

Statement of Community Engagement

In support of application for the siting of three temporary agricultural workers' dwellings for a period of five years together with an agricultural barn with PV array and alterations to existing highway access to provide three affordable small-holdings for new entrants to ecological agriculture

At:
**Land at Wolfester Paddock,
Sparkford Hill lane,
Sparkford,
South Somerset**

Prepared by The Ecological Land Cooperative

June 2019

1. Introduction

This statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for “*the siting of three temporary agricultural workers’ dwellings for a period of five years together with an agricultural barn with PV array, alterations to existing highway access to provide three affordable smallholdings for new entrants to ecological agriculture*” at land at Wolfester Paddock, Sparkford Hill Lane, Sparkford, South Somerset. It has been prepared by the applicant, the Ecological Land Cooperative (the ELC), in accordance with Article 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Development management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, to demonstrate their continued commitment to undertake meaningful community engagement.

The ELC is a community benefit society and membership organisation open to all. We create practical solutions to achieve recognition and value for ecological agriculture. A key aim of the ELC is to help revitalise rural communities by making land, food and jobs accessible to all. As a co-operative, co-operation, participation and transparency are central to what we stand for. It is intended that, once established, the smallholdings proposed at Sparkford will provide local businesses and markets with produce, and as such fostering positive community relations through community engagement is at the heart of what the ELC is trying to achieve. To this end the ELC has endeavoured to create a constructive dialogue between the ELC and the local community of Sparkford since identifying an interest in the site in April 2018.

2. Policy

National Policy

Paragraph 39 of NPPF encourages early community engagement stating that:

Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

Paragraph 41 goes on to state that:

The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

3. Initial Communication

Door to door consultation

In April 2018, prior to the purchase of the application site two members of the ELC team knocked on the doors of 50 houses that had been identified as overlooking, or within close proximity of, the site. These houses were located in Manor Close, Ainstey Drive and the village of Weston Bampfylde.

This led to meeting 26 members of the local community all of whom were given a pamphlet introducing the ELC and our aims and values (Appendix 1) and some of whom engaged in more in-depth discussions around the ELC's intentions for the site.

The ELC team members reported that the general response was positive, interspersed with some indifference. 12 of the 25 households with whom direct contact was made were identified as having the potential to become strong supporters of the project.

Those who expressed an interest in the project generally picked up on the importance of providing access to land for new entrants to farming, who would not otherwise be able to afford to live and work on their land. 16 of the 26 households contacted provided email addresses in order to receive further information relating to the site.

During this community engagement exercise the team also visited the local 'Old Parlour Farm Shop' where they learnt that although the shop sources its meat from local farms, its vegetables come from Bristol, indicating a gap in the local market for fresh vegetables.

Written Correspondence

A record was taken of all addresses where no contact was made and a follow up postal letter was sent to those with whom a face-to-face meeting was not possible (see Appendix 2).

Parish Council Meeting

In September 2018 three members of the ELC team attended the Sparkford Parish Council meeting to give an introductory presentation on the ELC, including our business model and intentions for the site.

The initial presentation was met with some scepticism over the local need, due to the existence of a farm shop in the area and fears that the three dwellings may lead to further development (these points have been addressed below). Four of the team attended a further Parish Council meeting in February 2019 to present a site plan but this was kept very brief as the members were aware of the forthcoming Community Meeting where this information would be given and questions would be answered.

5. Community Meeting

Publicity and Press

After the site was purchased by the ELC a community meeting was organised for 5th February 2019 at the Sparkford Inn function room to provide an opportunity for the local community to learn more about the ELC and our intentions for the site, as well as to express their support or concerns and have their questions answered. The ELC invited local residents, local farmers and other stakeholders, and posters were put up around the village (see Appendix 3).

Postal or email (where email addresses had been provided) invites were sent to the 50 immediate local residents, as identified in the initial door knocking engagement exercise (see appendix 4 & 5; two versions of the letter were sent depending on whether initial contact had already been made).

Research was also undertaken to identify local farmers, growers and other stakeholders within a 10 mile radius. 15 projects were identified and emailed (see appendix 6). Local agricultural networks were also emailed, including transition towns, young farmers groups, Somerset local food and Incredible Edible.

The email invited all stakeholders to the community meeting as well as providing an initial introduction to the ELC and clarifying that we are trying to understand and work with local needs and do not intend to provide competition but complementary products. All those who responded to the email were supportive and positive.

A press release was sent out by the ELC in January 2019 (Appendix 7). This announced the purchase of the land and ELC's intentions for the site as well as giving details of the February Community Meeting. The press release was sent to press local to the site - radio stations, magazines, newspapers as well as local relevant organisations. The release was picked up by two local magazines, Blackmore Vale and Breeze and by BBC Radio Somerset.

Further to the press release, an ELC director, Alex Lawrie, was interviewed on BBC Radio Somerset about the ELC during which details for the forthcoming Sparkford Community Meeting were mentioned.

Structure of the meeting

Five members of the ELC team opened the meeting with a presentation which explained the visions and aims of ELC, the ELC business model and legal structure and details of our other sites and existing businesses.

This was followed by a short film on the work of the ELC which is available to view on our website (www.ecologicaland.coop/film).

The outline details of the proposals for the Sparkford site were then presented before the floor was opened up for a question and answer session.

Attendance

57 people attended the meeting, including a local Councillor, and representatives from several local food businesses including the CEO from Somerset Local Food, who expressed an interest in sourcing food from our smallholders in the future.

In general, the meeting was attended by curious and supportive locals and stakeholders, and as such the tone of the meeting was very positive. Several attendees expressed support during the question and answer session and others did so in private discussion afterwards. A few local residents raised concerns about the project and these were addressed during the question and answer session (summarised below), as well as in the write up which was published on the ELC website (Appendix 8).

Key issues raised

Visual Impact

Concerns were raised over the potential visual impact of the proposals.

In response it was explained that visual impact had been carefully considered and the following measures would be proposed and / or carried out in collaboration between the ELC and the tenants, to ensure that any potential visual intrusion was minimised:

- The barn and dwellings have been sited close to the southern boundary in one development area to restrict any sprawl.
- Hedges interspersed with trees would be planted along the mid-section of the field to create a visual screen from the north. Trees would also be planted around the structures within the development area in the south east section of the field.
- Polytunnels, if required, will be sensitively sited within the landscape and further screened with additional landscaping measures where necessary.

Protection of the Agricultural tie

Comments were made which suggested a concern that the proposed dwellings may not be used as intended or be the beginning of infill development etc.

It is the view of the ELC that such concerns are easily countered as it is essential to the ELC model that smallholdings are: used for an ecological agricultural business; occupied by the person(s) operating the smallholding business; and kept affordable.

This is secured through Tenancy and Section 106 Agreements as detailed in the community meeting write up (Appendix 8).

Traffic and Access

Concerns were raised over the suitability of the access and the potential increase in traffic generated by the development. These concerns have been addressed as follows:

- Unlike conventional housing development the traffic generated from the three smallholdings will be low. ELC anticipate that the proposal will generate the same levels of traffic as our pilot project, Greenham Reach (which also has three smallholdings). Since planning permission was granted the Greenham Reach site has generated an average of 5 return journeys per day, or 1.7 return journeys per household per day.
- ELC will consult with the highways department at the council, during the course of the application to ensure the lane and access are suitable and safe for accessing the holdings.
- Careful consideration of the tranquillity of the neighbouring Sparkford Copse and its community use have been made in deciding the overall site layout including additional tree planting on the relevant field boundary.

The businesses and the financial viability of small farms

Questions were raised about the viability of small agricultural businesses and whether the proposal could result in damaging competition for existing businesses and the need for such development in the area. The following responses were given:

- In 2012 the ELC commissioned a report 'Small is Successful' which demonstrate the feasibility of such projects and has since compiled a booklet of 10 farms making a profit on a small acreage (see <https://ecologicaland.coop/small-farm-profits> and [https://ecologicaland.coop/sites/ecologicaland.coop/files/Small is Successful 0.pdf](https://ecologicaland.coop/sites/ecologicaland.coop/files/Small%20is%20Successful%20.pdf)). Furthermore, the recent grant of permanent permission for the Greenham Reach site is evidence that the ELC business model is sound.
- ELC aim to provide a supply of local foods and products that are lacking in the local area, or where the demand outweighs current supply. We look to collaborate with existing businesses where possible and work together to improve provision of good local food for the local community and rural economy. It would be against our values to conflict with existing local businesses.
- There is substantial local support for our work from existing food producers, new entrant farmers, potential applicants as well as local people working in the food sustainability sector.
- When considering applicants, preference will be given to local applicants assuming they fulfill the other necessary criteria.

7. Further Actions / Indicators

Open application process

An open application process was launched on 17th April 2019 for three ELCs sites, including the Sparkford site. In the subsequent month to 16th May 2019 the application process homepage received 1,288 views. There was also a 63% increase in traffic to the site compared to the previous month.

A press release was sent to mainstream, regional and sector press organisations, as well as local press announcing the beginning of the open application process for small holders (see Appendix 9), locally this was picked up by South West Farmer. Targeted emails were sent to organisations with relevant network/members (e.g. Soil Association Future Growers, Wwoof, the Tenant Farmers Association, Kindling Trust's Farm Start project, and a number of community land trusts) who went onto post details on their websites, include in newsletters or send to their members.

Potential small holders

To date, three potential smallholders have expressed a strong interest in the Sparkford site, all of whom are currently engaged in commercial agriculture, and have the appropriate agricultural as well as business experience.

All three applicants are local (within 10 – 15 miles of the site) and they all attended the community meeting. One applicant had prior connections with the ELC but the other two were identified through the community engagement process.

8. Conclusions

The nature of the proposal is such that it is important to foster positive community relations from the earliest possible stage as the proposed small-holdings will have close community ties through supplying local markets and businesses. To this end and in line with local and national policy on community engagement the ELC has been dedicated to ensuring that the local community are aware of ELCs intentions at the site and have had the opportunity to be actively engaged in pre-application discussions. Through this approach the local community has been able to raise concerns and questions, which have then been addressed where possible, and the proposals have been formulated in an open, transparent and iterative manner.

We would suggest that anyone with a strong objection would likely be motivated to attend the community meeting or reply to correspondence. As such it seems reasonable to assume that there is at minimum a level of ambivalence and at best tacit acceptance from those who chose not to engage with the process either through attending the meeting or responding to correspondence.

Amongst local stakeholders who did participate in the community engagement process, although some concerns were raised, we feel that these have been adequately addressed. Furthermore, the overall nature of feedback has been positive, including not only strong support from local business and residents, but also three potential applicants for the proposed smallholdings.

Appendix 1 – ELC Pamphlet

Please see separate attachment.

Appendix 2 - Initial letter

Dear Occupier,

We were recently door knocking in your area but didn't manage to see you. We wanted to let you know about our organisation's plan to purchase a 21-acre agricultural field nearby as indicated on the map overleaf.

Our organisation is called The Ecological Land Cooperative and we create affordable ecological smallholdings for new entrants to farming – those that would not be able to afford to buy a house in the countryside but who wish to earn a living through farming.

It is our intention to apply for temporary planning permission for this site to create residential smallholdings for three households. We would create a Section 106 agreement that legally ties the holdings to operate a viable agricultural business. If after five years, the businesses are a success, we would apply for permanent permission. If successful, at this point the smallholders would be able to build permanent dwellings within a set footprint and height and working to ecological principles. The households would also be legally tied to a Management Plan and an annual monitoring process.

The sale has not yet completed and we are interested to hear from locals whilst the sale is still in process if you have any comments, questions or concerns.

If the sale goes ahead we will create ample opportunity for you to ask us more questions, for us to explain how our model works in much more detail and to consult you as a local community as we prepare our planning application.

You can also find out more information about our work in the enclosed pamphlet or on our website at www.ecologicalland.coop and please contact us if you would like any further information or have any questions at the moment. Our office number is 01273 766 672 or you can email communications@ecologicalland.coop

Thanks very much for your time

Sonia Sinanan,
Operations Manager



Ecological Land Cooperative, Unit 204, Brighton Eco Centre, 39-41 Surrey Street, Brighton, BN1 3PB, 01273 766 672
Ecological Land Cooperative is the trading name of Ecological Land Limited, registered with the FCA under the Cooperative and
Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, Reg. No 30770R.

Appendix 3 – Community Meeting Poster



Sparkford Community Meeting

The Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) a not-for-profit social enterprise has purchased a 21-acre field in Sparkford. We would like to invite you to a community meeting to discuss our plans for the field.

Tuesday 5th February
Sparkford Inn, function Room
5pm – 7pm

The Ecological Land Cooperative's goal is to create affordable ecological smallholdings for new entrants to farming – those that would not be able to afford to buy a house in the countryside but who wish to earn a living through farming.

It is our intention to apply for temporary planning permission for the Sparkford site to create residential smallholdings for three households. We will create a Section 106 agreement that legally ties the holdings to operate a viable agricultural business. If after five years the businesses are a success, we will apply for permanent permission. With permanent permission, the smallholders will be able to build permanent dwellings within a set footprint and height, and working to ecological principles. The households will also be legally tied to an ecological management plan and an annual monitoring process as part of their lease.

The intention of the meeting is to consult with the local community about our plans, answer any questions, listen to any concerns and create a dialogue with local residents.

You can also find out more information about our work on our website at www.ecologicaland.coop.

If you are unable to attend but would like to get in touch, to raise a question or to show your support then please don't hesitate to contact us at sonia@ecologicaland.coop or 01273 911 494.

Kind regards,

The ELC team

Appendix 4 - Letter regarding community meeting



17th January 2019

Dear Resident,

I would like to invite you to a community meeting we are hosting on Tuesday 5th February from 5pm - 7pm in the function room at the Sparkford Inn on High Street. The meeting is to present our plans for the 21-acre field we have purchased in Sparkford, answer any questions, listen to any concerns and create a dialogue with you as a local resident.

In summary, The Ecological Land Cooperative creates affordable ecological smallholdings for new entrants to farming - those that would not be able to afford to buy a house in the countryside but who wish to earn a living through farming.

It is our intention to apply for temporary planning permission for this site to create residential smallholdings for three households. We will create a Section 106 agreement that legally ties the holdings to operate a viable agricultural business. If after five years the businesses are a success, we will apply for permanent permission. With permanent permission, the smallholders will be able to build permanent dwellings within a set footprint and height, and working to ecological principles. The households will also be legally tied to an ecological management plan and an annual monitoring process as part of their lease.

During the meeting, we will present our model in more detail and our proposal for this site specifically. You can also find out more information about our work on our website at www.ecologicaland.coop and please feel free to contact us if you have any questions before the meeting or if you are not able to attend.

Thanks very much and we hope to see you on the 5th February.

Sonia Sinanan
Operations Manager,
Ecological Land Cooperative

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T: 01273 766 672 | E: info@ecologicaland.coop | W: ecologicaland.coop

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Appendix 5 – Letter regarding community meeting v.2

Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside

17th January 2019

Dear Resident,

I would like to invite you to a community meeting we are hosting on Tuesday 5th February from 5pm - 7pm in the function room at the Sparkford Inn on High Street. The meeting is to present our plans for the 21-acre field we have purchased in Sparkford, answer any questions, listen to any concerns and create a dialogue with you as a local resident.

You may remember meeting Lauren and Phil from our comms team in April last year as they dropped round a pamphlet about the Ecological Land Cooperative's work before we purchased the field. It has taken a while but the purchase has been completed and we are now preparing our planning application.

In summary, The Ecological Land Cooperative creates affordable ecological smallholdings for new entrants to farming – those that would not be able to afford to buy a house in the countryside but who wish to earn a living through farming.

It is our intention to apply for temporary planning permission for this site to create residential smallholdings for three households. We will create a Section 106 agreement that legally ties the holdings to operate a viable agricultural business. If after five years the businesses are a success, we will apply for permanent permission. With permanent permission, the smallholders will be able to build permanent dwellings within a set footprint and height, and working to ecological principles. The households will also be legally tied to an ecological management plan and an annual monitoring process as part of their lease.

You can also find out more information about our work on our website at www.ecologicailand.coop and please contact us if you have any questions before the meeting or if you are not able to attend.

Thanks very much and we hope to see you on the 5th February.



Sonia Sinanan
Operations Manager,
Ecological Land Cooperative

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Appendix 6 - List of local farmers, growers, businesses and other stakeholders emailed regarding the Sparkford community meeting.

Camelot Growers
Camel Hill Farm
Wyke Farm
New Cross Fruit Farm
Merricks Organic Farm
Plotgate CSA
Shaftesbury Home Grown
Elderflowers farm Co-op
Good Life Horticulture
Somerset Young Farmers
Transition Langport
Transition Yeovil
Somerset Community Food
Somerset Local Food
Incredible Edible Somerset

Appendix 7 – Sparkford Press Release



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.

Appendix 8 – Community Meeting write up.

On Tuesday 5th February 2019, we held a community meeting for Sparkford residents where we presented and discussed our plans to create a cluster of three residential small and ecological 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.

At the meeting, we presented our vision and aims, our business model, our legal structure and presented the examples of our other sites and farm businesses. To read a summary of this information you can read our pamphlet [here](#). We also showed a short film about our work which you can watch [here](#).

We have conducted research into the financial viability of small scale farms. You can read our research report '[Small is Successful](#)' [here](#), and a booklet of ten case studies of profitable small farms can be read [here](#).

After the presentation, we opened the floor for questions. Below is a summary of the points that were discussed during the meeting.

Visual Impact & Development

Planning policy requires that new farm businesses prove their viability before a permanent planning consent can be considered. In the first instance, applicants are required to apply for a temporary planning permission of 5 years. Smallholders need to use temporary accommodation in this period. Temporary accommodation can be, for example, a portable timber cabin, shepherd's hut, or caravan.

If permanent planning permission were granted at the end of the temporary period, both the ELC and South Somerset Council would require the three temporary dwellings proposed with this application to be removed and replaced by permanent dwellings. These would need to be moderate in size (not larger than 140m² with a height limit of 5.5m) and in keeping with the landscape character. The ELC would also require the dwellings to be made predominantly of natural materials. And any other permanent structures need to first be approved by South Somerset Council.

To mitigate the visual impact caused by structures, we have proposed the following:

- The location proposed for the barn and dwellings has been sited close to the southern boundary in one development zone to restrict sprawl, and to minimise any potential visual intrusion in the open landscape.
- To plant hedges, interspersed with trees, along the mid-section of the field to create a visual screen from the North. To plant trees around the structures within the development zone in the south east section of the field.
- An effort would be made to set polytunnels into the landscape with the use of careful placement and plantings, which they will need for shelter anyway

Protection of the Agriculture Tie / Section 106

It is paramount that if the ELC is granted planning permission that the smallholdings are: used for an ecological agricultural business; occupied by the person(s) operating the smallholding business; and kept affordable.

We retain the freehold on our smallholdings and offer a strict tenancy agreement to our smallholders. Just as with county farms, the farm business tenancy that we use allows the ELC to evict a smallholder if they are in breach of their tenancy agreement. The tenancy agreement requires smallholders to operate a farm business on their holding, and adhere to the site's Management Plan. The Plan places obligations on the smallholder, including to manage the land ecologically.

Tenants cannot receive a windfall from their properties: if a tenant wishes to sell their holding, their tenancy requires that it must be offered back to the ELC in the first instance and in all cases must be sold at the re-sale value provided in their tenancy agreement, based on their improvements and not the housing market. Tenants cannot sub-let, and any future tenants would still be governed by the lease and management plan.

The ELC is a member-led organisation whose members care passionately about agriculture. Our members would not allow us to fail on one of our core objectives and watch land go to ruin or be taken out of agriculture.

Traffic & Access

We anticipate that our sites with three smallholdings would generate the same levels of traffic as our pilot project, Greenham Reach which has three smallholdings. We installed a traffic monitor at Greenham and have found the site has generated an average since planning permission was granted of 5 return journeys per day, or 1.7 return journeys per household per day.

We will be consulting with the highways department at the council and will ensure the lane is suitable and safe for accessing the holdings.

We will be careful to consider the tranquillity and community use of the neighbouring Sparkford Copse in the overall site layout including additional tree planting on the field boundary of the copse.

The Businesses & Financial Viability of Small Farms

In 2010 we commissioned research into the viability of ecological holdings on less than 10 acres. The report, [Small is Successful](#), was published in 2011. This study of eight enterprises found smallholder annual wages to be in the range of £12,000 – £16,000 on established holdings,

We have since conducted further research and compiled a booklet of ten case studies of farms making a profit on small acreages from across the UK – with the highest level of income at £80,000 per acre. [You can read about the case studies here.](#)

It would be against our values to conflict with existing local businesses – instead we aim to provide a supply of local foods and products that are lacking in the local area, or where the demand outweighs current supply. We look to collaborate with existing businesses where possible and work together to improve provision of good local food for the local community and rural economy.

Operations such as battery chicken, or other intensive livestock farming would go against our ecological and ethical values and would not be permitted under our whole site management plan. The ELC monitors each plot against the management plan and reports to the council annually.

Example business from our other sites are vegetable box scheme, salad bags, cut flowers, sheep & pigs, herbs, micro goat dairy and fruit tree grafting.

There is substantial local support for our work from existing food producers, new entrant farmers, potential applicants as well as local people working in the food sustainability sector. When considering applicants, preference will be given to local applicants assuming they fulfil the other necessary criteria.

Appendix 9 – Call for Farmers Press Release

New Entrants to Ecological Farming – the ELC wants you!

The Ecological Land Cooperative is on the hunt for passionate landworkers and ecological entrepreneurs to become farmers on their three new sites.

The Ecological Land Cooperative's (ELC) innovative model seeks to revitalise rural economies by creating affordable and residential small farms for those who would ordinarily be unable to afford a house in the countryside yet who wish to earn a living through farming.

Working across England and Wales the ELC have opened their application process looking to find future farmers for their three new sites in the following areas: Arlington, East Sussex; Sparkford, Somerset; and on the Gower Peninsula, South Wales.

Recognising that the barriers to accessing land are a complex mix of planning and policy, the ELC works to enable small, innovative and ecological entrepreneurs to get a foothold in the world of farming and agriculture.

One of the ELC's first tenants, and an experienced grower, James Dexter, says: "I always wanted a piece of land of my own. I'd been looking at buying some land and setting up a smallholding but I was aware that it was really complicated and our planning system wasn't friendly to sustainable farmers. I'd been looking and got discouraged because it was so difficult and expensive. Then I heard about the ELC – so I applied."

By focusing on access to land the ELC engages future farmers with real prospects of leading land-based livelihoods – and producing good, local, healthy food in a fast changing political, and rural, landscape.

"We're really excited about our open application process," says Oliver Bettany, Membership & Engagement Manager, for the ELC. "We know there are many talented people who would jump at the chance to have a land-based livelihood but are intimidated by planning laws or can't afford to purchase land outright. As the ELC we are the interface between the authorities and our tenants. We work to support our farmers so they can hit the ground running and get on with what they're passionate about: farming and food."

The UK faces multiple challenges in terms of food security, energy and climate change. A genuinely sustainable response to these immediate and long term challenges is the ELC's cluster model of small mixed farms as low impact developments. By providing good, local and healthy food ELC plots contribute to rural regeneration and a more vibrant local food economy – whilst increasing biodiversity, wildlife habitat and soil health.

The realities of an ageing farming population, high land costs, and larger farms relying on EU subsidies and struggling to make a profit, the ELC focuses on removing such barriers and making land – and ecological farming – accessible to new entrants.

The ELC's collection of case studies [Small Farm Profits](#) provides proof that small-scale doesn't mean uncompetitive and that ecological agriculture can create economically viable, highly productive and sustainable enterprises on small acreages.

Over the course of the next two years the ELC is creating three new ecological small farm sites with eight plots to establish ecological farm businesses. Looking for future farmers the Ecological Land Cooperative's open application process is now live. www.ecologicaland.coop
The Arlington site is ready for new tenants now and the Sparkford and Gower sites are being developed over the next year. The ELC would like to work with our future farmers to get them ready to start their new farm businesses as the smallholdings become available.