

Community Business re COVID-19, Mutual Aid
Theme – Forging new partnerships with local authorities and businesses
Host – Jonny Gordon-Farleigh, **Stir to Action**
14th April 2020



What's Selgars Mill?

Selgars Mill is a beautiful converted 19th Century mill house with cottages, set in eight acres of secluded grounds in the Culm valley in Mid Devon. The buildings offer accommodation for up to 29 people, 30 camping pitches, workshop and meeting spaces, converted barn with stage, sound, and lighting facilities, green spaces for outdoor activities, permaculture garden, mill pond and streams, four acre woodland, licensed wedding venue, and bar facilities.

In March 2020, Stir to Action started a new lease to set up a residential training centre for the democratic economy, climate emergency, and social change, with plans to host short courses to small festivals, retreats to eco-weddings, organisational away days to cultural residential.

Covid-19 Adaption

On 16 March, we started a five-year lease on Selgars Mill, the day the government called on the British public to stop coming together in groups, cancel events and non-essential travel, and stay put to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

As the coronavirus pandemic unfolded and our communities and livelihoods were put under extreme pressure to adapt, we too rapidly changed our business plan. We decided to delay the opening of the centre until the summer or autumn and created a proposal for local authorities and charities to see how we repurpose the centre as temporary accommodation for vulnerable people and/or frontline workers.

Within 24 hours of the circulation of our proposal, the housing options manager from Mid-Devon District Council got in contact with our team. He then visited the site to review the suitability for different levels of risk (low risk/high risk), making recommendations for improved health and safety, a disinfectant plan for communal areas, and security. We have now signed up as housing 'supplier' for Mid-Devon District Council and are now receiving residential placements.

The opportunities, challenges and impact of the work being undertaken-

- The opportunity to demonstrate the economic and social role of community assets in a crisis
- Our crisis-adapted business plan offers us business continuity, generating an income while we can not trade
- Opportunity to develop a strong relationship with the local authority and social care sector
- An inspiring story to generate more interest in our residential training centre when it opens later in the year

Issue / Risks

- The mill's occupancy rate is based on referrals, so our marketing is passive and dependent on council placements
- Investment in repurposing asset, such as new H&S and higher insurance costs,
- Our communications are sensitive because of the vulnerable residents, so we can't publicly announce our plans
- We've already received verbal abuse from a neighbour who is worried that we are setting up a 'Covid-19 Colony'. We have posted a note to say we are not receiving anyone with symptoms or who is in recovery from Covid-19.

Contact

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a residential training centre

Selgars Mill is a new residential training centre supporting the democratic economy, the climate emergency, and social change.

We'll be hosting events from short courses to small festivals, retreats to eco-weddings, organisational away days to cultural residencies. With our beautiful eight acre site and facilities, we'll be able to provide a unique space for your events.



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We're creating a space for you to bring people together to learn, to create, to grow, and to celebrate. Selgars Mill provides a beautiful canvas for you to design your event. Whether it's a personal or professional gathering, we're delighted to help you make it one to remember.

Abby Gordon-Farleigh,
Communications Manager