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**Subject:** FW: Plunkett News: An update from our Chief Executive  
**Date:** 24 April 2020 at 20:48  
**To:** Hambledon PC clerk@hambledon-pc.gov.uk, Paul Quinn paul.quinn53@btinternet.com

TC

FYI Tony Coates.

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**From:** Plunkett Foundation <info@plunkett.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 24 April 2020 17:38  
**To:** Tony <tcoates@btinternet.com>  
**Subject:** Plunkett News: An update from our Chief Executive

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***An update from our Chief Executive James Alcock:  
A rural renaissance?***



**Recent weeks have been a pivotal time for communities across the UK, not least those in rural areas. We have seen an outpouring of community spirit with new community businesses being explored and existing ones expanding services, recruiting new volunteers and working harder than ever to make sure they meet their community's need.**

Whilst undoubtedly it is the most challenging time many community businesses have ever faced – and difficult decisions have had to be made – this period of national crisis has also invigorated the sector with a variety of innovations and put many businesses on new trajectories. For example, difficulties such as the strain seen throughout the supply chain to rural shops has given rise to a growth of local sourcing, opening up new avenues in a way that will likely change the channels through which many businesses access their stock in the future.

In many ways it feels that, despite the huge challenges, we are witnessing a renaissance of community spirit that will herald a new era of opportunity for community businesses and be critical to the recovery of rural communities post Covid 19.

In this spirit, Plunkett is working actively with partners, funders and stakeholders to secure support and investment for the long-term. We want to ensure that community businesses can access the funding they will need in the coming months and years to implement and expand their services with these new ideas and advances – securing community businesses at the heart of a thriving and resilient future for rural Britain. This may see a refocusing of supply chains and services to be more locally rooted, not just for food but for other products and services too. Community businesses have often led the way in low carbon initiatives, and opportunities will lie ahead for existing businesses or completely new initiatives to emerge and push forward new ideas promoting environmental sustainability in their locality.

To help us secure adequate resource, I would therefore like to know how your community has changed as a result of the current crisis – and what changes you believe are yet to come? What new services, innovations and expansions is your community businesses planning or already operating? What does your community business want to do – and how can we help you to do it? Let Plunkett know using the contact details below.

### **Current Crisis**

I know that many community businesses are encountering new problems and challenges everyday as the lockdown continues. Whatever the issues –

whether it is accessing the supplies you need, covering costs of your rent, mortgage or wages – Plunkett would like to know so we can keep on supporting you. We continue to work hard with government, funders and partners to ensure rural community businesses don't miss out on the funding and support that is being made available.

Plunkett welcomed the government's announcement of £750,000 support for charities, and we have been working to ensure that community businesses in all their varieties are eligible for this.

Reports are still coming to us from rural community shops across the country on access to key products via national wholesalers. We are lobbying and supplying information to Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) at ministerial level but remain frustrated at how long it is taking to get a response on what action will be taken and what support will be introduced. We remain in dialogue and will continue making the case for members.

We will also be submitting a response to the [Commons Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Select Committee inquiry](#). If you have not yet provided feedback on our [draft submission](#) and would like to, please do so by Monday 27 April.

If your business has encountered issues around supply, or has an update on this matter, then Plunkett would like to hear from you. Get in touch by emailing [membership@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:membership@plunkett.co.uk) or call 01993 810730.

### **Government Support**

This week saw the opening of the government's [Job Retention Scheme](#) to keep staff on the payroll – up to 80% of furloughed workers wages, up to £2,500. The scheme has also been extended until the end of June. Understanding and accessing the government support available during this time is essential. To help community businesses navigate and access the support available, **Plunkett adviser Dave Hollings** has written this [extremely useful guide](#).

### **Community Pubs**

Community pubs have faced a deeply challenging time in recent weeks and continue to do so – the lockdown means many pubs have had to close completely. Whilst the government support, including rate relief, hospitality trade grants and the Jobs Retention Scheme have helped somewhat in the short term, the next biggest test is the unknown – we do not yet know exactly how long these community pubs will have to remain closed. That brings with it uncertainty over ongoing costs and cash flow. Ensuring these community businesses can sustain a potentially long period with closed doors is a great challenge indeed, and the period of recovery for the sector will be as important

as this time of crisis, in terms of ongoing access to support and resources. Plunkett is here to help in this moment and in the future. Our advice lines remain open – a reminder of our contact details is at the end of this message – and our network of advisers are available to offer one-to-one support.

I do however want to state that this crisis has also been an opportunity for many pubs to show the extraordinary community spirit which has always been at their hearts. Like many community businesses, pubs have managed to offer new services to serve local need, showing the flexibility and durability of these businesses and we remain keen to share these inspiring examples of [community spirit](#).

If you have an issue relating to community businesses that you would like raise, get in touch by emailing [membership@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:membership@plunkett.co.uk) or call 01993 810730.



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**James Alcock**  
**Chief Executive, Plunkett Foundation**



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