

Shopping for a Shop



**A guide to finding the right premises and
fittings for your community shop**

April 2016

Introduction

This guide is designed to assist those wishing to set up a community shop with one of the first and most crucial aspects of the whole project: the shop itself.

This guide will help you answer questions such as:

- What are the important things in looking for and setting up a shop?
- Where can premises be found?
- What is involved in building a new shop?
- What are the essential fittings and equipment?
- How have other people done it?

Examples of best practice abound, and this guide helps you search for the answers that will suit your own circumstances, and provide the very best for your community.

What does your community need?

The first consideration must always be: ‘What is required by our community?’

Is the priority to have a village shop, or is the driver behind the project to have a community hub? Does the community want a small line of essentials, or is a greater range of local foods and drink required? Is a café important and is there a need for a separate meeting space?

Once you have answers to these questions you can try to identify the best way of providing the service required by the community, rather than being driven by the desire to maintain/reinstate an existing building (indeed, sometimes the original shop failed specifically because of its location!).

The best way to get answers to these questions is to issue a questionnaire, whether by knocking on doors, a letter drop or web-based survey. By referring constantly to the feedback gained this way, you will ensure you keep a focus on your original objectives. Remember, the community shop is firstly all about the people who run it, volunteer in it and shop in it, and secondly about the stock on the shelves – it is not all about the building. However the building provides the practical space in which to run your shop. To meet the needs of those who shop and work there, the building needs to combine functionality and appeal: it needs to be a space people want to be in and return to on a regular basis.

Where do you start?

When you are consulting your community with questionnaires and meetings, it's also important to get the message out there that you are looking for premises.

By discussing this proactively with the community, various premises may become available which might not otherwise have been considered – you never know, someone may offer their own land or building for community use. As the majority of community shop projects are triggered by the last remaining village shop closing, many communities find it difficult to draw their eyes away from the “old” shop. Whilst the former shop premises can be ideal, they can also be very expensive, lack parking, require refurbishment and lack space for storage or additional community services such as a cafe, IT provision and meeting space. So make sure you start with a clean slate. The existing shop building is only one of the options.

The next step is to look thoroughly at all site options within the village – be radical and investigate absolutely every possible building and location.

Community shops have been started in churches, a dovecote, pubs, village halls, garages and outbuildings. Groups such as village sports clubs may have space available, or there may be a landlord with spare barns. Be adventurous – often the most unlikely buildings can turn into the most wonderful places for a shop - and again remember that it is the people who make the shop what it is.

Example: Lanreath Shop and Post Office is the perfect example of thinking outside the box. When the villagers of Lanreath wanted to open up a community shop they had no building or space available to them. In fact the only community building was the public toilets on the village green! Instead of being disheartened, however, the community set about turning the toilet block into a community shop, which opened its doors in 2007.



The table below shows the variety of premises that have been used for community shops around the country – surprisingly, only 37 per cent are housed in existing premises.

Premises type	Percentage of shop
Former village shop	37%
Converted premises	20%
New building	17%
Village hall (internal/external extensions)	14%
Portable/pre-fabricated	7%

Church/chapel	3%
Pub/pub car park	2%

Keep an open mind and also make sure you take the opportunity to visit as many community shops as possible; these visits will help you to get a feel for not only what is involved in setting up and running a community shop, but ideas about what you want your shop to look like. This is the secret weapon available to community shop groups – there are literally hundreds of other community shops that will be delighted to give you support and discuss their origins and ideas.

Once you know what sort of building you are likely to be using, track down the community shops that are of similar size and styles so that the comparisons are relevant, and go and see how they've done it! Be prepared to travel – it will be well worth it. The online directory at www.communityshops.coop is a good starting point for finding community shops. It is worthwhile making appointments to visit the selected shops so that you can meet with the most relevant members of the committee or staff/volunteers and so that they have the time to answer your queries. It is also worth visiting other shops including farm shops, convenience stores, and delicatessens to develop your ideas further.

There are so many wonderful examples of best practice out there – tap into them and you will be overwhelmed with the advice offered. Look at their designs, layout, fixtures and fittings, and ask how decisions were made. This will help to build up your profile of what you feel would work in your community. Visit www.plunkett.co.uk/community-shops for a searchable map of all the community shops in the UK to find ones near you.

What size should it be?

If you are not taking over an existing shop premises, the position and place identified will determine the size and style of the shop, whether it is a conversion, extension or new free-standing building.

Whilst there is an optimum scale for the size of the potential customer base, nothing is insurmountable when a band of volunteers is in control – even the smallest space can be constantly restocked to provide a professional service for the community. It can be actually better to have a compact space full of people and stock, than to have too large an area which doesn't have 'soul'! First, identify the services you wish to provide (again referring back to the feedback from potential customers) and how much space you would like to dedicate to selling them:

- basic provisions
- local food
- pre-wrapped or cut cheeses/meats
- fresh produce coffee and cake
- Post Office or postal services
- dry-cleaning
- second-hand book area
- alcohol
- newspapers
- cigarettes
- prescription collection service
- police/council surgery space
- public internet access
- photocopying
- information point, etc

A thorough discussion round these issues is very important in clarifying the priorities. For example, in many villages the customers see the provision of a small café as essential as part of the community shop, so that they can meet friends and catch up on news.

Second, you have to think about storage, office, toilet facilities and kitchen space. These are covered in more detail later in this guide, but it is worth listing the minimum requirements and then building a wish-list from there:

Shop requirements:

Essential:

- Display shelving, chilled merchandisers, freezer, counter and cash register
- Limited parking
- Access for deliveries (either from a small van or from volunteer's cars)

Desirable:

- Store room space – ideally integral or close by (lack of storage can be overcome with deeper shelves to take additional stock)
- Staff toilet (or access to one in close vicinity)
- Space for a small desk, safe and paperwork
- A worktop to prepare coffees and a dishwasher to wash up
- Some external display space to create a first impression of fresh, seasonal food
- Ample parking

Wish list:

- Kitchen – the specification for a kitchen will depend on the level of service to be provided
- Café – there are many examples, from one tiny table in a corner to an 18-cover mini-restaurant
- Heating – if necessary depending on the building, bearing in mind the refrigeration will kick out a lot of warmth. Door heat curtains work well but shops report that they are not used very often
- Renewable energy sources and environmentally friendly features e.g. PV tiles or solar panels, ground-source heat pumps, grey-water toilets, sustainable timber etc.
- Office - with computer, printer, filing cabinet and shelving (shops generate a lot of paperwork, such as invoices, staff records, promotional literature, supplier catalogues, daily cash sheets etc.)
- Public toilet (a new build will require a disabled toilet cubicle)
- Dog tie points and water bowls
- Retractable shop awning
- Outside coffee tables and chairs

What type of building?

It is worth looking through the following list of options used successfully as community shops, and some of the considerations that you may need to be aware of, as well as the likely budget you may need.

Portable buildings

Budget: £10,000 - £35,000

- These are available to rent or purchase
- Typical sizes vary from 12 x 18ft to 20 x 40ft
- Planning permission will be required, and this is often only granted for a limited period of 1-3 years
- You will need to consider the costs and practicalities of connecting to mains water and electricity
- This type of building is often regarded as a temporary solution to give communities a chance to trial running a shop and time to raise the required finance for a more permanent asset
- You will still need to kit out the building – shelving, refrigeration, Post Office counter, and there is no reason why this can't be an attractive space – see <http://www.ideshop.co.uk>

- As other community shops move from a portable building to a purpose-built one, they often offer their portable shop already kitted out for sale to fledgling community shops, so ask around!



Example: Alfrick in Worcestershire lost its shop in April 2011 after the owners retired, but the villagers of Alfrick and nearby Lulsley set about raising the necessary funds for a fully equipped 40' x 12' portable building to house a shop and Post Office. The project took a year to develop with around 20 visits to existing community shops to see how they work. With a staff of 60 volunteers lined up to run it, Alfrick & Lulsley Community Shop opened in June 2012. The villagers raised a total of £64,000 – of which £20,000 came from community share sales, and the rest in grants and a £10,000 loan, to cover the cost of the portable building, connections of services, refrigeration, shelving and stock. The portable building is sited on the village hall carpark. There are future plans to expand the shop into permanent premises.

‘Off the shelf’ building

Budget: £50,000 - £120,000

- This can be a very speedy option for setting up a community shop, in addition to being cost effective and practical

- Off the shelf buildings can be very attractive and would be regarded as more sympathetic to local surroundings than a portable building
- They do tend to be smaller than a purpose built premises, and can lack storage capacity
- Being built off-site and knowing what you are getting from the outset will help to control costs that can be associated with new builds, refurbishments and conversions.



Example: The Shop at North Marston was sourced from Norwegian Log Buildings Ltd and is made from slow-growing sustainable Norwegian pine. Being located on the village hall car park meant it could take advantage of existing utility services on-site. The building itself cost £46,000, with site preparation, water and service connection costing a further £14,500 (including £7000 for preparing and resurfacing the village car park, which was a condition of the build). The building was prepared in Norway to the committee's requirements, with a high-pitched roof and a deep verandah, and it took three months from ordering to being delivered by crane in February 2011 (including delays for the snowy weather). Once it had arrived it took less than a month to put together.

The plot of land is leased to the shop by the Parish Council at a peppercorn rent of £1 per annum, initially for three years. Already a prize-winning shop, the building is proving to be very successful.

Converting an existing building

Budget: £100,000 - £175,000

- Converted buildings can provide charming, characterful buildings which make your shop stand out from others
- Converted shop premises have included barns, stables, public toilets, church vestries, a fire station, a bus shelter and a dovecote!
- You may need to secure planning permission and consider listed building restrictions



Example: Sulgrave Village Shop opened in 2004, two years after the former village shop closed. The former village store was not placed on the market for sale, and land for a new build or off-the-shelf building was not available. In the village however, was a detached, one-storey, ironstone, listed building, originally the village school and left in trust for the benefit of the village – and at the time in a dilapidated state. Permission was gained from the Charities Commission to buy it and convert it for use as a community shop.

The Parish Council raised £94000 for purchase and refurbishment (via grants, reserves, and Public Works Loan) and the community shop association raised £23,000 for equipping it. The shop association pay rent to the Parish Council which more than covers the interest on the original loan. The end product is a beautiful shop, with exposed timbers and stone, and handcrafted shelving. An upstairs loft was fitted out for storage and space to bake bread on site. Whilst the shop is small and several motions have been made to find larger premises, the community is proud that their efforts have not only resulted in the provision of an essential service, but also saved an attractive building which had played an important part of the community's heritage and was in desperate need of repair and restoration.

Extensions to the village hall or new build alongside

Budget: £100,000 - £250,000

- Extending an existing building can be more cost efficient than building from scratch and offers more bespoke space that an existing building can offer
- Co-locating the shop with the village hall can offer mutual benefit to shop and hall as it tends to lead to greater usage of both facilities. Linking to existing community activity in the village will have the added advantage of creating a social hub within the community
- The village hall can provide extra space for the shop to offer additional services such as café, childcare services, meeting space etc., and village halls will often offer great parking facilities and good signage throughout the village
- You will need to consider what the relationship between village hall committee and community shop committee is and whether there is any impact on the hall's charitable status
- You will need to consider how services such as electricity and water are to be split/paid for if the shop is inside the village hall
- You will also need to consider separate access to the shop and related security requirements that are likely to be specified by an insurance provider



Example: Down Ampney Village Shop and Post Office was transferred from its initial portacabin, where it had been run by the community since 1998 after the privately owned village shop closed down, to a purpose-built annexe of the village hall in the summer of 2010, after a tremendous three-year fundraising effort which raised £260,000. Four times the size of the old shop, the environmentally-sensitive building (which includes solar and photovoltaic panels, light tubes, an air source heat pump and rainwater harvesting) has about 900 square feet of usable space and is of stone construction under a tiled roof. They have no issues with land lease and the shop occupies a similar site to where their portable building used to be.

Co-existing with faith-based buildings

Budget: £50,000 - £250,000

- Faith buildings can provide fantastic spaces for a shop and opportunity for making greater use of an existing community building
- Shops can be housed inside the building, or even added as an extension
- It is important that the faith community is involved in the shop project from the point that their building is selected as an option

- Any changes to faith-based buildings will require a faculty or denominational consent
- You may experience difficulties within the community from both faith-based and non faith-based groups concerning trading activity inside a faith building. Plunkett Foundation has produced some guidance on this which can be downloaded from our website, or give us a call and we'll send it to you.
- You will need to consider access, security, noise and impact on service



Example: St Leonard's Church in Yarpole is an excellent example of using a faith building for community enterprise. The Yarpole Community Shop Association had been operating the village shop and Post Office out of a portacabin on a temporary basis. At around the same time the church authorities identified the need to improve and modernise St Leonard's church so that it could be a useful community asset. A Building Group committee was established from people within the village who after consultation with the parishioners drew up plans for the re-ordering of the church. A total sum of £250,000.00 was raised for the project; of which £37,000 came from village fund raising. Work started on the church in January 2009 and was completed by September, and the shop moved into its new premises in the church in October

2009. There is still ongoing work required to incorporate the chancel area into the heating system and to insulate the chancel roof; however Yarpole was the first full-time shop to operate in a church and won Best Village Shop of the Year for 2011 (Countryside Alliance).

New build

Budget £150,000 - £350,000

- New builds provide the unique opportunity to design and build purpose-built space to accommodate your community's ultimate needs
- You have the flexibility to incorporate ecological features such as ground-source heat pumps, water recycling and solar power
- This is potentially, but not necessarily an expensive option
- Planning issues and raising the necessary funding takes a lot of time, however the advantage is that once built you will have a long-term asset connected to your shop



Example: Woodgreen Community Shop. When the time came to move from their small rented premises to a new build, those involved in setting up Woodgreen

Community Shop decided from the outset that they wanted a sustainable building as close to an eco-build as their budget would allow. Therefore the building was built with English red cedar for the cladding and window frames, and scots pine for the framework, with Glulam internal beams. The building will weather well, and as it is not painted it is cheap to maintain. The roof was made with Marley tiles with insulation from recycled newspapers. It is double glazed to a very high standard, and solar shading by extending the roof over the gable ends reduces the effect of direct sunlight on the internal temperature of the shop. A very substantial building, it cost approximately £350,000 and the village took four years to raise the funds.

Former shop premises

Budget £100,000 - £500,000

- Former shop premises can be quaint in appearance and fulfil expectations of what a village shop should look like
- They have the advantage of being set up for trading activity and have the necessary permissions. There is no need to source shelving unless it is dilapidated
- They are usually in a central location and where villagers are used to going, and have a heritage within the community
- They can however be small and lack the potential for new services such as cafes and often lack parking, outside space, and storage
- If attached to residential premises, they can often be marketed for sale by former owners with inflated 'hope values' if they feel they have potential to convert to full residential use

Example: Hinton St George in Somerset. Faced with the closure of their shop and PO, the villagers of Hinton St George in Somerset decided to purchase the premises and set themselves a target of raising £550,000 (subsequently reduced to a more manageable £450,000) to buy the freehold, which included residential accommodation. They had a year to achieve the task and with the help of £160,000 raised from the village in shares and donations, grants and a mortgage, the shop and PO opened as a community-run shop, named simply "Our Shop", in August 2011.

This is an example of the pre-existing shop being in the right location in the village, and having the potential to turn the accommodation into a rentable self-contained flat to offset against mortgage repayments.

Considerations

Once you've looked at all the different options for the building, it's important to have the following factors in mind before you develop your plans any further. They will ultimately help you to run the shop efficiently with your community's needs in mind.

Make sure your shop is light and airy

High vaulted ceilings work well for air circulation and a feeling of space if planning a new build. However, if you are going for the portable option make sure it is one with several windows rather than a 'container-style' cabin.

Good artificial light

Artificial light is going to be very important and it is worth planning carefully. Modernising the lighting in an old store will improve it dramatically, and with a new build you have free rein. Aim to go for prismatic controlled lights if possible, plus accent lights for displays. Consider allowing sockets for external lighting, either to illuminate your shop name or sign, or for use in the winter when volunteers are locking up (and for the Christmas tree lights!). A few solar car park lights are really useful too.

Electricity supply

Utilities can be exceptionally slow so make sure you contact them at least six months before you need connections so that you are on their radar. If going for a new build it is important to decide on your refrigeration equipment early on, so that you can get manufacturers' data on this.

Ask for more plugs than you will ever need; high level sockets behind the chillers allow you to push the units right back against the wall, utilising sales space to a maximum. If considering an espresso coffee machine, check the loading of this.

If you are using an EPOS system this will need to be hardwired to all other till points and the back office with a CAT 5 Ethernet wire to form a Local Area Network. If your shop is a new build, all the electrics need to be carefully thought through before any plastering is done, otherwise extra wires will be visible and a potential hazard.

Water

A hand wash basin is a minimum requirement for a shop, but there are portable units available if water is not accessible. Most coffee machines need to be 'plumbed in' with water and/or drainage; otherwise a supply needs to be available for filling kettles for cafetieres/teapots. Alternatively 'bubble-type' coolers can provide this supply.

Extractors/air conditioning

Requirements for this will be determined by the type of chillers purchased, as internal compressors create an enormous amount of heat, which then needs to be extracted. Even with external compressors, consideration should be given to some extract to ensure that the area near the chiller has some air-flow and does not get damp, causing lost stock. Remember this when designing a storeroom, especially if it has chillers or freezers in it. High levels of insulation in new buildings compounds this problem and so is a recurring issue with new shops across the country.

Kitchen standards

Consultation with the local Environmental Health Officer at an early stage is a very good idea when planning the kitchen facilities. Your services will be categorised as low, medium or high risk depending on whether you are intending serving high-risk food such as meat, protein and dairy items. As a generalisation, it is often best to start small (offering coffee and cake) and build up the service (to a full lunch menu) once the shop is established. Facilities provided and staff training will depend on the type of service.

Environmental issues

These can depend on the location (for example, if you are located in an AONB), budget and environmental impact on the village. Examples where alternative energy sources have been fully integrated into the designs of the building include Woodgreen, Hampshire; Dalwood, Devon; Lodsworth Larder, West Sussex; and Freshford, Bath. Smaller-scale use has been made elsewhere by using PV tiles or solar panels to top up supplies.

Plunkett Foundation membership

We've developed an exclusive membership package for community co-operatives, whether in the initial stages of setting up or those open and trading. This membership package gives you the opportunity to join together and give support back to others just starting out. It also helps your co-operative to benefit from additional advisory services from us, and to access a range of purchasing benefits.

Cost

- It costs £240 per year to join the Plunkett Community Co-operative Network (PCCN).

Benefits

- As well as receiving all the supporter membership benefits, community co-operative members also receive:
- Exclusive access to purchasing benefits to help reduce running costs (see more below)
- Discounted services from selected third party suppliers of professional services
- Additional advisory services from us, including annual health checks
- Discounted Model Rules for Community Benefit Societies.

Find out more at www.plunkett.co.uk/become-a-member

“ We at the Galleries Shop & Café near Bath joined up straight away - it just seemed such a good idea to negotiate with suppliers collectively as a large group rather than each of us struggling on individually! ”

Gitte Dawson, The Galleries Shop and Café

Equipping your shop

Floor plans

Most shop fitters will draw shop plans for free, which helps enormously with planning your design as it is then on a scale drawing. You will need to give the designer a specification first (e.g. external compressors on the chillers) so that he knows what you require from the space, but it is then useful to see his ideas on layout. You are not duty bound to buy from him (although you may need fascias or extra bits which you could purchase from him), and the manufacturers mentioned below have worked with other community shops so they understand the constraints.

Display shelving

Essential:

- Sufficient space to display desired product lines adequately
- Adjustable shelving heights to fit products
- Flexibility of display i.e. slat wall and peg boards, newspaper display, card racks etc.

Desirable:

- Aesthetically pleasing presentation of goods
- Low level gondolas encouraging customers to flow round the space rather than up and down an aisle
- Chillers placed face on, at the far end of the shop so that customers are drawn to the back by the illuminated display
- Coffee tables placed at the front to entice customers in and to create atmosphere

Wish List:

- Bespoke craftsman-made units to reflect local materials and trades

A mix-and-match approach to display shelving works really well in most shops and gives great flexibility to suit all budgets. Below are the main options from which you can choose:

Second-hand shelving units

These can be picked up from local supermarkets that are refitting; however you must make sure they are good standard fittings which are flexible enough to fit into different spaces and with adjustable shelf heights to take maximum volumes of stock. These can be 'customised' with fascias in many different finishes e.g. from www.mactrashop.co.uk, and are often Arneg or Tegometal constructions. It is worth considering these for fitting out a storeroom as well.

Flat pack units

Bookshelves of various widths and heights or 'box-style' are great for large volume space; however they are not flexible in height. They are easily available and cost effective and can blend in well when used with standard fittings finished in similar material e.g. birch/limed oak.

Farmhouse-style shop fittings

These are wooden finish free-standing units which have flexible shelves, standard size units or can be made-to-measure e.g. www.stagecraft.co.uk.

Craftsman-made units

These create an impact and hold the opportunity to reflect local trades or materials. Handmade units can be used effectively to establish an image at the front of the shop. However take care that the units hold sufficient products for the majority of the shelving i.e. use them to create an impression at the front of the shop but consider standard units for the body of the shop as they are more space effective.

Chilled merchandisers and freezers

It is vitally important to make sure you have suitable chilled merchandisers and freezers in place to get your shop ready for opening day.

Essential:

You need to allow enough space to have as much chilled display as you can afford. With the growing wish to stock local, seasonal food comes the additional requirement for chilled display space. Currently in favour are sliding door units, as the open-fronted, blown-air units consume great quantities of electricity. Plastic strips can be added to alleviate this loss, however they can create a barrier to purchase and do not enhance the look of the products being displayed.

There is considerably more display space available in a sliding-door unit than in two upright chillers and if space and budget allow, consider a whole wall length of chilled display.

Desirable:

External compressors - when the compressor is integral to the unit, considerable heat is pumped out into the shop, raising the temperature throughout and shortening the life of the unit. The room temperature at one community shop dropped by 8 degrees when the chillers were replaced with external compressors. You will need to take into consideration the external wall access, the security of the unit outside and the internal ducting to the external wall.

The investment in external units can be balanced with the need to install air conditioning units. The high levels of insulation now required in new buildings mean that it is necessary to look at such ways of reducing temperatures in the building.

Freezers tend to have integral compressors. Aim for upright freezers: although they can be more difficult to use to display products effectively, the space utilisation is far better than the chest type which can cause significant congestion/pinch points. The volume of freezer space will depend on your sales mix but should not be excessive.

One supplier that has been involved with several community shops is www.deltarefrigeration.co.uk but ensure that you shop around, ask for recommendations from other shops and take particular notice of service arrangements, costs and call-out speed.

About Plunkett Foundation

Plunkett Foundation helps communities to take control of their challenges and overcome them together. We support people, predominantly in rural areas, to set up and run life-changing community co-operatives; enterprises that are owned and run democratically by large numbers of people in their community. They help people to tackle a range of issues, from isolation and loneliness to poverty, and come in many forms including shops, cafes, pubs and land-based initiatives, and everything in between.

Our core values are the values of the great Irish co-operative pioneer, Sir Horace Plunkett, who founded the Plunkett Foundation in 1919. He believed that rural communities didn't have to wait for someone else to make life better for them; they had the potential to do it themselves – with a little help. His values are embedded in the heart of what we do:

- We seek economic solutions to create social change
- We seek solutions that enrich rural community life
- We see self-help as the most effective way to tackle rural needs

We use a unique combination of approaches to help communities. We call it 'The Plunkett Way', and it is made up of four stages that we term Inspire, Explore, Create and Thrive:

- We Inspire communities to realise the potential they have within themselves of tackling the issues they face. We do this in a number of different ways, for example by proactively promoting the co-operative approach through national and local media work or hosting and attending community events.
- We then help communities Explore different ways of addressing their specific needs, which could be by visiting existing examples.

- Our expert team then works with the community to help them Create their co-operative, drawing on our wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as our specially-developed tools and resources.
- Once up and running we help the community to make sure their co-operative Thrives by continuing to support them through our membership scheme, by representing their views to governments, funders and other support organisations, or helping them to address another issue by setting up another co-operative.

We work largely in the UK, but also increasingly in Ireland. We also, at times, help to support the development of community-owned co-operatives outside of the UK and Ireland. We're an active member of the international co-operative movement and proud members of the International Co-operative Alliance, the International Agricultural Organisation Society, Co-operatives Europe and Co-operatives UK.

Contact Us

We're always happy to hear from you!

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