



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

April 2020
 Aberystwyth University
 Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins
 Brg16@aber.ac.uk

Cletwr – A community-owned rural service hub

Living Lab Mid Wales

Key words: Village shops, community ownership, social enterprise

1. Introduction

Many rural places are losing their local services, from shops and banks, to meeting places. Community-owned social enterprises can open new possibilities.

Cities benefit from agglomeration: there are shops and the people to shop in them; services and the people to use them. But, in rural locales, shops are struggling to stay open and services are being centralised further and further afield. A recent report from the Prince’s Countryside Fund (Skerratt 2018) found that people in rural Britain are feeling increasingly remote – geography has not changed, but infrastructure and services have.



Figure1: Cletwr. Photo © Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins

Community ownership is one model that can **enable rural shops and facilities to stay open**, and even **expand their services into local hubs**. Cletwr, a community-owned shop and café in Mid Wales, is an excellent example. In 2019, Cletwr won the rural social enterprise of the year award at the UK-wide Rural Business Awards.



2. Project Intention / Background information

The Plunkett Foundation estimates that, in the UK, some 400 village shops are permanently closed each year¹. In Wales, between 2008 and 2016, the number of active businesses per capita fell in all but one of the nine predominantly rural counties (Auditor General for Wales 2018). As well as local shops selling food and household necessities, rural Wales is rapidly losing access to services such as banking (National Assembly for Wales 2019). The map below shows access deprivation in predominantly rural Mid Wales – taking into account the distances required to travel to access shops, schools, healthcare and pharmacies, post offices and so forth.

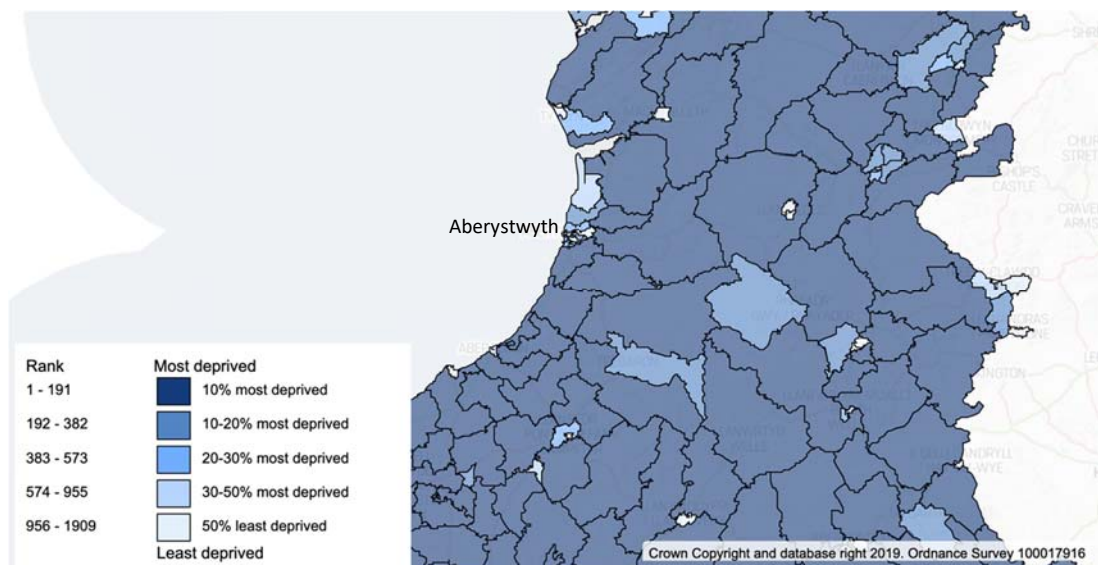


Figure 2: Access deprivation in predominantly rural Mid Wales. From the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019.

The impact of these closures is compounded by poor public transport connectivity, which makes it more difficult to get to shops and services in larger towns. Older people are less likely to have access to a car (Powell et al. 2018) – and because Wales is home to an increasingly ageing demographic (StatsWales 2019), village shop closures can exacerbate access deprivation and social isolation (National Assembly for Wales 2017).

3. Main Description

Tre'r Ddôl is a small village in the Llangynfelyn parish (population approx. 650) in the predominantly rural Welsh county of Ceredigion. In 2009, the village garage – which also served as a local shop – closed. The nearest shop was several kilometres away. The village also lost its post office, café, school and church, leaving residents little option but to travel elsewhere for shopping and sociality.

¹ <https://plunkett.co.uk/community-shops/>

In response, a group of community members decided to re-open the garage as a not-for-profit community-owned enterprise. Cletwr shop and café opened in 2013.

The main motivations for re-opening as a community enterprise were:

- Providing a local shopping, eating and meeting space,
- Saving travel costs and emissions,
- Adding value to local properties,
- Creating new economic and social opportunities,
- Providing opportunities to sell local produce.

Re-opening the garage as a café and shop was funded through small grants, the Village SOS programme, and reverse credit capital fundraising.

One of the first challenges was that the re-purposed building was poorly laid out, inefficient and expensive to run (Cwmni Cletwr 2016). Following successful funding bids, the original garage was replaced by a purpose-designed and environmentally sustainable building in 2017. The

Art gallery / display space for local artists and heritage exhibitions.	Children's play area
Welsh-language library	Second-hand book sales
Regular guided walks	Evening classes
Story-time in Welsh for young children	Films – for children, adults and Welsh learners
Food and craft Fairs	Oil buying syndicate for central heating boilers
Monthly sessions to allow Welsh learners to improve conversational skills	'Knit and natter' – group of ladies who knit and talk in the café each week
Young artists after-school club	Visiting mobile library
Information point	Parcel drop-off point for deliveries
Free WiFi – including for local workers	Visits by Sion Corn (Santa Claus)
Heating advice sessions	Police and MP surgery
Cash withdrawal	General-interest talks
IT training	Tourist information point (in conjunction with local Council)

Figure 3: A list of services and activities offered at Cletwr. Source: Callaghan, 2017.

rebuilt Cletwr received funding from the Welsh Government's Rural Community Development Fund (£95,000) and Community Facilities programme (£172,000), Big Lottery Fund (£497,000), Ceredigion Council (£25,000), and Trusthouse Charitable Foundation (£25,000). These funds were used to buy the site and design and build the new premises. A continuing challenge is to ensure a sustainable business model so that Cletwr is not dependent on external funding.

Cletwr has proved popular, and turnover has increased by 150% since the new building opened (Callaghan 2019). While demographic information about the clientele is not available, Cletwr aims to serve a cross-section of the community and offers facilities including a children's play area. Staff also include a paid community coordinator, tasked with developing Cletwr as a community hub. Cletwr's Chairperson reflects that:

"The situation in Llangynfelyn was that there were some groups of people who knew each other ... and more generally there were people who had moved into the area, predominantly English speaking, and those born and raised in the area, mainly Welsh speaking. There was little overlap between the groups, and no opportunity for people in the different groups to meet and mix ... Cletwr has changed that. Whether through volunteering, attending events or

simply being customers, people meet and talk to their neighbours ... “Community” is turning from being a nice idea to being a reality.” (Callaghan 2017: 7).

Alongside offering shopping, eating, and a place to meet, Cletwr provides other important services, events and opportunities, including a free WiFi hub, an oil buying syndicate, and Welsh language support. These are summarised in Figure 3 above. The site is clearly visible from the main road past the village, attracting visitors from further afield. The roadside location and proximity to nearby tourist sites including the Wales Coastal Path make Cletwr well-placed to attract passing tourists, and the shop also provides local visitor information. Both the shop and café are open throughout the day (0830 to 1830 for the shop), and staffed by a mix of paid staff and volunteers. Many volunteers are in older age brackets and retired or semi-retired; Cletwr also explicitly aims to offer opportunities to local young people to gain skills and experience, and includes a young volunteer team in the organisational structure (Cwmni Cletwr 2016).

Structurally, Cletwr is operated as a company limited by guarantee, and run by an elected management board on a non-profit basis. The company is open to the local community to join, and has around 40 members (Plunkett Foundation, n.d.). To keep operating costs down and ensure the shop and café are affordable for local people to use, Cletwr relies on volunteer staff. This is not just part of the economic model, however: volunteering itself provides opportunities to socialise and learn new skills. The profits from operating the café and shop are used to subsidise the community activities. Unfortunately, Cletwr’s application for charitable status was not successful, which means that the enterprise is liable for taxes.

Some of the key lessons from the Cletwr experience include:

- By creating a focal point for the local community, rural community enterprises can serve as a hub for co-locating a wide variety of social and economic services and activities.
- Operating effectively as a hub requires interfacing with a wide variety of other organisations, including: service providers, funders, governance organisations, and NGOs.
- External support is often necessary – from advice on setting up a community enterprise, to funding to develop facilities;
- However, community needs, aspirations and talents need to drive the project, and there needs to be regular communication and consultation.
- At the same time, there is a need to avoid exhausting the (voluntary) time and energy of project leaders, and ensure there are other community members available to take over if necessary.
- While volunteer staff and a non-profit model help keep costs down, a successful community enterprise also needs to operate sustainably as a business.
- A sustainable business model is doubly important because social enterprises are often dependent on grant revenue; this requires the time and expertise to apply for funding, and creates a risk that the service will need to close if funding dries up.

Videos about Cletwr are available here: S4C (Welsh media): <https://youtu.be/CsKokpwk7dE>, Plunkett Foundation: <https://vimeo.com/252328450>

4. References

Auditor General for Wales (2018). *Local Government Services to Rural Communities*. Wales Audit Office. Available at: <https://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/LG-services-to-rural-communities-report-english.pdf>

Callaghan, N. (2017). *Cwmni Cletwr: A case study of a successful Welsh rural social enterprise*. Evidence presented to a public hearing of the European Economic and Social Committee, 14 February 2017. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/background-info-mr-callaghan.pdf>

Callaghan, N. (2019). *Cletwr: The heart of a community*. *Rural Wales Magazine*, June 2019. Available at: http://cletwr.tth7.co.uk/uploads/cletwr_cprw_magazine_june2019.pdf

Cwmni Cletwr (2016). *Cynllun Busnes / Business Plan 2016-2019*. Available at: http://cletwr.tth7.co.uk/uploads/cletwr_business_plan_2016.pdf

National Assembly for Wales (2017). *Inquiry into Loneliness and Isolation*. Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. Available at: <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11310/cr-ld11310-e.pdf>

National Assembly for Wales (2019). *Access to Banking*. Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee. Available at: <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld12818/cr-ld12818%20-e.pdf>

Plunkett Foundation (n.d.) *Community shop case study: Cwmni Cletwr, Machynlleth*. Available at: <https://plunkett.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Community-Shop-Case-Study-Cletwr.pdf>

Powell, J., D. Keech & M. Reed (2018). *What Works in Tackling Rural Poverty: An evidence review of interventions to improve transport in rural areas*. Wales Centre for Public Policy. Available at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/An-evidence-review-of-interventions-to-improve-transport-in-rural-areas.pdf>

Skerratt, S. (2018) *Recharging Rural: Creating Sustainable Communities to 2030 and Beyond*.

The Prince's Countryside Fund. Available at: <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/downloads/research/recharging-rural-full-report-final.pdf>

StatsWales (2019). *Summary Statistics for Welsh Economic Regions*. Statistical First Release, 30 May. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-05/summary-statistics-for-welsh-economic-regions-wales-338_0.pdf