



The Old School, Lover, Wiltshire



Location
Lover, Wiltshire

Purchased
June 2016

Ownership
Lover Community Trust, Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Description of activity
Educational, recreational and sporting facility for Lover village and surrounding areas

Staff and volunteers
Lover Community Trust has no paid staff. There are eight people on the trustee board, and they have around 40 volunteers involved in supporting refurbishment works, cleaning, fundraising and events

Biggest obstacle to success
Obtaining grant funding to complete a programme of refurbishment works so that they can increase use of the asset, and as a result, increase income generation

Overview

In June 2016, Lover Community Trust purchased The Old School in Lover, Wiltshire. The building had been derelict for over 10 years, following the closure of Redlynch Church of England Aided Primary School in 2004. The local Parish Council had previously looked into purchasing the asset from the Diocesan Board of Education, however they struggled to raise sufficient funds. Knowing this, concerns about the future of the building, and thus the future of the adjacent village green and village preschool, increased within the community. The village had already lost its pub and village shop; losing another community asset, which many people had an emotional attachment to, meant that *“without a doubt, securing this school was what the village wanted. Doing nothing was not an option.”*

In response to this growing concern, a group of villagers came together in 2014 and formed Lover Community Trust – a Charitable Incorporated Organisation – which has the primary aim of purchasing and managing The Old School building. The first task was to consult with the village to ensure that there was sufficient community backing regarding the purchase of The Old School. Leaflets were delivered, and a range of public and committee meetings were held, in order to consider a range of issues relating to the purpose of the asset and to think through its viability.



Lover Community Trust also set up a membership scheme so that the local community felt involved and had some ownership over the ideas that were emerging.

Acquiring the asset

Once the community interest and mandate had been established, Lover Community Trust worked with the Parish Council to get The Old School registered as an Asset of Community Value. They then spent time negotiating with the Diocese regarding the sale price of the asset. Given that the asset had been registered as an Asset of Community Value, and is located in the New Forest National Park, the Diocese had limited options regarding the sale of the asset and, as a result, Lover Community Trust successfully negotiated a sale price of £70,000. This was felt to be great value for money given the size of the building, as well as average property prices in the area.

With a purchase price agreed, raising funds for the building began. In a period of 10 weeks leading up to Christmas they successfully secured £80,000. This included a large number of £500 donations from the local community, a smaller number of £5,000 donations, and one £10,000 donation from a local resident. They also received a £3,000 donation from a local food market. Everyone who donated £500 or more was offered lifetime membership of Lover Community Trust. In total there are now 130 members and the names of all the people who donated funds are framed on the wall in the main community room.

Since purchasing the building, The Old School has been refurbished with the help of just under 30 local volunteers as well as the donation of goods and services which supported the renovation of the building's heating system.

Currently, the building hosts a range of fitness classes and it has been used to host the pop-up Lover Valentine Post, which was very successful this year. The hope is that, following additional refurbishment work, The Old School will be able to host weddings, local sporting events and local fundraising events, such as Lover Village Fayre.

The Old School's journey to success

There are three key factors that have enabled Lover Community Trust to purchase the Old School.

1. Access to skilled and committed trustees and volunteers

Since 2014, Lover Community Trust has had access to a range of skills including: accountancy; IT; negotiation; facilities management; communication skills; organisational skills; leadership skills; and building skills. Together, these skills have enabled the Trust to:

- Develop a viable business plan;
- Communicate effectively with, and retain the interest of, the community;
- Update the website, including the ability to receive online payments and donations;
- Make efficient use of funds e.g. utilising volunteers to support the majority of the refurbishment work, as well as attract donations of goods and parts;
- Negotiate a good initial sale price;
- Write ongoing grant applications in support of the refurbishment.

As one interviewee said, “[I] don't think that the way to manage community assets and involvement is to ask for volunteers all of the time. The real secret is to spot the people who can make a contribution and have the energy to do so...”

2. Encourage a strong sense of community engagement and involvement

Lover Community Trust has made a huge effort to get the community involved and engaged in the purchase of the asset through holding open meetings, offering people membership to the organisation, and holding a range of social gatherings for members to ensure they are kept informed about the developments taking place.



“You need to get a shared vision with the community and make them feel that they’re involved, that they have a say in what’s going on and that they are kept informed.”

They also organise a range of community fundraising activities that attract significant local support, including the Lover Village Fayre, Safari Supper, Lover Valentine Post, and the Lover garage sale.

3. A unique brand

Lover is fortunate that it has been able to utilise its unique name and develop a strong brand which has been used to establish one of its very successful income streams – the Lover Valentine Post. Once a year, anyone can order a valentine’s day card online and have it stamped with the Lover post office stamp. In February 2019 this raised a total of £22,000, having been featured on the BBC. As a result, the Lover brand is being used to support the financial health of the asset.

“You need a strong community identity...draw on the USP you have, whether it’s a piece of local history, a building, a landscape, a local poem, an old battle, any type of landmark...”

Future direction

Lover Community Trust is optimistic and determined that it will be a success in the future. As the Chairman said, “nothing will break it...things may just slow us down.” Obtaining funding to continue a programme of refurbishment works is the current priority. In particular, the organisation is seeking funding to improve the main community room, improve the rear entrance of the building – thus improving its connection to the adjacent village green – and refurbish the kitchen and toilet facilities. It is hoped that these improvement works will increase the attraction, and therefore use of the asset, thus increasing income generation opportunities.

At the moment, the current tenant is helping the organisation to cover its basic costs, however as income generation improves, the vision is that this will provide surplus income that can be used to support an increasing range of community activities and programmes including a pensioner café, a local repair café, and increased use as a sporting facility. “We’d like to see it as a place where people drop in across the week... a place from which we can help to create a healthy, self-sufficient community where people are caring for each other and it [The Old School] benefits people throughout their lives.”

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of Lover Community Trust’s income, expenditure and assets for the year ending 31.12.2018.

Income	£19,548.34
Expenditure	£9,474.24
Difference between income and expenditure	£10,074.10
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£10,074.10
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£3,200
Fixed assets	£81,195
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	Stocks: £0 Debtors: £0 Cash at bank or in hand: £31,089.37
Net assets	£112,284.37

