Social enterprise and rural religious buildings, March 2017

08/06/2012

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Research to examine whether social enterprise can effectively assist the sustainability of rural places of worship.

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The research established that in all cases the presence of social enterprise had a positive impact on the sustainability of the place of worship.

However, it showed that in order to be successful the needs of the wider community must be the starting point in the development of the social enterprise project, as solutions based on social enterprise need to service the needs of the community first and not the place of worship.

The research also showed that where high quality advice and support was available, the chances that others would be able to learn from the development would be greater.

There would also be an increased likelihood that the social enterprise model could become a mainstream option for improving the sustainability of places of worship. The research additionally showed that the positive impacts of the social enterprises go beyond merely providing a much needed service and included benefits such as increased volunteering, social interaction and improved community cohesion.

This research used a case study approach to consider whether social enterprise can be an effective method to assist the sustainability of rural places of worship. However, as the original research was carried out in 2011-12, the case studies are now out of date and the appendix that contains them has not therefore been included. We may consider following up the case studies at some point in the future.

To find out more about social enterprise and community co-operatives, please visit the Plunkett Foundation website.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact research@hlf.org.uk.