



CLA / AirS Rural Business Award 2010

The Village Shop, Upper Dicker Tess Flower and Mat Knight, Proprietors

The Village Shop

The Village Shop has been trading since the 1850s. However in 2008 the Post Office had been closed down and shortly after we were hit hard by the economic difficulties. We were almost forced into closure, but decided to risk all and embark on a programme of business development that would keep the shop open and also re-capture the community spirit in Upper Dicker.

We are restoring the shop to its former glory, being an old fashioned general store, selling local produce and every sort of household item to the locals.

We now also offer hot food, drinks, cakes, and takeaway food through the newly developed café side of the business. This is a brilliant asset to a village providing great food, coffee & culture for the locals with many social & ethical benefits, selling locally grown and homemade goodies through the café and our deli fridge.

We now host a number of community events; including re-introducing the annual village fete - Dicker Day - held every June, scone afternoons for the elderly, evening events for local performers and a fortnightly café evening offering fabulous local meals and a social opportunity for everyone in the village.

We believe in building up the local economy and already use many local suppliers and growers as well as employing a dozen or so local people part time.

We have recently taken on the Little Green Shop at the Arlington Reservoir conservation site. The shop supplies it with homemade cakes & soups to the and its number one ethos is to cut down packaging & food miles

We live in the village and run the shop with a team of 11 other part-time members of staff (full time equivalent is 4.5 staff). Tess's brother Warrick Flower is a co director, mentor and investor in the business.

The Village Shop has been helped with funding from the LEADER European funding programme. This funding has enabled us to make some of the important changes and developments listed in the business plan below that were needed to secure its immediate survival. The current business plan will improve and broaden the business for the future.

Current Business Plan

- To expand & develop the business, so we can increase the local food & products we sell, reaching more local customers and using more local suppliers & growers.
- To continue increasing the productivity of our kitchen & food servery. Using the bountiful local products to create convenient, ready to go meals and snacks for the locals and increasing our orders from local suppliers.
- To expand the social services we provide to the community including an internet café, hosting more community events and improving those we already run, including:
 - Internet café: We plan to promote the use of the shop computer & wifi and offer free IT lessons from local pros to those who do not know how to use a computer, particularly the elderly, but these will be available to anyone in the village.
 - Events: We will continue to run Dicker Day and plan to put a huge emphasis on local food, producing more local salads, chutneys & drinks than we have been able to do before. Following recent work to our serving area & café we are able to offer more food to more people. We are planning themed café evenings and hope to soon offer Open Mic events for local musicians & performers. We also offer a venue for private events and have already hosted several local birthday parties.
 - Delivery Service: the recent purchase of a company van means we can now offer a delivery service, especially for those less mobile residents and perhaps elderly, who might struggle with the technology of online ordering used by supermarkets.
 - Local Info: we will soon be revamping our website to offer village information (eg. Where can I recycle in the Dicker, a “what’s on” page & links to lots more) so people can access all sorts of information about village life. We have installed a projector linked to the computer providing entertainment for social events and have also started an information board in the shop for local events and, of course, our staff are always available to answer questions on what happens where, by who and when as we have naturally become a hub of village information and happenings.
- We are currently joining the Sussex Breakfast scheme offering a locally produced breakfast for the locals.

Why we feel the Village Shop is important and necessary to the village of Upper Dicker

The Village Shop is an important amenity to the local community, but it needs to continue to expand its services & products in order to compete with the big supermarkets nearby and to grow stronger as a small local business & employer.

We are the only shop in the village and there are several households who have limited mobility, so it provides a lifeline to them.

The business also supports the local & rural economy by purchasing all our fruit & veg, eggs, chutneys, sauces, ales, dairy, honey etc. from local small suppliers - in addition to our employment of local people.

In the last few years, at least two village businesses have ceased to trade here, showing the real strain that local rural businesses are facing (but even more so in these difficult economic times).

We are increasing the production of pies, quiches, cakes, soups & salads. We use local vegetables & fruit and this part of the business is beginning to take off. We are also the only place serving breakfast and home baked food in the village.

We offer an alternative to supermarket online ordering and deliveries and we bring down the food miles in the local area.

We offer a unique shopping and eating experience- something that can't be created, imported or mass produced by the big supermarkets-we offer local food for local people, served by friendly local staff, grown by local farmers *across those fields just over yonder*. We know our customers and what's going on in the local community. We employ and train local people as they grow up and need work experience or need an income for their family. We play an important role in the local economy and we will continue to work every hour God gives us to keep this little shop alive serving its community.

Upper Dicker Village Shop Website: <http://www.upperdicker.com/>

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