

Somerset Co-op CLT Social Impact Report 2022



The mission

Our objects specified in our rules are:

to provide sustainable, affordable housing; and to provide workspace for community enterprises in Somerset; promoting co-operative principles and equality of opportunity for the benefit of the community,

Social accounts should use these aims and objectives to identify measurable indicators of progress. We try to re-use the same indicators from year to year, each year providing a baseline against which the next can be measured.

Unique objectives

Provision of housing

The measurements for this target are the quantity and value of property acquired, the rate at which additional accommodation is developed there, the time taken to release it to tenants and the organisational capacity for further acquisitions.

Year end:	Units let:	Units being prepared:	Units awaiting PP:	Land being acquired (min units):
2019	5	0	8	20
2020	5	0	8	25
2021	5	0	27	27
2022	4	0	33	33

The apparent improvement from 27 to 32 is actually the result of a change to our plans for Golden Hill towards a larger number of smaller flats. Actual progress was in fact much slower; while some issues were resolved, the logjam resulting from phosphate pollution of the levels was still the main obstacle.

At the end of 2022 voids were higher than we would like because we have left the flat at 11a empty while it is marketed. Happily there were no voids at all at 10 East Reach, so the voids rate was 3.3%, not as good as 2018 (2.4%) but better than 2021 (5.4%).

Provision of workspace for community enterprises

At the end of 2022, we welcomed Somerset Community Credit Union as the main user of the shop at 10 East Reach (though South West Co-op Development, formerly SCS CIC remains the tenant). This leads to a

big rise in assets managed (as SCCU has two offices, it is half their total). The drop in hours is due to there being fewer SWCD staff.

Year end:	Jobs with community enterprises hosted by SCCLT (hrs / week):	Assets managed by those community enterprises (£000):
2019	180	400
2020	220	420
2021	225	405
2022	162.5	907

Organisations being incubated in the shop held steady at five: one credit union, one transport mutuals, two co-op development organisations, an embryonic resource centre for sustainability, and an urban farming co-op.

Year end:	Work space let (m2):	Work space in progress:	Awaiting PP:	Plots (m2 to be developed):
2019	75	0	20	370
2020	75	0	20	370
2021	75	0	100	200
2022	75	0	100	200

The land acquisition for workspace is entirely in Wiveliscombe, where we have the opportunity to develop new workspace on the Exmoor Ales site and may also acquire some small business units at the Greenhouse. Note that as the design process has evolved, we've been obliged to moderate our expectations.

Sustainability of housing

2022 has not seen much progress since the advances of 2021 and 2020 (energy efficiency, a shared laundry and solar generation).

The research and development around sustainability at Golden Hill identified some important opportunities for ground source heat pumps to provide geothermal power, car sharing and even a possible new electric bus service. However, these are all still very much at the planning stage and the challenge for 2023 will be to make them into concrete proposals.

Lifestyle changes, including transport and recycling:

Recycling rates continued to improve in 2022, and it is now much more consistently collected each week.

Transport options are now a focus of activity for the board, but it is still early days. The long awaited car

club bays in Taunton seem not to be progressing as fast as we had hoped.

Supply chain: we continued to have as valued suppliers:

- Co-op Bank (while not a co-op itself, it supports co-ops)
- Midcounties Co-op (telecoms)
- South West Co-op Development
- Cave Architects
- Stephens Scown (an employee owned practice)

Gardening: use of the garden for recreation and horticulture has unfortunately slumped as we have no volunteers enthusiastic to take it forward at present.

Affordability of housing

Having taken the first steps towards social rents in 2021, we consulted with tenants and reached agreement on a new tenancy agreement which commenced in 2023 which is fully compliant with social housing standards.

Promoting equality of opportunity

Minority groups (LGBT+, ethnic minority, disabled) made up 100% of tenants in 2018; since then, however, it is zero. Our small number of tenancies mean that we can't place much weight on it.

In terms of leadership, the board at the end of the year had lost its only female director and included no minority groups; we remain dissatisfied that we are much less representative of our community than we have been in the past. Strengthening the board is a high priority for 2023.

Co-operative objectives

Building membership

Category:	End 2019	End 2020	End 2021	End 2022
Tenant	9	5	5	4
Community	80	81	94	93
Investor	136	144	238	235

Community membership has slipped back somewhat, in part because of the controversy of our Golden Hill planning application – something we are keen to address. Clearly we have more to do here.

Tenant membership is low – but as it does not include commercial tenants, it does at least show that all our tenants are members in good standing.

Consulting with and empowering members

Again, we produced only one newsletter and one even (our AGM) in 2022, as was the case in 2021, 2020 saw three newsletters in the year, two press releases and

an average of 5 social media posts each month. Social media posts were also slightly down.

The need to focus on the fine detail of planning applications has undoubtedly been a problem here.

Creating common wealth

Our balance sheet has greatly improved with the investment – funded by the Community Housing Fund – that we've been able to make in Wiveliscombe. We've also continued to make progress towards our East Reach scheme, which has enhanced asset values.

Autonomy and independence

We have succeeded in further reducing our reliance on a small number of large investors: the largest investment in our share capital is now just 2.0% of the whole, down from 3.2% and 3.5% the year before that.

Close links between SCS CIC and the CLT are a concern with the overlap of board members up from 20% to 25%. This is another good reason to encourage more members to get involved as directors. At the end of the year saw SCCLT significantly increasing the level of support it provided to SWCD – something of a reversal of the indented relationship. However, since the year end SWCD has repaid all its borrowing, and has paid down a large part of its rent arrears.

Education and support for the co-op movement

Our website, newsletters and shop front all stressed our co-operative values and identity; in Co-operatives fortnight we supported some public events.

Other social and environmental impacts

Concerns in Wiveliscombe about the impact we might have on traffic congestion and the quality of the urban landscape were addressed with revised proposals and some innovative thinking about green transport and district heating. This remains a challenging area, and progress is slow because of the connection to our planning application..

Conclusions

There are some clear areas for consolidation:

- our relationship with the credit union could help us provide more integrated support and develop joint projects
- working on ways we can help reduce phosphate pollution could unblock the planning process
- help from the Council with improving governance is certainly timely

However, we are aware that we have some weaknesses:

- community participation
- maintenance and improvement of neglected land and buildings