

Seven Fables:

A Rural Enterprise Exmoor business case study



Seven Fables, based in Dulverton and founded by the husband and wife team in 2002, is 'A haven of inspiration on Exmoor'.

The gallery has gained a loyal community of customers, many live and work locally, while others return year after year to holiday on Exmoor.

Owners Davina and Christopher Jelley predominantly run the gallery themselves with some assistance during the summer months from local people.

They have drawn on their creative skills to create a welcoming and inspiring environment. Seven Fables has evolved from their shared passion for art, storytelling and the changing seasons.

The gallery is the principal outlet representing the work of author and illustrator Jackie Morris, whose collaboration with Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words*, received international acclaim.

Working closely with writers, artists and makers, Seven Fables hosts regular book signings and events alongside story nature walks to immerse its customers into the beauty and magic of Exmoor.

Benefits and challenges of working on Exmoor

Benefits

Davina and Christopher believe their business benefits from being based on Exmoor for a few reasons:

- After making the decision to live and work on Exmoor, leaving city careers many years ago, we realised to be here we needed to create our own employment opportunities and what better place to share our passions that link perfectly with the beauty of Exmoor.
- We believe Exmoor is a very inspiring place to be and are in awe of the wooded valleys and coastline - the sense of wildness and freedom.

Challenges

Some of the challenges they have faced running a business on Exmoor are things such as:

- The seasonal aspect of running a business proved very challenging at first particularly when we had our shop in Dunster.
- Transport links are incredibly poor, I would catch the bus to work but the return journey now leaves at 3pm, not a timetable that supports a regular working day. We've ended up with two cars which isn't ideal and not the environmental answer to the problem.

Aspirations and advice

Aspirations

“Our aspiration over the next 3-5 years is to ideally find a larger premises, preferably in Dulverton.

We would like to host more events and continue to build on our international sales which really took off during lockdown.”

Advice

“A few bits of advice for other Exmoor businesses would be not to forget the importance of looking fresh and vibrant. Customers often make a quick judgement whether to step inside based on the appearance of your property. Changing window displays regularly holds local customer interest. Social media, an up to date website and key points of advertising are all essential.”

