

# Case Study: Cooked in Coddenham



## Introduction

[The Coddenham Centre](#) is a hub for local residents and those further afield, providing an accessible space for everyone to enjoy sport, leisure, learning and fun activities, and open nearly all days of the year. They have a couple of paid staff members, and many volunteers from the community, including Trustees, who support the running of the centre and activities – including some of the local councillors. Customers to each activity vary, but their new [Community Lunches](#) are often on a waiting list, seating roughly 50 people each time.

## Background



The community lunches were developed by the Centre after the success of their 2023 Winter Warmth sessions, underwritten by Mid Suffolk District Council. Free soup, freshly made on site, 'Cooked in Coddenham' was offered with an opportunity to chat with local neighbours in a warm space. There was also a chance to donate food items to a local foodbank. The soups were made from local ingredients and there was an emphasis placed on minimising food waste as much as possible, aligning with the Coddenham Centre's values around sustainability. It was found that offering food for free was a limitation in some ways, meaning that a few residents were less likely to attend because they were feeling stigma around this. The Coddenham Centre sought feedback from attendees, building on previous door-to-door research for the community/neighbourhood plan. The results indicated enthusiastic support for the sessions, with social interaction identified as one of the key outcomes.

## How was the project set up?

When setting up, the community lunches received support from trustee leadership, an employee with hospitality experience, enthusiastic volunteers and Locality Funding. The project also required simple, locally sourced ingredients, with a focus on vegetables to offer an inclusive menu, and a kitchen (which the Coddenham Centre already had). The main challenges in setting up and maintaining the lunches included, maintaining a good level of volunteers, keeping menu choices interesting, and dealing with occasional dietary challenges. Working with the local Community Shop, the project also kept the aim of reducing food waste at the forefront of the project, strengthening a solid foundation of partnership-working too – for example, crusts cut from the shops toasted sandwiches were frozen and kept for croutons at the Community Lunches, rather than thrown away.

## How does the project operate?

The project offers fresh soup, bread, refreshments and occasionally homemade cakes once a month in winter, free of charge. A three-course lunch is also offered monthly in winter, for a discretionary donation, with a suggested minimum between £7.50-£10. Lunches have a pop-up bar for additional wine, beer and soft drinks. Special occasions are celebrated too, e.g. the Christmas Lunch included a glass of bubbles donated by a local parish councillor. Everyone is invited to bring some (no matter how small or large) for a nearby foodbank. All attendees are seated and served by volunteers. Trustees and volunteers engage in conversation and introductions, particularly aiming to make newcomers feel welcomed – written feedback is also obtained from attendees. 'Soup Socials' and Community Lunches are promoted through the Centre's websites, leaflets and posters at the Centre, local notice boards (e.g. at the shop and local sheltered housing), social media, and occasional email and door drops. The Centre also draws attention because they generate their own electricity and heating, having reduced their carbon footprint by 91% in five years.



## Where does the food come from?

Food for the lunches is usually sourced locally, donated by the community, bought from the Coddenham Community Shop and sometimes foraged in local areas by residents. The focus is on community and sustainability, working to reduce food waste wherever possible. Community lunches usually have three courses, with refreshments, and are affordably priced on a pay-what-you-feel basis, with a suggested

donation of £10. The money earned from each lunch goes straight back into future lunches, providing a flexible and sustainable model which aims to work against the stigma for some people who might feel uncomfortable at the suggestion of free food.

### **How has your project changed and developed over time and why?**

The growth of the project has led to The Coddendam Centre receiving a five-star food hygiene rating from the local Food Standards Authority. They have also seen the lunches as providing an engagement opportunity with the surrounding communities, not just Coddendam. The Coddendam Centre feels that the lunches have provided an excellent return on tax-payer investment with the locality awarded funding, achieving low-cost engagement and community support through strong volunteer collaboration and innovation. “The interest and engagement from Mid Suffolk District Council’s Communities Team and Grants Team, District Councillors, and CAS’ Food Team has been invaluable.”

### **What advice would you give to anyone thinking about setting up a similar project?**

When asked for one thing the Coddendam Centre wished they knew at the start of the project, they answered, “The astonishing need for social interaction, even in a comparatively affluent part of rural Suffolk. Social exclusion and loneliness exist everywhere, but people are naturally reluctant to admit it.” They suggest thinking about your project image and the perceptions of ‘charity’, e.g. re the stigma attached to the ‘free soup’ concept.

