

Ashfield Community Enterprise

Business Plan - VALUES FOR MONEY 2009-2015

Executive summary

Howey is a relatively deprived village in Mid Wales with a population of just under 1,200 which has had very little inward investment of any kind. It has a long and interesting history, but is now almost a forgotten village with very little to offer other than somewhere to live. It has one pub and a restaurant – the shop, post office and village school shut a couple of years ago and Ashfield was also due to be sold in 2009.



Ashfield is a 7.5 acre organic nursery on the edge of the village and was abandoned by a charity who no longer provided land-based activities for people with learning difficulties. As the site was never run along commercial lines it became surplus to requirements and was due to be sold. The site includes poly-tunnels, soil association accreditation, an array of outbuildings, a 6 bed-roomed house; all with amazing potential.

Ashfield Community Enterprise Ltd (ACE) was set-up by local people to buy, regenerate and convert Ashfield into a workable community enterprise to make enough money to sustain itself in the long-term. There are no locally produced organic fruit and vegetables on sale within twenty miles of Howey and the feasibility study showed that Ashfield has the capacity to grow sufficient organic produce to meet a well defined demand for local consumption. The plan is to build that market and share the benefits in the locality by acting as a hub and resource to stimulate and support the development of a local micro economy.

In addition to the market for produce, there is capacity for Ashfield to generate income from a variety of other sources e.g. rental of spaces, 'care farm'¹ and other forms of supported service contracts, ACE would subsequently generate sufficient income to become self-sufficient and cross-subsidise it's wider social and environmental aims in the longer term.

1.2 Project scope, products and services.

The key needs we identified in Howey are summarised below:

1. Valued occupation, training, work experience and employment
2. Growing and communal spaces
3. Community identity, pride and a community focus
4. An opportunity to address inclusion and diversity issues
5. Facilities for a range of vulnerable local people.
6. Transition issues including tackling fuel poverty through low carbon technologies

To meet these needs we have identified five activity strands which also address market demands and will together help to regenerate Howey.

1. Organic horticulture and food production

Focused around growing organic food in the poly tunnels and fenced meadow, Ashfield will also offer space to local people to set-up community gardens and have access to a commercial kitchen.

2. Community engagement -

Site facilities will create a "community hub" for people to meet and exchange skills, produce and time. Ashfield will provide and encourage therapeutic, intergenerational and social opportunities to counter isolation and prejudice.

3. New business outlets

As we develop the local market for organic food based products we will nurture at least two small businesses at Ashfield and establish an Ashfield brand. One of these will be based around making and selling jams and chutneys; the other will be our mobile catering unit Mange2. Both will provide part-time employment for at least 2 people. A number of further small businesses could emerge around composting, carnivorous and bedding plants and fruit juice.

¹ <http://www.ncfi.org.uk/> Combining care of the land with care of people, in a setting where they feel safe, respected and engaged in meaningful activity. Using commercial farms, woodlands and market gardens as a base for promoting mental and physical health through normal farming activity. A partnership between farmers, participants and health & social care agencies, that develops people's potential rather than focusing on their limitations.

4. Demonstration site for energy conservation, low carbon living and transition projects

We will work closely with the local Transition Group and people will be able to learn how to grow their own food, cut their energy bills, recycle and repair by attending special events throughout the year.

5. Uses of the house

The house has been converted to two affordable housing units that are rented out to provide an income stream.

1.4 Key stakeholders, partners and how we will work together

The community of Howey, our 160 shareholders and our potential customers are our key stakeholders. In addition there are local groups and organisations who want to work with us in a variety of ways. We have identified our 'core business' but can achieve much more by working in partnership and maximising our resources in a way that works for all. We will:

- Keep all stakeholders informed and facilitate regular feedback
- Ensure that people who get involved 'register an interest', agree to honour our principles and ground-rules
- Establish more formal agreements when appropriate, which will outline the key responsibilities of each partner in more detail

ACE has a strong board of trustees who with the help of the Big Lottery Fund Village SOS Grant bought and renovated the Ashfield site in 2010 and are now working to run Ashfield and establish a sustainable community enterprise that will make a real difference to Howey.