



The Connected Village Cricket Club

Our villages are crumbling in front of our eyes and many of our village cricket are clubs dying and, as a result, the number of cricketers is declining.

At the same time the cornerstones of traditional village life, such as the local school, the shop and the pub, are disappearing from the rural landscape at an alarming rate.

It has been claimed that rural towns and villages need to have mixed, working communities, otherwise there is a very real danger our countryside will become little more than a theme park for weekenders.

So if our village cricket clubs continue to be 'just cricket clubs' chances are that they will lose their relevance and their demise will continue.

At a time when there is an increased focus on how we can create a more coherent society, there seems to be considerable scope for sport to play a pivotal role in our communities. At the same time many of our clubs could benefit greatly from the added benefits of engaging with new audiences in terms of new users, volunteers, sponsors and community partners.

The challenge is that too many cricket clubs suffer from 'cricketing myopia' where the main success criteria are being associated with sport only: number of users or members, The performance of the first team and everything else has to support that. So what happens out there in the community and the 'real world' is often regarded as a bit of an irrelevance, even a nuisance, sometimes.

This narrow view then creates a disconnect between cricket and society and both lose out. If your values are just 'to coach cricket' or 'provide enjoyment for your members', then you'll probably find that people within the community surrounding you care little about you and your activities unless they are directly involved with your club. If you only have a narrow focus on 'your club' then your scope will be very limited. How can you grow membership and sponsorship if you are only interested in yourself?

However, one can then often see the same clubs 'playing the community card' when it comes to applying for various grants!

Inspiring Scotland to Choose Cricket



Cricket does compete for the resources of the community. Community groups, faith, arts, etc. are also vying for volunteers, goodwill and money - if they are better engaged and involved than you and your club, they will be more successful in attracting support and resources.

At the same time many of our non-traditional, successful community sport/activity providers from outside the traditional sports world regard the success of their community engagement as just as important as the outcomes of their sporting activities. Often, because their roots are *in* the community, they design and deliver the programmes to suit people's real needs, not what the club coach wants to do.

So what are we to do? Can King Kanute stem the tide? I am not suggesting that I have all the answers and that one size fit all, but here are some ideas and thoughts. This is all work in progress and I am keen to hear your ideas and experiences.

Connected cricket clubs can become thriving community cricket enterprises

Cricket clubs should act as much more than a sports venue. They should become a focal point for other sports teams, local groups and meetings. Also, they could provide a range of community services like post offices and shops. We need a climate and culture that support and train these clubs to become community cricket enterprises and then the cricket club will also thrive.

Two examples - from two completely different angles...

Uffington CC brings the community together providing the best tea in town...

(Uffington is a village with a population of 715 on the Wiltshire/Oxfordshire border.)

Some great examples where village cricket clubs are performing a role as community hubs can be found in the finalists of the Yorkshire Tea Great Cricket Tea Challenge, run in partnership with the Daily Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/sport/cricket-tea-challenge>

There is a great video from Uffington CC. Forget about the food, tea and cakes; here is a village community coming together around the cricket creating civic pride and community cohesion.

Spend 90 seconds and watch the video.



Twechar Healthy Living & Enterprise Centre engaging the whole community.

(Twechar is located 2 miles south west of Kilsyth in East Dunbartonshire, not far from Glasgow - population of 1363.)

A former mining and quarrying village, Twechar is one of Scotland's 15% most deprived areas. Twechar Community Action is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. They were established in April 2001 when the local authority decided to close the Recreation Centre. There was a community sit in and the local authority eventually agreed to hand over the building to the community.

Twechar Community Action was then developed and were successful in securing funding to completely refurbish the centre and transform it into a Healthy Living & Enterprise Centre which was more appropriate to the community's needs. They are based in and operate the centre which provides facilities for learning, training, health and well-being activities, sport and recreational pursuits as well as offering accommodation for community and youth groups.

The centre is now thriving as a Development Trust and Social Enterprise, operating 7 days a week and provides a hub for the village engaging with a wide cross section of people from all ages and offering a variety of activities and services to support the community. But Twechar Community Action is so much more than just the Centre, through the work of a dedicated group of local residents other organisations have been formed such as Twechar Youth Group and Twechar Environmental Training Project.

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So here are eleven steps to take to become a Connected Club

1. Open your minds
2. Discuss and agree what is your purpose
3. Be open to new skills, users/members, volunteers and partners
4. Draw up a list of your current and potential community partners, their needs, your skills and contacts
5. Take your ball and bat out into your community - go to galas, agricultural shows, shopping centres, parks and housing estates: be seen and meet people
6. Design activities around community needs
7. Identify *Connectors* both within and outside your club (Connectors are people who can help link up with different groups)
8. Work out how to collaborate with other groups
9. Organise the *Big Launch* - invite every single possible community partner both official and 'unofficial'. Tell them about what you are currently doing, what you would like to do, what you are offering and can contribute (not what you want)
10. Set up a Community Board for your club with representatives - not just VIPs but also 'real' people - from across the community to advise you on how best to engage and share value
11. Invite ideas and suggestions, set in action and then follow up

