

Ecological Land Cooperative purchases site in South Somerset to create new small farms.

The Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) is delighted to have purchased its fourth site in Sparkford, South Somerset continuing the work of making land accessible to ecological farming.

With news that Somerset County Council continues to sell off County Farms to raise millions for the authority, and with the uncertainties facing British Agriculture after Brexit, the work of the ELC putting small-scale, agro-ecological farming on the map is as pressing as ever.

With the continued successes of the three small farm enterprises on their first site in Devon, temporary planning permission awarded on their second site in East Sussex and working with Wales' largest Community Supported Agriculture scheme to steward their third site on the Gower Peninsula, the Ecological Land Cooperative model of cluster farms fit for the future reflects an increasing desire for many to live and work on the land whilst producing ecologically grown food.

The 21-acre agricultural field that the ELC has purchased, in the village of Sparkford, was recently used for sheep grazing.

The ELC will apply for planning permission to create a cluster of three residential small farms accompanying land-based businesses. Each would have an agricultural tie committing the smallholders to operate farm businesses, bringing local food, employment and diversity - both ecologically and agriculturally - to the area.

The Ecological Land Cooperative works to create affordable ecological smallholdings for new entrants to farming – those who would ordinarily be unable to afford a house in the countryside yet who wish to earn a living through farming.

With the purchase of the Sparkford site, the first five year's permission would be temporary allowing land-based businesses to establish and grow. After the initial five years lapses the ELC would apply for permanent permission at which point the smallholders would be able to build permanent dwellings (within a set footprint and height and working to stringent ecological principles). ELC tenants are legally tied to a Management Plan with strict ecological guidelines and an annual monitoring process carried out by the organisation who work closely with the local authorities.

The ELC will be hosting a community meeting in the Sparkford Inn on Tuesday 5th February 2019, 5pm – 7pm to present their model, answer any questions and consult the local community before submitting any planning application.

EDITORS' NOTES

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The Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) is a social enterprise, co-operative in structure, established to address the lack of affordable sites for ecological land-based livelihoods in England and Wales.

Set up in 2009, the ELC purchases land, obtains planning permission, and installs the infrastructure to create clusters of three or more affordable smallholdings for future farmers.

The ELC's first project, Greenham Reach, in mid-Devon, was granted temporary planning permission in 2013 and has recently been granted permanent permission (pending final legal agreement). Now home to three thriving smallholdings – including businesses such as veg box scheme, salad bags, micro goat dairy, tree nursery, medicinal herbs, meat and educational course. Greenham Reach is a living example of ecologically managed land providing truly sustainable land-based livelihoods.

The ELC's second site in Arlington, East Sussex has secured temporary planning permission and is the process of recruiting tenants to join the cooperative and start farming.

The ELC has also purchased land on the Gower in Wales with a planning application in process.

For more info about ELC please visit: <http://ecologicalland.coop>

The ELC has published the report '[Small is Successful: Creating sustainable livelihoods on ten acres or less](#)'.