

Somerset Co-op CLT Social Impact Report 2023



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):
2020	5	0	8	25
2021	5	0	27	27
2022	4	0	33	33
2023	4	0	33	33

Progress remains desperately slow; however, by the end of 2023 the single largest obstacle – phosphate neutrality – was finally showing signs of being solvable.

As with 2022, we had voids only because we have left the flat at 11a empty while it is marketed; in 10 East Reach there were no voids at all. However, the void persisted the whole year, making voids 20%. This is much worse than 2022 (3.3%), or even 2021 (5.4%) which was previously considered a poor result.

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). However, staff numbers did decline over the course of the year.

Year end:	Jobs with community enterprises hosted by SCCLT (hrs / week):	Assets managed by those community enterprises (£000):
2020	220	420
2021	225	405
2022	162.5	907
2023	130	895

Organisations being incubated in the shop held steady at five: one credit union, one transport mutual, one co-op development body, an embryonic resource centre for sustainability, and an educational charity.

Year end:	Work space let (m2):	Work space in progress:	Awaiting PP:	Plots (m2 to be developed):
2020	75	0	20	370
2021	75	0	100	200
2022	75	0	100	200
2023	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. Again, progress has been painfully slow.

Sustainability of housing and support for greener lifestyles

2023 has not seen much progress: our solar panels remain out of action, the proposal for one or more ground source heat networks has not seen rapid progress, and to our dismay our preferred supplier for car sharing, Co-cars, collapsed entirely.

However, the team setting up a new Electric Bus Co-op have made some headway, and we have learned more about the potential for funding for feasibility studies.

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)

- Third Sector Accountancy (employee owned)

Gardening: with no volunteers able to contribute to gardening, the garden at East Reach is becoming choked with weeds and inaccessible. We do hope that it offers some benefit to wildlife, but that will be limited due to its isolation.

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. In particular, all tenants have been offered a refund of any deposit they made, as we no longer require deposits for housing.

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 began to undergo a transformation towards the end of the year; at the 31st December it was up to eight members (and still growing), They included three women and one director from an ethnic minority background – much closer to being reflective of the community we serve.

Co-operative objectives

Building membership

Category:	End 2020	End 2021	End 2022	End 2023
Tenant	5	5	4	5
Community	81	94	93	99
Investor	144	238	235	234

Community membership has risen somewhat, largely as a result of the board expansion. We remain concerned about the low takeup of membership in Wiveliscombe.

Consulting with and empowering members

Communications and outreach picked up in the course of the year. We circulated two newsletters, and in addition to the AGM in the autumn we held a community open day in July. Bad weather limited its effectiveness, and we will need to improve our planning and preparation before attempting something like it again – nonetheless it contributed to one of our most active years since 2020.

Creating common wealth

After a very good year 2022, 2023 saw large losses as we committed to property development and capacity

building without the support we had enjoyed from the Community Ownership Fund the year before. However, the investment of subcontractor time did seem to be paying off with progress on both fronts. However, the benefit to the balance sheet has yet to become evident.

Autonomy and independence

Our reliance on large investors remains low with: the largest investment in our share capital just 2.0% of the whole, unchanged from last year. However, the dominant position of one large loan stock investor may become an issue as the loan stock begins to mature.

Close links between SCS CIC and the CLT were uncomfortably high (25%) but by the end of the year they had halved and SCCLT was on the way to becoming fully independent of what is now known as SWCD (South West Co-op Development). However, SWCD staff do continue to play a large role in the preparation of this social impact report.

Education and support for the co-op movement

Our website, newsletters and shop front all stressed our co-operative values and identity; our open day in Co-ops Fortnight was another good opportunity to stress our belief in the solidarity economy.

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:

- The community enterprises we host at East Reach have achieved a lot, but there are signs that in some respects they are finding trading conditions challenging and may benefit from more support.
- Adopting a method for phosphate neutrality is more than just a fix for the planning process – it's also part of our commitment to protecting Somerset's landscape and wildlife.
- The stability of our tenancies is contributing to resilience and some convivial relationships.

However, we are aware that we have some weaknesses:

- Community participation remains low, and we're not succeeding in encouraging members to give their time to activities in the CLT.
- The planning blight on our properties means they are embarrassingly neglected.