

# COMMUNITY OWNED BUSINESSES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROMOTED BY THE PLUNKETT FOUNDATION IN UNITED KINGDOM

August 2025

[The Plunkett Foundation has published its 2025 Impact Report](#) outlining key achievements in its work supporting rural communities in the United Kingdom.

They achieve these results by supporting people throughout the UK to set up and run a wide range of community-owned businesses such as village shops and pubs, woodlands, farms and fisheries. Their mission is to ensure these businesses create innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces benefiting everyone who lives and works there.



Founded in 1919 by the great co-operative pioneer, Sir Horace Plunkett, the [Plunkett Foundation](#) is an extraordinary organisation that supports rural communities across the United Kingdom to tackle the issues they face through community business. *Community businesses* are enterprises that are owned and run democratically by members of the community, on behalf of the community. The Foundation's team and network of advisers across the UK provide support to the community groups from their first steps until the business develops and grows.



Plunkett has supported over 800 community businesses to open, and with 30 opening each year, the sector has grown by 70% in the last 10 years with a total of 828 community-owned businesses trading. Their community-owned businesses include: 30 Farms, 459 Shops, 18 Cafés, 199 Pubs, 36 Woodlands. Other community businesses include 13 community centres, 10 leisure and arts centers, 10 health and sports, 10 land trusts, 9 energy producers, 8 markets, 6 breweries/distilleries, 6 bookshops, 6 transport providers, 5 bakeries and 3 credit unions.



Plunkett is an organization dedicated to supporting rural community-owned businesses across the UK. At a practical level, their dedicated and expert team:

- Raise awareness of the community ownership model through proactive press, media and campaigns
- Provide practical support to people setting up and running community-owned businesses via specialist business advice, training, webinars and toolkits
- Represent their members' interests through policy, research and advocacy.

In 2024 the Plunkett's support and advocacy activity resulted in:

- 287 community groups embarking on a new community ownership project.
- A total pipeline of 797 community businesses.
- 73 groups registering a new community business using Plunkett's model rules for a Community Benefit Society.



- Several community businesses were saved from closure resulting in a five-year survival rate of 99%.
- 30 new community businesses began trading.
- A total of 828 community businesses were successfully trading.

Plunkett has promoted the community ownership model for over 100 years because of its track record for delivering better businesses for people, communities, the economy and the environment. [The 2025 Report illustrates the impact achieved by the Plunkett Foundation through the community-owned businesses in these five measurable themes:](#)

- *Impact 1 Safeguarding access to a wide range of goods and services.*

Plunkett estimates that 300 village shops and 200 pubs closed in 2024 alone, alongside school closures, reduced public services, limited healthcare and inadequate public transport. When such businesses close, they leave people without access to vital supplies and services and increase the risk of isolation. Community-owned businesses, supported by Plunkett, are reversing this trend. Thriving where others fail, they offer more than basic services, acting as multi-service hubs that proactively reach out to support those most vulnerable in a rural community. Typically serving an immediate population of 500 residents, with a further 2,000 able to access their services from surrounding parishes, this means an estimated 2 million people currently benefit from rural community businesses.

- *Impact 2 Boosting the local economy.*

Rural community businesses contribute significantly to both the local and the UK economy. Their total combined turnover reached an estimated £166 million in 2024. Community businesses tend to source goods and services locally, creating a circular economy in the places they exist. For every £1 spent with a community business, 56p stays in the local economy – compared with just 40p for large private sector firms. Profits from community-owned businesses typically stay in the local area too. In 2024, community shops sourced from an estimated of 13,000 local suppliers. A total of 34% of community-owned businesses were able to invest their surplus to support local community action. With average profits of £5K per business, this represented a total investment of £1.4 million in 2024 into local communities. With the consistently high survival rates (99% over 5 years and 94% longer-term), it is also important to note the resilience and stability community businesses offer to the local economy in contrast with other forms of business (39% survival rates over 5 years).

- *Impact 3 Creating opportunities for employment, training and volunteering.*

Rural community-owned businesses boost local employment, training and volunteering in areas where such opportunities can often be limited and in decline. 53% of community businesses employ young people, aged 16-25. 25,000 volunteers are involved in the community businesses collaborating with the 3,500 staff. Many actively employ people who face barriers to work, such as those with caring responsibilities, disabilities, or limited qualifications. They do so by providing flexible and part-time employment, and by investing in practical and hands-on training in a supportive environment of staff and volunteers.

- *Impact 4 Tackling climate change.*

Rural community businesses are investing into initiatives that have a positive environmental impact. 96% of community businesses took





some form of climate action last year. 58% of community businesses have an ambition to invest in energy saving and efficiency measures if grant funding is available to them. 85% of community businesses have either installed or are considering installing energy saving measures. Whether it is a community-owned farm, woodland, or other land-based initiative, it will be more likely adopting organic principles and regenerative practices that protect soil health, biodiversity, and water quality. For community shops, sourcing goods and services locally minimizes the need for long-distance transportation, cutting down on car journeys and associated carbon emissions. Increasingly, the buildings in which community businesses are located are designed with energy efficiency at their heart including the production of renewable energy where possible. Whether through introducing refill stations into a community shop, organizing repair cafés, or car sharing clubs, they are encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours within their community.

- *Impact 5 Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all.*

Rural community-owned businesses are naturally inclusive as a result of their democratic ownership structure and founding principles to benefit the wider community above that of their members. 33% of community businesses offer employment to people for whom it was their first paid job. 14% of community businesses offer employment for people with a disability. According to their research, a third of community businesses partner with other charities and organizations to offer volunteer opportunities for people with additional support needs, a disability and/or long-term health condition.

The [case studies published in the Plunkett website](#) show the variety of community businesses associated with the network and supported by the Foundation. These case studies also describe the main characteristics of the community businesses and the methods used for their implementation and management. In many cases, the legal structure of these enterprises is the *Community Benefit Society (CBS)* a type of organization adopted in the UK and registered with the specific intention to benefit the community. In other projects, the management is carried out by adopting the model of social enterprises or co-operatives and [Plunkett works in close collaboration with Co-operatives UK](#), the organization supporting the movement and members of cooperatives in the country. For the start of the activities and for their financial management, after having formulated the project with the collaboration of local actors and institutions, a public share offer is launched at the local level to raise funds and engage with community stakeholders that can benefit from the business.

The outstanding achievements of the rural community business members were also recognized in July 2025 celebrating the nine winners of the [National Award 2025 organized by the Plunkett Foundation in collaboration with its national partners](#).

In countries where the development of rural areas is considered a priority for local and national actors, the practices carried out by the Plunkett Foundation can be of great inspiration, not only for the community business approach that represents an innovative modality for the management of local services and resources, but also for the role played at the national level by the Foundation for the structural, expert and permanent support to local practices.

**To know more**



[Plunkett Impact Report 2025](#)

[Plunkett Foundation Strategy 2022- 2026](#)

[Case studies published in the Plunkett website](#)

[National Award 2025 organized by the Plunkett Foundation Winners](#)

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