Community Business Award for ‘Community Food and Local Supply’. The business operates around the ‘farm to fork’ approach using meats, dairy products, vegetables and serving drinks from over 40 local suppliers. As stated on their nomination for the award: “Behind every recipe is the story of how that food or drink product (sold at the pub) was crafted. We believe this approach not only embeds the local economy into people’s purchasing choices, it also creates a sense of place and enhances, or in most cases, reconnects people with nature, the seasons and how food is produced.”

Based in the rural uplands of Mid Wales, agriculture is a fundamental economic driver. Due to the sensitive farming practices the area is fortunate that it has a high-quality environment with dedicated food producers that support the Menter y Glan vision.



3. Create access to more employment, training and volunteering opportunities – often supporting people who are excluded from the labour market

Whilst the motivation for establishing a community-owned business is rooted in a local desire to protect an asset, retain a service, or reintroduce something that has been 'lost' previously, there is also a growing opportunity to create employment and volunteering opportunities for local people.

Our sector is supported by an **estimated workforce of over 4,000 people** who are employed in roles that are often flexible and suited to supporting individuals who have struggled to find employment through mainstream means. Furthermore, this workforce is bolstered further by **c.25,000 volunteers** who perform duties from back office and governance / compliance to maintenance and cleaning, to marketing and front of house roles. **Quite simply the community business movement is one with a network of dedicated people at its heart.**



INSIGHT

In the context of rural communities, creating fair paid, flexible employment for young people is supporting a generation that are leaving rural areas due to a lack of opportunities, according to research from Plunkett partners, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

At our Rural Community Business Awards 2023, Plunkett celebrated several young people who are currently involved – in a range of roles – with community businesses across the UK. One of the highly commended entrants to the Awards was **Tilly Goodwin, from the Auctioneers Arms at Caverswall.**

The Auctioneers Arms is a community-owned pub in the Midlands that has actively sought to create roles for young people, through apprenticeships and working with the local college. Tilly started in backroom and kitchen-based roles, before progressing to front of house where she serves with distinction – something which has been formerly recognised by Newcastle College. Tilly is a great example of how a young person's confidence can grow, with the right support and an opportunity to work in an inclusive business environment.

52% of businesses with paid staff gave employees a minimum of 5% 'cost of living' payrise

More than half (53%) of community businesses employ young people (16–25 years of age)

Plunkett UK's 'Community Ownership: A Better Form of Business' 2023



96% took some form of climate action last year

44% are taking action to reduce their waste (e.g. reducing use of packaging)

85% of businesses surveyed have either installed or are currently considering installing Energy Saving Measures

Plunkett UK's 'Community Ownership: A Better Form of Business' 2023



4. Tackle climate change through environmentally sustainable initiatives

It is no surprise that a network of businesses that have been established to protect and sustain local assets and services are equally committed to environmental action.

As businesses that are owned and run by local people, community businesses have ethical practice and local accountability at their core. With there being a greater societal awareness of the climate crisis, we are seeing more and more grassroots action taking place at a local level.

For community businesses, this means reducing the carbon footprint of products and services, managing waste responsibly, helping local people to live more sustainably, and setting up new initiatives to directly benefit the environment. Community-owned businesses, as locally rooted operations, makes sustainable living more affordable and accessible to all.

INSIGHT

Cleve Archers, a community business with 260 members and based in South Gloucestershire, has embarked on a project to develop an energy efficient and environmentally friendly sports venue. The group were a winner at the Plunkett Rural Community Business Awards last year because of their demonstrable commitment to not only promote educational awareness of renewable energy, working with local schools, but also how they have considered and utilised the green space surrounding the asset, in terms of achieving their ambition to be carbon neutral.

Alongside the installation of solar panels on the clubhouse, a major part of the project was to plant and maintain a variety of British trees, shrubs and meadowland which will encourage wildlife back into this beautiful area of the country. They also introduced a wildflower meadow on the north west side of the facility and have identified other parts of the sites to extend the meadows further. The project will ensure Cleve Archers can utilise a low-cost energy supply and provide a viable sports venue giving young people, parents and adults the chance to develop a healthy lifestyle in a sustainable sports environment.



5. Promote equity, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all

In 2023, Plunkett published its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion in the context of the work it does to support new groups and trading community businesses across the UK. As well as publishing an internal action, Plunkett wants to reach areas where community ownership is currently underrepresented with an ambition to address social and economic deprivation and other hidden needs, such as poor mental health, loneliness and isolation that exist in the countryside. Plunkett also wants to inspire community businesses to benefit, engage or be led by individuals currently underrepresented or who are facing marginalisation.

Community-owned businesses often act as gateways of opportunity for people living locally; to get involved and feel included through the service they provided. The network also has a strong track record of fostering integration, with residents from all backgrounds able to have a stake in a business that trades for their benefit locally.

INSIGHT

Upper Eskdale Development Group (UEDG) is a community business set up for the benefit of the 300 residents of a small community who live within the beautiful parish of Eskdalemuir, in Dumfries and Galloway. **The Old School Hub and Café** that they run is a great example of how a group can put inclusion at the heart of their operating model. As part of an ambition to be a place to bring people together, they run a variety of courses, provide arts facilities and exhibitions, rental space for therapies, businesses, and local meetings. They also run a shop and a café with a bar. In addition, they aim to be a focal point for other community development locally, across a wide range of themes for all sections of the community, including Social Care and Affordable Housing.

Like many other community businesses doing similar, UEDG set up a Warm Hub, in response to the cost of living crisis. The hub is available on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11am till 2pm during the winter. This is a safe space where members of the community, and beyond, can expect a warm welcome, get cosy by the fire, and enjoy a hot drink, free of charge. Without this facility there would be nothing to bring people together. It prevents isolation and promotes wellness in an incredibly small community in Scotland that could otherwise become cut off.

14% of community businesses offer employment for people with a disability or long-term health condition

33% offer employment to people for whom it was their first paid job

31% offer volunteer opportunities for people with additional support needs, or who have a disability and/or long-term health condition

Plunkett UK's 'Community Ownership: A Better Form of Business' 2023





The work of Plunkett in 2023

To support the impact achieved by community businesses across the country, our dedicated staff team answer enquiries every day from people across the UK who are exploring the idea of setting up a community business, as well as from existing businesses who need additional support.

In 2023, we received **424 enquiries** from a range of businesses seeking support across the UK, including 266 enquiries from communities looking to set up new community businesses.

During the year, we delivered **606 days of one-to-one support to 260 community businesses**, by matching community groups with an expert adviser. This included:

- **119** days of business and financial planning
- **24** days on setting up legal structures and good governance
- **59** days action planning to success
- **40** days on raising community shares
- **111** days of mentoring
- **239** days of in-depth support for the Community Ownership Fund

Other ways we support community businesses:

Almost **3,000 people** use our online peer networks for community shops, pubs and woodlands.

We held **59** events with **1,289 attendees** in 2023: webinars, courses, workshops, networking and study visits. Our training covers a range of topics, such as diversity and inclusion, recruiting staff, and keeping down energy costs.

We also awarded over **£28,000 in grants to 6 communities**.

404 community businesses benefit from Plunkett UK Membership, which offers them benefits such as discounted suppliers and an annual healthcheck for their business.

How did we do?

99% of groups found Plunkett support **easy to access**.

93% were able to **address their challenges** with our help.

Plunkett UK provide the majority of our direct support to new and flourishing community businesses thanks to funding from:

Benefact Trust

Bestway

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

Community Ownership Fund

Cooperative Development Scotland

Dulverton Trust

Esmee Fairburn

Garfield Weston Foundation

National Lottery Community Fund

North Barnes Farm Partnership

Royal Warrant Holders Association

Scottish Government

Thakeham

Worshipful Company of Innholders

We are also grateful to have received support and sponsorship from the following organisations:

Ansvar, Anthony Collins, Blenheim Palace, The Co-operative Group, Doris Field Charitable Trust, Hastoe Housing, Landis+Gyr, Midcounties Co-operative, PF Charitable Trust, Power to Change, Radstock Co-operative, Southern Co-op, Suma, Voneus Broadband, and Webmart.

**Acknowledging
our Funders
and Supporters**



Join the movement

If you share our vision for a vibrant rural economy with community businesses at its heart, why not join Plunkett as a member?

[Become a supporter member](#)

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