



Case Study: Rhossili Village Hall and Bunkhouse



Before 2005

After

About Rhossili Village Hall

The village hall offers a meeting space for groups in Rhossili; a village of around 250 people which lies on the west coast of the Gower Peninsula in the first designated area of outstanding natural beauty in the UK. The hall is a registered charity, run by a management committee of trustees that is responsible for maintaining the fabric of the building and for ensuring that it continues to serve the needs of the community. A social sub-committee focuses on the planning of community events held at the hall. A building sub-committee focuses on planning and development issues. Volunteers currently run the hall and the bunkhouse.



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Source: <http://www.the-gower.com/villages/Rhossili/rhossili.htm> (accessed 16.12.07)

Redeveloping the hall

At the millennium, Rhossili was featured in a Countryside Exchange report taking stock of the state of villages in the UK. This highlighted the poor state of the village facilities including the hall and the pub. The hall, built in 1924, was by the end of the century, sadly dilapidated as the picture above shows. However, the major driver for action was the failure of the hall to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This meant that unless the trustees acted to rectify the access arrangements, the hall might be liable to closure.





A Community Appraisal survey undertaken by the Community Council was crucial in pointing the direction of change. This was delivered to every house in the village and received a 70% response. Villagers wanted the existing hall refurbished rather than demolished and a substantial number wanted the hall extended. The extension could not have been built without the generosity of two people in the village who gifted the land on which the extension is built. Very early on in the project, the committee realised that by raising the height of the extension to match the existing building they could add a bunkhouse accommodating 18 people in the roof space.

The project was funded 50% through European Union Objective 1 funding of £147,803. However, this posed a challenge for the committee as they had to match this within the time frame allowed and many of the funding streams they approached had a longer lead-time. They gained substantial funding from Swansea City and County Council, the Gower Society and the local Community Council but even with this, there was a shortfall. At this point, the committee decided to take a mortgage from Lloyds TSB bank.

“Everyone realised the risk but the commitment (to the project) was such that they were willing to do it. The word ‘committee’ must come from ‘commitment’.”

The village hall has been substantially redeveloped as the picture above illustrates. It offers a desirable space for village activities as well as a place where the MP and AM hold their surgeries. There are regular social events for local people such as a Christmas pantomime, strawberry teas in the summer, a harvest supper, musical evenings and so on. There is an excellent virtual guided tour of the hall on the website, which illustrates the facilities now on offer

http://www.vrvistas.com/sample_tours/Gower/RVH/1.html .

The bunkhouse comprises accommodation for up to 18 people. There are seven rooms each sleeping between 2-4 people. There is also a separate toilet/washroom on the first floor.



A bunkhouse room



The new kitchen



Benefits

The bunkhouse is the key to the sustainability of the hall as it has the potential to generate up to £100,000 per annum if operated at full capacity. Since it opened in May 2007, the income generated to December 2007 is £13,000, which has exceeded the expectations of trustees. The trustees anticipate that they will be able to generate £30,000 per annum and pay off their loan within 3-4 years as well as using surpluses to underwrite community events.

The development of the hall, besides bringing obvious benefits to the village, has built the confidence and functioning of the hall trustees as a group. They have become a good working team and used their networks and skills to achieve resources. These resources are not simply financial, but the high degree of trust that pertains between members to ensure the smooth running of the letting and maintenance arrangements. Everyone has a role. There is a rota to meet and greet guests, which all take part in. Trustees also have skills and networks that they have used effectively to secure the funding required. These skills provided credibility in the eyes of funders to invest substantial resources in the project.

“Trust comes after years of meetings and building personal relationships.”

The most important partnership was with the National Trust, a major landowner in the area, who supported them and gave considerable assistance with the preparation and presentation of the case for EU funding and later on over a VAT problem. Substantial support also came from the European Office staff at the local council and from the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service.

Top tips

1. The key thing about all these community projects is getting the right people in place who are committed and do it professionally. *“It’s the project management that is key.”*
2. Get the commitment of the local community through consultation and involvement – in this case the questionnaire about options.
3. Organise a sub-committee to run the project, which is separate from the other business of the trustees.
4. Use your networks and skills: in this case links to the National Trust, European Union funding and experience of tourism development within the trustee group, advert for bunkhouse on an existing local tourism website.
5. Funding does not always come up front. There is a need to think about cash flow and consider some kind of bridging finance to make the project work – this means thinking about sustainability and income generation.
6. There is a need for persistence. When there is a problem, you have to be quite resourceful, stick to your guns and do something about it. *“You can’t say ‘Oh dear we can’t afford it!’”*
7. Good teamwork and trust are vital.
8. Give everyone a role in the project.





9. Employ professionals for professional jobs. For example, this project employed a project manager to manage the building works and issue all the necessary certifications.
10. If you are going for income generation, then know where you stand with VAT at the outset.
11. Pay attention to the detail. For example, the hall has a relatively expensive electronic key system, which means that access of guests can be restricted to only the kitchen, lounge and accommodation areas. When a key card is lost, the locks do not have to be changed.

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